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The Spirit of Nature and the spirit of God

Jacques Joseph

The Spirit of Nature is a characteristic feature of Henry More's later philosophy. He defines it as "A Substance incorporeal, but without Sense and Animadversion, pervading the whole matter of the Universe, and exercising a Plastical power therein according to the sundry predispositions and occasions in the parts it works upon, raising such Phænomena in the World, as cannot be resolved into mere Mechanical powers."¹ It is thus a spiritual principle that supplements mechanicism, causing such things as gravity, electricity or magnetism. However, its scope remains somewhat unclear – for example in More's *Enchiridion Metaphysicum* (1671), it is invoked to explain a much wider range of phenomena, including storms, clouds or colours. Alan Gabbey has argued that More's decision of what can or cannot be explained mechanically is rather arbitrary (calling the Spirit of Nature a "Spirit of the Causal Gaps"²) but as we will see, this point is made void by the fact that ultimately, More outright says that "there is no purely Mechanical *Phænomenon* in the whole Universe."³ Either way, the Spirit of Nature is obviously introduced into a discussion very strongly rooted in 17th century natural philosophy. As such, it is only natural that it has been often discussed against this background, while the fact that it is a notion originating in Neo-Platonic conceptions of a world soul, although acknowledged, has not received much attention.⁴

In the preface to the Latin edition of his *Opera omnia*, More himself says that the Spirit of Nature is to be understood as the equivalent of his earlier notion of *Physis*. In this paper, I shall try to examine this

¹ More 1662d, 193.

² Gabbey 1990, 24.

³ More 1713, viii.

⁴ Besides Gabbey 1990, see also Greene 1962 or Reid 2012, 313ff. An interpretation tying the Spirit of Nature more strongly to its Neoplatonic roots may be found in Jacob 1991 but the reader should be aware that Jacob's overall interpretation of More is somewhat problematic, see Reid 2012, 158ff.

connection between the Spirit of Nature and More's early, much more Neoplatonic poems in more detail. In the course of this examination, we will have to take into account *Psyche* as the whole of the world soul, and not only its vegetative part *Physis*. We will also find out that besides this "inferiour Soul of the World", as More himself calls it, his metaphysical system also contains something akin to a "higher Soul of the World", identified by him as the spirit of God, an entity that is in a lot of regards analogical to the Spirit of Nature, only acting on souls rather than on matter, dispensing the word of God and bringing divine illumination to virtuous souls. In the first part of the paper, I will focus on More's early philosophical poems (*Psychodia Platonica*, 1642). In them, I will analyse the position of *Psyche*, the world soul, and some related notions, namely the Mundane Spright and the spright of God. In the next part of the paper, the focus will shift to More's later works, *The Immortality of the Soul* (1660) and the *Enchiridion Metaphysicum*, treating of the Spirit of Nature, on the one hand, and the more theologically oriented *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (also 1660) where we can find more information on the spirit of God.

I. Psychodia Platonica

With the exception of the Cartesian-inspired *Democritus Platonissans*, More's early philosophical poems present us with a mixture of Spenserian allegory and Neoplatonism, mostly inspired by Marsilio Ficino and, through his mediation, Plotinus.⁵ In these poems, More describes an emanational hierarchy with eight ontological levels. The first three are, in good Neoplatonic fashion, the One, Intellect and Soul, called by More *Ahad*, *Aeon* and *Psyche*. The one that will interest us most is *Psyche*, since for More, it not only represents the platonic hypostasis Soul but also the world soul and the Holy Spirit (with *Ahad* and *Aeon* being the Father and Son, respectively).⁶ The operations of *Psyche* in the world can thus be divided into three kinds.

⁵ For a general analysis of More's poems, see Jacob's introduction in More 1998, and also Crocker 2003, 30ff., Staudenbaur 1968, Jacob 1985 and Leech 2013, ch. 2-3.

⁶ The identification of the whole Platonic Triad with the Christian Trinity is explicitly stated in More 1878, 10ff., the identification with the world soul, in turn, in More 1878, 136.

