

“Plato and Deep Plotin”: Cambridge Platonism, Platonically Triads, and More’s Reflections on Nature

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The Cambridge Divine Henry More (1614–1687) was clearly a significant figure in early modern philosophy. His correspondence with Descartes, and his polemic with Hobbes, placed him firmly within the main philosophical debates of his day. The nonconformist clergyman Richard Baxter saw him as “the chief of the Cambridge Platonists,”¹ and it was said generally at the time that “the *Mystery of Godliness* and Dr More’s other Works ruled all the Booksellers in London.”²

But despite his notable engagement with the main proponents of the new philosophy, More’s roots were in the Platonism of the Renaissance, as developed in the fifteenth century by Ficino and Pico. It is well known that this eclectic brand of Platonism was very influenced by Plotinus, and More’s philosophy, though in many ways suggestively modern, belongs squarely in this tradition.³ The early More, like Ficino, linked Plotinus firmly to Christianity. He believed, with all the eclectic enthusiasm of a Renaissance mind, that the truth had been revealed to Moses in the form of a pristine *cabbala*; that this truth had been passed down the great traditions of Hellenism and Judaism; and that, as a consequence, Christianity could be excellently served by the wisdom of the pagans—indeed, it was More’s conviction that “God hath not left the Heathen, *Plato* especially, without witness of himself.”⁴

1. For this judgement of Baxter’s (1615–1691), see A.R. Hall, *Henry More: Magic, Religion and Experiment* (Oxford, 1990) 127.

2. See A. Lichtenstein, *Henry More: The Rational Thought of a Cambridge Platonist* (Cambridge, MA, 1962) 13.

3. See, for example, E. Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England* (Edinburgh, 1963).

4. See the preface to the *Psychozoia* in Henry More, *A Platonic Song of the Soul*, ed. A. Jacob (Lewisburg, PA, 1998) 153. In the same place, More writes: “it is no contemptible argument, that the Platonists, the best and divinest of Philosophers, and the Christians . . . do both concur that there is a Trinity.” In all the following references to the *Psychozoia* and the notes the text used is that of Jacob’s edition (henceforth abbreviated to *PSS*). The preface and notes of the

"*Plato*," here, means "Plato's school," which "well agrees with learned Pythagore, / Egyptian Trismegist, and th'antique roll / Of Chaldee wisdom, all which time hath tore," but which is happily restored to its true meaning by "deep Plotin" (PSS 161). More's great debt to the latter is nowhere perhaps clearer than in his first important work of philosophy, the *Psychozoia*. Published in 1640 together with other philosophical poems then enlarged and reedited with explanatory notes in 1647, this poem in three cantos, described by its most recent editor Alexander Jacob as "the first major philosophical document of the Cambridge [Platonist] movement," elaborates an understanding of the Christian Trinity explicitly in terms of the "Platonick Triad," viz., Plotinus' system of the three hypostases.⁵ This poem, however, vital for any grasp of the sources of More's inspiration, has tended to be seen, along with his other early works, as a hotchpotch of Platonisms and Neoplatonisms of varying pedigrees. Jacob, for instance, while acknowledging the importance of Plato and Plotinus, writes that "the metaphysics of More's [early philosophical poems] ... relies on a variety of Neoplatonist doctrines, such as those of Ficino, the Chaldean Oracles, Hermes Trismegistus, Agrippa von Nettesheim, and Psellus, and even incorporates the scientific theories of Platonic astronomers such as Copernicus and Galileo."⁶

In this paper I intend to show that accounts of More's Platonism of the above sort, although trivially true, mask the important fact that the author of the *Psychozoia*—though his notes may be scattered with references to other philosophers—is chiefly going *ad fontes* to the *Enneads*, and that the contours of More's philosophy are distinctively Plotinian.

That a vaguer description of the early More's Platonism prevails is no doubt due to the fact that More is seen—rightly—as a Renaissance Platonist drawing together widely different authorities into a broad doctrinal unity, reflecting the accommodating spirit of *philosophia perennis*. However, the way he draws together his sources is important. Jacob, as we have seen above, refers to the "variety of Neoplatonist doctrines" that went into the formation of More's early metaphysical views, and recently A.R. Hall, in his book *Henry More: Magic, Religion and Experiment* (1990) has characterized More

poem are referred to using Jacob's page numbers, and the poem by canto and stanza; the Greek has been transliterated.

5. This is the concern of the first part of the poem down to stanza 24 of the second canto. The remainder of the second canto and the third concern themselves with the journey of the individual soul through life. In this paper I restrict my attention to the first part. For background on the composition of the poem see More, *Platonic Song* 2 ff.

6. More cites a range of authorities in the *Psychozoia*, including Philo, Iamblichus, Hermes Trismegistus, and Theophrastus among the ancients, and Galileo, Copernicus, and Descartes among the moderns.

as a follower of Neoplatonism “in a somewhat weak and general sense,” remarking, curiously, that his philosophical poems “seem to contain more echoes of Copernicus and Galileo” than of Platonism. Such descriptions risk imprecision, and can leave the impression that More’s Neoplatonism was rather fuzzy, of no definite extraction.

A careful look at the *Psychozoia* shows that this is not the case. The poem offers an intimate glimpse into More’s reading of Plotinus thanks to his copious notes—mostly exegesis on books of the *Enneads*—added in 1647. *Psychozoia*, due to these notes, is precious among the works of the Cambridge Platonists for the degree to which its author lays bare the exact sources of his philosophy. If one sets aside these general descriptions of More’s Platonism and makes a close reading of the notes, three things become clear: firstly, and obviously, that the majority of them are references to the *Enneads*; secondly, that where (to modern eyes) there is a more or less contorted attempt to show the agreement of two sources, one of which is Plotinus, More generally does violence to the other source—even if it is scriptural—to preserve the appearance of harmony; thirdly, that his other sources generally seem chosen not to conflict with his citations from the *Enneads*.

