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THE LEGACIES OF RICHARD POPKIN

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JEREMY D. POPKIN

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The Legacies of Richard Popkin

Edited by

Jeremy D. Popkin

Lexington, KY, USA

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Martin Mulrow is Professor of History at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. He is the author of *Moderne aus dem Untergrund. Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland, 1680–1720* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2002) and editor, together with Richard H. Popkin, of *Secret Conversions to Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004). He first met Popkin in 1990.

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INTRODUCTION

By the time of his death on 14 April 2005, my father, Richard H. Popkin, had already received many tributes for his contributions to the history of philosophy, Jewish studies, and other fields. He had been honored with two volumes of essays and several academic conferences had been held about his work. The memorial conference held at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles on 10–12 June 2006, sponsored by the UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies and its director, Peter Reill, showed that there was still something new to be said about the new directions in research he had continued to inspire until the very last days of his life. As his son and, later, as a fellow scholar, I had grown up listening to my father develop his ideas, and I thought I knew his areas of interest well, but the papers presented at the conference taught me many new things about his own research and the work it has inspired other scholars to undertake. As the program unfolded, all the contributors gained a new appreciation of the breadth of Richard Popkin's interests, the number of fields he reshaped by his lifelong refusal to accept conventional scholarly wisdom, and his never-ending capacity to detect unsuspected connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena. Although each of the participants at the UCLA conference spoke about some particular aspect of my father and his intellectual legacy, the papers fit together into a larger whole: the portrait of a man whose scholarly curiosity never flagged, and who took as much interest in what others were discovering as in his own research.

Richard Popkin sketched out the main stages of his career in several autobiographical essays, and the many letters that he left to the Clark Library, as part of his donation of his scholarly papers, make it possible to follow the details of his intellectual development, as I have attempted to do in the essay, "In His Own Words: Richard H. Popkin's Career in Philosophy," which concludes this volume. His first great interest was in the role of the skeptical tradition (why he insisted on the spelling "scepticism" throughout his career remains a mystery). This was the subject of his first scholarly book, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*, originally published in 1960 and still in print, in a revised and expanded edition titled *The History of*

Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle (2003) as I write this in 2008. He was proud of having shown the central role of the skeptical challenge in shaping the main lines of modern philosophy, but he never claimed to have written the definitive account of the subject. The contributions to this collection by Brian Copenhaver, Alison Coudert, Jose Maia Neto, and Gianni Paganini look at aspects of this subject that Popkin did not explore, and add to the picture he laid out; all of them show the continuing fruitfulness of the questions he raised. Sarah Hutton analyzes Popkin's view of Spinoza, a figure who fascinated him although he was certainly not in the skeptical camp, and John Christian Laursen raises the question of why he paid so little attention to another classical philosophical tradition revived in the Renaissance, the school of cynicism.

The earliest versions of Popkin's thesis about skepticism said little about the connections between religion and philosophy in the early modern era. It was a turning point in my father's thinking, as he himself recognized, when he came to see the debates about religious certainty provoked by the Reformation as crucial to the development of philosophical thinking, a thesis laid out in the initial chapters of the *History of Scepticism*. In all his later work, Popkin paid great attention to the interplay between religious and philosophical issues. James E. Force's paper on Newton and Martin Mulsow's discussion of the thinkers who Popkin labelled "the third force" in seventeenth-century philosophy – writers who found in millenarian conviction a position between philosophical scepticism and dogmatism – explore some of the new directions that Popkin's work in this area suggested.

As he was finishing the writing of *The History of Scepticism* in the late 1950s, my father began to develop a passion for a new subject: friends who had been in the habit of calling him *Popkin Scepticus* began to refer also to *Popkin Judaicus*. Never willing to invest the effort to learn Hebrew, he devoted himself instead to tracing the interactions between Jewish and Christian thinkers in the early modern period, and especially to exploring the impact of members of the Sephardic diaspora as they and their descendants dispersed throughout the European world. In their contributions to this volume, David Ruderman, Yosef Kaplan, David S. Katz and Matt Goldish look at the reasons for Popkin's interest in this subject and the new perspectives he brought, both to the history of philosophy and to the field of Judaic studies.

