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Dmitri Levitin
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1 Introduction: histories of philosophy between 'Renaissance' and 'Enlightenment'

That the way humans see the past shapes their actions is not a new idea. It thus might be thought surprising that there has been no systematic investigation of how learned men and women conceived of the history of philosophy in a period that is supposed to have witnessed the development of a self-consciously '*new* philosophy'. The main objective of this monograph is to convey how much interest in, and engagement with, the history of ancient thought permeated English (as a subset of European) intellectual culture throughout the seventeenth century. Achieving this objective, it is hoped, will also lead to some major revisions to existing understandings of intellectual and religious change in this period, both in terms of developments that are often assumed to have led to something that one might or might not term 'enlightenment', and those that may or may not have constituted a part of a broadly conceived 'scientific revolution', in which England has always been assigned a very large role.

Such a simple formulation notwithstanding, this is a subject that touches on many other historiographical traditions and assumptions, and on the wider question of the nature of early modern English and European intellectual culture; some preliminary remarks are thus required. These will fall into three categories. The first will position this book within the disciplinary boundaries of intellectual history, especially as they have been applied to the study of early modern intellectual change. The second will chart some of the historiographical assumptions about the historiography of philosophy in the long period *c.* 1400–1800. The third will focus more narrowly on seventeenth-century English intellectual culture.[1]

1.1 Method: the history of scholarship, the history of philosophy, or the history of intellectual culture?

This book examines the history of historical scholarship and its wider dissemination. Given recent historiographical developments, this requires some

[1] This introductory chapter is not intended as a full survey of literature on early modern historiography of philosophy; many other references are provided in the chapters themselves. Those interested in a tangentially connected and wider discussion of similar themes to those discussed here might consult Levitin, 'From sacred history to the history of religion' (2012).

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elucidation. As the best recent summary points out, the history of scholarship 'as a constituted branch of knowledge, an *episteme* . . . has, until quite recently, hardly existed at all'.[2] Classical scholars themselves have long examined, critiqued, praised, and reappraised the efforts of their predecessors, sometimes even in monographic format.[3] While classical scholars are of course well positioned to know what classical scholarship involves – not least because they possess the requisite technical skills – the limitations of these approaches, especially their tendency to ahistorical value judgements and insensitivity to context, have now begun to be recognised.[4]

A concomitant problem has been that the object of study of the history of scholarship when practised by classical scholars themselves, when not limited to individual scholars, has been the development of scholarly disciplines. To give an example relevant to us, two prominent recent studies of seventeenth-century English approaches to ancient Egypt and to ancient Zoroastrianism have sought to chart the 'birth' of a historical discipline (Egyptology or Zoroastrian studies).[5] This is to miss the basic point that those approaches cannot possibly have been contributions to those disciplines, which simply did not exist.[6] This is not just a point about anachronism; it is about the need to place scholarship within institutional and disciplinary contexts. It is only now that the history of scholarship is reaching a stage at which such an attempt can be made. The pioneering works that have defined the field as it has recently flourished – most notably Anthony Grafton's monumental intellectual biography of Joseph Scaliger (1983–93) – have understandably tended to focus on one figure, recreating their scholarly practices, intellectual networks, and charting their sources.[7] This has perhaps served to maintain an unwarranted distance between historians of scholarship and intellectual historians interested in broader patterns of change. But by building on such foundational studies, scholars can now use the history of scholarship to construct convincing, elaborate, and important long-term narratives that address such diachronic questions.

[2] Ligota and Quantin, 'Introduction' (2006), 1. For a more theoretical approach, see Güthenke, 'Reception studies and recent work in the history of scholarship' (2009).

[3] Sandys, *A history of classical scholarship* (1903–8); Pfeiffer, *History of classical scholarship* (1968, 1976); von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *History of classical scholarship* (1982 [1921]); Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and scholars* (1991). See also Jehasse, *Renaissance de la critique* (1976); Kenney, *The classical text* (1974); Timpanaro, *The genesis of Lachmann's method* (2005 [1963]).

[4] Ligota and Quantin, 'Introduction', 10–11.

