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## Thomas Taylor's Dissent from Some 18th-Century Views on Platonic Philosophy: The Ethical and Theological Context

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### Abstract

Thomas Taylor's interpretation of Plato's works in 1804 was condemned as guilty by association immediately after its publication. Taylor's 1804 and 1809 reviewer thus made a hasty generalisation in which the qualities of Neoplatonism, assumed to be negative, were transferred to Taylor's own interpretation, which made use of Neoplatonist thinkers. For this reason, Taylor has typically been marginalised as an interpreter of Plato.

This article does not deny the association between Taylor and Neoplatonism. Instead, it examines the historical and historiographical reasons for the reviewer's assumption that Neoplatonic readings of Plato are erroneous by definition. In particular, it argues that the reviewer relied on, and tacitly accepted, ethical and theological premises going back to the historiography of philosophy developed by Jacob Brucker in his *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-44). These premises were an integral part of Brucker's Lutheran religiosity and thus theologically and ethically biased. If these premises are identified, articulated and discussed critically—which they have not been so far in connection with Taylor's reception—it becomes less obvious that the reviewer was justified in his assumption that the Neoplatonic reading was erroneous by definition. This, in turn, leaves Taylor's Plato interpretation in a more respectable position.

### Keywords

Plato, Plotinus, Platonic virtue ethics, Thomas Taylor, Jacob Brucker, Anti-Platonism, Lutheranism

## Introduction

The English Platonist and translator Thomas Taylor (1758-1835) published *The works of Plato* in 1804, comprising his own and Floyer Sydenham's (1710-1787) English translations of Plato's dialogues and letters, as well as both men's introductions and notes to these texts.<sup>1</sup> In his 'General introduction', Taylor sought to justify this novel translation and explained the order of Plato's works, as any translator is expected to do. He also advanced a remarkable interpretation of Plato's philosophy, its nature and aim. In Taylor's eyes, Plato was not just any ancient philosopher who happened not to be fully translated into English; his philosophy could serve as a remedy of what Taylor perceived as modern materialism and its evils.<sup>2</sup>

So, what kind of philosophy did Taylor find in Plato's writings? On the opening page of his 'General introduction', Taylor cites the Neoplatonist Hierocles (fl. ca. 430), author of a commentary on Pythagoras' *Golden Verses*, in answer to this question:

Philosophy is the purification and perfection of human life. It is the purification, indeed, from material irrationality, and the mortal body; but the perfection, in consequence of being the resumption of our proper felicity, and a reascent to the divine likeness. To effect these two is the province of *Virtue* and *Truth*; the former exterminating the immoderation of the passions; and the latter introducing the divine form to those who are naturally adapted to its reception.<sup>3</sup> (Taylor's italics)

This ethical and metaphysical agenda is reflected in Taylor's selection of interpreters of Plato, primarily ancient Neoplatonists. Before entering the agenda set forth in this quotation, it is worth observing the terminology

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<sup>1</sup> This 1804 publication has been reprinted by the Prometheus Trust, 1995-96. In this recent publication we find orthographic changes, corrections of grammatical errors and spelling, and some re-arrangement of the notes. Below I refer to the original 1804 publication and to this reprint; I refer to the latter in square brackets. This applies to the texts of Plato and to the texts of Taylor in these two publications. For Taylor's life and work, see Raine 1969. For his influence upon the English romantic movement, see Raine 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor 1804: lxxxiv [Taylor 1995: 59].

<sup>3</sup> Taylor 1804: iii [Taylor 1995: 1]. The quotation is from Hierocles, *In aureum carmen*. It may be Taylor's own English translation from the Greek-Latin 1709 edition by Needham; Taylor owned a copy of this edition in his private library: See *Catalogue* 1836: 8 n. 172. I am grateful to Tim Addey for providing this auction catalogue and for his helpful comments.

with which Taylor discussed ancient Platonism, including what we now call Neoplatonism, that is, late ancient Platonism from ca. 200 CE to ca. 550 CE.

Although German historians of philosophy had coined the terms 'Neoplatonism' and 'Neoplatonist' in the 1770s and 1780s, Taylor did not use these terms in his 1804 publication, but spoke indiscriminately of 'Platonism' and 'Platonists', even when referring to philosophers whom these German historians of philosophy had called Neoplatonists, and whom we still call Neoplatonists by convention. Taylor may not have known the neologism, or, more likely, he may have decided not to use it because of its negative connotations.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Taylor consciously abstained from using the term 'Alexandrian philosophy', which had been used as a pejorative throughout the 18th century, denoting the philosophical movement to be labelled 'Neoplatonism' from the 1770s onwards. When Taylor's 1804 publication was reviewed in 1809, his critic spoke precisely about the 'Alexandrains', clearly using the term in a condemnatory sense.<sup>5</sup>

In his 1804 publication, Taylor also omitted the widely used labels 'eclecticism' and 'syncretism', which had been part of the conceptual scheme used to characterise, among other things, what we now refer to as Neoplatonism, and which had also been used as pejoratives. Again, Taylor's 1809 critic used precisely these two terms in a depreciatory manner.<sup>6</sup> In Rigg's biographical entry on Taylor, dating from 1898, he emulated this disdainful use of the term 'syncretism', accusing Taylor of adhering to the "forced and fanciful syncretism of the ancient commentators [on Plato and Aristotle]", i.e. the Neoplatonists.<sup>7</sup> The historiographical terms 'Alexandrian philosophy', 'Neoplatonism', 'eclecticism' and 'syncretism'

<sup>4</sup> Taylor 1804 does not use the term 'Neoplatonism' / 'Neoplatonist' at all. For the emergence of the term 'Neoplatonism' in the 1770s and 1780s, see Meinhardt 1984, cols 755-756.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor 1804 avoids the terms 'Alexandrian philosophy' and 'Alexandrains' for Neoplatonic philosophy and Neoplatonists; when he uses the term 'Alexandrian' to refer to Neoplatonism, he does so in order to point out an interpretation of Neoplatonism that was unfavourable and unfair in his eyes, as in the case of Warburton: E.g. Taylor 1804: xci [Taylor 1995: 63], as cited in page 190 below. For Warburton, see page 191 below. As we shall see, Taylor's critic refers frequently to the "Alexandrains"; see [Mill] 1809/2001: 153-163, 167, 179.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor 1804 does not use these two terms at all in his 1804 publication. They are used in [Mill] 1809/2001: 158, 160.

<sup>7</sup> Rigg 1898: 469.

had been developed in the 18th century and applied to late ancient Platonism in a fairly condemnatory manner.<sup>8</sup> Taylor's unwillingness to employ these historiographical terms was hardly a sign of incompetence or ignorance on his part, or of any strong debt to the outdated Renaissance Platonism of Marsilio Ficino; rather, it indicated Taylor's philosophical position bound up with these terms in the course of the 18th century.

Having clarified Taylor's terminology, let me return to the agenda presented in the quotation above. On a general level, Taylor held that Plotinus (204/5-70), Porphyry (ca. 233-309), Iamblichus (ca. 242-327), Syrianus (d. 437), Hierocles, Damascius (462-540) and Proclus (ca. 411-85), had been able to recognise this fundamental conception of philosophy in Plato's writings. Taylor clearly favoured their interpretations over those of the Platonists from the Old Academy, such as Crantor (276/75 BCE), and Middle Platonists such as Atticus (fl. ca. 175 CE), Albinus (fl. ca. 150 CE), Galen (129-210 CE) and Plutarch (ca. 46-120 CE). Although these Middle Platonists had been closer in time to Plato than the Neoplatonists, "they appear", Taylor said, "not to have developed the profundity of Plato's conceptions".<sup>9</sup> The Neoplatonists did, due to their gifted natures:

This task was reserved for men who were born indeed in a baser age, but who being allotted a nature similar to their leader, were the true interpreters of his mystic speculations. The most conspicuous of these are, the great Plotinus, the most learned Porphyry, the divine Jamblichus, the most acute Syrianus, Proclus the consummation of philosophic excellence, the magnificent Hierocles, the concisely elegant Sallust, and the most inquisitive Damascius.<sup>10</sup>

The authority of this series of Neoplatonists was also supported by external circumstances: Their native language was Greek; they had access to Platonic literature; and they dedicated their lives to Platonism. To them, Platonism was not merely an abstract complex of theories and arguments, but a way of life.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For this development in the 18th century, see Catana 2012a and Catana 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor 1804: lxxxvii [Taylor 1995: 61].

<sup>10</sup> Taylor 1804: lxxxvii [Taylor 1995: 61]. The Sallust mentioned here is not the historian but the philosopher. In 1793, Taylor had published an English translation of a work by Sallust, namely *On the gods and the world*.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor 1804: xci-xcii [Taylor 1995: 63-64].

Taylor's conception of Platonic philosophy, and his use of Neoplatonists as guides to Plato's philosophy, clearly stood out from Plato scholarship typical of the 18th century in Northern Europe. The 19th-century reduction of Taylor to a "nobody" in classical scholarship was largely due to his dissent from some assumptions in 18th-century Protestant philosophy and hermeneutics, which had shaped contemporary Plato scholarship, and which was effectively reflected in the devastating 1804 and 1809 reviews. These assumptions, however, may be untenable or dubious upon closer examination, but they have not all been articulated and discussed.

Over the last sixty years we have become familiar with Taylor's significance to 19th-century English and American romantic literature, but we still know very little about the 18th-century background against which Taylor reacted.<sup>12</sup> This means that we are left with the image of Taylor as a man who had no critical faculty, who succumbed to Neoplatonic (mis) interpretation of Plato's works; a man who made his mark upon the romantic literary imagination, but who did not contribute to Plato scholarship or philosophy.<sup>13</sup> The intended force of my argument is not that we should go back to Taylor's Plato interpretation and accept it uncritically,

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<sup>12</sup> For Taylor's influence upon the Platonism of the poet Shelley, see Notopoulos 1936. Evans 1940: 1070-72, ignores Brucker's historiography of Plato as a background to Taylor and the 1804 and 1809 reviews. Evans 1943: 107, points out Taylor's significance for literary romanticism, but without comparing his Plato interpretation with those of the 18th century. Raine 1968 and 1969 offers good introductions to Taylor and his significance to 19th-century English romantic authors like Blake, Coleridge, Shelley and Wordsworth, but has little to say about his 18th-century context. Tigerstedt 1974 only offers brief comments on Taylor's Plato interpretation (48, 62-63). Tigerstedt 1977 ignores Taylor's Plato interpretation completely. Glucker 1987 provides a good survey of 19th-century Plato interpretations in England, including that of Taylor (160-165), though without commenting on Taylor's context in 18th-century Plato scholarship. Glucker 1996: 394-396, briefly identifies two 18th-century figures as central to the Plato reading against which Taylor reacted; Mosheim and Brucker. I shall examine these figures below. Burnyeat 1998, 2001a and 2001b, does not examine the 18th-century assumptions informing the 1804 and 1809 reviews.