As the Holy Spirit, she is heavily involved in the creation of the world. She unites herself with *Æon*, More likens them to a newlywed couple of lovers out of whose nuptial union there springs forth the material world. However, the connection between *Psyche* and *Æon* is even closer, closer even than the union between body and soul; *Æon* is the perfect *entelechia* of *Psyche*.⁷ As the world of Ideas, *Æon* also serves as the ideal model of the material world that is its imperfect imprint in the potentiality of the prime matter, *Hyle*. The material world is further described as a garment or a robe in which *Psyche*, in her beauty, dresses herself. In this sense, *Psyche* can thus be seen as a bridge between the world of Ideas and the lower, material world. Besides the cosmological function just described, this connection has also a meaning for the individual soul's return back to God, as we will see below.

Psyche also acts as the Neo-Platonic hypostasis Soul. As such, she is further divided into the following three hypostases that represent the Aristotelian types of souls: vegetative (*Physis*), sensitive (*Arachne*) and rational (*Semele*). On this level, More's ontology stops being clear-cut and becomes somewhat fuzzy, maybe even a little confusing. *Semele*, *Arachne* and *Physis* are on the one hand independent hypostases, each consisting of the totality of the given type of souls. Yet this means that in a sense, they are only subsets of *Psyche* that, as a hypostasis, encompasses all souls in general. This confusion is further exacerbated by the fact that *Psyche* is not only the totality of all souls, but also a soul on its own, namely the soul of the whole universe, and when More talks of *Psyche* in these terms, *Semele*, *Arachne* and *Physis* suddenly become the rational, sensitive and vegetative *part* of the world soul, respectively. This all leads to a further confusion as concerns the relation between individual souls and *Psyche*. On the one hand, More claims that individual souls are both metaphysically and spatially only parts of the world soul,⁸ yet he also

⁷ More 1878, 139. In the passing, note More's peculiar tendency to use 'body' only as a relative term, designating the less perfect container or mediator of an entity higher up in the ontological hierarchy: *Psyche* is like a body to *Æon*, air is like a body to the soul, the terrestrial body is like a body to the aerial one etc., see More 1878, 138.

⁸ Since the world soul is at the same time the Holy Spirit, we can also clearly feel the ghost of pantheism looming in the background, although More sees himself as a strong opponent of pantheism (see More 1878, 132f.).

greatly stresses the fact that when they leave the body after death, they do not merge with the world soul but remain separate and individual.⁹

At this point, we need to introduce two more entities into our discussion. The first of them, the Mundane Spright, is a direct descendant of such concepts as the Stoic *pneuma* or the (not exclusively) Neoplatonic astral body. It is a fine, very subtle but still material, substance that works as an intermediary between the soul and grosser, more material bodies. Furthermore, as its name indicates, this spirit is “mundane” – it permeates the whole world and acts primarily as the intermediary not between any soul and its body, but between the soul and the body of the universe. Individual souls are thus spatially located within the world soul, just as their bodies are really just parts of the world soul’s body, and furthermore, even the subtle spirits that tie bodies and souls together are just parts of one overarching and omnipresent Mundane Spright. At the same time, More tries to maintain a strong and clear-cut distinctness of every individual soul (mostly to accommodate a Christian conception of individual moral responsibility). We can clearly see how these two conceptions might clash, as the world soul is much more than just another soul that happens to belong to the whole world, it is in fact something very intimately connected to all other individual souls.

This connection has important consequences even for our everyday experience: our sensory perceptions, just as everything that goes on between body and soul, are mediated by the Mundane Spright. But this Mundane Spright mediates primarily between *Psyche* and its body, the world. For More, then, whenever we perceive anything, it is only thanks to the fact that *Psyche* perceives it in the first place. Our perceptions are ultimately only secondary reflexions of what the world soul perceives in a more perfect, more direct fashion.¹⁰

In this context, mention should also be made of More’s theory of three bodies. A stable feature of More’s both early and later philosophy is his conviction that the soul clothes herself in three types of bodies: the brute, terrestrial one, a finer and more subtle aerial one and finally the most subtle one, called interchangeably celestial, ethereal or fiery. It is not clear, however, whether the soul has these

⁹ It was a very important point for More to defuse the threat of Averroism, i.e. the notion that all but the rational part of the soul die together with the body so that the personal identity of individual souls is not conserved after death. For more on this see Leech 2013, esp. ch. 4-6.