[5] Stroumsa, 'John Spencer and the roots of idolatry' (2001) esp. 22–3; Stroumsa, 'Thomas Hyde and the birth of Zoroastrian Studies' (2002). Both reappear, in truncated versions, in Stroumsa, *A new science* (2010), 77–112. See similarly Parente, 'Spencer, Maimonides, and the history of religion' (2006).

[6] But see Ligota and Quantin, 'Introduction', 9. See also the comments in Quantin, 'John Selden et l'étude de l'Antiquité chrétienne' (2011), at 339–40.

[7] Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger* (1983–93); Toomer, *John Selden* (2009).

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One recent example, Jean-Louis Quantin's study of seventeenth-century Anglican patristics, has set a new benchmark for how this can be achieved;[8] Professor Quantin's remarkable work is the closest methodological model for this book, and I can only hope to achieve a fraction of what is achieved there.

This book is thus first and foremost a contribution to the history of early modern English intellectual culture, and only by association to the fortune of various classical philosophical texts. A few studies of the historiography of classical philosophy in the early modern world have charted the afterlife of a specific text (or corpus of texts) within a specific timeframe.[9] This approach has the tendency, once again, to focus on texts that can easily be classified as 'scholarship': especially new editions and translations. It has generated very important results, essential to any student of the field. But 'to establish itself, however, [early modern] philology constantly had to engage with other disciplines, especially theology'.[10] In some sense, to point this out is to follow in reverse findings in other disciplines: for example, we are now aware of the great extent to which seventeenth-century 'political thought' was conducted in historical mode.[11] Indeed, the dominance of historical discourse in much of early modern intellectual culture is now being openly asserted in some quarters.[12] This book thus engages in the history of scholarship only to the extent that that discipline is essential to comprehending wider patterns of intellectual change, whether in the history of science, philosophy, theology, or historiography.

There is another quasi-methodological issue that concerns us, more familiar to intellectual historians than the issues raised by the history of scholarship. Anyone with a passing interest in early modern intellectual history will be aware that this is an age often defined by recourse to ancient ideologies, to the extent that one could believe that ancient Greece was being relived in seventeenth-century Europe. The period saw, we are told, the demise of 'Aristotelianism' in favour of any other number of 'isms': 'Epicureanism' in

[8] Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian antiquity* (2009). See also Toomer, *Eastern wisedome and learning* (1996).

[9] See e.g. Casini, 'The Pythagorean myth' (1996); Bercovitch, 'Empedocles in the English Renaissance' (1968); Kraye, 'Aristotle's God and the authenticity of "De mundo"' (1990). For further details on the transmission of *De Mundo*, see Kraye, 'Daniel Heinsius and the author of *De mundo*' (1988); Lorimer, *The text tradition of pseudo-Aristotle 'De mundo'* (1924).

[10] Hardy, 'The *Ars Critica* in early modern England' (2012), 21.

[11] The classic statement remains Pocock, *The ancient constitution and the feudal law* (1987 [1957]). See also Soll, *Publishing the prince* (2005); Bulman, 'Constantine's enlightenment' (2009), 160, *passim*; Levitin, 'Matthew Tindal's *Rights of the Christian Church* (1706)'. The pioneering work in this regard in the Restoration English context remains Champion, *The pillars of priestcraft shaken* (1992): although I disagree with its central thesis and many of its specific interpretations, its importance in this regard must be acknowledged.

[12] Mulsow and Zedelmaier, eds., *Die Praktiken der Gelehrsamkeit* (2001); Pomata and Siraisi, eds., *Historia* (2005).