Always open to new ideas, Popkin was nevertheless essentially a scholar of western European thought in the early modern period. Nevertheless, as the two papers by the young scholars who worked with him in the last years of his life, Peter Park and Knox Peden, show, he took an interest in issues going well beyond his own field of expertise, including Asian philosophy and twentieth-century intellectual developments. An often unrecognized aspect of his

influence was his co-authorship of several introductory books about philosophy, intended for general audiences and students. Avrum Stroll, his longtime collaborator on these projects, has added to the papers delivered at the 2006 conference a short account of this aspect of Popkin's work, together with an appreciation of Popkin's work as seen by a friend who was also a practitioner of the analytic approach to the subject that my father often criticized.

This volume is not meant to be the last word on my father's work: with the donation of his scholarly papers to the Clark Library, it will be possible for others to study the development of his own ideas and to find hints that will allow them to go beyond what he accomplished in his own studies. We hope, however, that *The Legacies of Richard Popkin* will provide a permanent record of his many intellectual contributions. Some contributors to this volume have insisted on referring to my father as "Dick" because they also want their words to convey the personality of a warm and witty man who was never happier than when he was discussing scholarship with his friends. Like the other participants in this volume, I learned a great deal from discussions with my father, who introduced me to the world of the mind and the passion of history. To me, of course, Richard Popkin was not "Dick" but "Dad." Putting together this volume for publication in the *International Archive of the History of Ideas*, the monograph series he co-founded with Paul Dibon in the early 1960s, has been one small way of honoring his memory.

Jeremy D. Popkin

PART I
RICHARD H. POPKIN AND THE
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

1. POPKIN NON-SCEPTICUS

Brian Copenhaver

הניב מוקמ הז יאר אימת ניאמ המכחהו¹

René Descartes, a patriarch of modern philosophy, turned his back on history but could not escape it. Something similar can be said of the field in its current state: while a few of its practitioners have renounced history, philosophy still revels in its past. Indeed, considering philosophy's ambition to be scientific, it is surprising that not many of the university's disciplines concern themselves as much with the past as philosophy does – on the evidence of such things as numbers of journal pages or courses in college catalogs. Nonetheless, given the prominence of history in philosophy, it is not surprising that philosophy also has its historiography, best described in Giovanni Santinello's massive *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*.² That this fundamental work of reference has appeared in Italian, not in English, bears on my story today.³

Periodization is a key problem for Santinello's topic, historiography. It matters how we break the past into pieces, especially how we cut the big slices, giving them names like "ancient" and "modern." For several centuries, the usual practice has been to put something between those two temporal bookends, something intermediary or "medieval." The script says that modernity starts when the intermezzo stops. Jacob Burckhardt, a Swiss historian of art and culture, gave this new beginning a French name – *Renaissance* – borrowing it from Michelet for the title of a book written in German that deals almost

¹Job 28:12: "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?"

²Giovanni Santinello, *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1981–1995); for a robust view of history in the context of contemporary Anglophone philosophy, see Daniel Garber, "Does History Have a Future? Some Reflections on Bennett and Doing Philosophy Historically," in *Descartes Embodied: Reading Cartesian Philosophy Through Cartesian Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 13–30

³Only the first volume has appeared in English: *Models of the History of Philosophy*, eds. and trans. C. Blackwell and P. Weller (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993).

uniquely with Italians.⁴ Since Burckhardt had little to say about philosophy, perhaps it is fair that philosophers have had little to say about the period that Burckhardt named.

Descartes published his first book – which included his most famous abjuration of history – in 1637; his last major work (not counting some of the letters) appeared posthumously in 1664.⁵ If Descartes is to count as the founder of modern philosophy, the founding seems to have lagged. If we think of literature, government, religion, art and politics, for example, such icons of incipient modernity as Ariosto, Henry VIII, Luther, Leonardo and Machiavelli had been dead for more than a century when Descartes made his fatal move to Sweden. And if, persuaded by Burckhardt, we locate the new age earlier, with Savonarola, Petrarch, the Medici, Masaccio and Brunni, the philosophical lag is even longer.

Notice that these last names are all Italian – just an artifact, you might say, of Burckhardt’s selection, in an un-philosophical book whose setting was Italy. But Italians, and people who taught in Italy, had long been prominent in philosophy. Think of Pythagoras, Empedocles, Cicero, Plotinus, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas – all of them fixtures in the contemporary Anglophone canon. But after Vico, and with the possible exception of Croce, no Italian has entered that canon. Moreover, despite Italy’s time of glory in the Renaissance, there are no *Renaissance* Italians in that canon: not even Valla or Ficino.