It is clear, then, as I shall show in detail below, that Plotinus (More refers to him more than once as “the Philosopher”) emerges as More’s major source in the *Psychozoia*, and though he does not follow Plotinus at every turn (for instance, in his account of how the sensible world arises), More’s Platonism is deeply marked by his reading of the *Enneads*, which he often interpreted with the care of an exegete. This recognition of the specifically Plotinian contours of More’s Platonism is naturally important for a deeper understanding of the sources of More’s inspiration, but it is also of interest for our picture of the early modern retrieval of Neoplatonism. Despite Hall’s judgement that “fortunately, perhaps, there seems to be no return to these [Neoplatonic] ideas in More’s later prose works,” in fact there are good grounds for believing that More held on to his original vision in his more mature thought. The ideas of Plastic Nature (or Spirit of Nature), the immaterial omnipresence of God, the priority of the goodness of God, and the utter passivity of matter are ones which are developed in the *Psychozoia* through his reading of the *Enneads*; but they are equally present later on. Moreover, Hall himself points out that some of the central ideas of More’s fellow Platonist and colleague Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688) seem to have been formulated first by More; there is some reason to believe, then, that the central concerns of Cambridge Platonism, at least as they achieved philosophical articulacy in Cudworth and More—its most eloquent exponents—may have derived originally from the latter’s early reading of the *Enneads*. If this is so—and it seems probable—Cambridge Platonism represents a strik-

ing early modern return to Plotinus; as such, it has parallels with the more mediated and historically momentous Cartesian retrieval of Plotinian metaphysics via Augustine, whilst it also differs from it in decisive ways.⁷

I shall pick up these points in the conclusion. In what follows I trace the Plotinian sources of More's "Platonick Triad," taking each of the three Persons/hypostases in turn, plus his concept of matter.

AHAD

More's description in the poem and the notes of God the Father as an Ultimate Cause, called Ahad, follows closely on Plotinus' words about the One.⁸ Ahad, in the poem, is:

Th' Ancient of dayes, Sire of Eternitie,
 Sprung of himself, or rather no wise sprong:
 Father of lights and everlasting glee,
 Who puts to silence every daring tongue
 And flies man's sight, shrowding himself among
 His glorious rayes good *Atoue*, from whom came
 All good (1.5)

This condensed poetical account of the Ultimate Principle reflects what Plotinus says about the One: that it is unknowable and ineffable ("puts to silence every daring tongue,"; "flies man's sight"), "productive" of Intellect ("Sire of Eternitie"), self-caused ("No wise sprong"), and identified with the Platonic Form of the Good ("[he] from whom came / All good").

More's notes on Ahad (*PSS*, 544–45) show that the inspiration is indeed Plotinian: "[Ahad is] the deepest Centre of all things, and first root of all beings [which] the Platonists call *t'agathon* & *to hen*, that is, the Good, and the One" (*PSS* 544). More draws on two of Plotinus' treatises, *On the Primal Good and the Other Goods* (I.7.1 [54]) and the celebrated final treatise *On the Good or the One* (VI.9.7 [9]) in illustration of his First Principle. Using this latter treatise, More affirms that Ahad cannot "be known by reason or Intellect" but rather by a "tactual Energie of the soul" (*PSS* 544–45). Hermes

7. Cf. C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

8. The three persons of the Christian Trinity are designated by the slightly pompous sounding names of Ahad (also *Atoue*), Aeon, and Psyche (also *Uranore*). More did himself no favours in using these "barbarous words" for the Divine Persons, and his 1647 notes along with the short *Interpretation General* (a glossary of terms) are clearly efforts to make amends for the fact that he offended his readership with such apparent obscurity. His notes, however, make it clear that the Greek and Hebrew appellations simply represent the Plotinian hypostases of One, intellect and soul.

Trismegistus, the Chaldean Oracles and Michael Psellus are also cited here, but the brevity of his treatment of them and the space he affords to Plotinus make it clear that the sense of the occasional short citation from another author (e.g., “[knowing] *noou anthei*, as the Oracle speaks, by the flower, or the summit of the Intellect”) is to be interpreted through the longer citations from the *Enneads*. Thus, the idea of knowing ineffably by a “tactical Energie of the soul” is to be understood primarily through More’s references to the Plotinian idea of the “intellectual energie” which is beyond intellect rather than the cognate Chaldean “flower ... of the Intellect” or Psellus’ “unitive power of the Intellect,” and the nature of “that still and silent tactical conjunction with this Universall Good” (*PSS* 545) is best grasped through Plotinian metaphors of the coincidence of centres: “God and the soul doth as it were *kentron kentron sunapsai*, joyne centres” (VI.9.10,17).⁹ Nor does More hesitate to elucidate scriptural sources in the light of Plotinus: “This tactical conjunction of the soul with God surely in the Christian phrase is no more then divine love, as *S. John* speaks. God is love, and he that is in love is in God, and God in him.” Typically of More, this appears to be not so much an attempt to harmonise Plotinus with scripture, but rather the other way round: drawing again on VI.9, for example, More uses the Plotinian image of the love of a daughter for her noble father to shed light on the traditional expression of the Christian doctrine of agapeistic love.¹⁰

The notes are thus explicit about some of More’s Plotinian sources for his description of the Ultimate Cause. But it is difficult not to sense the background presence of the treatise *On Free Will and the Will of the One* (VI.8 [39]) in the *Psychozoia* too, especially in More’s note to 1.6 of the poem. The stanza in question contains a strident rejection of the harsh Calvinist doctrine of predestination:

nothing [is] wont to burn
That *Atove* lists to save; and his good Art
Is all to save that will to him return (1.6)

9. Cf. *Enneads* VI.9.8, 1–10 and VI.9.10, 11–20, cited elsewhere in the notes. In all the following references to the *Enneads* the text used is that of the third volume of the revised *editio minor* of P. Henry and H-R. Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera III* (Oxford, 1982). I have followed the translation of A.H. Armstrong.

10. “The soul in the purity of her own nature, loves God and desireth to be joined with him, as a beautifull virgin to a beautifull man.” The source is obviously *Ennead* VI.9.9, 33–35: “The soul then in her natural state is in love with God and wants to be united with him; it is like the noble love of a girl for her noble father.”