<sup>13</sup> Rigg 1898: 468, thus stated about Taylor: "Critical faculty he had none." Such ridicule is absent in the most recent biographical entry on Taylor; see Louth 2004. There are exceptions to the negative view of Taylor expressed by Rigg and others: See Saffrey and Westerink 1968: xcv, paying tribute to Taylor's competence in Platonic texts (especially Proclus' *Platonic Theology*) and to his textual conjectures; Allen 1982: 41 ("that eccentric but brilliant scholar-Platonist, Thomas Taylor").

but that it is time to take an informed and critical approach to our inherited disdain of Taylor's interpretative outlook.

### Platonic Ethics: Divine Likeness

In the citation on page 181 above, we find Hierocles' exhortation to "reascend to the divine likeness". This *telos* of philosophy (in Greek, *homoiōsis theōi*) was an important theme in the ancient Platonic tradition, and it features prominently in Plato's *Theaetetus* 176A-B, in the Middle Platonist Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* 28, and in Plotinus' *Ennead* I.2.1 and IV.7.10, to mention just a few examples. Neoplatonists like Plotinus and Hierocles thus continued this tradition from the earlier Platonic tradition. The existence of such a continuity does not exclude, of course, that some ancient Platonists did not accept this as an important and continuous tenet in Platonism; nor does it exclude that there were other topics about which ancient Platonists disagreed. Such differentiation, however, we do not find in Taylor's reading. Although this tradition of Platonic ethics has been marginalised in 19th- and 20th-century ethical discourse, which has followed different conceptualisations of ethics and typically emphasised agency rather than the individual's noetic and metaphysical constitution, it has recently been rediscovered by some scholars working on the Platonic tradition.<sup>14</sup>

How does Taylor interpret this ethical *telos*? He does not rely on Hierocles for clarification. Apparently, he returns to Plato himself: "In short, the soul, according to Plato, can only be restored while on earth to the divine likeness, which she abandoned by her descent, and be able after death to reascend to the intelligible world, by the exercise of the cathartic and theoretic virtues; the former purifying her from the defilements of a mortal nature, and the latter elevating her to the vision of true being".<sup>15</sup> In a note to these words, Taylor claims (without further references) that Plato discusses the cathartic virtues in the *Phaedo*, and the theoretic virtues in the *Theaetetus*. Although it is true that Plato discussed purification (*katharsis*) in *Phaedo* 67D-70A, where we find his argument about the

<sup>14</sup> For this reading of Plato, see Annas 1999: 52-71; Sedley 1999; Beierwaltes 2002: 132-142; Karamanolis 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor 1804: lxx [Taylor 1995: 45].

purification of the philosopher's soul, he did not there develop a technical term for 'cathartic virtues', and certainly not one that was distinguishable from the other term, 'theoretic virtues'. Nor can one claim that Plato developed the term 'theoretic virtues' in the *Theaetetus*, or indeed that he developed it in explicit opposition to 'cathartic virtues' in that work. So where does this terminological scheme come from? In his commentary on *Phaedo* 69C, Taylor explains:

Above these [i.e. the political virtues, as explained in the *Republic*] are the cathartic virtues, which pertain to reason alone, withdrawing from other things to itself, throwing aside the instruments of sense as vain... Prior to these, however, are the theoretic virtues, which pertain to the soul, introducing itself to natures superior to itself, not only gnostically, as some one may be induced to think from the name but also orrectically: for it hastens to become, as it were, intellect instead of soul; and intellect, as we have before observed, possesses both desire and knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

To these three classes of virtue (political, cathartic and theoretic), Taylor adds a fourth, namely paradigmatic virtues, which he refers to Plotinus, probably *Ennead* I.2.7.<sup>17</sup> Taylor does find that Plotinus' virtue theory is an adequate account of Plato's ethics, and in this respect one can say that Taylor was indebted to Neoplatonism. He refers continuously to these four ethical virtues in his commentary on Plato's dialogues and letters, suggesting that Taylor's exhortation to virtue on the first page of his 'General introduction' is more than a rhetorical gesture; he actually means it,

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<sup>16</sup> Taylor's comment to Plato 1804, IV: 273 n. 1 [Taylor's comment to Plato 1995-1996, IV: 246 n. 12].

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Taylor affirms the centrality of wisdom and virtue in Plato's *Phaedo* in his introduction to that dialogue; see Plato 1804, IV: 250 [Plato 1995-1996, IV, p. 232]. Moreover, Sydenham and Taylor refer approvingly to Plotinus elsewhere in the context of the soul's noetic ascent and the intelligible realm, as is clear in the introductions to, or commentary to, Plato's *Phaedrus* 246E (Plato 1804 III: 595 [Plato 1995-1996, III: 409]), *Gorgias* 525A (Plato 1804 IV: 455 [Plato 1995-1996, IV: 429]), *Meno* (Plato 1804, V: 33 n. 1 [Plato 1995-1996, V: 30 n.]). For Plotinus' virtue theory, see Dillon 1996; Smith 1999; Schniewind 2003 and 2005; McGroarty 2006; Remes 2006; Stern-Gillet 2009.



and he often brings in Platonic and Neoplatonic virtue terminology in his commentaries.<sup>18</sup>

Again, Taylor quotes Plato's *Theaetetus* 176B in his 'General introduction' in order to explain this *telos* of divine likeness. The quotation reads, in Taylor's translation: " 'It is necessary', says he [Plato], 'to fly from hence thither: but the flight is a similitude to divinity, as far as is possible to man; and this similitude consists in becoming just and holy in conjunction with intellectual prudence.' "<sup>19</sup> Plotinus had quoted these words in his *Ennead* I.2.1.1-5, adding that if we reach this desired similitude, then we shall be "in virtue" (*en aretê*). Again, Taylor finds himself in line with Neoplatonists like Plotinus when interpreting Platonic ethics.

Plotinus had used this quote from Plato as a starting point for his own virtue theory, as developed in the remaining part of I.2 *On virtues*, and in I.4 *On well-being*. The articulation of virtues transcending the political virtues, the so-called higher virtues, provided a conceptual framework through which it became possible to account for the individual soul's communication with the divine realm, and for its self-transformation, its "becoming divine"; the aim of philosophising. Plotinus explained the centrality of virtue to anyone approaching the good: "For wisdom and true virtue are divine things, and could not occur in some trivial mortal being, but something of such a kind [as to possess them] must be divine, since it has a share in divine things through its kinship and consubstantiality."<sup>20</sup> As is well known, Plotinus developed a complex theory about lower and higher virtues in I.2.3-7, which was further elaborated and systematised by Porphyry in his *Sententiae* 32.<sup>21</sup> Marinus of Neapolis' biography of Proclus, *Proclus, or On Happiness*, can similarly be understood within the tradition of Platonic and Neoplatonic virtue ethics, since it rephrased several of these higher virtues as conductive to the philosopher's *telos*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>) One example of this is found in Taylor's introduction to the *Phaedo*, commenting on *Phaedo* 69C (Plato 1804, IV: 273 n. 1 [Plato 1995-196, IV: 309-31]).

<sup>19</sup>) Taylor 1804: lxvi [Taylor 1995: 45].

<sup>20</sup>) Plotinus, *Ennead* IV.7.10. Armstrong's translation.

<sup>21</sup>) For Porphyry's virtue theory in his *Sententiae* 32, see Porphyry 2005, I: 334-344, and the notes by L. Brisson and J.-M. Flamand to that passage in Porphyry 2005, II: 628-642. For Porphyry on virtue theory, see also Smith 1974: 25-26, 48, 50, 59-61, 76-77, 104-105, 128, 134-135, 147-148, 153.

<sup>22</sup>) To some extent Marinus structures his biography according to a scheme of virtues,

Taylor's English translation of Marinus' biography was published in 1788 together with his translations of Proclus' mathematical and philosophical works; his translation of Plotinus' *Ennead* I.4 was published in his *Five Books of Plotinus* in 1794; his translation of *Ennead* I.2 was included in his *Select Works of Plotinus*, published 1817; and his translation of Porphyry's *Sententiae* was published in 1823. In short, Taylor was familiar with the basic features of Neoplatonic eudaimonism and virtue theory already before 1804. He drew on this knowledge in his Plato commentary of 1804, and he continued to take an interest in Neoplatonic virtue theory after 1804. Hence, Taylor's Plato interpretation of 1804 was not a random compilation of Neoplatonic ideas, as has been suggested—it was fairly consistent with his emphasis on *homoiosis theōi*, with his selection of cited Neoplatonists, and with several of his other works on the Platonic tradition. Evidently, he focused on Platonic virtue ethics, to which the selected Neoplatonists had made a substantial contribution.<sup>23</sup> One might claim that Taylor is thereby guilty by association, but that is another issue.

What did this mean to Taylor's conception of philosophy and its relationship to theology? Among the above-mentioned Neoplatonists, Taylor makes use of Proclus as a "guide", in at least two senses. First, on several occasions he cites approvingly Proclus' commentaries to Plato's individual dialogues.<sup>24</sup> Second, he draws on Proclus' idea that Plato's philosophy is

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where we first find the physical, ethical and political virtues (3-17), then the higher virtues, that is, the purificatory, contemplative and theurgic virtues (18-35). For Neoplatonist biographies, see Edwards 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Compare with Evans 1940: 1071: "It is quite true that Taylor made no distinction between the thoughts of Plato and the neo-Platonists; his notes and introductions are little more than compilations from the most heterogeneous neo-Platonic sources." Ibid., Evans cites approvingly [Mill] 1809/2001: 153-154, which reads: "Mr Taylor has scarcely done any thing, or indeed professed to do any thing, but to fasten upon Plato the reveries of Proclus, and of the other philosophers of the Alexandrian school." Burnyeat 2001b: 106, tends to follow this line of interpretation: "Mill's account of Proclus and other NeoPlatonists is grossly unfair. But I admit that I would not want to read Plato solely through their eyes. They miss so much that Cicero appreciates. Like Taylor, they completely lack his (and Mill's) esteem for the Socratic spirit of questioning. And they are much too solemn."