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moral and natural philosophy, 'Stoicism' in the same, 'Hermeticism' in sixteenth-century natural philosophy and natural magic, a revitalised or surviving 'Aristotelianism' in the universities and throughout all branches of philosophy.[13] What is remarkable is the extent to which such readings tend to take for granted the existence of essentialist 'isms' whose play through the course of a historical period can be charted. This kind of reification can be harmless, such as when an 'ism' is used simply as shorthand for an intellectual position: certainly someone who writes a commentary on the *Corpus Aristotelicum* can be usefully described as engaging with one or more of a variety of 'Aristotelianisms'.[14] But much more often these reified concepts become explanatory concepts, where as supposed historical phenomena they are attributed some kind of logical content. One need hardly delve deep into linguistic philosophy to make the obvious point that there was no such thing as 'Epicureanism' in seventeenth-century England, only attitudes to Epicurus. On the most abstract level, this is a point about the methodology of reception studies. To turn texts into 'ideologies' and then to chart the play of ideologies through various periods is tempting: it brings a familiarity to the material, and allows far easier descriptions of philosophical 'traditions' and their development through centuries of textual renegotiation. But this is to ignore the specificity of reception, and the fact that readers, in our case, seventeenth-century Englishmen and women, have unique and contingent attitudes towards philosophical texts.[15] Most importantly, by the seventeenth-century European intellectual culture had reached a stage at which ancient philosophy was *never* approached ahistorically. No one was an 'Epicurean' in some essentialist sense: even if they subscribed to the label, their ideas about what it meant were mediated through many layers of humanist historiographical tradition. One aim of this book is to challenge the facile use of ancient labels to describe early modern intellectual positions by examining what the early moderns themselves thought of the ancient positions: the results are often very surprising.

1.2 The historiography of the history of philosophy

As the historiographical proclivity to write early modern intellectual history through ancient labels suggests, men and women of letters throughout this

[13] The literature on these subjects is huge. On the diversity and survival of Aristotelianism, see the overview by Edwards, 'Aristotelianism, Descartes, and Hobbes' (2005); for the pedagogical context, see Feingold, 'Aristotle and the English universities in the seventeenth century' (1998); for Epicureanism and Stoicism, a good starting point are the essays in Osler, ed., *Atoms, pneuma, and tranquillity* (1991). For Hermeticism, see Merkel and Debus, eds., *Hermeticism and the Renaissance* (1988). On all these, see further below.

[14] The plural famously suggested in Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (1983).

[15] A useful discussion, with a specific focus on intellectual history, is Thompson, 'Reception theory and the interpretation of historical meaning' (1993).

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period continued to live in a world in which the intellectual landscape was dominated by the past. Given this basic fact, it is again worth remarking upon how recent and sparse is investigation into the history of early modern history of philosophy. Pioneering works first appeared in France and Italy in the 1960s and 1970s.[16] They were followed by the encyclopaedic *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia* series.[17] These rich and erudite works remain essential to the field, often offering valuable expositions of texts unfamiliar to mainstream intellectual history. Yet in some sense they remain tied to the 'old' model of the history of scholarship, their ultimate aim being to chart the development of the 'discipline' of the history of philosophy.[18] As a result, they have almost nothing to say about the history of philosophy as it was practised by those who did not write works entitled *Historia philosophiae*, or the like.[19] Second, and connected, they subscribe to rather old-fashioned notions of wider intellectual change. Given that they are works about historical scholarship, the key markers of change remain, surprisingly, philosophical, especially Bacon and Descartes.[20] Finally, and again connected, they remain wedded to a model in which all pre-eighteenth-century history of philosophy is 'pre-enlightened', whereas the eighteenth century, especially in Germany, and especially in Johann Jakob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742–44), is said to witness the rise of a truly 'critical' or 'enlightened' history of philosophy.[21]

The last two decades have seen the crystallisation of this orthodoxy, with special focus devoted to histories of philosophy written in Germany between *c.* 1680 and 1750.[22] The stimulus has been twofold. First, a small academic

[16] Garin, *La filosofia come sapere storico* (1959); Braun, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (1973); Del Torre, *Le origini moderne della storiografia filosofica* (1976); Gueroult, *Dianoématique: histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (1979–88).

[17] Santinello, ed., *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia* (1979–2004). The first two volumes have been translated as Santinello I and II.

[18] As made clear in Santinello, 'Preface', in Santinello, II, ix.

[19] An exception is Bayle: Piaia, 'Philosophical historiography in France from Bayle to Deslandes'. This point has already been made in the review by L. Catana, 'The history of the history of philosophy' (2012), at 621–2.