More's note reads:

It being acknowledged both in the purest Philosophy and in Christianity, that the root of all things is goodnesse it self, the most genuine consequence of this is, That his providence being measured by himself, goodnesse it self is the measure thereof.

(PSS 546)

This seems to recall *On Free Will and the Will of the One* about freedom and necessity in the One/Good, and how it is not to be thought of as free to commit evil. Considering More's general debt to Plotinus and the fact that he cites this treatise elsewhere in the notes it is probable that if, as he says, he found this agreeable doctrine expressed in "the purest Philosophy," he must have found *On Free Will and the Will of the One* one of its clearest expositions. More would certainly have found a whole battery of arguments against the harshness of Calvin's "arbitrary" God in this important document of Neoplatonic theology. That VI.8 also helped shape More's understanding of the Ultimate Cause, then, must be practically beyond doubt.

AEON

More's description of the Son of God, called Aeon, is, like the description of Ahad, a careful exegesis of Plotinus. Aeon derives eternally from Ahad; he is:

that ancient *Eidos* omniform,
Fount of all beauty, root of flowring glee,

.....

Joyfull *Eternity* [Aeon]

Admits no change or mutability,
No shade of change, no imminution,
No nor increase; and what increase can be
To that that's all

(1.9)

The youthfull *Aeon*, whose fair face doth shine
While he his Fathers glory doth espy

(1.13)

Aeon-land, which men *Idea* call,
is nought but life in full serenity

.....

This *Aeon* is also hight *Autocalon* and *On*.

(1.14)

More's image of Aeon turning his face towards the brilliant glory of his Father and being illuminated by it ("While he his Fathers glory doth espy") evokes the Plotinian doctrine of intellect's reversion upon its superior princi-

ple, the One, in contemplation of it. Like divine intellect, Aeon constitutes a unity with the Forms, or "true beings" ("[Aeon is] that ancient *Eidos* omniform"; "*Aeon-land* ... men *Idea* call"); More presses home the identity of Aeon with the multiple unity of true beings ("this *Aeon* is also hight ... *On*"), supporting the equation by citing the Plotinian derivation of *aïôn* from *aei on* in *On Eternity and Time* (III.7.4, 44). He further identifies Aeon with Beauty, citing liberally from *On the Intelligible Beauty* (V.8.4 [31]). More's Aeon is fullness of life, yet this life does not suffer change and temporal succession: it is God's "inward comprehension of all things *ab aeterno*," his "*logos endiathetos*" (*PSS* 546), knowing and being all things together and at once, not separately and in time. More completes his notes on Aeon by citing the account of the nature of intellect from the treatise *On Providence I* (III.2.1), where all these themes are to be found together. Apart from an unaccompanied citation of a fragment from the Chaldean Oracles, his notes on Aeon are drawn exclusively from Plotinus.

More's Aeon is thus the totality of Forms, the act, offspring and image of the One, eternally in contemplation of it: "a life exhibiting all things at once, and in one" (*PSS*, 543). It is the first stage in the derivation of things from the One and gives rise to Psyche, the third hypostasis of the Divine Triad, which in turn contemplates Aeon eternally and by a secondary act generates the world.

PSYCHE

When we come to the Holy Spirit, or Psyche, the true subject matter of the *Psychozoia*, we find that the Plotinian influence is not total. However, it is still by far the most active. When she is first invoked in the first stanza of the poem, Psyche is described as:

th'inward Fountain, and the unseen Seeds,

 life of Time, and all Alterity! (1.1)

To judge from the notes, More wrote these lines with the treatise *On Eternity and Time* (III.7 [45]) fresh in his mind; certainly, his description of Psyche follows Plotinus' account of soul in III.7 very closely. Soul, for More, is an expression of intellect at a further degree of dispersion; on account of her "unquiet power" (see III.7.11, 20, his source) she produces the world through dynamic contemplation, viz., a spreading out into succession of the unified life of intellect. Time, for More, is this very dynamism of soul in distinction from the serenity of the latter: it is the "perseverance and the motion of the soul of the world" (*PSS* 543), consistently with the final lines of III.7.11: "one must not conceive time as outside Soul ... it is not an accompaniment

of Soul or something that comes after ... but something which is seen along with it and exists in it and with it." More's image of the fountain evokes Psyche's self-dispersion, her breaking up of unified life into successive moments in time: "Psyche is the fountain of this evolved life, whence she is also the very life of time" (PSS 543). In the notes More has recourse to *On the Three Primary Hypostases* (V.1.8 [10]) as support for his contrast between the eternal, static contemplation of Aeon and the eternal, but dynamic contemplation of Psyche, of which he says that "it is not of her Essence to be all things *actually and steddily*" (PSS 548, italics mine). It is needless to point out Plotinus' influence here.

The analysis of Psyche's parts in stanzas 39 to 60 seems to stick equally closely to Plotinus. Here she is described as having three "inward films," Physis, Haphe, and Semele, which are unmistakably modelled on the "powers" or "faculties" (*dunameis*) of Plotinus' soul: vegetative (*phusis/phusikon*), sensitive (*aisthêsis/aisthêtikon*), imagination/memory (*phantasia/phantastikon*). The lowest is Physis, described by More as "the vegetable World, the Universall comprehension of Spermaticall life dispersed throughout" (PSS 552). Physis much resembles Plotinus' *phusis*; it is a barely conscious form of life comprising the lowest, vegetative part of human souls, but continuous with the animal life-force and the "Spermaticall life" (the *logoi spermatikoi* of Plotinus) which organises and sustains the world.¹¹ The middle film, Haphe ("touch"), is sensory perception, and the highest, with its upper and its lower part, is Semele, the imagination.