¹⁰ More 1878, 140, 68.

bodies concurrently or one after the other. If we take the aerial body, for example, it would seem to correspond perfectly to the fine spirits that unite the soul with its terrestrial body (More even describes them in the same terms), yet at the same time, More says that upon leaving the terrestrial body, the soul fashions for itself a body out of thin air which would seem to imply that before that moment, it did not have one.¹¹ Another remarkable point is that according to this theory, the soul is ultimately very rarely, if ever, without any sort of body. While this serves to solve certain problems for More (mostly related to the aforementioned Averroism and the problem of the soul's personal identity after death), it also gives an almost materialistic undertone to More's otherwise very spiritually oriented philosophy, as John Henry has noted.¹²

Things get even more complicated when we move on to the celestial body. At first, we might expect it to fulfil an analogical function as the aerial one, only one level higher. But More speaks nowhere explicitly of the soul's fate upon the aerial body's death (that is even supposing that this body is perishable which is again a question that More leaves open). If we look at what More does say, he presents quite a different story – one where there is pretty much no room for the celestial body but where, on the other hand, the second of the terms I mentioned comes in, the spright of God. The spright of God is introduced in explicit parallel with the Mundane Spright: just as our souls perceive the material world through their connection with the Mundane Spright, so are they able to reach up to the world of eternal Ideas through a connection with the spright of God.¹³ It is difficult to say more about the nature of this spright of God in More's poems, as this is the only mention More makes of it. For the most part, however, the analogy with the Mundane Spright seems to be enough to grasp the general idea of what this spright of God should be. It is a similar kind of intermediary, only facing upwards instead of downwards, connecting souls not to the lower, material world, but to higher levels of the ontological hierarchy, the closest one to Soul being the level of Intellect, corresponding for More at the same time to the Son and to the Neoplatonic world of Ideas.

¹¹ More 1662d, 122ff.

¹² Henry 1986. Leech 2013, ch. 5, presents a more detailed account of More's doctrine of soul vehicles. He also stresses (*pace* Henry) that despite the intimate connection postulated between body and soul, More clearly remains a substance dualist (see esp. p. 102ff.).

¹³ More 1878, 75.

In More's early philosophy, we thus find a complex psycho-physiology combined with a complex metaphysics, forming together a very specific system. In it, all the souls are intimately connected with the world soul, which is not only an individual soul of its own, but also the hypostasis Soul, i. e., in a sense, the totality of all souls. As the world soul, she is bound to its body thanks to the Mundane Spright. Through it, she perceives all that happens in the world, her perceptions being what enables other souls to perceive as well. This Mundane Spright may not be identical, but is at least very similar in nature to the aerial body in which souls reside upon leaving the terrestrial one. In this state, souls are even closer to the world soul, which means, among others, that their perceptions are much more perfect, as they are not limited by the bodily senses and are much more directly derived from the perceptions of the world soul. Yet souls can be even closer to the world soul, in perfect union with it – though More seems to claim that even in this case, souls still remain individual (perhaps that is that the *raison d'être* of the celestial body).¹⁴ This state, however, does not seem to be something that happens naturally, like the soul's leaving the terrestrial body after death, but is rather described in terms of a spiritual illumination that one has to strive for. At a certain point, the soul cuts her ties even to the Mundane Spright and turns instead to its higher relative, the spright of God, that lifts her to the world of Ideas. At this point, it would seem that the soul needs to be completely disembodied. Not only that, it is even debatable whether at this point, the soul remains whole, or whether it is only its highest part, the intellect (described by More as "that impeccable spirit that cannot sinne"¹⁵), that rises towards the world of Ideas.¹⁶

II. The Spirit of Nature

If we turn to More's later works, it would seem at first that very little remains of this complex set of intertwined notions and of its crucial actor, the world soul. Instead, we find More's hylarchic principle, the Spirit of Nature, a notion that shares a lot of characteristics with the

¹⁴ More 1878, 120.