[20] As revealed by the very title of the second volume, and by comments at, e.g., Malusa, 'Renaissance antecedents to the historiography of philosophy', 3; Tolomio, 'The "Historica philosophica" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', 66; Malusa, 'The first general histories of philosophy in England and the Low Countries', 163–71; Piaia, 'Foreword to the English edition', v; Piaia, 'The histories of philosophy in France in the age of Descartes', 3–4, and most explicitly in Piaia, 'Cartesianism and history: from the rejection of the past to a "critical" history of philosophy' (2012).

[21] Santinello, 'Preface', xi, betraying the influence of Paul Hazard, on whom, see below. Longo, 'A "critical" history of philosophy and the early enlightenment', does not reduce Brucker to post-Cartesian rationalism, as does Piaia, but still insists on the 'enlightened' nature of his criticism.

[22] Hochstrasser, *Natural law theories in the early Enlightenment* (2000), 150–9, 170–5; Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte* (2004).

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industry has been devoted to the study of 'eclecticism': a self-defining school of thought that sought to synthesise the best elements of various philosophies.[23] This approach was inherently historical, and much of the original stimulus for it came from the scholarship of the polymathic Gerardus Johannes Vossius, whose *De philosophorum sectis* (1657) devoted a whole final chapter to the 'eclectic sect' whose putative founder was Potamon (it had only been mentioned in passing by Diogenes Laërtius).[24] An emphasis on the positive aspects of eclecticism was taken up by figures such as Jakob Thomasius, his son Christian, and then Brucker. But despite the strict chronological and geographic focus in the best scholarship,[25] there has been a somewhat careless tendency to reify eclecticism, and to assign it a massive role in the development of the history of philosophy as an intellectual exercise.[26] Eclecticism was a local phenomenon, whose broader importance should not be overplayed.

The other impetus for the recent upsurge in the study of German histories of philosophy is both more complex and has links to a much wider body of secondary scholarship, namely that concerned with what has solidified into a relatively widely accepted historical phenomenon: the 'early enlightenment'. German histories of philosophy are claimed as manifestations of a wider intellectual process:

> In the latter part of the seventeenth century ... a revolution in the historiography of philosophy pioneered by Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94) and Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) and associated with a new understanding of 'eclecticism' in philosophy paved the way both for a coherent notion of philosophical progress and for the large, multivolume histories of philosophy written in the eighteenth century.[27]

This interest in Germany is unsurprising. The great 'enlightened' history of philosophy, famous across the continent, was Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae*. Brucker is seen as the culmination of several 'enlightened' trends in the historiography of philosophy: the anti-syncretism of Thomasius (and others), and the propagation of Boyle's and Locke's natural philosophy by

[23] The key text is Albrecht, *Eklektik* (1994), which very much exaggerates the canon of supposed 'eclectics' (as admitted at 661). The best English summary is Schneider, 'Eclecticism and the history of philosophy' (1997), where many of the German-language secondary works are listed. See also Schneider's review piece, 'Eclecticism rediscovered' (1998), esp. the comments on Albrecht at 175. See further Blackwell, 'Sturm, Morhof and Brucker vs. Aristotle' (1998); and the brief remarks in Donini, 'The history of the concept of eclecticism' (1988).

[24] On Vossius, see Malusa, 'First general histories', 222–35; DL, I.21. Another key programmatic statement is that in Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom*., I.7.37; for a summary and discussion of the very few ancient references, see Hatzimichali, *Potamo of Alexandria and the emergence of eclecticism* (2011), 14–24.

[25] Schneider, 'Eclecticism'; Blackwell, 'Sturm, Morhof and Brucker'.

[26] See above all Kelley, *The descent of ideas* (2002). There is little evidence to support this attribution, and the book fails to justify its central thesis. It is particularly weak on England; for example, Theophilus Gale mutates into Thomas Gale within the duration of a sentence (50).

[27] Brooke, 'How the Stoics became atheists' (2006), 395.