More also follows his author in his concern to keep rigorously to the distinction between soul and body. Thus we find in the notes that no aspect of soul, neither the hypostasis soul; nor world soul, in its relation to the body of the world; nor individual souls, in their relation to their particular bodies, acts on body as though soul itself were a body (i.e., mechanically). More respects the Plotinian gulf between the material and the immaterial: "Psyche keep[s] steddily her own station" (PSS 558) while producing the sensible world; in her contemplation she can "discern all things unmixtly and undisturbedly" (PSS 555), producing by inspiring imitation, not by moving material here and there. For More, as for Plotinus, Psyche is thus responsible, but only indirectly, for the production of the world, which she gives rise to through Physis, her projected image. This Plotinian idea is probably behind More's affirmation in the notes that "the union betwixt Aeon and Psyche is much more near then between Psyche and the Mundane Spirit," as well as his description of the higher imagination proper to Psyche herself as "more high ... hovering and suspense from immersion into the grosser

11. More, following Plotinus, was always of the opinion that "there neither was, nor is, nor shall be any thing in the World devoid of life" (PSS 560).

spirits of this body, which is little or nothing conscious of whats done so farre above" (*PSS* 555). In his psychology, then, More appears to be following Plotinus' strategy of retaining the Platonic concept of the nature of soul as utterly separate from body while adopting a more or less Aristotelian description of its powers.¹²

Now More's reception of the Plotinian *physis* is perhaps most interesting from the viewpoint of an understanding of More's and Cudworth's Platonism, since the author of the *Psychozoia* is set against a demiurgic model of creation as the author of the *Enneads*, and he largely takes on board Plotinus' alternative account. More follows Plotinus in his anti-Gnostic treatises in throwing out the model of demiurgic creation in favour of the model of contemplative production: the world, for More, is "produced" by Physis as a secondary act resulting from its contemplation of Psyche, just as Physis arose from soul's contemplation of Aeon, and Psyche from Aeon's contemplation of the One.¹³ Physis, in More, does a lot of explanatory work in accounting for this effortless type of production. It is described in the following terms:

Physis (as I said) is not the divine Understanding it self, but is as if you should conceive, an Artificers imagination separate from the Artificer, and left alone to work by itself without animadversion. (*PSS* 552)

Nature, for Plotinus the lowest "level" of soul but often practically a fourth hypostasis, is presented by More as generating the world through its constituent "plasmaticall Spirits or Archei" (*PSS* 549), the "unseen seeds" of the first stanza of the poem, which produce, organize and sustain the sensible universe. These principles, the *logoi spermatikoi* of More's Plotinian sources, work matter into shape. Citing *On Difficulties about the Soul I* (IV.3 [27]), More keeps close to Plotinus in portraying Psyche as firstly projecting matter ahead of her, then shaping it into life and form in a second outward movement with the help of these *logoi spermatikoi*. In his notes More says that Psyche "produce[s] herself a body" by which she can then "issue out

12. Discussed in H.J. Blumenthal, "On Soul and Intellect," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L.P. Gerson (Cambridge, 1996) 82–104.

13. Cf. the personification of nature in *On Nature and Contemplation and the One* (III.8.4, 1–14): "Understand ... that what comes into being is what I see in my silence, an object of contemplation which comes to be naturally, and that I, originating from this sort of contemplation have a contemplative nature. And my act of contemplation makes what it contemplates, as the geometers draw their figures while they contemplate. But I do not draw, but as I contemplate, the lines which bound bodies come to be as if they fell from my contemplation. What happens to me is what happens to my mother and the beings that generated me, for they, too, derive from contemplation, and it is no action of theirs which brings about my birth; they are greater rational principles, and as they contemplate themselves I come to be." Cf. also *Ennead* IV.3.9, 26–27.

into an external vivificative act" (PSS 558), and that the "dead mist" which Psyche's "entrance" stirs up is nothing but "the utmost projection of her own life" (PSS 549).¹⁴

More turns to the treatise *On Providence (I)* (III,2 [47]) to elucidate the nature of these seminal powers. Paraphrasing from III.2.16, 14–16, he enlists Plotinus' authority in claiming that:

the seminal World [Physis] is neither the very intellect it self, though it be stored with all forms, nor any kind of pure soul, though depending of both, *hoion eklampsis ex amphoin nou, kai psukhes*, A kind of life eradiating and resulting both from Intellect and Psyche. (PSS 552)

It is in More's engagement with such passages of the *Enneads* (particularly those in III.2.16) we see the famous Plastic Nature doctrine emerging, a doctrine that More employs not only to explain the orderliness of the world but also its production. In this same passage from III.2.16, for example, just below the lines More cites, Plotinus holds that:

All life, even worthless life, is activity: activity not in the way that fire acts; but its activity, even if there is no perception there, is a movement which is not random. For with living things when there is no perception present and any one of them has any share in life, it is immediately enreasoned, that is informed, since the activity which is proper to life is able to form it and moves it in such a way that its movement is a forming.

Further down he continues:

Now the rational forming principle of this universe ... is not a single life nor any kind of single intellect ... nor does it at every point give itself whole and entire to the things to which it does give itself. But by setting the parts against each other and making them deficient it generates and maintains war and battle ... [it] is one though it contains in itself many battles.

More explicitly equates this Plotinian account of the *logos* (the "rational forming principle of the universe") here at the end of treatise III.2 with his own account of Physis. In "On difficulties about the Soul I" (IV.3.10, 13–14), Plotinus writes of this formative rational principle within soul that it has the power to set in order according to rational principles just as "the formative rational principles in seeds mould [*plattousi*] and shape [*morphousi*]

14. Cf. *Ennead* IV.3.9, 21–24En.4.3,9: "If body did not exist, soul would not go forth, since there is no place other than body where it is natural for it to be. But if it intends to go forth, it will produce a place for itself, and so a body."

living beings like little ordered universes.”

These lines, cited by More in a note to 2.15 of the poem, together with the above cited passage from III.2 strongly evoke his own expressions of “plasmaticall spirits or Archei,”¹⁵ as well as his general account of the Plastic Nature as an imagination functioning on its own without “animadversion.” More’s description of Physis as “sometimes puzzled and bungell[ing] in ill disposed matter, because its power is not absolute and omnipotent” (PSS 552) suggests the fainter unity of Plotinus’ rational forming principle cited above, which is “one though it contains in itself many battles.” Here one finds not only the assimilated Stoic insight that there is good (i.e., unity) in apparent evil but also the idea, reflected by More’s description, that unity, good and order are less and less perfectly present at each successive stage in derivation. Thus far More follows Plotinus with fidelity.