<sup>24</sup> Taylor 1804: xxxv [Taylor 1995: 24]. Taylor similarly praises Proclus, among others, see Taylor 1804: xxxii, xlii, xlix, lxvii, lxxxvii, xc [Taylor 1995: 22, 28, 33, 67, 61, 62]. Taylor cites Proclus' interpretation of Plato's "theological dogmas" in Taylor 1804: xlii-xlix [Taylor 1995: 28-33]. Finally, Taylor reports Proclus' commentary to several of Plato's dialogues in that 1804 publication.

not only a philosophy, but also a theology: The ineffable One is the cause of all, and from it everything receives its being and form. The human soul is amphibious and has a privileged middle position in a hierarchy of being stretching from the One, the summit, to the lowest being, and it is given freedom to approach that divinity. He regards noetic ascent (or “reascent”, as he sometimes calls it) towards the summit as a religious phenomenon described as an act of piety.<sup>25</sup> Platonic ethics, stressing the approach to divinity through the exercise of higher virtues, can be seen as a corollary of such a conception of theology. In 1816, twelve years after his volumes of Plato appeared, Taylor published an English translation of Proclus’ *Platonic Theology*, and several of the views propounded in his ‘Introduction’ were consistent with his views stated in 1804.

In his ‘General introduction’, Taylor underlines the radical difference between, on the one hand, God in the genuine Platonic tradition, and, on the other, the Christian God. He makes it clear that the Platonic God, as understood by Proclus, cannot be understood within the Christian dogma of the Trinity:

Lastly, from all that has been said, it must, I think, be immediately obvious to every one whose mental eye is not entirely blinded, that there can be no such thing as a trinity in the theology of Plato, in any respect analogous to the Christian Trinity. For the highest God, according to Plato, as we have largely shown from irresistible evidence, is so far from being a part of a consubistent triad, that he is not to be connumerated with any thing.<sup>26</sup>

This represents a firm rejection of the Patristic tradition, in which Neoplatonic metaphysics to some extent had been accommodated to Christian dogma.<sup>27</sup> He regards Emperor Justinian’s closure of the Academy of Athens in 529 as a disastrous event in the history of Platonism, which ruined Platonic theology.<sup>28</sup> Consistent with this view, Taylor only cites those Neoplatonists who were working prior to, or escaping from, the reign of Justinian (527-565), e.g. Damascius and Simplicius (fl. 6th century CE); or

<sup>25</sup> Taylor 1804: xxxii-xxxiv [Taylor 1995: 22-23].

<sup>26</sup> Taylor 1804: xxxv [Taylor 1995: 24].

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Augustine, *De civitate dei* X.23, 29. For this subject, see Glawe 1912, which discusses Plato and the Trinity (and anti-Trinitarianism) in the 17th and 18th centuries.

<sup>28</sup> Taylor 1804: lxxix [Taylor 1995: 55].

those who were openly critical of Christianity, e.g. Porphyry. He does not praise Neoplatonists accommodating Platonism to Christianity—he bypasses thinkers like Marius Victorinus (fl. 4th century CE), Augustine (354-430), Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-394) and pseudo-Dionysius (fl. ca. 500).<sup>29</sup> He similarly rejects Renaissance interpretations of Plato advanced by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) and Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), as well as the interpretation set forth by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-87): “[I]n order to combine Christianity with the doctrines of Plato”, Taylor explains, they “rejected some of his most important tenets, and perverted others, and thus corrupted one of these systems, and afforded no real benefit to the other.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore Taylor speaks of his own interpretation of Plato in rather evangelical terms; the path he seeks has not been trodden since Justinian closed the Academy.<sup>31</sup>

### Some 18th-Century Critics of Neoplatonism: Warburton and Brucker

To Taylor, this is all well and good, but it was not so to Taylor’s contemporaries or near-contemporaries. The “labors” of those Neoplatonists, Taylor reports, “have been ungratefully received.”<sup>32</sup> Why? He wonders:

Was it because that mitered sophist, Warburton, thought fit to talk of the polluted streams of the Alexandrian school, without knowing any thing of the source whence those streams are derived? Or was it because some heavy German critic, who knew nothing beyond a verb in *μῆ*, presumed to *grunt* at these venerable heroes [i.e. these select Neoplatonists]? Whatever was its source, and whenever it originated, for I have not been able to discover either, this however is certain, that it owes its being to the most profound Ignorance, or the most artful Sophistry, and that its origin is no less contemptible than obscure.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Taylor thus accuses pseudo-Dionysius for having “stolen” and Christianised the original Platonic concept of prayer developed by the Neoplatonists Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Hierocles; see Taylor’s ‘Introduction to the Second Alcibiades’ in *Plato* 1804: IV: 574 [Plato 1995-1996, IV: 541].

<sup>30</sup> Taylor 1804: xc [Taylor 1995: 63].

<sup>31</sup> Taylor 1804: iv, lxxix [Taylor 1995: 2, 55].

<sup>32</sup> Taylor 1804: lxxxviii [Taylor 1995: 61].

<sup>33</sup> Taylor 1804: xci [Taylor 1995: 63]. For further discussion of these recent critics, see

Who are these figures? To which writings does Taylor allude, if any? According to Myles Burnyeat, the first is Bishop William Warburton (1698-1779), “a learned divine who engaged in violent polemics on theological, philosophical and other topics.”<sup>34</sup> He was the author of numerous writings and sermons. In Taylor’s commentary on *Phaedrus* 250C, discussing the nature of the ancient mysteries, he refers to Warburton’s best-known work, the *Divine Legation of Moses, Demonstrated on the Principles of a Religious Deist* (2 vols, 1737-1741).<sup>35</sup> In that work, Warburton had defended Christianity against various forms of modern atheism, allegedly to be found in the writings of Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525), Benedict Spinoza (1632-77) and Pierre Bayle (1647-1706); he had been opposed to ancient polytheism and its fusion of philosophy and theology; and he had blustered against “Platonic fanaticism”, a typical invective used against Neoplatonists among 18th-century German historians of philosophy. However, Warburton had said nothing in his *Divine Legation* about Plotinus and Proclus, the founders of Neoplatonism, and he had only said very little about other Neoplatonists such as Porphyry,<sup>36</sup> Iamblichus,<sup>37</sup> and Hierocles.<sup>38</sup> Although Warburton had a critical view of Platonism and Neoplatonism, he had not addressed these philosophical traditions in a serious manner in that work.

Who, then, is the other person mentioned in the quotation on page 190 above, the “heavy German critic”, who possessed little knowledge about Greek, or who knew nothing more than Greek grammar, and had no philosophical sophistication? Taylor does not disclose such information in this 1804 publication.<sup>39</sup> If we look at the auction catalogue produced when

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Taylor 1804: lxxxix n. 1 [Taylor 1995: 81-82]. In his introduction to Plato’s *Cratylus*, Taylor similarly defends Proclus as a respectable interpreter of Plato, and rejects, once again, those “modern theologians” who claim that Proclus perverted Plato’s theology; see Taylor’s ‘Introduction’ in Plato 1804, V: 488 [Plato 1995-1996: V: 460].

<sup>34</sup> Burnyeat’s note to Mill 1809/2001: 156 n. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor’s note to the *Phaedrus*, in Plato 1804, III: 328 n. 2 [Plato 1995-1996, III: 414 n. 18].

<sup>36</sup> For Porphyry, see, for instance, Warburton 1755-58, I.1: 109; I.2: 216; II.1: 110, 111 n. c, 195.

<sup>37</sup> For Iamblichus, see, for instance, Warburton 1755-58, I.1: 122 n.; I.2: 323; II.1: 195-196.

<sup>38</sup> For Hierocles, see, for instance, Warburton 1755-58, I.2: 216 n. v, 228.

<sup>39</sup> In this 1804 publication Taylor does not refer explicitly to any of the important 18th- and 19th-century German critics of Neoplatonism, e.g. C. A. Heumann, M. G. Hansch, J. L. Mosheim, J. F. Budde, J. Brucker, J. G. Buhle, A. F. Büsching, C. Meiners, W. G. Tenemann, D. Tiedemann, J. G. Walch, J. H. Zedler. For criticism of Platonism—Plotinus in

his library was sold after his death in 1835, we only find manuscripts and books written in the two classical languages and English.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that Taylor did not know German and is likely to have known this German critic through Latin or English texts, if Taylor spoke from first hand knowledge at all.<sup>41</sup> Taylor admits that he did not know French, so we can also exclude German critics translated into French.<sup>42</sup> The majority of 17th- and 18th-century German critics of Neoplatonism had written in Latin, and some of these appeared in the 1836 catalogue: Jonsius' *De scriptoribus historiae philosophicae* (1659), and the erudite Fabricius' *Bibliotheca Latina* (1697) and *Bibliotheca Graeca* (1713-28).<sup>43</sup> However, Jonsius' work had little to say about Plotinus, and he hardly qualified as the "heavy German critic" in question.<sup>44</sup> Fabricius edited and published Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* and wrote entries on several Neoplatonists. Fabricius' comments on Neoplatonists reported the standard accusations—e.g. that Plotinus was a quasi-Spinozist, due to his ontological monism, and aversion to Christianity—but one can hardly accuse him of being incompetent in Greek, and it would be unfair to characterise even Fabricius' sceptical but sophisticated comments on Neoplatonists as "grunts".

The best known of the remaining German critics is Johann Jacob Brucker (1696-1770), a historian and Lutheran minister. His *Historia critica philosophiae* came out in a first edition in 1742-44, in a second edition in 1766-67, consisting of the 1742-44 edition plus an appendix. This work was abbreviated and translated into English by William Enfield (1741-97) and published in London in 1791—implying that it was circulating in England during Taylor's formative years. We do not find Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* or Enfield's translation in the catalogue of Taylor's auctioned

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particular—in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Matton 1992: 647-653, 700-704; Neschke 1992.

<sup>40</sup> *Catalogue* 1836.

<sup>41</sup> Glucker 1987: 170, observes that it was common in early 19th-century English scholarship to ignore German contributions; Grote was the first to take notice of their work in a serious way.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor 1804 cvii [Taylor 1995: 75].