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Jean Le Clerc, as channelled through earlier German scholars like Johann Franz Buddeus.[28]

But were the new German developments really so revolutionary, and so intrinsically tied to 'enlightenment'? Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Brucker's celebrated delineation of independent 'systematic' philosophies – as opposed to 'syncretist' ones that confused philosophy and theology – derived from a specific background in Lutheran pedagogy.[29] More generally, we encounter here a larger set of assumptions, in which the history of humanist scholarship is seen as somewhat irrelevant to the history of 'enlightened' historiography and criticism, because the former was mere accumulation and pedantry, whereas the latter was truly critical and philosophical.[30] This is the case not just for the historiography of philosophy. It has been – and continues to be – a commonplace that attitudes to ancient religion, to the Bible as a historical text, and to paganism more generally did not become 'critical' until the early enlightenment, or a post-1680 'crise de la conscience européenne'.[31] This view, however, is the product of eighteenth-century propaganda, especially the French *querelle des anciens et des modernes*;[32] accordingly, we should be wary of adopting it.[33] Far from rejecting the work of their humanist predecessors, eighteenth-century freethinkers were more likely to plagiarise it. 'The bright weapons of eighteenth-century enlightened warfare were forged in the murky smithies of seventeenth-century erudition' – a conclusion that will be confirmed again and again in this study.[34] This book thus does not operate within the framework of the fetishisation of the post-1680 period that has dominated much of twentieth- and twenty-first-century European intellectual history.[35]

[28] Longo, 'Critical history'; Blackwell, '"Ideas" and their redefinition in Jacob Brucker' (1997), esp. 78–9; Blackwell, 'Thales philosophus: the beginning of philosophy as a discipline' (1997); Häfner, 'Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philologie um 1700' (2001); Thouard, 'Hamann and the history of philosophy' (2006); Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, v (2012), 199–200. Israel, *Enlightenment contested* (2006), 470–95, pushes these themes to extremes. The fullest studies are now those collected in Schmidt-Biggemann and Stammen, eds., *Jacob Brucker* (1998).

[29] Catana, *The historiographical concept 'system of philosophy'* (2008), 147–92.

[30] For prominent statements of this view, see e.g., Israel, *Enlightenment contested*, 473; Trevor-Roper, *History and the enlightenment* (2010), 1–16 ('The historical philosophy of the enlightenment' [1963]), at 1–2.

[31] Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne* (1935).

[32] Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: a genealogy* (2010); Fumaroli, 'Les Abeilles et les araignées' (2001); Norman, *The shock of the ancient* (2011), esp. 99–110.

[33] See now Quantin, 'Reason and reasonableness in French ecclesiastical scholarship' (2011), esp. 434–5; Bravo, '*Critice* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (2006); Hardy, '*Ars critica*'; Edelstein, *Enlightenment*; Levitin, 'Sacred history'.

[34] Serjeantson, 'Hume's *Natural history of religion* and the end of modern Eusebianism' (2011), 279.

[35] A fetishisation that no doubt also stems from the decline in Latin education, and thus a lack of familiarity with much pre-1680 material. It is worth noting the absence of this fetishisation in two old studies relevant to our topic: Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes* (1869) and Glawe, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums* (1912) (the latter is discussed in Ch. 6 below).

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What does all this mean for the history of the history of philosophy? First, it means that the category of 'early enlightenment' needs – at least in this context – to be abandoned. It is a central claim of this book that the category obscures more than it reveals about seventeenth-century scholarship. This is not to say that Brucker and the German works were not central to the formation of the historiographical discipline of history of philosophy, which of course they were; rather, it is to escape altogether such disciplinary history, and instead examine seventeenth-century histories on their own terms. It emerges that many of the conclusions supposedly unique to the 'critical' and 'enlightened' historians – especially the rejection of Jewish and patristic narratives of pagan-Christian syncretism, and new attitudes to the relationship between ancient and modern natural philosophy – were not only present, but sometimes even commonplace, in the seventeenth-century discussions, and that there was no intrinsic connection between 'criticism' and heterodoxy. It is not only the fetishisation of 'enlightenment' that has led to neglect of this; it has been a problem from the side of Renaissance scholarship also. It remains customary to claim that Renaissance attitudes to ancient philosophy were 'syncretist', obsessed with developing narratives of a *prisca sapientia* or a *philosophia perennis*.[36] The seventeenth century then falls into the gaps, as scholars are unsure whether to classify seventeenth-century attitudes to the history of philosophy as 'syncretist' or 'enlightened'. However useful the terms *prisca sapientia* or *prisca theologia* are for the fifteenth century – and that itself is dubious – they will not be used here. Take for example the following different views: all philosophy derives from Moses or the ancient Israelites; certain natural religious truths descended from Noah to his children and then to the whole world; the Hebrews had vague foreshadowings of Christian doctrines like the trinity which then spread to some pagan philosophers; all pagans believed in God; all pagan *theists* were monotheists. All of these views have been labelled *prisca sapientia* or *prisca theologia* by modern historians, but they are all fundamentally different positions, and were recognised as such by seventeenth-century men of letters.