More’s twist on this account is to present the production of the world by Plastic Nature as unfolding in time. He says of Psyche, through the mediation of Physis, that she:

awaken[s] that immense mist of Atoms into severall energies, into fiery, watery and earthly; and placing her Magick attractive points, sucks hither and hither ... those Cuspidal particles, knedding them into Suns, Moons, Earths, &c. (PSS 552)

The details of this account, both in the poem and in the notes, are sketchy and unclear, but it seems that More thought the immaterial *logoi spermatikoi* are first materialised as subtle atoms of ether, which become fiery, watery and earthly before being combined into the physical objects of the sensible world by magnetic forces.¹⁶ This seems to be the picture in stanzas 42–43 and 46 of the poem:

[Psyche comprises] centrall spots,
Dark little composites in this hid inward veil:
But when the hot bright dart doth pierce these knots,¹⁷
Each one dispreads it self according to their lots. (1.42)

15. Cf. also More’s definition of “Plastick” in the *Interpretation General*: “*dunamis plastikè*: “that efformative might in the seed that shapes the body in its growth” (PSS 620). More also writes here under “Soul” that “this world is but one Plant, one *logos spermatikos* giving it shape and corporeall life” (PSS 623).

16. In the *Interpretation General* (PSS 613), More is a little more specific on this process of creation than he is in the poem: “the last projection of life from Psyche ... is a liquid fire, or fire and water, which are the corporeall or materiall principles of all things.” Note also his description of “mundane spirit”: “that which is the spirit of the world, or Universe. I mean by it not an Intellectual spirit, but a fine, unmixed, attenuate, subtil, ethereall substance, the immediate vehicle of plasticall or sensitive life” (PSS 619).

17. This is probably a reference to Psyche’s role as *Erôs* in organizing matter.

When they dispread themselves, then gins to swell
 Dame *Psyches* outward vest (1.43)

From this first film [Physis] all bulk in quantity
 Doth bougen out, and figure thence obtain.¹⁸
 Here eke begins the life of Sympathy,
 And hidden virtue of magnetick vein (1.46)

In the notes he writes that there was a time when “no particular straitned being [was yet] made; no earth or any other Orb [was] yet kned together” (PSS 552). However difficult this is to square with his otherwise orthodox Plotinism—particularly given his appeal to *On Eternity and Time* (see above)—More was nevertheless committed to the idea that the world arose in time.¹⁹ This is clear from his ruminations on the duration of the world’s creation in *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, written a mere six years after publication of the second edition of the *Psychozoia*.²⁰ More’s millenarian expectations that a new millennium of peace and greater spiritual maturity would bring about a literal transformation of the world sits equally uncomfortably alongside the Plotinian conviction that the world abides eternally in its present perfection. More’s position, however, is clear from the *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, and from the preface to the *Psychozoia*:

It is nothing harsh for me to take occasion . . . to sing a while the true Christian *Autocalon*, whose beauty shall adorn the whole Earth in good time; if we believe the Prophets. For that hath not as yet happened. (PSS 153)

18. Cf. *Ennead* IV.3.9, 49–51 En.4,3,9: “the formative principle [which comes from soul] is of such a kind as to make a size as large as the form from which it derives wants to make.”

19. More tries nevertheless to recruit Plotinus in support of his creation account by misrepresenting the dynamic images found in the *Enneads*, which More suggests were meant literally. Citing Plotinus’ description of soul animating the universe in *Ennead* IV.3.9 (earlier referred to), More says that the Philosopher “describes the production of the corporeal world” (PSS 558). However, Plotinus in this very passage is clear that he speaks metaphorically of temporal change when talking about the production of the world: “Of course [when talking about the Soul of the All] we must consider that the terms ‘entry’ and ‘ensoulment’ are used in the discussion for the sake of clear explanation. For there never was a time when this universe did not have a soul, or when body existed in the absence of soul, or when matter was not set in order; but in discussing these things one can consider them apart from each other. [When one is reasoning about] any kind of composition, it is always legitimate to analyse it in thought into its parts.” Plotinus holds consistently to the eternity of the sensible world; that More was aware of his innovating is clear: “Thus I conceive is the sense of the Philosopher, whose conceit I have improved and made use of as here in this Canto for many Stanzas together” (PSS 558).

20. H. More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica: Or, A Conjectural Essay of interpreting the minde of Moses according to a threefold Cabbala, viz., literal, philosophical, mystical, or, divinely moral* (London, 1653).

It is also suggested in the following stanza of the poem:

Thy [Aeon's] rod thou shalt extend from sea to sea,
 And thy Dominion to the worlds end;
 All Kings shall vow thee faithfull fealty,
Then peace and truth on all the earth I'll send. (1.37, italics mine)

More thus temporalizes the workings of Physis to make it agree with his creationist account of the world's production and his millenarian hopes of its future transformation. It is in this form that it enters into the current of seventeenth century English natural philosophy.