That Italian names do not show up when the credits roll on the story of modern philosophy is not a consequence of “presentism,” to use an unfortunate word for an unfortunate thing. By anyone’s standards, Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Abelard, Aquinas and Ockham belong to the deep past, and all of them get lots of attention from philosophers. Ockham, well regarded by contemporary students of logic, language and metaphysics, died nearly three centuries before Descartes published his *Meditations*. But (ignoring Bacon, if I may) no philosopher *after* Ockham and *before* Descartes has earned such respect. In effect, for a period of three centuries – which is also how long it took for philosophy to get from Descartes to Quine – philosophy has very little history.

⁴Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989); Jules Michelet, *Renaissance et réforme: Histoire de France au seizième siècle* (Paris: Laffont, 1992); Lucien Febvre, *Michelet et la renaissance* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992); Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 203–295; John R. Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), pp. 139–198.

⁵For a detailed biography, see Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

But I should be less hyperbolic – and more precise. It would be more precise to say that philosophy has lacked *not* what Croce called the “history” of those three hundred years but what he called their “historiography”: it is not *events* that are lacking but an *account* of events.⁶ Ockham died in the time of the Black Death – maybe because of it. And if the plague had also killed almost every other philosopher in Europe, then old mortality could explain why the canon registers so few philosophical events for nearly three centuries after Ockham. But dozens of universities had been founded all over Europe after 1200. Most of the undergraduate curriculum had long been philosophical, taught by professional philosophers. Yet those philosophers who kept philosophizing after 1350 have all but vanished from the historiography, in Croce’s sense.

But again, I should be less hyperbolic – and fairer. It would be fairer to say that all this began to change in 1981, when Charles Schmitt launched the project that became the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, with a chapter by Richard Popkin on “Theories of Knowledge,” culminating, naturally, in a section on “Scepticism.”⁷ The *Cambridge History*, soon followed – in this our age of compendia – by Oxford, Routledge and Columbia histories, finally made room for the Renaissance in the Anglophone historiography of philosophy. Popkin was editor-in-chief of the *Columbia History*, and he saw to it that the Renaissance got its due.⁸

Part of the force that drove Popkin’s monumental achievement was human and social – his dazzling gift for talking to people and convening them for hundreds of projects, conferences and publications of great and enduring influence. But what he achieved intellectually is deeper and wider than that. His range was enormous, of course, centering on French, Dutch, English and Jewish thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but reaching forward to twentieth century politics in this country and back to fifteenth century religion and philosophy

⁶ Benedetto Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, ed. G. Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 1989), pp. 88–89, 354–356.

⁷ Richard Popkin, “Theories of Knowledge,” in Charles B. Schmitt et al., *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 279–328.

⁸ Copenhaver, Michael Allen and John Monfasani, “The Renaissance,” in *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, ed. R. Popkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 279–328; Copenhaver and Schmitt, *A History of Western Philosophy*, III: *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Jill Kraye, “The Philosophy of the Italian Renaissance,” in *The Routledge History of Philosophy*, IV: *The Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Rationalism*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 16–69; Stuart Brown, “Renaissance Philosophy Outside Italy,” *ibid.*, pp. 70–103.

– to the Italian Renaissance. In fact, his influence on the historiography of Renaissance philosophy was profound.

Popkin's most important book – one of a multitude – is his *History of Scepticism*.⁹ The revision published in 2003 carries a dedication “to three of my coworkers in the ... history of scepticism,” one of whom is Charles Schmitt. Since Popkin started at Columbia in the early 1940s, he was a generation ahead of Schmitt, who studied with Paul Kristeller at the same university in the 1950s. But Popkin had been one of only two students in the first course that POK taught at Columbia, and it was that course, along with another taught by John Herman Randall, that first attracted him to Sextus Empiricus and the Sceptics. As Popkin hunted for connections between Sextus and Hume, Kristeller encouraged him to find out what happened *before* Hume, which eventually became the *History of Scepticism*. The first edition, Popkin writes, “was submitted to two major academic presses ... [but] turned ... down on the grounds that it was not sufficiently philosophical”; it appeared, nonetheless, in 1960, followed by a second edition in 1979 and a third in 2003.¹⁰ Evidently, it was sufficiently readable.