The true revolution in attitudes to paganism and its relationship to Judaism and Christianity occurred not at the end of the seventeenth century, but at the end of the sixteenth, in the chronological works of Joseph Scaliger, emulated and developed by scholars such as John Selden, G. J. Vossius, and Samuel Bochart in the next half-century.[37] Almost all of them rejected 'syncretism' in the manner it had been espoused by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century

[36] On this, see Vasoli, *Studi su Marsilio Ficino* (1999), 11–50 ('*Il mito dei* prisci theologi *come* ideologia *della* renovatio') (German trans. in Mulsow, ed., *Das Ende des Hermetismus* (2002), 17–60).

[37] Many of the landmarks and findings of this scholarship are discussed in Levitin, 'Sacred history', so I do not list them here. Restoration Englishmen were aware of the importance of

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neoplatonists like Marsilio Ficino and Agostino Steuco,[38] a move that occurred not only in Casaubon's famous denunciation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* as a forgery.[39] In his chronological work, Scaliger inveighed against patristic distortions of the history of philosophy for the sake of Christian apologetics:

> Eusebius . . . to assert the truth of the Jewish (and thence the Christian) dispensation, has laid open the libraries of the ancient Egyptian, Phoenician and Greek philosophers, historians and theologians, so as either to disclose their foolishness, distant from the Word of God, or to show that the most ancient Egyptians, Chaldeans and Greeks drank from the fountain of the Hebrew prophets and thence quenched the thirst of their genius *[ingenium]*.[40]

These ideas became popularised in a new form of 'critical' Christian apologetics. A lovely summary of such intentions is available in a 1627 letter by G. J. Vossius, whose *De theologia gentili* (1641) would become probably the most important work on pagan religion to be published in the seventeenth century, and was extremely popular in England, as we shall see:

> I come now to the opinion that you asked about. I for my part, think that [Agostino] Steuco does a poor service to the Christian religion when he claims that its mysteries were known by the ancient pagan philosophers, especially Plato. And in order to claim this convincingly, he [Steuco] clearly twists Plato's words away from what that famous philosopher meant. Nor do I any more approve of the fact that he tries to establish these beliefs from [Hermes] Trismegistus and the Sibylline Oracles, where the secrets of the religion would be revealed much more clearly than in the revelations of the prophets . . . Heavenly truth, which is from Christ and from his Spirit, does not require falsehood . . . Hermes and the so-called Sibyls are spurious, as proven by both their contents and language . . . and I would here show this with many examples, if Casaubon (among others) had not already done it splendidly.[41]

Scaliger in this regard: see e.g. Robert Cary, *Palæologia chronica. A chronological account of ancient time* (London, 1677), sig. b^{r}.

[38] For literature on Ficino, Steuco, and others, see 3.1 below. The classic study of the 'ancient theology' remains Walker, *The ancient theology* (1972). It retains much value, avoiding the simplistic reductionism characteristic of many subsequent works, including many which cite it. But it still rests on the fundamental misconception that interest in ancient wisdom was characteristic of philosophical 'Platonism' rather than of professional scholarship much more widely (see e.g. the summary at 194–6).

[39] See 6.1 below.

[40] Joseph Scaliger, 'Animadversiones', in *Thesaurus temporum Eusebii Pamphili* (Leiden, 1606), 4–5, 'Quemadmodum igitur Eusebius in divinis commentariis Προπαρασκευή, ut legis Iudaicae, & inde Christianae veritatem assereret, omnes veterum Philosophorum, Historicorum, Theologorum Aegyptiorum, Phoenicum, & Graecorum Bibliothecas reclusit, ut aut eorum vanitatem ex lege Dei arguerer, aut vetustissimos Aegyptios, Chaldaeos, Phoenicas, & Grecos de prophetarum Hebraeorum fonte potasse, & sitim ingenii sui inde rigasse ostenderet'.