Towards the end of the first canto, Psyche is portrayed as all-knowing:

Psyche sees
 All that falls under sense, what ere is done
 Upon the earth (1.50)

More adds an explanation of the nature of Psyche's omniscience in the notes, which he attributes to her power of "infinite animadversion." This argument for Psyche's infinite knowing—most concisely laid out on page 554 of the notes—is short and simple:

No living soul is sensible of ought in this out-World, but by being joined in a living manner to it. Therefore *Psyche* being joined to it all, must needs perceive all forms and motions in it, that are presented to any particular soul. For these representations be made in some particular body, which is but part of the whole, a knot as it were of *Psyches* outward stole, but the universall body of the World, is one undivided peece, wherefore nor Owl, nor Bat, nor Cat, nor any thing else can possibly see, but *Psyche* seeth *ipso facto*, for 'tis part of her body that hath those representations in it; wherefore man is transfixt through and through by the rayes of the divine Light. (*PSS* 554)

This argument, which gives human knowing a participatory role in the Divine omniscience, supposes an understanding of soul as a multiple unity: More's individual souls, world soul, and hypostasis soul, though they are in one sense separate, must, in another sense, be a unity if the argument is to work. More's reasoning, though fairly obscure and underdeveloped, suggests the influence of the *Enneads*, particularly, perhaps, Plotinus' reflections on the soul in his treatise *On Difficulties about the Soul I* (IV.3). More had clearly read this treatise—he cites it in the notes to the second canto (*PSS* 558)—and its discussions of the *aporiai* surrounding how the different types of soul relate to one another suggests this as a likely source for his understanding of soul as multiple unity. It is at least probable that Plotinus' reflections on the traditional Platonic definition of the soul as "One and Many," and his ex-

periments with metaphors of multiple unity to try to illuminate soul's paradoxical nature, had a formative influence on More and lie behind his idea of Psyche's infinite animadversion.²¹

Moreover, More's contention that the sensory "representations" of humans and animals form part of the body of the world seems to owe something to the Plotinian idea that nature (*phusis*) in the world soul is continuous with the vegetative power (*phusis/phutikon*) in individual souls, so that one can speak indifferently either of individual souls perceiving or of the world soul perceiving through them. More appears to share much the same thought in the preface to his poem: "the low Spirit of the Universe ... go[es] quite through the world ... our lower man is part of the inferiour Spirit of the Universe" (PSS 153). Thus one is to understand the sense of More's idea that human beings and animals are "knots" in the world's "outward stole": "Every particular body [viz., body + lower soul] is esteemed, but a knot or close folding of that one intire Out-garment of *Psyche*" (PSS 550).²²

More makes it clear, however, that he does not simply want to collapse the omniscience of the Triune God into the infinite animadversion of Psyche/Physis which "go[es] quite through the world." Although he holds that God is "in every Atom ball" (2.10), More does not believe that God's knowing is exhausted by that of the lowest hypostasis—there is still a "more incomprehensible way of omniscieny in God." He attempts to apply the notion upwards: the "thoughts of all mens minds and motions," including

21. More shows a keen awareness of this understanding of the soul, drawn from the *Parmenides*, in his notes on Psyche. Reflecting on the manner in which Psyche participates in the Divine Unity, he writes: "First to *hen* or *Abad*, that is a simple unity: then *Aeon*, that's *hen panta* an actual unmoveable Omniformity: Lastly, *hen kai panta*, that's *Uranore* or *Psyche*, viz. capable of that stable Omniformity ... but it is not of her Essence to be all things actually and steddily" (PSS 548, italics mine). Cf. Plotinus' *On the Three Primary Hypostases*: "But Parmenides in Plato speaks more accurately, and distinguishes from each other the first One, which is more properly called One, and the second which he calls 'One-Many' and the third, 'One-and-Many.' In this way he too agrees with the doctrine of the three natures [i.e., hypostases]" (V.1.8, 24–29 [10]). For an example of a Plotinian metaphor of multiple unity, cf.: "in the case of the soul which is said to be divisible in relation to bodies, this assertion that all souls are one thing has many difficulties; unless of course one made the one stand by itself without falling into body, and then said that all the souls, the Soul of the All and the others, came from that one, living together with each other, so to speak, down to a certain level and being one soul by belonging to no particular thing; and that, being fastened [to the one] by their edges on their upper side, they strike down this way and that, like the light which, just when it reaches the earth, divides itself among houses and is not divided, but is one none the less" (IV.3.4, 13–22).

22. For an account of Plotinus' position, see Blumenthal, *Soul and Intellect*. Blumenthal claims that Plotinus regards the lower powers of soul either as part of the material world as a whole, i.e., the lowest level of world soul, or as discrete lowest parts of individuals, depending on the point of view from which he regards a particular issue concerning them.

“every sensitive and imaginative act,” pass from Psyche, who “knows exactly inferior things” (*PSS* 555), into the sight and presence of Aeon, whose infinite animadversion “discern[s] all things unmixedly and undisturbedly.” In turn, what Aeon sees is “clearly in the view of Ahad.” In this way Ahad too “knows every individual thing and motion,” and “thus the thoughts of all mens minds and motions of heart arise up into the sight and presence of the all-comprehending Divinity ... the spirit of the Lord fills the world.”

More’s expansion of the idea of “infinite animadversion” to Aeon and particularly to Ahad is a good deal more strained than its application to soul, as the defensive nature of More’s notes belies (*PSS* 555–56), and the thought is generally rather weakly developed in the poem. It does, however, provide an interesting insight into the very Plotinian ideas about the soul which were grabbing More’s imagination; it seems probable that they were sparked by his reading of *On Difficulties about the Soul I* and treatises like it.

MATTER

In some parts of the poem, More seems to treat matter as a metaphysical reality: matter, which he calls “Hyle,” is personified as a witch, who introduces imperfection into the natural and human order:

Foul *Hyle* mistresse of the miry strond,
Oft [*Physis*] withstands, and taketh great delight
To hinder *Physis* work, and work her all despight. (1.44)

More thus gives expression to an intuition, not without its parallels in Plotinus—for instance in the treatise *On the Nature and Source of Evil* (I.8 [51])—that matter is somehow the principle of particular evil things, which are not evil themselves but become evil through participation in this principle. Indeed, some stanzas of the poem have a Gnostic flavour. The sensible world, in the tenth stanza of the first canto, is portrayed as a snare, and human beings, “impassion’d / With [its] outward forms,” reel “into th’dirt” to their perdition. More employs the Narcissus myth, very likely derived from his reading of *On the Intelligible Beauty* (V.8.4), to emphasise the perils of the world, which is in the thrall of matter/evil: Narcissus, because he does not tend to “the inward,” blends love, life and form “in foul filthy mire” and loses contact with true being through too great attachment to the world.²³