Popkin's very compelling story, according to the title of the first edition, goes *From Erasmus to Descartes*; but the second goes *From Erasmus to Spinoza*; and the third *From Savonarola to Bayle*.¹¹ Once the apocalyptic Florentine friar appeared in Popkin's title, the Italian renaissance of scepticism had finally made the headlines of Anglophone historiography. That alone was newsworthy, given the previous record of oblivion, both for Renaissance philosophy and for scepticism.

If you still need help forgetting the Renaissance, read almost any history of philosophy written in English before Schmitt's *Cambridge History* became influential. One such work, first published in 1914, was still in print when Popkin was teaching at Iowa and Schmitt was studying at Columbia: this was *A History of Philosophy* by Frank Thilly, a Kantian who taught at Berkeley. In a book of 677 pages, Thilly's Renaissance rates fewer than two dozen, including one whole paragraph on scepticism – mainly on Montaigne.¹²

⁹Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960); *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰Popkin, “Preface,” in *Scepticism* (2003), pp. vii–ix; above, n. 9; Copenhaver, “Science and Philosophy in Early Modern Europe: The Historiographical Significance of the Work of Charles B. Schmitt,” *Annals of Science*, 44 (1987), 507–517.

¹¹Above, n. 9.

¹²Frank Thilly, *A History of Philosophy*, ed. L. Wood (3rd ed.; New York: Holt, 1957).

Otherwise, scepticism was chiefly a Greek affair for Thilly, and thus stuck in antiquity. In the modern period, Berkeley gets just one paragraph to refute it. Pierre Bayle gets twice as many to expose inconsistencies in religion and work his “potent influence on Hume.” But Thilly’s Hume is the Third Person of the British Empiricist Trinity and thus immaculate against such stains. Hume has his doubts about cause and effect, of course, and about knowledge of the external world and other such items, but we are not told that these worries are “sceptical.” The word enters Thilly’s main account of Hume only in an affecting digest of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, where “in spite of these skeptical reflections, Hume declares that it hardly seems possible that anyone of good understanding should reject the idea of God How seriously these remarks are to be taken, . . . the reader is left to decide for himself.”¹³

That was where scepticism stood in the awareness of Anglophone philosophy when Popkin awoke it from its dogmatic slumber. Leaving his voluminous work on the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries to those who know those periods better, I wish to return to the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries and to consider a reasonable question – which Popkin helped to answer – about that era. Why should philosophers care about the Renaissance? Nothing important happened, right? One might reply with other questions. How would you know? How much Renaissance philosophy have you read? Pico? Ficino? Valla? Even now, Valla’s *Dialectical Disputations*, a stunningly original exposition of the philosophy of language, can be read only in Latin. How many contemporary philosophers of language have heard of Valla?

But that question, which is about access to texts, is for another day.¹⁴ Behind philosophy’s plausible scepticism about the Renaissance lie questions more relevant to this occasion and more serious. If the Renaissance is to be regarded as a period in the canonical historiography of philosophy, what is *distinctive* about it? What makes it *different* from what came before and from what came after? Even more important, how was Renaissance philosophy *effective*? How did it *cause* what came next to be different from what came before? It is this second question, about the philosophical consequences of Renaissance philosophy, that Popkin answered with great originality and effect.

¹³Thilly, *History*, pp. 318–319, 364–366, 367–381, cf. 382, where Reid’s common sense is described as a reaction against “the idealism of Berkeley and the scepticism of Hume,” both of whom in Thilly’s account belong to the movement called “British empiricism.”

¹⁴Copenhaver “How Not To Lose a Renaissance,” *Rinascimento*, 44 (2nd ser., 2004), 443–458, commenting on Christopher Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians and Latin’s Legacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

By the time Popkin met Kristeller in the early 1940s, Kristeller, having come to this country from Germany and Italy, had begun to fill gaps in Burckhardt's suggestive sketch of the Renaissance.¹⁵ Eugenio Garin was doing the same in Italy, while still in exile intellectually under Fascism.¹⁶ Garin, Kristeller and their students showed in detail how classicism – the rediscovery of Greek and Roman antiquity – made the Renaissance distinctive. Part of that classicism, of course, was philosophical. In the medieval university, where Aristotle was The Philosopher, Plato, Epicurus, Epictetus, Plotinus and dozens of other names were little more than that – just names. It was Renaissance scholars who attached texts to the names, recovering the philosophical literature of ancient Greece and turning it into Latin, the intellectual *koine* of Western Europe. Because of this philological achievement, the philosophy that Descartes learned from the Jesuits was not the philosophy taught by Aquinas or Scotus or Ockham. It was a new kind of Aristotelianism, eclectic and classicized.¹⁷