<sup>43</sup> Jonsius' work is mentioned in *Catalogue* 1836: 21 n. 569. Fabricius' *Bibliotheca Latina* (2 vols, 1712) is listed *ibid.*: 7 nn. 138-140 (see also Taylor's reference to this work of Fabricius, *ibid.*: 5 n. 75). Fabricius' *Bibliotheca graeca* (14 vols, Hamburg 1708) is listed *ibid.*: 11 n. 282 (see also Taylor's note reference to this work in *ibid.*: 13 n. 314; 26 n. 696).

<sup>44</sup> For Plotinus, see Jonsius 1659: 264-265, 281-282, 293.

library, which may not come as a surprise, given Taylor's reservations. Still, Brucker is probably the "heavy German critic" in question. Brucker had been strongly opposed to Platonic philosophy, especially Neoplatonic philosophy, and his orthodox, emotional and linguistic flamboyance may well be rendered as "grunts" by anyone happening to disagree with him. Brucker himself stated in 1767 that he sided with Warburton in central philosophical and theological matters.<sup>45</sup> It was no coincidence that Taylor linked the two. Moreover, Brucker's expositions had often suffered from his desire to reduce past philosophers' ideas into preconceived and anachronistic schemes, as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) objected in 1804.<sup>46</sup> The two reviews of Taylor's 1804 publication support the assumption that Brucker was Taylor's target. To these reviews I now turn.

### **James Mill: Taylor's Anonymous Critic of 1804 and 1809, Emulating Brucker**

Taylor's *Works of Plato* was reviewed in 1804 in *The Literary Journal*, and in 1809 in *The Edinburgh Review*. The two reviews commented upon the same three issues in the same order: Taylor's hermeneutic outlook, his philological work supporting his English translation, and his translation itself. The first issue occupied most of the space and was an onslaught on Taylor as an interpreter of Plato. The reviewer accused Taylor's hermeneutic approach to Plato of being indebted to Neoplatonism, and Proclus in particular.<sup>47</sup> Taylor was guilty by association. In this attack, the reviewer repeated several assumptions from 18th-century histories of philosophy. The second issue was dealt with briefly, given Taylor's lack of interest. The third issue was drawn out over several pages, making it painfully clear that Taylor was largely a self-taught classical scholar, who never attained the proficiency that a university education in classics might have brought him.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Brucker 1742-67, VI: 202.21-205.18, agrees with Warburton (relying on a Latin translation of his *Divine Legation of Moses*) against emanative and pantheistic systems of philosophy, and sees Warburton as siding with Mosheim.

<sup>46</sup> Schleiermacher 1804: 7-9, objects to the systematization of Plato found in Brucker and his followers, e.g. Tennemann.

<sup>47</sup> See [Mill] 1809/2001: 153-154.

<sup>48</sup> Raine 1969: 19-20.



The 1804 review was signed by 'M', the 1809 review was completely anonymous, but has traditionally been attributed to James Mill (1773-1836). Today Mill is chiefly known for his systematization of Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) utilitarianism, and as the father of the philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), who formulated empiricist and liberal traditions with considerable influence in the 19th century. Recently, John Glucker and Myles Burnyeat have argued convincingly that James Mill was the author of both reviews. They point out that James Mill was the founding figure of *The Literary Journal*, in which the 1804 review appeared; "M" stands for the founder and editor of the journal, [James] M[ill]. The crucial difference between the two reviews is, according to Glucker, that the above-mentioned Brucker is cited extensively in the 1809 review, whereas he is not cited in the 1804 review.<sup>49</sup>

This identification can be supported by internal evidence. Both reviews followed the same composition, as mentioned above, and they both turned Cicero's interpretation of Plato as a sceptic against Taylor's reading, as I shall explain in a moment.<sup>50</sup> In the following, I refer to James Mill as the author of these two reviews. The important point, however, is the fact that the reviewer's opinions were put into circulation and had a damaging effect upon Taylor's reputation as an interpreter of Plato, and that Brucker's views were explicitly praised as authoritative.

The 1809 review cites Taylor's words about Warburton and about the "grunt" of some "heavy German critic" (cited on page 190 above). It identifies Jacob Brucker as the latter.<sup>51</sup> Whereas Taylor had regarded Brucker's denigration of the Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato as an effect of his ignorance and sophistry, the reviewer values Brucker highly as a historian of philosophy and turns with irony against Taylor's rejection of Brucker. Mill praises Brucker for his critical faculty—something which Taylor lacks, according to Mill—and introduces Brucker in the following manner:

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<sup>49</sup> It is stated in the bibliography to *Thomas Taylor the Platonist: Selected Writings* Raine 1969: 535, that the 1809 review "is usually attributed to James Mill". Glucker 1996: 395-397, argues that James Mill is the author of both reviews. Burnyeat 2001a: 65 n. 41 and 2001b reaches the same conclusion.

<sup>50</sup> For identical references to Cicero's *Academica* and its sceptical interpretation of Plato; see [Mill] 1804/2001: 115-116 (referring to the *Academica* 1.15-16, 1.46), and [Mill] 1809/2001: 154.

<sup>51</sup> [Mill] 1809/2001: 156.



There is one of these German critics, who, though not endowed with the spirit of philosophy to that eminent degree which, for his arduous and important task, was to have been wished, has yet, by his industry, by his erudition, and the general soundness of his judgement, performed a service of the highest value to philosophy,—we mean Brucker, the author of the celebrated and most useful *Historia critica philosophiae*; some of whose *swinish* notes respecting these Alexandrian worthies, it may not be improper for Mr Taylor to hear.<sup>52</sup>

In Brucker's terminology, the "Alexandrian worthies" was a pejorative referring to ancient Neoplatonists. Mill cites three "grunts", in the form of citations from Brucker's Latin opus, criticising—or, to put it more plainly, unfairly vilifying—the interpretation of Plato advanced by Proclus and other Neoplatonists.<sup>53</sup> In addition to these "grunts", Mill cites a series of "squeaks", in the form of citations from Brucker's work, all targeting the morality of the Neoplatonists favoured by Taylor: Plotinus, Porphyry, Apollonius, Proclus, and Hierocles.<sup>54</sup> Together, these "grunts" and "squeaks" make up a substantial part of Mill's criticism of Taylor's interpretation of Plato. Brucker's outlook was thus at the core of the Taylor-Mill controversy 1804-1809.

Brucker had considered Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato unreliable and corrupt. Neoplatonists were infected by Egyptian culture and religion, whose polytheism and pluralistic religiosity had turned Alexandrian philosophers into timid minds inclined towards religious syncretism, since they were too fearful to abandon inherited religious traditions. This mindset shaped their philosophy—they were constantly in want of the most incoherent synthesis of philosophical systems, and they never exercised the intellectual courage required to abandon inherited philosophical traditions. Moreover they suffered from the illusion that *furor*—the alleged aim of Platonic philosophising—could bring about the blessed life of their souls. This was contrary to Christian doctrine and therefore wrong. Finally, they suffered from a medical condition in which an excess of melancholic humours generated mental images in their disturbed brains,

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<sup>52</sup>) [Mill] 1809/2001: 156-157.

<sup>53</sup>) [Mill] 1809/2001: 157-158.

<sup>54</sup>) [Mill] 1809/2001: 158-163.

which they, unfortunately, mistook for real concepts and divinities.<sup>55</sup> Instead of relying on Neoplatonic interpreters of Plato, Brucker had turned to Cicero (*Academica* I.5ff.), Apuleius (*De Platone et eius dogmate*) and Alcinous (*Didaskalikos*) for guidance, since they had not been infected with the Neoplatonic disease.<sup>56</sup> To what extent Brucker actually followed the guidance of these Middle Platonists in his own reconstruction of Plato is quite another question, with which I shall not deal here.

In his 1804 and 1809 reviews, Mill returned to Cicero for much the same reason as Brucker, in order to avoid the infected, Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato, and he even returned to the same work of Cicero, the *Academica*. Hence, it is unlikely that Mill was “on his own”, as has been suggested recently.<sup>57</sup> Admittedly, Brucker and Mill used Cicero in different ways—Brucker used Cicero’s account, together with those of Apuleius and Alcinous, to present Plato as a system builder, whereas Mill used Cicero to present Plato as an undogmatic sceptic.<sup>58</sup> Taylor did not see Plato through the eyes of the sceptic Cicero, as Mill made abundantly clear in his two reviews. Taylor, however, did not turn his back on Cicero as a competent reader of Plato, but he primarily acknowledged him as an orator with a keen sense of stylistic devices in Plato’s texts.<sup>59</sup>

Before examining Mill’s quotations from Brucker—the “grunts” and “squeaks”—let me cite Mill’s own words about the Neoplatonists informing Taylor’s interpretation of Plato:

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<sup>55</sup> Brucker separated Middle Platonism from what we have come to call ‘Neoplatonism’. Brucker himself labelled the Neoplatonic movement ‘secta eclectica’, the ‘eclectic sect’. For his account of Neoplatonism, see Brucker 1742-67, II: 189-462.

<sup>56</sup> Brucker 1742-67, I: 669,13-23.

<sup>57</sup> Compare with Burnyeat 2001b: 105, who writes: “Because he [James Mill] was on his own, he had the luck to fall in love with a Plato unencumbered by the NeoPlatonic interpretation which had prevailed since Ficino and the Renaissance. He read Plato and he read Cicero, and found the second an attractive guide to the first. Later he read Taylor, a mere epigonous of Ficino.” Brucker is ignored as a possible source of inspiration. Burnyeat’s further suggestion, that Taylor simply succumbed to Ficino’s influence, fits badly with Taylor’s own rejection of Ficino’s Platonism (Taylor 1804: xc [Taylor 1995: 63]), and it also fits badly with the fact that Ficino’s interpretation of Plato had not been dominant since the first half of the 18th century, as explained in Tigerstedt 1974 and 1977.

<sup>58</sup> For Brucker’s reconstruction, see Catana 2008: 73-94.

<sup>59</sup> Taylor 1804: lxxxv, ci [Taylor 1995: 59, 70].