However, it is clear elsewhere in the poem, and in the notes, that More thinks it is only prolonged association with the world, a preoccupation and fascination with it, that leads soul into evil, whereas the world itself does not

23. More’s citation from an adjacent passage in *On the Intelligible Beauty* (*PSS*, 546) gives every reason for thinking that Plotinus is More’s source for the Narcissus myth.

participate in any separate evil principle but rather is very good and necessary. In an echo of the Stoic optimism in providence found so often in Plotinus, More portrays evil in the world as only apparent and contributing towards a greater good:

And when false life doth fail, it's for the sake
Of better being. Riving tortures spight,
That life disjoyns, and makes the heart to quake,
To good the soul doth nearer reunite (2.7)

In contrast with the more Gnostic-sounding stanzas, and in keeping with this emphasis, More speaks elsewhere of the “perfect comliness” of Psyche’s “outward vest” (1.18), and his description of the sensible world between this and stanza 33 presents it as divine:

O gladsome life of sense that doth adore
The outward shape of the worlds curious frame!
.....
How sweet it is to live! What joy to see the Sunne! (1.32)

This is consistent with the idea that the sensible world derives from one sole principle which is identified with the Good, and that matter/evil has no independent existence, an idea very deeply rooted, of course, despite its many paradoxes, in the *Enneads*. Such lines as the above invite comparison with Plotinus’ more poetic flights in praise of the world in, for example, the treatise *Against the Gnostics*:

will anyone be so sluggish in mind and so immovable that, when he sees all the beauties in the world of sense, all its good proportion and the mighty excellence of its order, and the splendour of form which is manifested in the stars, for all their remoteness, he will not thereupon think, seized with reverence, “What wonders, and from what a source?” If he did not, he would neither have understood this world here nor seen that higher world. (II.9.16, 50–56 [33])

In the notes, consistently with this denial of “metaphysical” evil, More describes matter as “Nothing,” or “as low as next to nothing” (*PSS* 558). It seems that he has Plotinus’ construal of matter as non-being here as his model: “[matter is] lower then this shadow that *Plotinus* speaketh of, and which maketh the body of the World” (*PSS* 558). As in the case of Plotinus, matter, for More, lacks all definiteness; it is “nothing else but potentiality” (*PSS* 558). Consequently it is inert and has no capacity for self-organisa-

24. For matter as non-being in Plotinus, see, e.g., *Ennead* II.5.5, 9: “So then [matter] must be non-existent not in the sense of being different from existence, like motion ... but matter is

tion.²⁴

This notion of matter as non-being is assumed in the logic of More's account of reality as a "universal Ogdoas" in the second canto, as his notes to this part make clear. His so-called "Ogdoas," which is a presentation of reality as an eight-levelled hierarchy of being, is described as "an Unitie / One mighty quickened Orb of vast extent" (1.15), one simple unified being from Ahad to Hyle.²⁵ Despite first impressions, this is an alternative presentation of the Trinity from the first canto, seen through the lens of the Plotinian theory of derivation *kath'hupostolên*.²⁶ Following this Plotinian theory—he cites the tag *kath'hupostolên* three times in the notes (PSS 543, 548, 556)—More represents each successive stage in derivation (starting from the One/Ahad) as implying a lesser degree of goodness/unity until the derivation process utterly exhausts itself in nothingness. The logic of this theory, when rigorously followed through, means that the Divine Triad comprises all reality, so that matter must have the status of non-being.²⁷ More shows a keen awareness of this in the notes to his "Ogdoas" theory, where he cites with approval Hermes Trismegistus for voicing "the strange opinion of God being all, and that there is nothing but God." Further, More affirms that:

it is not at all strange that all things are the mere energie of God, and do as purely depend on him, as the Son-beams of the Sunne ... we may be bold to say that God is all

as if cast out and utterly separated, and unable to change itself, but always in the state it was from the beginning—and it was non-existent." On its utterly indeterminate nature, *idem*, II.4.12, 34–38: "But even corporeality does not belong to [matter]; for if corporeality is a rational formative principle it is different from matter, and so matter is something else; but if corporeality has already come into action and is so to speak mixed, it would clearly be body, and not matter alone"; as potentiality, *idem*, II.5.5, 1–7: "How, then, do we speak of it? How is it the matter of real things. Because it is they potentially. Then, because it is they already potentially, is it therefore just as it is going to be? But its being is no more than an announcement of what it is going to be: it is as if being for it was adjourned to that which it will be. So its potential existence is not being something, but being potentially everything; and since it is nothing in itself—except what it is, matter—it does not exist actually at all."

25. With regard to "Ogdoas": More, as so often, employs a Chaldean or other term but presents a Plotinian idea; it does not imply that he has integrated Chaldean material here.

26. The Ogdoas comprises Ahad, Aeon, Psyche, Semele, Arachne, Physis, Tasis, and Hyle. This account is not in compliance with the Trinitarian one presented in the first canto since Semele, Arachne, Physis, and Tasis are to be thought of as diminishing degrees of Psyche, and Hyle as mere potentiality; they are not to be thought of as additional hypostases. (Tasis, a very obscure term in More, usually refers to the sensible world, i.e., the actualisation of what is potential in the organizing forces (*logoi spermatikoi*) within Physis; thus its position, perhaps, between Physis and Hyle. In this scheme it is apparently counted as the lowest radiation from Psyche, since it has determination.)

27. For a development of this idea, see D.J. O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford, 1995).

things, and that there is nothing but God. (PSS 559)

If More cites Hermes Trismegistus here rather than the *Enneads*, he could just as well have turned to passages in the latter, for certainly More believed that in Plotinus too “the whole Universe is exhibited to the mind as one vitall Orb, whose centre is God himself, or *Ahad*” (PSS 560). In spite of More’s lip service to the doctrine of the unity of Persons within the Trinity and his occasional employment of metaphors of equality to characterize the inner relatedness of the Godhead (PSS 552), it is the Plotinian theory of derivation which prevails as the way in which the relations between *Ahad*, *Aeon* and *Psyche* are basically understood in the *Psychozoia*. It is also the key for understanding More’s description of matter.