More and more Greek philosophy became available in better and better texts and commentaries and translations. Good news: except that *more* was not unequivocally *better* in the eyes of a Renaissance reader. Although Aristotelian philosophy remained paramount throughout the period of recovery and after it, what was recovered was also Platonic, Stoic, Epicurean and Neoplatonic, even Cynic, Hermetic and Pythagorean – a volatile mix of authorities for a culture that venerated authority, especially ancient authority. When venerable masters disagreed, disciples cried scandal. *Conflict* among authorities was a *crisis* of authority.¹⁸

The crisis boiled over after 1512, when the Church convened the Fifth Lateran Council. In its eighth session of 1513, the Council issued a decree which needs to be read in a substantial passage to feel its force. It condemned “every proposition contrary to the truth of the enlightened Christian faith,” including

a number of extremely pernicious errors ... particularly on the nature of the rational soul, specifically that it is mortal, or that it is one for all people ...
 .And since there are some who philosophize so recklessly that they have

¹⁵For recent discussions of Kristeller's work as a philosopher and a historian, see *Kristeller Reconsidered: Essays on His Life and Scholarship*, ed. J. Monfasani (New York: Italica, 2006).

¹⁶Copenhaver, “Eugenio Garin,” in *Renaissance News and Notes* (<http://www.rsa.org/rnn.htm>), February, 2005.

¹⁷Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁸Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 1–36, 51–59, 196–328; Copenhaver, “The Slums of Cosmopolis: A Renaissance in the History of Philosophy?” in *Everything Connects: A Festschrift for Richard Popkin*, eds. J. Force and D. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 63–86.

maintained this to be true, at least philosophically, ... we condemn and rebuke all those who maintain that the intellectual soul is mortal ... and impute doubts in this matter, since the soul not only really exists, of itself and essentially, as the form of the human body ... but is also immortalThis is manifestly established by the Gospel....And since truth never contradicts truth, we define every contrary claim ... to be totally false, and we strictly prohibit it and declare it impossible to make any different statement of the dogma. Moreover, we command each and every philosopher who gives public lectures in university faculties or elsewhere ... to devote his every effort to teaching ... the manifest truth of the Christian religion, teaching it as persuasively as is possible, and giving all his effort to excluding and eliminating the arguments of philosophers of that sort....But since it is not enough to snip the roots of the brambles now and thenand since extended study, especially of human philosophy,... sometimes leads more to error than to clarifying the truth, it is our decision and ordinance ... that no one in sacred orders ... may concentrate on the study of philosophy or poetry for more than five years ... without some study of theology or pontifical law.¹⁹

Too many verses and too many syllogisms too! The target of this anathema was an eminent professional philosopher, Pietro Pomponazzi, an Aristotelian who had access to the new Plato and to the Greek commentators on Aristotle, some of whom were Neoplatonists. Behind Pomponazzi's subtle and disquieting treatment of the soul was a new array of philosophical authority. Horrified by novelty, the Council made Pomponazzi's book on the soul infamous and dissuaded him from publishing more, but it failed in its main goal, which was to clean up corruption in the Church.²⁰ As a result, when Luther made his complaints public in 1517, the last year of the Council, there was still much to complain about.

The dogmatic Luther, in conflict with the diffident Erasmus, has a leading role in the part of Popkin's *History* that deals with the Renaissance – the introduction and the first three chapters – and this has been so from the first edition through the third. But in the third edition, the even more doctrinaire Savonarola has a part as big as Luther's in the story of scepticism.²¹

¹⁹Sessio VIII, 19 Dec. 1513, Concilii Laterensis V, in *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, eds. J. Alberigo et al. (3rd ed.; Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 1973), pp. 605–606.

²⁰The best treatment in English of Pomponazzi is Martin Pine, *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance* (Padua: Antenore, 1986); Copenhagen and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 103–112.

²¹Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 3–7, 19–27.