Those men were in fact the *charlatans* of antient [i.e. ancient] philosophy; and we have nothing in modern times to compare either with the phrenzy of their writings, or the infamy of their lives. A gross mixture of the allegorical genius of Oriental theology, with the quibbling genius of the worst kind of Grecian metaphysics, and an audacious spirit of mystical, irrational and unintelligible fancy-hunting, respecting the invisible powers of nature, and the economy of the universe, constitutes the essence or the animating principle of that absurd and disgusting jargon which they exhibit to us under the profaned name of philosophy. Add to this, that they were, almost without exception, impostors and mountebanks, THAUMATURGI *par metier*, that is, lying professors of miracle-working, of conversing with the gods, of revelations from heaven, and other cheats by which they could purloin the admiration of an ignorant and abused [1809: absurd] multitude. (Reviewer's italics and upper case letters)<sup>60</sup>

These hateful words convey a political accusation against Neoplatonists. They claimed the existence of non-existent metaphysical entities about which they did not, and could not, have any real knowledge. Hence, they had to postulate such non-existent entities and a cognitive content about such realities (their “fancy-hunting”); and they had to make others believe in these entities by means of “that absurd and disgusting jargon”. Given that their ontological and cognitive categories were nothing but hypostatizations—or worse, fraud and mendacity—the outcome of the Neoplatonists’ performances was poor: They were “lying professors of miracle-working”, that is, “charlatans”.

Most importantly, the Neoplatonists carried out these “cheats” in order to manipulate the “ignorant and absurd multitude”.<sup>61</sup> The philosophical term ‘multitude’ had already a long history around 1800, typically denoting the ignorant and physically violent masses. In 17th-century political philosophy, however, it had become opposed to another term, the ‘people’. Thomas Hobbes’ *De cive* of 1642 played a key role in this development. In his terminology, the term *multitudo* was used for groups of men (*homini*) living in a state of nature in pre-civilised societies. He opposed ‘multitude’ (*multitudo*) to ‘people’ (*populus*), living in more civilised societies where

<sup>60</sup>) [Mill] 1809/2001: 155. Compare with [Mill] 1809: 193.

<sup>61</sup>) Here I follow the 1809 edition ([Mill] 1809: 193), which reads “absurd”, not “abused”, as transcribed by Burnyeat. [Mill] 1809/2001: 159, also refers to the “admiration of a deluded multitude”. For Neoplatonists and their societies, see Smith (ed.) 2005.

men are regarded as political subjects and organised under politically legitimate leadership (VII.5).<sup>62</sup> Given this pre-history, Mill's use of the term 'multitude' brings out an accusation: the ancient Neoplatonists belonged to a less developed political culture, in which charlatans could manipulate the ignorant masses with their lies and tricks. The Neoplatonists, pseudo-philosophers and charlatans as they were, took advantage of this.

The philosophical reservations articulated in Mill's "grunts" and "squeaks" go deeper, however, since they also concern Neoplatonic ideas of philosophy, theology and ethical virtue, as well as historiographical categorisations of Neoplatonism. In the remaining part of his 1809 review, Mill elaborates these reservations, mainly through numerous citations from Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae*, discrediting some Neoplatonic philosophers, Proclus in particular. In order to explain this element in Mill's review of Taylor, we have to understand Brucker's denigration of the ancient biographical model, which underpins his scornful words about Marinus' biography of Proclus.

### Brucker's Rejection of the Biographical Model

Diogenes Laertius' the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* had been rediscovered in the 15th century and it served as a model for the biographical genre up till Brucker.<sup>63</sup> Brucker acknowledged Laertius' work as an important source for parts of ancient philosophy that had otherwise been lost (Epicurus, for instance), but he rejected it as a model for accounts of past philosophers, partly because it did not exhibit the systems of past philosophers, and partly because Laertius and other biographers did not employ their critical power of judgement in these accounts.<sup>64</sup> Brucker, in his history of philosophy, did not discard biographical and historical information about the past philosopher completely, but he subordinated it to

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<sup>62</sup> Hobbes 1983: 152-153.

<sup>63</sup> For the writing of philosophy's past up till Brucker, see Blackwell and Weller (eds) 1993, and Piaia and Santinello 2011. For the origin of the biographical genre in late ancient philosophy, see Edwards and Swain (eds) 1997, and Edwards 2000. We are less well informed about the 18th-century crisis and marginalization of the biographical genre.

<sup>64</sup> For this evaluation of Laertius, see Brucker 1742-67, I: 32.21-33.

an even more important account of the past philosopher's system of philosophy; biographical circumstances were reported as far as they had influenced the philosopher's system. Nevertheless, the *persona* of the philosopher ceased to be of prime importance to Brucker.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the subtle and often oblique rhetorical strategies employed in ancient biographies, were abandoned in Brucker's accounts.

In Brucker's programmatic statements, the philosopher's personality is valuable only as far as it is intellectually emancipated from traditions and their inherited prejudices, enabling the philosopher to choose freely and independently the principles of his system; the noetic and metaphysical constitution of the philosopher's soul, on the other hand, did not qualify his system, which stood on its own as a propositional complex of doctrines.<sup>66</sup> In practice, however, Brucker was not shy of citing whatever biographical source he could find, if it could be used to discredit a past thinker whom he happened to dislike. One example is his uncritical and unfair citations of biographical statements about Neoplatonists.

Brucker's compatriot, the Lutheran theologian Christoph August Heumann (1681-1764), had dethroned the biographical genre as an adequate model for narratives of past philosophers already in 1715, using Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* as an example of the weaknesses in this model. Here Heumann had turned ancient Neoplatonists' fondness of biographies of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophers into a matter of reproach: the admiration with

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<sup>65</sup> Perhaps one should not write off the interest in the philosopher's *persona* among 18th-century philosophers. It may be more to the point to interpret Brucker's move as a desire to replace the prestigious *persona* of the Renaissance philosopher—the contemplative Platonist who sometimes found himself in conflict with Christian orthodoxy and university institutions (e.g. Pico and Bruno)—with a new *persona* conforming to 17th- and 18th-century harmonisation in Northern Europe of Protestant church and national state (including its universities). For this harmonisation and its implications for the philosopher's *persona*, see Condren, Gaukroger and Hunter (eds) 2006. For a theoretical clarification of the concept of *persona* as a hermeneutic tool in the history of early modern philosophy, see Hunter 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Hadot 1995: 107-108, suggests that medieval scholasticism distinguished philosophy's spiritual content from its theoretical content; the former was transformed into theology, the latter into philosophy. My analysis opens up an additional perspective: Brucker's introduction of the historiographical concept system of philosophy implies that post-Bruckerian historians of philosophy have been inadequately equipped to identify this spiritual dimension in past philosophy.

which these biographies were read by subsequent Neoplatonists proves that they were not independent and autonomous minds, as genuine philosophers should be, but adhered to ancient authorities. In fact, Heumann reasons, in these ancient biographies, Neoplatonists were presented as pagan saints, as if they were equal to Christ in spiritual stature. In order to achieve this impressive depiction, biographers had dressed up and portrayed Neoplatonic philosophers with lies, frauds and mendacities, as Heumann seeks to demonstrate through a critical examination of Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*.<sup>67</sup> Brucker fully subscribed to Heumann's severe verdict in the case of Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* and other Neoplatonic biographies, and he, also following Heumann, regarded this biographical genre as a failed model in need of replacement. His *Historia critica philosophiae* was intended to supplant the biographical model for the history of philosophy.

Taylor sticks to the pre-Bruckerian idea, strong in Neoplatonism, that the noetic and metaphysical constitution of the agent's soul, manifested in his or her lower and especially higher virtues, is essential not only to the quality of his or her philosophising, but also to the very aim of philosophising; to reascend to "the divine likeness" through a purification of the virtues. Marinus' biography of Proclus is an example of this tradition in Neoplatonism. Contrary to Brucker and those who agreed with him, Taylor is, as we have seen, positively inclined towards Porphyry's and Marinus' biographies, and his position clearly stands out compared with Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* and other prominent histories of philosophy at the forefront in the last decades of the 18th century.

Mill, on the other hand, follows Brucker's criticism, and he turns the Bruckerian accusation against Taylor; he, too, lacked originality and critical power of judgment.<sup>68</sup> Mill, in his 1809 review, is caught up between the old and the new paradigm as regards biographical information. On the one hand, he follows Brucker and his relatively novel historiography, focusing on the systems of the Neoplatonists. On the other hand, he also clings to the old biographical model by his extensive use of *ad hominem* arguments (the "squeaks") intended to discredit the modes of philosophising

<sup>67</sup> Heumann 1715b: 144-146, 148. We find the same characterisation of Neoplatonic biographies in Brucker 1742-67, II: 319.3-13, 328.6-14 (Marinus' biography on Proclus), 378.23-379.40 (Neoplatonist biographies in general).

<sup>68</sup> [Mill] 1809/2001: 153-154.

of the Neoplatonists. Proclus, regarded by Taylor as “the consummation of philosophic excellence”, is targeted by Mill in this manner. Seen from a logical viewpoint, Mill’s *ad hominem* arguments are fallacies, because they suggest invalid inferences from the personality of the thinker to the validity of that thinker’s ideas and arguments. Nevertheless, these *ad hominem* arguments perform well as rhetorically effective devices, demolishing the credibility of the philosophies produced by Proclus.<sup>69</sup>

### Christian Revelation and Its Significance to Brucker’s Historiography

As explained above, Taylor maintained a Neoplatonic virtue theory and used it forcefully in his interpretation of Plato’s philosophy. Mill, on the other hand, scorned Neoplatonic doctrines on ethical virtue in his 1809 review.<sup>70</sup> To be more precise, Mill attacked one key concept in Neoplatonic ethics, namely that of noetic ascent through *furor*, or enthusiasm, which is conceptually connected to Neoplatonic virtue theory, and which is an essential component in Neoplatonist biographies, as exemplified in Marinus’ biography of Proclus.<sup>71</sup> What was the ultimate background of Brucker and other 18th-century German historians of philosophy?<sup>72</sup> Three things, I shall argue: Protestant theology and its emphasis on Christian

<sup>69</sup> For these “squeaks” targeting the personalities of some Neoplatonists, see [Mill] 1809/2001: 159-163.

<sup>70</sup> [Mill] 1809/2001: 157, cites Brucker’s disparaging account of Proclus’ personality and virtues. Mill does not discuss Neoplatonic virtue theory *per se*.

<sup>71</sup> For Mill’s denigrating words about Platonic *furor* and *enthusiamus*, see for instance [Mill] 1809/2001: 161-162, citing Brucker 1742-67, II: 231.5-14 (Oriental theology introduced into Neoplatonism superstition and enthusiasm).