¹⁵ More 1878, 164. One possible interpretation of the celestial body would thus seem to be that it is, in fact, the soul, if we conceive her as the vehicle (or body) of the intellect, further confirming More's tendency to use 'body' as a relative term, see above.

¹⁶ A slightly different (yet I believe compatible) account of More's early doctrine of spiritual ascent may be found in Leech 2013, 42ff.

world soul but also misses some very important ones. As already mentioned, it is defined as “a Substance incorporeal, but without Sense and Animadversion, pervading the whole Matter of the Universe, and exercising a Plastical power therein according to the sundry predispositions and occasions in the parts it works upon, raising such Phænomena in the World, by directing the Parts of Matter and their Motion, as cannot be resolved into mere Mechanical powers.”¹⁷ It thus primarily serves to explain phenomena that were usually considered non-mechanical at that time. This covers a very wide set ranging from gravitation and magnetism and going to classical Renaissance examples of sympathetic action at a distance like the resonance of similarly tuned strings or the “weapon salve”, an ointment that was supposed to heal a wound at a distance by being applied to the weapon that caused the wound.

The first model of explanation of how the Spirit of Nature works seems to be for More that, under certain circumstances, it supersedes the mechanical laws and moves the particles of matter differently than they would have moved if left to themselves. Thus, for example, when we shoot a bullet in the air, it would, by itself, continue in its trajectory. The friction of the air would slow it down, sure, but certainly not enough for it not to fly off into space. That would be the normal cause of action under mechanical laws. However, the Spirit of Nature (as the cause of gravity) will pull the bullet down with enough force to eventually bring it back to the ground. The relationship between the Spirit of Nature and the particles it moves is described by More in very vitalistic terms. This may seem a bit paradoxical since in his later philosophy, More explicitly rejects the vitalism of his youth. That vitalism was however understood as the claim that matter is in itself alive. Such living matter then wouldn't need any immaterial principles (not even God) as it would be able to organize itself into the beautiful and interconnected world that we live in. This form of vitalism really has no place in More's later philosophy where he greatly stresses the fact that matter is completely passive and inert, unable to do anything without some immaterial principle to breathe life into it. These principles are spiritual substances, most of which are regular souls, yet in the case of non-living matter, the same function is fulfilled by the Spirit of Nature. This however means that we can't really take the label “non-living matter” literally because the situation

¹⁷ More 1662d, 193.

is in fact quite analogical to that of a living creature and its body. In both cases, the matter, taken in itself, is completely inert and dead; however in both cases, the union of an active, immaterial principle with that matter creates an entity that is very much alive. That is explicitly the case with us and our bodies but the way More describes the action of the Spirit of Nature and its union with matter leaves hardly any other way of conceiving their relation.

It is then in this sense that we should understand More when he speaks of the Spirit of Nature as the “inferiour soul of the world”. The parallel with his earlier notion of a world soul is thus made explicit, just as the transformation that happened. The Spirit of Nature is no longer the world soul as a whole but only its lower part. In other texts, More says the Spirit of Nature is to be understood as the equivalent of his earlier hypostasis *Physis*, i.e. the vegetative part of *Psyche*. There are two important facets to this transformation. The first is that such a lower world soul is deprived of any “sense and animadversion”,¹⁸ the other that from an overall perspective, such a lower world soul seems to be the *only* form of world soul that remains in More’s later philosophy – his earlier *Psyche* with its complex web of related concepts seems to be reduced only to its vegetative aspect, *Physis*. We shall look at both these questions in turn.