CONCLUSION

More’s early philosophy, as this article has set out to show, is definitively Plotinian. Though the metaphysics of the *Psychozoia* is in many parts sketchy and inchoate, we can nevertheless make out that its greatest debt is to the *Enneads*. Contrary to Hall’s judgement, then, there is nothing “weak and general” here about his Neoplatonism: with the important exception of his rejection of the eternity of the world More reproduces the features of the Plotinian scheme with remarkable fidelity.

More brought out the first edition of the *Psychozoia* in 1640, the year of the lifting of the censorship in England. The date is probably significant: More may have felt that the greater liberty of expression being ushered in made it safer to publish such ideas. He nevertheless remained cautious; the prefaces of his philosophical poems are filled with *caveats*. As though sensing the danger of controversy, More appears to have played a delicate game of publishing his heterodox ideas and disclaiming authorial responsibility. In the preface to the *Psychozoia* he writes:

in what [pagan and Christian Trinities] differ, I leave to be found out according to the safe direction of that infallible Rule of Faith, the holy Word. (PSS 153)

Further, in his preface to one of his other philosophical poems, *Democritus Platonissans*, he says that it is much more his custom:

to furnish mens minds with variety of apprehensions concerning the most weighty points of Philosophie, that they may not seem rashly to have settled in the truth, though it be the truth ... [than to be] dogmaticall. (PSS 403)

In the poems he wishes himself to be understood as “a Representer of the Wisdome of the Ancients rather than a warranter of the same” (PSS 144). More’s caution was probably justified: from the viewpoint of more main-

stream believers, this Plotinian rehash of Christian theology must have certainly seemed to say too little about Christ's incarnation, his crucifixion, his resurrection from the dead, not to speak of the necessity of grace; moreover, his vision of the Trinity as descending in successive stages of derivation must have seemed to come perilously close to the heresy of subordinationism.

Regardless, however, of whether or not they were heterodox, many of the ideas of the *Psychozoia* turned out to be of lasting currency. More's "necessitarian" views about the nature of God as conditioned by his goodness are consistently present in his thought. In More's *Divine Dialogues* he writes:

[God's] Goodness [is] so perfect, immutable and permanent, as never ... to be carried otherwise than to what is the best For is there not all reason, that he that is so immutably Good, that it is repugnant that he should ever will any thing but what is *absolutely* for the best.

He continues:

No power, though never so omnipotent can claim a right to ... do what is wrong ... no more than any Intellect, never so omniscient, can claim a right of authentickly thinking that true which is really false.²⁸

Moreover, More defended his idea of the Spirit of Nature with the utmost tenacity throughout his career. J. Henry observes: "The Spirit of Nature was the salient feature of Henry More's natural philosophy ... [it] seems to derive from neoplatonic notions of an *anima mundi*, appeared in More's earliest writings—his philosophical poems of the 1640s—and was successively elaborated until it achieved its mature statement in *The Immortality of the Soul* of 1659. More made no significant changes to his concept of the Spirit of Nature from then until his death in 1687."²⁹ (We may now suggest more precisely than this that it derives from passages in the *Enneads* discussed in this paper, or passages very like them.) A look at the 1659 definition of the Spirit of Nature from *The Immortality of the Soul* confirms that More never abandoned its basically Plotinian inspiration:

A substance incorporeal, but without Sense and Animadversion, pervading the whole Matter of the Universe, and exercising a Plastick power therein according to the sundry predispositions and occasions in the parts it works upon, raising such phaenomena in the World, by directing the parts of the Matter and then Motion, as cannot be resolved into mere Mechanical powers.³⁰

28. H. More, *Divine Dialogues* (London, 1668) 2:24–25.

29. J. Henry, "Henry More versus Robert Boyle: The Spirit of Nature and the Nature of Providence," in *Henry More (1614–1687): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. S. Hutton (Dordrecht, 1990).

30. H. More, *The Immortality of the Soul* (Cambridge, 1659) bk 3, chap. 12.

More makes much use of his concept of Plastic Nature as well as his notion of matter as totally inert in his famous controversies with Descartes and Boyle. For example, in his 1648–49 correspondence with Descartes concerning the problem of the communication of motion from one body to another (letter of 23 July 1649), More writes:

everything that is called body I hold to be alive in a sottish and drunken way, inasmuch as it is an image and the lowest and basest shadow, though destitute of sense and animadversion, of the Divine essence.³¹

The language of this rebuttal of Descartes' *res extensa* evokes More's account of Plastic Nature in the *Psychozoia*, and generally the Plotinian roots of More's thought. A. Gabbey writes: "the shadow and image of life [mentioned here is] of divine origin and enigmatically resid[es] in bodies ... as the source and ontological ground of their motions," and is the forerunner of "the post-1659 Spirit of Nature."³² Passages such as these show the continuing influence of More's early reading of the *Enneads* on his more mature views.

More's Neoplatonism, then, was no mere extravagance of his youth, but rather an enduring feature of his natural theology. This was not a diffused or diluted Neoplatonism, but took its contours from More's close attention to Plotinus' own words. It is a striking testimony to the enduring power and legacy of the *Enneads* that More could employ Plotinian ideas in his critique of such avant-garde philosophies of the day as Cartesianism or Boyle's philosophy of nature. In a century which saw the reappearance of Augustinian Neoplatonism as philosophically central,³³ the Neoplatonism of More also left its deep mark—that this metaphysics was authentically *Plotinian* is a fact seldom emphasised in textbook histories of philosophy.

31. In *Oeuvres de Descartes: Nouvelle Presentation*, éd. B. Rochot, P. Costabel and J. Beaudé (Paris, 1964–74) 5:383.

32. See A. Gabbey, "Henry More and the Limits of Mechanism," in S. Hutton, ed., *Tercenary* 28.

33. For this claim, see Taylor, *Sources*; see also W.J. Hankey, "Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self," *Augustinian Studies* 32:1 (2001): 65–88.