<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, 18th-century German Protestant polemics against Platonic and Neoplatonic virtue ethics has not yet been studied thoroughly in discussions of 18th-century Platonism; see Knox 1957, Tigerstedt 1974, Tigerstedt 1977, Neschke 1992, Israel 2001, Franz 2003, Israel 2006, Varani 2008, Vassányi 2011 and Hanegraaff 2012. As Glucker 1996: 395 n. 27, observes, Tigerstedt’s two books are “too brief... The proper and extensive history of the modern study of Plato is yet to be written.” Matton 1992, Heyd 1995 and Varani 2008 have carried out important work in this direction, although much still needs to be done, in particular when it comes to the metaphysical, psychological and ethical aspects of Platonic and Neoplatonic virtue ethics in 17th- and 18th-century Protestant thought. So far, Varani 2008: 179-191, has offered the most careful account of the metaphysical and psychological dimensions.



revelation in moral matters; the overt anti-Platonic ethics among the same 18th-century thinkers; and the medical criticism of *furor*, also current among Protestant thinkers.

Let me examine the theological background first. It is a huge and complex field, and I shall restrict my analysis to its ramifications in 18th-century histories of philosophy. German Protestant thinkers from the 18th century reacted with great force—rhetorically and scholarly—against earlier and contemporary thinkers whom they perceived as threats to their confessional position. The establishment of the history of philosophy, undertaken by some of these German thinkers, was partly motivated by the desire to set the record straight: that is, to re-organise historical self-awareness in the field of philosophy according to the outlook determined by their confessional stance, Protestantism, and to expurgate Christianity more broadly from various “errors” (Protestantism being the corrective), especially those originating from Neoplatonic authors and absorbed into the Christian tradition through the Church Fathers.

The purpose of Brucker’s history of philosophy was thus apologetic and is best seen as an extension of Protestant church history, inspired by Johann Lorenz Mosheim (1693-1755).<sup>73</sup> The history of philosophy, thus conceived, was not only a record of philosophy’s past with intrinsic value, it was also a useful and expedient tool when confronting contemporary philosophers referring back to “erroneous” philosophical doctrines. One conspicuous example of such a triumphant error was to be found in Platonic philosophy, where the idea of *amor* and *furor* had led the *platonici* to believe, quite falsely, that the human soul could re-ascend to the divinity, due to the divine nature of the human soul, and due to the universal procession and return of which the human soul is an integral part. This erroneous Platonic doctrine had been integrated into Christianity via the Fathers and it lived on through more recent Platonists, Brucker explains; he may be referring to Renaissance Neoplatonists like Ficino and Pico, but he may also be referring to the Lutheran Ehregott Daniel Colberg (1659-1698) and his *Platonisch-Hermetisches Christenthum* of 1690-91,

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<sup>73</sup> For the apologetic nature of the history of philosophy proposed by Heumann and Brucker, see Catana 2008: 147-191; Catana 2012b: 623-624. For Brucker’s apologetic agenda, see Brucker 1742-67, I: 21.10-23.25, especially 21.17-32, where it is said that the history of philosophy leads not only to the recognition of truths and felicity, but also to the expulsion of errors dangerous to Christianity, e.g. those of Platonists.



where Platonic philosophy, especially Neoplatonic philosophy, was seen as a virus which had entered Christianity in its early phase and which still influenced contemporary, non-confessional religious movements in Germany, posing a threat to orthodox Lutheranism;<sup>74</sup> or Brucker may refer to the Lutheran Friedrich Christian Bücher (1651-1714) and his *Plato mysticus in pietista redivivus* (1699), which accused contemporary Pietism of using ancient Platonists, including Plotinus and Porphyry, in its theological foundation. It is an explicitly stated aim of the Bruckerian history of philosophy to expurgate this error from the Christian church.<sup>75</sup>

In this context it is worth recalling Brucker's orthodox Lutheran distinction between philosophy and revelation, presented in the 'Dissertatio praeliminaris' to his *Historia critica philosophiae*, and used in his subsequent categorisations and evaluations of the philosophers treated in that work. Brucker explains:

In fact, there is a double source to the understanding of the truth, which leads to the possession of the real good, and hence to the possession of felicity. One [source] consists in the rules of the inborn light or human reason, the other [source] consists in divine revelation. For since the human intellect is circumscribed by narrow limitations to such a degree that it is unable to measure the vast areas of the complete truth, and even less to comprehend all that is required for the sake of human happiness, it was necessary that divine revelation was brought to the aid of man, and that it taught him about the matters which are befitting for the enhancement of his happiness.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>) I have not had access to the 1690-91 first edition. Instead I rely on the 1710 edition of that work. In Colberg 1710: 4-16, it is claimed that Plotinus' metaphysics and psychology were instrumental to Platonic philosophy and its notion of noetic ascent by means of higher ethical virtues. *Ibid.*, 103-107, this Plotinian metaphysics is regarded as central to the Platonic philosophy that has contaminated contemporary non-confessional religious movements. For Colberg's attack on Platonism, see Varani 2008: 192-205.

<sup>75</sup>) For the dangerous error of Platonic philosophy, see Brucker 1742-67, I: 22.20-23.25. For Ficino and Pico as deplorable examples of such a revival, see *ibid.*, IV: 59.38- 60.4.

<sup>76</sup>) *Ibid.*, I: 7.27-34: "Duplex vero veritatis ad veri boni possessionem, et exoriundam inde felicitatem ducentis cognitionis fons est, unus congenitae lucis sive rationis humanae regulae, alter divina revelatio. Cum enim adeo angustis limitibus humanus intellectus circumscribitur sit, ut patentissimos veritatis universae campos emetiri, immo nec ea omnia cognoscere valeat, quae tamen felicitatis humanae ratio cognosci et sciri postulat, necesse erat, ut divina revelatio suppetias homini ferret, et de iis eum instrueret, quae felicitatem

By 'revelation' Brucker refers to the Protestant Bible, given his adherence to the Lutheran Augsburg confession and his role as a Lutheran minister.<sup>77</sup> Revelation thus conveys truths about "vast areas of the complete truth", that is, we may assume, theoretical knowledge about the universe. First of all, however, the Bible conveys truths about moral issues essential for human happiness—truths which cannot be obtained by human reason alone. We may assume that Brucker alludes to Christian doctrines on original sin resulting from the fall of man, the afterlife of man's soul, the Eucharist, the Trinity, and so on.<sup>78</sup> These truths are disclosed, or at least hinted at, through the Bible, not through sense and reason, and these revealed truths are elucidated by Christian theology, not by philosophy, which is confined to the narrow borders of human sense and reason.

Brucker employs the Bible and Christian doctrines as a corrective in his judgements about the normative conformity of past systems of philosophy—one of the two issues to be assessed in his "critical history of philosophy"; the other issue being the logical, internal coherence of the doctrines within the system itself.<sup>79</sup> Having accounted for the circumstances of a past philosopher and the coherence of his system, Brucker typically ends his narrative by an assessment of such normative character. In particular, he asks whether the past philosopher was an atheist or violated Christian transcendentalism by some sort of Spinozistic monism. For instance, he asks whether the concept of the divinity in Plato's *Timaeus* was in conflict with the Christian notion of the divinity.<sup>80</sup> Another example is Brucker's condemnation of Aristotle as an atheist. Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the universe was in conflict with the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*; his notion of the first mover as eternally absorbed in self-contemplation and indifferent to his creation violated the Christian doctrine of divine providence. These and other "errors" (*errores*) in Aristotle's philosophy are judged by Brucker on the basis of their

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eius summo loco ponere apta sunt." For the doctrine on double truth in Lutheran theology, see Bianchi 2008: 25-32.

<sup>77</sup> For Brucker's confessional identity, see also François 1998, especially 107.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, Brucker 1742-67, I: 26.26-30, where Brucker speaks of the mystery of salvation (*mysterium salutis*), referring to the redemption of the Christian's soul.

<sup>79</sup> For the assessment of the system's internal coherence, see *ibid.*, I: 15.10-18.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 682.5-29, Brucker discusses whether Plato was guilty of Spinozism by claiming in the *Timaeus* that the universe is a fusion of the divinity and matter.

conformity with Protestant doctrine.<sup>81</sup> Likewise, Porphyry is condemned in the most colourful phrases as the enemy of Christianity, because of his criticism of Christ's divinity, as reported by Augustine.<sup>82</sup> Arabic philosophers are condemned too, again on confessional grounds; they accepted Muhammad as a prophet.<sup>83</sup> Neoplatonists are routinely condemned as "superstitious" syncretists, produced by the syncretistic religious culture of Alexandria.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, the Neoplatonic theory of virtue is non-Christian and cannot in any way lead to the true *vita beata*; the very idea of a divine human soul able to communicate directly with the divinity through a hierarchy of being—thus bypassing the priesthood, church and Bible—is regarded non-Christian and rejected.<sup>85</sup> All this is in line with the premise of Brucker's history of philosophy,<sup>86</sup> but it is one that has often been ignored when subsequent authors have cited Brucker's individual accounts, Mill's 1809 review included.

Brucker's practice seems to fit badly with his own recommendations to the historian of philosophy, to pass his judgements on past systems without prejudices.<sup>87</sup> To Brucker, however, there is no contradiction involved

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<sup>81</sup> Brucker 1742-67, I: 832.14-835.6. Compare with Israel 2006: 409-512, especially 479; he contends that Brucker was undogmatic and a keen defender of freedom of thought from theological and political authority.

<sup>82</sup> Brucker 1742-67, II: 257 n. d, referring to Augustine, *De civitate dei* XIX.23. For Porphyry as an "enemy" (*hostis*) of Christianity, see Brucker 1742-67, II: 251.14-257.17. For the general opposition between Neoplatonism and Christianity, see, for instance, Brucker 1742-67 II: 372.12-376.13.

<sup>83</sup> For Brucker on Arabic philosophy, see Flasch 1998: 187-197.

<sup>84</sup> Brucker 1742-67, II: 191.1-23 (characteristic of Alexandrian Neoplatonism, the *secta eclectica*, to fuse popular religious superstition with philosophical eclecticism), 318.1-7 (Proclus' "insania superstitio"), 321.13-17 (superstition in Alexandria). For the alleged superstition among Alexandrian Neoplatonists, see for instance *ibid.*, II: 325.8-20, 330.15-18, 358.18-33, 370.23-371.30. Brucker also finds it in the so-called theology of Iamblichus; see *ibid.*, II: 431.20-435.20. *Ibid.*, I: 22.20-23, Brucker claims that superstition is inherent in Platonism as such. For a modern discussion of Iamblichus' theology, see Bussanich 2002.

<sup>85</sup> Brucker, 1742-67, II: 318.16-319.33. See also Brucker's general account of the virtues in the Neoplatonic system, which are similarly rejected as non-Christian; *ibid.*, II: 459.29-462.22.