Why then does the Spirit of Nature not have any sense, conscience, and will of its own? The reason is that while More needs an active, spiritual principle to cause all of the non-mechanical phenomena, he also needs this cause to act with a sort of blind regularity that would rather suit a machine than a living soul. More first asks us to imagine a heavy object falling on some good and innocent person. If the Spirit of Nature could make the decision, it would certainly want to change its course of action so that the object would fall in a different way and not hit the person. The fact that gravity acts always the same way regardless of the consequences therefore shows that the Spirit of Nature does not have any ability to influence its own behaviour – to make conscious decisions in accordance with perceived circumstances.¹⁹ Boyle’s experiments with the vacuum pump and air pressure were another demonstration of a very similar principle. More

¹⁸ Today, “animadversion” usually means some sort of critical remark or adverse criticism, however More uses the term in its original meaning (from the Latin *animus advertere*) as the ability to turn one’s mind to something, i. e. “intentionality” or, more generally, “consciousness”.

¹⁹ More 1662a, xvi.

was a plenist. He admitted the possibility of an artificially created vacuum but was convinced that the Spirit of Nature was determined in such a way as to prevent the creation of a vacuum. Yet through their treacherous design, Boyle's experiments managed to trick the Spirit of Nature to act against its own interest. For example, when we suck air out of a container that has a valve on the other side, the pressure difference will keep the valve closed. For More, this means that the Spirit of Nature is trying to push air into the container so hard that in doing so, it actually keeps the valve closed and prevents the air from getting in, thus allowing for the vacuum to be created. If the Spirit of Nature had the ability to make conscious decisions, to adapt its actions to the given circumstances, it would never allow that. The fact that we can trick it so easily (and repeatedly) can only mean that it acts completely blindly, without any conscience, without any will and without any awareness of the circumstances.²⁰

Before we proceed to the second aspect, I would like to make a couple of remarks concerning the range of phenomena the Spirit of Nature covers. I said that at first, the Spirit of Nature seems to be a principle complementary to mechanical interactions. The question might arise, then, how to tell whether something can be explained mechanically or not.²¹ When we turn our attention to the *Enchiridion Metaphysicum*, we immediately notice a shift of balance. The Spirit of Nature is no longer on par with mechanicism, supplementing it only in quite specific (and notoriously non-mechanical-looking) situations, it really becomes a rather omnipresent principle causing a very wide range of phenomena related to air pressure and specific gravity (as demonstrated mostly in Boyle's experiments), meteorology or even optics. This great variety, combined with More's exclamations that "there is no purely Mechanicall *Phaenomenon* in the whole Universe"²² but also with the strict regularity he claims for the Spirit of Nature, should make us rethink the whole mechanical/non-mechanical distinction. The omnipresence of the Spirit of Nature's actions seems to bring it somewhat closer to the image of a world soul, really turning the whole universe into one big living entity (though a plant might be a more fitting example than an animal, after all, the Spirit of Nature

²⁰ More 1662a, 44; see also Greene 1962, 464-474.

²¹ It is exactly the arbitrariness of this distinction that led Gabbey to call the Spirit of Nature the "Spirit of the Causal Gaps", though the whole situation is rather more complicated, as we will see.

²² More 1713, viii.

corresponds to *Physis*, the vegetative part of *Psyche*). On the other hand, its absolutely blind regularity (guaranteed by the fact that it lacks certain properties traditionally attributed to souls) brings it closer to the way mechanical laws themselves are supposed to act. Furthermore, according to More's early correspondence with Descartes, matter itself, if considered really completely passive, shouldn't even be able to transmit motion through contact. Even the most basic explanatory scheme of mechanicism, the fact that upon being hit, matter starts moving, in fact needs the help of some immaterial principle to get off the ground!²³ It would seem in the end that the whole mechanical/non-mechanical distinction is irrelevant, as in both cases a further metaphysical cause is needed (the Spirit of Nature) and at the same time, in both cases the action is perfectly regular, which means (although More does not yet say it explicitly) mathematically tractable. The Spirit of Nature, this lower soul of the world, thus is in fact little more than a personified form of the natural laws it enacts.²⁴

This leads us to the second aspect of the transition from *Psyche* to the Spirit of Nature that I mentioned – that while it is the lower soul of the world, there does not seem to be a parallel, higher soul of the world in More's later system. The whole rich and complex notion of *Psyche* thus seems to be trimmed down to this Spirit of Nature that isn't really much more than a set of natural laws turned into an independent entity. That is however only partially true because if we look beyond More's natural-philosophical works and take into consideration also his theology, we will find an entity called the "spirit of God" that very strongly resembles the earlier "spright of God".²⁵ This parallel (which as we will see below I believe to be very much justified) would in turn invite another one – between the Spirit of Nature and the earlier Mundane Spright. Now the differences between the two are quite strong and should not be underrated but I believe this analogy to be also relevant to the overall picture. It may be said that just as the Spirit of Nature might be considered as the world soul reduced, trimmed

²³ More 1662c, 87ff.