[41] G. J. Vossius to Abraham van der Meer, 13 Dec 1627, Bod. MS Rawl. letters 84c, fol. 7^{r} (=*Gerardi Johan. Vossii et Clarorum Virorum ad eum Epistolae*, ed. P. Colomiès (London, 1690), 112b–113a): ' . . . venio ad judicium quod poscis. De Steuchio Eugubino equidem ita judico, male eum mereri de Religione Christiana, quando mysteria ejus cognita fuisse docet,

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Vossius's published work was thus a form of Christian apologetic history of paganism – including pagan philosophy – without the syncretism he found in the previous neoplatonic apologists,[42] an aim Vossius shared with other major scholars.[43] This is a key point: whatever the apologetic aims such scholarship was put to, it relied on a contextualist recognition of *difference* between the ancient and modern worlds, a recognition that characterised late humanism more generally. This kind of scholarship has been largely neglected by the historiography of the history of philosophy because it was not immediately conducted in works explicitly devoted to the subject. But as we shall see throughout, the post-Scaliger 'critical turn' in biblical criticism, sacred history, and patristics was of central importance in the development of new histories of philosophy, directly leading to the reconsideration of the relationship between pagan wisdom and Jewish and Christian knowledge that has often been considered symptomatic only of 'enlightenment' works.

It is useful at this point to remind ourselves of the basic beliefs about ancient history held by virtually all educated Europeans in this period. Apart from a tiny and un-influential group of pre-Adamists, everyone believed in the gradual diffusion and subsequent corruption of Noachic belief: given the narrative offered in the Old Testament, how could anything else be the case? 'Prisca theologia' was not part of Christian 'orthodoxy', and challenges to it were not intrinsically 'heterodox'; nor, conversely, was it a preliminary stage to veneration of 'natural religion' only.[44] Anyone who used the Old Testament story was a diffusionist of one sort or another, totally irrespective of other political or ecclesiological preferences.

Antiquis Gentium Philosophis, imprimis Platoni: atque hoc ut persuasum eat, planè alioversum torquet verba ejus quàm Philosophus ille senserat. Nec magis probo, quod ea stabilire conatur, ex Trismegisto, ac Sibyllinis Oraculis: ubi multò apertiùs arcana Religionis proponuntur, quàm in Prophetarum Vaticiniis … Nec enim veritas coelestis, quae est à Christo, & Spiritu ejus, indiget mendacio, quod Patrem habet Diabolum. At Platonicos non id voluisse, quod Eugubinus putavit, nemo negabit, qui in Platone cum judicio fuerit versatus. Trismegistum autem, & Sibyllina, ut vocant Oracula, esse suppositia, & res clamat, & dictio ipsa arguit. Quod ego pluribus commonstrarem hoc loco, nisi inter alios luculentè id fecisset Casaubonus, exercitatione prima ad apparatum Annalium Baronii'.

[42] G. J. Vossius, *De theologia gentili, et physiologia Christiana; sive de origine ac progressu idololatriae* (Amsterdam, 1641), e.g. 10. The popularity and importance of Vossius's work is a recurring theme in this book: for a formal statement of his large reputation in England, see Thomas Pope Blount, *Censura celebriorum authorum, sive, Tractatus in quo varia virorum doctorum de clarissimis cujusque seculi scriptoribus judicia traduntur* (London, 1690), 680–1.

[43] See the important conclusion about Bochart and his counterparts in Shalev, *Sacred worlds*, 178–80: '[their] syncretism was very restricted … That Saturn hid the truth of Noah did not mean that they were equally valid narrations of the same story. It is therefore problematic to see in [Bochart] a promoter of syncretism, or even cabalism and "ancient theology", as some scholars do'.

[44] For the first view, see Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English enlightenment* (1990), 131–2, *passim*; for the latter, Champion, *Pillars*, 133–69.

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