<sup>86</sup> Brucker 1742-67, I: 7.27-34, as cited in n. 76 above.

<sup>87</sup> For the ideal historian of philosophy judging past systems without prejudices, see Brucker 1742-67, I: 12.18-13.3. Genuine philosophers, i.e. eclectics, reflect without prejudices; see *ibid.*, V: 3.22-4.11.

here, since the assumption about the Bible's divine origin and infallibility is not categorised as a prejudice, but as a truth transcending human reason, which must therefore be accepted by faith. Heumann, an important source for Brucker's conception of the history of philosophy, shared this view: According to Heumann, philosophy should be guided by Christian revelation, and a philosophy only based on human authority ("bloß menschliche Auctorität"), is false, as in the case of the Epicureans.<sup>88</sup> In the thought of Heumann and Brucker, reason is not divorced from religion—on the contrary, the express intention is to unite the two. Their harmonisation conflicts with the interpretation of the Enlightenment as a period in which these two were kept apart.<sup>89</sup>

Given these assumptions in Brucker's thought, it hardly comes as a surprise that he is openly hostile towards Platonism, especially late ancient Platonists, who had the chance to follow Christ, but chose not to do so, and who, in some cases, even rejected Christianity as a form of re-mythicising that belittles man's noetic faculties. It becomes more understandable that anyone sensitive to the tenor of Brucker's writings—like Mill in 1809—comes to regard non-Christian, Hellenic philosophers like the Neoplatonists as "charlatans of ancient philosophy", who succumb to "superstition".<sup>90</sup> Mill's first "grunt", cited from Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae*, brings out this hostility eloquently. Here Brucker is cited for his attack on Proclus, whose Platonic theology is characterised, without qualification, as "old-womanish superstition" and "inane religiosity".<sup>91</sup> Likewise, in one of Mill's "squeaks" from Brucker's opus, Plotinus' philosophy is branded as one "entirely composed of superstition, enthusiasms, tricks and countless arts of deceiving people".<sup>92</sup> Mill's own words, cited on page 197 above, emulate this disdain of religion among Hellenic

<sup>88</sup>) Heumann 1715d: 183.11-13. Heumann condemns Epicureans and similar thinkers on the same grounds *ibid.*: 235.20-236.16. For Brucker on the authority of revelation, see *ibid.*, I: 7.27-34, as cited in n. 76 above.

<sup>89</sup>) Compare with Israel 2001: 327, 474, 547, 645, and Israel 2006: 409-512, especially 477-479. For some links between university culture and the search for confessional identity in 17th- and 18th-century Germany, see Hsia 1989.

<sup>90</sup>) Mill on the superstition of the Neoplatonists, see for instance [Mill] 1809/2001: 161-162, citing Brucker 1742-67, II: 231.5-14.

<sup>91</sup>) [Mill] 1809/2001: 157, citing Brucker 1742-67, II: 333.12-23.

<sup>92</sup>) [Mill] 1809/2001: 161, citing Brucker 1742-67, II: 231.5-14.

philosophers. Though Mill does not articulate this explicitly, he perpetuates Brucker's implicit distinction between revelation and philosophy, when he cites Brucker's claims about Neoplatonists being superstitious.

If we read in this implicit claim, Taylor's error is not reducible to the rather superficial circumstance that he refers to Hellenic gods, mentioned by Neoplatonists, and that Brucker did not accept these gods because they were not mentioned in the Bible. Taylor's real error was one that he shared with ancient Neoplatonists, namely his affirmation of a Platonic theology in the guise of Proclus. Hereby Taylor tacitly elided the Lutheran distinction between revelation and philosophy, which had been affirmed in Brucker's determination of the two sources of truth. This distinction had been deployed forcefully in Brucker's assessment of the religious correctness of past philosophers' theologies, and it had been instrumental to the way in which history of philosophy was written and taught in the 19th century.<sup>93</sup>

When Mill in his 1809 review repeats Brucker's accusation that ancient Neoplatonists (and Proclus in particular) were "superstitious", he implicitly subscribes to this distinction, though he may not have liked the distinction itself if he had thought carefully about it. Similarly, if we accept Christian revelation (in whatever version of the text) as a criterion of truth, and if we accept Brucker's Lutheran view of the relationship between revelation and philosophy, it follows that Proclus' Platonic theology, affirmed by Taylor, must be condemned as "superstitious", as done by Brucker, and later on by Mill. But should we accept this criterion in Mill's criticism of Taylor? And should we accept it as a valid criterion in writing the history of philosophy?

### **Brucker and the 18th-Century Campaign against Platonic Virtue Ethics**

The German reaction against Platonic virtue theory targeted the theories of Plotinus, Porphyry and Macrobius, and their Renaissance revival in Ficino's commentary on Plotinus' *Enneads*. As explained above, Brucker's express intention with his history of philosophy was to expurgate Christianity from the errors caused by Platonic philosophy and its notion of

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<sup>93</sup> Brucker 1742-67, I: 7.27-34, as cited in n. 76 above.

*amor*.<sup>94</sup> Given this intention, Neoplatonic virtue ethics was a very important target. It should be observed, however, that this strain of ancient virtue ethics also spread outside Neoplatonism through the accounts of Porphyry and Macrobius—for instance, to medieval scholastic philosophers like Bonaventura (1217-74) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-74).<sup>95</sup> Brucker and his supporters may well have been aware of the influence of Neoplatonic virtue ethics among late medieval thinkers—“Catholics” as they were from a confessional viewpoint—and this knowledge may have fuelled their criticism of this version of ancient virtue ethics. However, the German theological reaction against Platonic ethics was decisively provoked by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-87) and his *Enchiridion ethicum* (London, 1666), where the notion of the soul’s “boniform faculty” re-introduced the Platonic idea of the human soul’s divinity and noetic ascent towards the good.<sup>96</sup>

A few words about More, before I proceed to his German critics. More defines virtue as a “power of the soul” (*vis animae*) able to ignore sense impressions and bodily impulses and to seek the good for itself. Contrary to Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.1), More holds that virtue is not a habit (Lat. *habitus*), partly because ‘virtue’ means ‘power’, partly because virtue as a power of the soul can exist in a human being independently of habits. More calls virtue, understood in this manner, “right reason”.<sup>97</sup> According to him, man possesses innate ideas about good and evil, on the basis of which he makes judgements.<sup>98</sup> Man has innate knowledge of the good by means of the “boniform faculty of the soul”, which is intuitive and not the result of logical deduction from principles.<sup>99</sup> This boniform faculty prepares for his Platonism in the field of ethics. He thus refers to Plotinus’ ethical and ontological determination of the contemplative man approaching the good.<sup>100</sup> He also picks up on aspects of Aristotle’s ethics concordant with this Platonic view, namely Aristotle’s notion of the intellectual

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 22.20-23.25.

<sup>95</sup> Hochschild 2002.

<sup>96</sup> For More’s use of Plotinus and Ficino, see Hutton 2007.

<sup>97</sup> More 1690: 11.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*: 81-82.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*: 16.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*: 8-9, 29-30, 192.

virtues and their contribution to man's well-being, as presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.<sup>101</sup>

More integrates into all this Pythagorean and Platonic doctrines on the purification of the human soul, though without clinging slavishly to the subtle scheme of lower and higher virtues developed by Plotinus and Porphyry.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, More holds that the divinity's illumination is a prerequisite for the soul's ascent, though it is unclear whether he conceives of this illumination as natural or actively caused by the divinity.<sup>103</sup> These and other modifications of Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas, laying the foundation for a synthesis of Platonism and Christianity, may account for Taylor's rejection of More's interpretation of Platonism.<sup>104</sup> To German Protestant thinkers, on the other hand, More's modifications were too Platonic, as we shall see, and they typically condemned More's *Enchiridion* with its idea of the boniform faculty.

These German thinkers from the first half of the 18th century regarded More as a near-contemporary Platonist posing a threat to their theology.<sup>105</sup> In 1743, Brucker articulated this acute sense of confessional and national hostility by describing More as one who "has flung against German theology" the philosophies of the Platonists Plotinus, Ficino and Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>106</sup> Brucker's counter-attack was informed by a series of anti-Platonic texts written in the first half of the 18th century by Protestant theologians, to whom I now turn.

In 1690-91 the above-mentioned Colberg published his *Platonisch-Hermetisches Christenthum*, attacking a variety of contemporary religious movements outside Lutheranism for relying on Platonic philosophy. Although he gives a very long list of movements contaminated by Platonic or Neoplatonic philosophy, pietism is not among them; it was left to Bücher to adopt Colberg's anti-Platonism to pietism.

In 1699, the above-mentioned Bücher (1651-1714) published his *Plato mysticus in pietista redivivus*, in which he accused Jakob Spener (1635-1705),

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<sup>101</sup>) Ibid.: 14.

<sup>102</sup>) Ibid.: 220-221.

<sup>103</sup>) Ibid.: 205.

<sup>104</sup>) Taylor 1804: iv, lxxix [Taylor 1995: 2, 55].

<sup>105</sup>) More is presented as a near-contemporary exponent of Platonism in Hansch 1716: 134; Walch, 1775, II: col. 1205.

<sup>106</sup>) Brucker 1742-67, IV: 439.1-440.4. See also the account of More in *ibid.*, IV: 439-443.



the founder of contemporary Pietism, of using Plotinus, Porphyry and other Platonists in support of his unorthodox theology.<sup>107</sup>

In 1711, the Leipzig professor Gottfried Olearius (1672-1715), theologian and philologist, published a Latin translation of Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy* (1655-62) supplied with several supplements, where Olearius severs the connection between Platonism and Neoplatonism and turns against the religious aspects of Platonic *furor*.<sup>108</sup> In 1716, the philosopher, theologian and mathematician, Michael Gottlieb Hansch (1683-1749) published his *Diatriba de enthusiasmo platonico*, which was an attack on Platonic *furor*, or *enthusiasmus*. Generally speaking, he regarded a synthesis of Platonism (Neoplatonism in particular) and Christianity as self-contradictory and impossible, due to very different doctrines on the origin and nature of the universe upheld in these two traditions.<sup>109</sup> Hansch was familiar with the Neoplatonic theory of the lower and higher virtues, and the role of the latter in the theory of noetic ascent, and his account of ancient and Renaissance Neoplatonic virtue ethics is, despite its polemical agenda, the most extensive in the 18th century that I know of. Section VII, chapter 3-6, is thus dedicated to the Neoplatonic theory of the physical, political and purificatory virtues.<sup>110</sup> The Platonic *enthusiasmus*, to which the exercise of these virtues should lead, still according to the Neoplatonists, is hardly to be found in the Bible, Hansch observes, for which reason this road to felicity is suspect.<sup>111</sup>

In 1725, Mosheim published *De turbata per recentiores Platonicos ecclesia*, which was partly integrated into his 1731 Latin translation of, and commentary on, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, written by the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth (1617-89). Mosheim carried on the

<sup>107</sup> Bücher, *Plato mysticus*, pp. A2<sup>r</sup>-A4<sup>v</sup>, B4<sup>r</sup>, C1<sup>v</sup>. For Bücher's criticism of ancient Platonism, see Glawe 1912: 103-105; Lehmann-Brauns 2004: 187-222. Bücher's anti-Platonism is not studied in Tigerstedt 1974 and 1977. Remarkably, Bücher is given an entry neither in the *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie* (1875-1912) nor in the *Neue deutsche Biographie* (1952-).