²⁴ We should keep in mind that it was approximately between Descartes and Newton, that is exactly in the period and intellectual environment in which More was evolving, that the modern idea of a natural law emerged, see e. g. Harrison 2013.

²⁵ After all, the names themselves are basically the same, since the words "spright" (today usually spelled "sprite") and "spirit" are etymologically related and in his early poems, More uses them interchangeably on several occasions.

down to its lowest, most basic part – that is also the part that is most primitive and closest to the body – it might also be considered as the Mundane Spright elevated to the status of a soul – but again one that is still lowest and closest to the body. We saw that the Mundane Spright acted primarily as the intermediary between body and soul which it could do thanks to its being halfway between the two, as a body so subtle that it could almost be considered a soul. However, More's later philosophy marks a turn closer to a stricter psycho-physical dualism (though plainly calling him a dualist would still be an oversimplification²⁶). Within it, it is the passivity or activity of a substance (together with its in/discernibility and im/penetrability) that determine whether it is a soul or a body.²⁷ This means that such a strongly active role as was fulfilled by the Mundane Spright needed to be attributed to a soul. That is why the Mundane Spright (of which there is no mention whatsoever anywhere in More's later philosophy) had to be turned into the Spirit of Nature. The connection between the two is most visible when More speaks of 'vital congruity' which is a sort of affinity or sympathy between a body and a soul which causes the soul to be drawn to the body and which subsequently allows it to act on the body much more easily than it would on other parts of matter. In this sense, the Spirit of Nature 'prepares' matter of the body for the soul to enter and, albeit indirectly, allows for their interaction (though the medium of an aerial body is still needed, just as in the poems).²⁸

²⁶ As witnessed by the fact that his "dualism" has also been interpreted as a form of materialism (Henry 1986), or a vitalistic monism in line with his early philosophy (Jacob 1991). Although both these interpretations have their problems, the fact that they are possible should be kept in mind when assessing More's later "dualism".

²⁷ See e. g. More 1662a, 15f.

²⁸ More 1662d, 120ff. It might be argued that making the entity that should guarantee the interaction of soul and body simply another soul (as opposed to some intermediary substance) turns the whole affair into a vicious circle, so that such a strict dualism again faces the same problem that any psycho-physical dualism seems to face – how can such radically different substances interact at all. A more nuanced discussion of this problem would take us too far off; I will however note two things. First, as I already mentioned, calling More in his later phase a straight-up dualist is an oversimplification, as he seems to allow for some intermediaries between body and soul; second, the Spirit of Nature most definitely is not 'simply another soul'. It certainly is a spiritual substance but a very special one which is demonstrated, among other things, by the fact that it does not need to be in vital congruity with a body in order to act on matter.

III. The spirit of God

The spirit of God is a subject only rarely discussed in secondary literature on More.²⁹ The main reason for that would be that in most of More's philosophical work it does not appear to be a very important concept. Even when More speaks of it (that would be mostly in his *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*³⁰), it just seems to be another term for designating the Holy Spirit or – more or less indirectly – God. It is therefore the bearer of the word of God or the aspect of God that attends to pure and holy souls, lifts them in their righteousness and sanctifies them. This impression is only confirmed if we look to More's more theologically oriented works, as for example *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* where, again, the spirit of God is quite explicitly identified as the Holy Spirit.³¹

At the same time, this spirit of God is very explicitly connected to the Spirit of Nature. In a language very much reminiscent of the parallel functions of the Mundane Spright and the spright of God, More describes the Spirit of Nature and the spirit of God as two analogical principles. They are both omnipresent entities, acting everywhere in the world in accordance with God's will. At the same time, there is also a crucial difference between them, as one acts on mere matter, while the other acts on souls. Yet this is only a difference in the object each of the spirits works upon, their actions themselves, on the other hand, really are quite similar, just as they both also have to deal with the same limitations. They always try to do what is best but are met with the imperfections of the objects they work with, so that they are only able to give to each object according to its possibilities. That is the reason both why some parts of matter are better prepared to accept some kind of form rather than another, and why some souls are more easily turned to virtue and happiness than others.³²

Seen thus as a complementary pair, the spirit of God and the Spirit of Nature really seem to be a continuation of More's earlier ideas about the Mundane Spright and the spright of God. In the case of the spirit of God, this reveals a rather new layer of More's later philosophy. While it is usually seen as a natural philosophy that, although critical of Descartes, still proceeds in a rather similar fashion, being exposed

²⁹ An exception would be Fouke 1997, *passim*.

³⁰ More 1662b, 2, 15, 44 *et passim*.

³¹ More 1660, 11.

³² More 1660, 458.

rationally in terms of axioms, demonstrations, arguments and counter-arguments, in the background, it still remains a Christian Neoplatonic illuminationist mysticism, sharing a surprising lot of features with the forms of religious enthusiasm that More himself has criticized.³³ The path to righteousness through the spirit of God is thus not just a matter of leading a good life according to both reason and faith but is really some sort of spiritual rebirth described by More in very ecstatic terms of mystical death and self-annihilation followed by the rise of a new creature whose existence is not sustained by material principles but only by the spirit of God.³⁴ This spiritual ascent may be described in somewhat different terms in More's later philosophy but its general outline remains the same. In the poems, the purified soul rises to *theosis*, a mystical union with God. The passage where he mentions the "spright of God" makes it quite clear that the soul unites itself with the Son who is the hypostasis *Æon*, the world of Ideas. When in his later work More speaks about the good form of enthusiasm and the soul's union with Jesus Christ, he may *sound* slightly more orthodox but he is in fact saying the same thing. The Christ that More speaks of does not seem to be the historical person but rather again the Son as a transcendent divine Person, the second hypostasis also described as the Eternal *Logos*, the only source of all reason (understood not in a discursive but rather a contemplative manner). While More seems to be presenting a rational philosophy opposing religious enthusiasm, the ultimate ground of his philosophy thus lies in fact in the mystical contemplation of God.³⁵

Even as regards the subject of the world soul, More's later philosophy is thus shown to contain a structure very similar to that of the early poems. The Spirit of Nature and the spirit of God are spiritual principles pervading the whole universe, attending to matter on the one hand, organizing it and creating all sorts of interacting bodies, and attending to souls on the other, helping them on their way towards God. What is peculiar, however, is that this similarity of structure is

³³ More was very much aware of this similarity. That is why, in his *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, he differentiates between enthusiasm as the false conviction that one is inspired by God (a conviction that is the consequence of an imbalance of bodily fluids and a diseased imagination) and true enthusiasm in which one is really and authentically inspired and moved by God himself, see More 1662b, 2, 44.

³⁴ More 1660, 398f.

³⁵ Crocker 1990, Leech 2013, Fouke 1997.