<sup>108</sup> [Olearius] 1711: 1205-22. Olearius is not mentioned as the translator and author to the supplements, but Walch 1726, I: col. 594, and Brucker 1742-67, I: 36.29-31, provide this information. I owe the Brucker reference to Tigerstedt 1974: 54 n. 413. Brucker refers approvingly to Olearius in his section on Neoplatonism; see, for instance, Brucker 1742-67, II: 190 n. c.

<sup>109</sup> Hansch 1716: 55-57.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*: 88-92.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*: 71. For Hansch's attack on Platonic enthusiasm, see Varani 2008: 179-191.



campaign against Platonic ethics manifest in Hansch's work of 1716, asserting that Neoplatonism was the villain of the history of Christian doctrine. Brucker, in his *Historia critica philosophiae* of 1742-44, cited Olearius and Mosheim frequently in his section on Neoplatonism, the "secta eclecticica", largely subscribing to their theological reservations against Neoplatonic ethics.<sup>112</sup> We have to wait until around 1800 before we find a rejection of the theological orthodoxy of Mosheim and his peers. Before then, however, Brucker and other 18th-century historians of philosophy had firmly established the historiographical concepts 'system', 'eclecticism', 'syncretism', and reduced Neoplatonic ethics to an insignificant (and in this case erroneous) appendix to a metaphysical system of philosophy.

Other figures popularised this Protestant anti-Platonic campaign. In 1726, Johann George Walch (1693-1775), professor of theology in Jena, published his very popular *Philosophisches Lexicon*, which came out in three subsequent editions, in 1733, 1740 and 1775. Entries like 'Moral', 'Sitten', 'Tugend', 'Seele' and 'Freiheit zu gedencken' are permeated by Protestant doctrines on the human soul and its virtues, divine grace, soteriology, Christian revelation, Trinity, and the limits of human reason. Again we see Henry More singled out as the enemy.<sup>113</sup>

Brucker quoted Walch approvingly in his work of 1742-67.<sup>114</sup> In return, in Walch's 1775 edition, Brucker was given credit for circulating his views on Platonic ethics.<sup>115</sup> The 1775 edition also paid tribute to Brucker by appending an outline of the history of philosophy drawn up in the *Historia critica philosophiae*. Moreover, Walch and Brucker were privately connected—they both frequented the house of Brucker's university teacher Johann Franz Budde (1667-1729), whose daughter Walch married.<sup>116</sup> Although Walch's *Lexicon* is mediocre and unoriginal from a philosophical perspective, its popularity helps us to explain how the negative view of Neoplatonism, which we saw in Bücher, Hansch, Mosheim and Brucker,

<sup>112</sup> Brucker 1742-67 II: 190 n. c and several other places in the section on Neoplatonism (*ibid.*, II: 189-462).

<sup>113</sup> Walch 1775, I: 1205.

<sup>114</sup> Brucker 1742-67 refers approvingly to Walch in I, 38 n. e; V: 545.29-31.

<sup>115</sup> Walch 1775, II: col. 1226.

<sup>116</sup> For Brucker's regular visits to Budde's house and for his friendship with Budde's son, Carl Friedrich Budde, see Alt 1926: 42-43. For Walch's connection to Budde's daughter, see *ibid.*: 40, and Schmitt 1998: col. 183.

came to dominate 18th-century histories of philosophy in Northern Europe.

The third and final motive for attacking Neoplatonism in the 18th century was medical. Brucker reduced the cognitive content of Platonic *furor* or *enthusiasmus* to a medical condition; an excess of melancholy generating a host of simulacra and images in the sufferer's disturbed imagination.<sup>117</sup> On this score Brucker was probably influenced by Meric Casaubon's (1599-1671) medical critique of enthusiasm in his *Treatise concerning Enthusiasm* (1656).<sup>118</sup>

It was this fusion of (Protestant, or Lutheran) confessional identity, university culture, and historical outlook, outlined on the previous pages, which alienated Taylor from the scholarly establishment, as is clear in the quotation from Taylor on page 190 above.<sup>119</sup>

### Taylor's Legacy

Taylor made no distinction between Platonism and Neoplatonism, as had been paramount in 18th-century Plato scholarship. Mill did. To him Neoplatonism presented a distorted and unreliable interpretation of Plato. If one doubts the legitimacy of the distinction, then a vital premise for Mill's attack dissolves and Taylor's Plato interpretation emerges in a new light. If one can legitimately elide the distinction, it does not necessarily entail,

<sup>117</sup> Brucker 1742-67, II: 366.25-367.3.

<sup>118</sup> For this medical criticism of Meric Casaubon, see Heyd 1995: 44-92.

<sup>119</sup> Taylor 1804: xci [Taylor 1995: 63], as cited on page 190 above. Compare with Raine 1969: 3-4, who claims that Taylor lived in an age with two cultures, that of the "scholastic theologians" and that of the "romantic poets". Taylor may have influenced these romantic poets through his works on the Platonic tradition, but his attention in those works is not directed at the romantics, but at the Platonic tradition itself, as his 1804 publication of Plato indicates. Hence I find it slightly misleading to present Taylor as belonging to the camp of romantic poets, standing in opposition to the camp of scholastic theologians; Taylor is first of all placed in a philosophical tradition. *Ibid.*, 4, Raine explains: "The divergence between those 'two' [cultures] whose frontiers may be variously drawn goes back to Greece; and the ultimate distinction lies in what is thought to be the nature of the primary reality." Though I agree that Taylor took a very critical stance towards the culture of Protestant academics, including theologians, I also find that there is a danger in this sweeping picture; we risk losing sight of Taylor's immediate background, 18th-century philosophy and its histories of philosophy.

of course, that Taylor's interpretation is true—only that we may approach it differently than has typically been done.

The marginalization of Taylor's ethical and metaphysical reading of Plato was confirmed by institutional and methodological circumstances of the history of philosophy in the 19th century. The history of philosophy was institutionalised when courses in the subject became mandatory in philosophy departments in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>120</sup> Brucker's view of the history of philosophy, including historiographical concepts like 'system of philosophy', 'eclecticism' and 'syncretism', was affirmed and adopted by most 18th-, 19th- and in some cases even 20th-century historians of philosophy writing general histories of philosophy.<sup>121</sup> Admittedly, there were critical voices and rhetorical declamations stating radical dissent, as in the case of Hegel, but despite criticism his conception of the discipline remained fundamental; Hegel too carried on Brucker's system concept in his lectures on the history of philosophy.<sup>122</sup> Even Zeller, still an authority in the history of ancient philosophy, carried on the Bruckerian concepts 'system of philosophy' and 'eclecticism', though in a modified form, and he used them effectively to characterise Neoplatonism.<sup>123</sup>

When Mill wrote his reviews of *The works of Plato*, he could not have known how successful Bruckerian history of philosophy was to become in the 19th century, but Brucker's 18th-century followers had already increased in numbers over the last decades of the 18th century, and they were probably sufficient in number and academic status to make Mill confident that Taylor was a solitary and easy target, working against the current.<sup>124</sup> Taylor was clearly aware of this trend in the academic world, as his 'General introduction' testifies. However, he did not receive a university education when he was young, and as an adult he was not part of academic university culture, with which he did not identify at all.

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<sup>120</sup> Schneider 1993.

<sup>121</sup> For a late follower of Brucker's idea of the history of philosophy as the history of philosophical systems, see Copleston 1985, I: 2-9.

<sup>122</sup> For Brucker's influence, see Catana 2008: 193-282.

<sup>123</sup> For Zeller's use of the historiographical concept eclecticism in regard to Neoplatonism, see Zeller 1923, III.1: 547-564.

<sup>124</sup> Mill was in line with public ridicule of Taylor in the years leading up to his 1804 publication; see Evans 1940: 1068-70.

Taylor's reading of Plato and his emphasis upon the idea of divine likeness were not opposed by Mill's two reviews alone. The damaging effect of these reviews was reinforced by the advent of Kant's deontology and Bentham's utilitarianism in 19th-century ethics, which marginalised virtue ethics—not just Neoplatonic virtue ethics, but other forms of ancient virtue ethics as well. Utilitarianism, perhaps the most influential position, was propagated through the very same Mill and his systematization of Bentham's works, where ancient Platonic ethics was considered nonsense, and where human happiness was severed from the metaphysics of the human soul and its ethical virtues.<sup>125</sup> Instead, emphasis was placed on moral agency. Though often anti-clerical, utilitarianism carried on this tenet inherited from 18th-century Protestant ethics, and Mill is an interesting transitional figure in this respect.

Taylor's philosophical legacy, then, was unfortunate, to say the least. He was not only working against the current of the 18th century, shaping the intellectual identity of the majority of his contemporaries—he also had the misfortune to be followed by further movements which buried virtue ethics altogether. Although ancient virtue ethics have been recovered over the last decades through the works of Anscombe, MacIntyre and others, it is mainly the Aristotelian version that has been revived, not the Platonic or Neoplatonic one. Taylor's reading of Plato reminds us that such a reading is not only possible in the field of Platonic ethics, but also worthy of being taken seriously and discussed critically, just like any other interpretation presented by a serious scholar of Plato.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Glucker 1987: 165.

<sup>126</sup> For such a line of research, see Sedley 1999.

- Whittaker uses the name Alcinoos, not Alcinous, for the author of this work. I cite, nevertheless, this Greek edition as “Alcinous, *Διδασκαλικός*, ed. Whittaker”.
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