not reflected in More's terminology. While the Mundane Spright and the spright of God were both "instruments" of *Psyche*, there is no such unifying principle for the Spirit of Nature and the spirit of God. Furthermore, while I have mentioned that More frequently refers to the Spirit of Nature as the "lower soul of the world", there is no analogical mention of the spirit of God as the "higher soul of the world". The reason for this seems to be that More in his later philosophy decided to draw a much clearer distinction between God and the world. As we have seen, in the early poems, *Psyche* is at the same time the world soul and the Holy Spirit, creating a bridge linking God and the world on a continuous ontological scale going from the most transcendental principle (God the Father, *Ahad*) to the furthestmost reaches of metaphysical matter (*Hyle*). I have already mentioned that More rejected pantheism, yet some pantheistic undertones can very clearly be felt in his early philosophy. Later on, More would point out "actinism", the doctrine of emanation, as one of his early opinions he came to reject. If we look at the *Fundamenta philosophiæ*, a critique of the kabbalah from the 1670s, which appeared in Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's famous compendium *Kabbala denudata*,³⁶ the main reason for the rejection of actinism seems to be the fear that it leads to a pantheistic deification of matter that in turn leads to atheism. From this point of view, More's refusal to consider the spirit of God as the "higher soul of the world" may be just another way of preventing pantheism by making a clear distinction between God and the world. While the spirit of God is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Nature is a special but created spirit. Insofar as its activity makes the world behave as one living creature, it can be seen as the soul of the world but given that it has no sense or animadversion, it really corresponds only to the vegetative part of the soul (*Physis*). In More's later philosophy, the world thus is not a living animal but rather a plant and there really is no other world soul than the "lower" one.

IV. Conclusion

This move away from immanentism and towards a clearer distinction between God and the world thus proves to be a fruitful tool in understanding the development in More's later philosophy. It goes hand in hand with a separation within the notion of a world soul. This crucial concept of his early philosophy handles, in true Neoplatonic

³⁶ More 1677.

fashion, almost everything going on from the ontological level of soul below. It first creates the lower level of the material world by channelling the forms from the world of ideas into lowly matter; it then attends to the comings and goings of this material world, uniting souls with their bodies and allowing them to perceive their surroundings; and it ultimately participates also in this world's return back to its higher sources by leading souls back up to the Intellect. Such a description of More's early philosophy really demonstrates the importance of *Psyche* within his system. It should however be noted in passing that even though this may remind one of traditional Neoplatonic concepts of *prohodos* and *epistrophe*, More himself does not use these terms and the creation of lower ontological levels is very much intentional and not just the indifferent consequence of an overflow of goodness and being like in Plotinus.³⁷

Even in More's later philosophy, all these aspects are taken care of by a sort of world soul, the only difference being that it is divided into two entities. The spirit of God (as the Holy Spirit) obviously takes part in the creation of the material world but also, at a certain point, leaves things to the Spirit of Nature which is there to handle the regular interactions of matter as well as the preparing of various bodies so that individual souls may enter them. Material interactions, mechanical as well as non-mechanical, are then handled by the Spirit of Nature while the spirit of God simultaneously attends to souls, bringing them the word of God and trying to inspire them to virtue and eventually lifting them back up to God. The similarities of the two descriptions are obvious, yet in More's later philosophy a strict difference is maintained between the Spirit of Nature and the spirit of God. While the latter is clearly the Holy Spirit and thus a divine Person, the former is a created spirit. It is indeed the "lower soul of the world" but, although universal, it is described as if it were just another soul among all the others. Yet I believe this appearance to be somewhat misleading. Regardless of this proclaimed difference between the two, the Spirit of Nature is in fact much closer to the spirit of God than to any other created soul. It is omnipresent and hypothetically omnipotent (limited only by the limitations of the matter it works upon), it is what unites other souls with bodies through *vital congruity* but it itself acts on all matter without such *vital congruity* and therefore without really having a body. Its connection to God is further confirmed by the fact

³⁷ Although compare Leech 2013, 44.

that More calls it explicitly “the vicarious power of God upon this *automaton*, the World.”³⁸ From this point of view, it thus seems that the distinction that tries to separate the Spirit of Nature from God is really quite artificial, a consequence of rather external factors, like More’s sudden need to steer clear of any form of immanentism. What is further interesting is that one of the main points of this separation is the insistence on the Spirit of Nature’s lack of any “sense and animadversion” which is a move that simultaneously makes this living principle much more machine-like and ultimately reduces it to nothing but a personified set of natural laws. This whole back-and-forth between the Spirit of Nature and the spirit of God can thus be seen as a reflection of tensions between remnants of More’s early, illuministic and mystical Neoplatonic philosophy and his later attempt to fashion a natural philosophy that would resonate with the sensibilities of the new science of the 17th century.

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³⁸ More 1662a, 46.

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