Popkin opens the story with a sketch of ancient scepticism: Academics as negative dogmatists; Pyrrhonists as suspenders of judgment; and Sextus Empiricus as the sceptical physician who prescribes “a purge that eliminates everything including itself,” a methodical formulation of sceptical doubts about absolutely anything that you might be tempted to assert.²² Then, after more than a millennium of intermission, action resumes in the middle of the fifteenth century with the first signs of interest in scepticism that suggest continuity with its later career. Savonarola enters in the 1490s. As Prior of San Marco in Florence, he roars at that opulent city in sermons that turned it briefly into a pinched theocracy. He believes in his own prophetic authority and no other, not even the Church as an institution, which had tainted its authority by consorting with Aristotle. In this circumstance, Savonarola – who is a preacher, not a scholar – orders some of his friars to translate Sextus into Latin. He takes up scepticism as a sword to destroy philosophy and thus to chastise the worldly-wise clerisy that quakes at his prophetic thunder.

Savonarola, the scourge of Renaissance Florence, is the emblem of a rupture in historiography: the view of modern scepticism that Popkin found current in the 1950s identified it simply with *disbelief* in religion; fifty years later, Popkin had traced its roots to a priest whose dogmatic *belief* was not just sincere, but fanatical. Accordingly, Popkin sees scepticism not as disbelief in religion but as opposition of a certain kind to dogmatism of a certain kind – philosophical opposition to philosophical dogmatism. The ensuing suspension of judgment about truth-claims assists faith when the claims that threaten faith are philosophical and hence vulnerable to sceptical attack. Fideism emerges as a philosophically attenuated species of scepticism: scepticism about claims *not* based on faith, whether that faith is completely blind or simply prior to reason. Only faith, in any case, can trump the sceptic’s doubts for the religious fideist.²³

But religion needs a *rule* of faith, a license for its own claims to truth, and after 1517 some Christians promulgated rules that clashed, violently and shamefully, with rules decreed by other Christians. Catholics appealed to a criterion of tradition and institutional authority, while for their criterion Protestants looked to scripture, as revealed by grace to the illuminated individual. But Catholic tradition contradicts itself, ending in confusion, complain the Protestants, while Catholics rejoin that individual conscience is unreliable, leading to Protestant anarchy. From a Catholic perspective, the Protestant “criterion of religious knowledge is inner persuasion, the guarantee of... inner persuasion is... God, and this we are assured of by our inner persuasion.” From a

²² Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. xvi–xix.

²³ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. xix–xxiii; above, n. 21.

Protestant perspective, “the Church cannot be the authority of its own infallibility, since the question at issue is whether the Church is the true authority on religious matters. Any evidence for the special status of the Church requires a rule or criterion.” Either way, the search for a rule of faith spins in a circle.²⁴ No wonder that scepticism and suspension of judgment looked appealing in the sixteenth century, as Christians fought bloody wars over points of dogma.

Popkin tells the story of scepticism during the Reformation and the wars of religion through books that he loved and collected, books produced by the younger Pico, Erasmus, Agrippa, Talon, Hervet, Sanches and others, including Henri Estienne, who published the first complete printed version of a work by Sextus in 1562, after which interest in scepticism accelerated and deepened philosophically.²⁵ Popkin’s hero in this part of his story is Montaigne.²⁶

Because the “Apology for Raimond Sebond” is unforgettable, we all remember it: the relativism, both anthropological and moral; the critique of sense knowledge; the choice of Pyrrhonism over Academic dogmatism; the use of the sceptical tropes; the infinite regress of the criterion; the advice to follow law and custom in matters of practice; and the complementary advice to suspend judgment in matters of theory. Reading Montaigne reading Sextus through the Paul of I Corinthians, the Paul who writes “to destroy the wisdom of the wise,” Popkin recapitulates the immortal essay with grace and clarity.²⁷ But he misses something about the relationship between Montaigne’s scepticism and Descartes’ first public reaction to it, in the *Discourse on the Method*.

Although Popkin discusses the *Discourse*, he follows the main line of Cartesian criticism by focusing on the *Meditations* and its aftermath. But the *Discourse* came first, after years of avoiding publicity.²⁸ Since Descartes was at least obsessive, if not worse, about self-presentation, and since theological problems were exceedingly sensitive, we may assume that he thought very carefully about the theology in the fourth section of the *Discourse*. Having doubted everything but his bare thinking – everything including his own body and other bodies – he needs God to get them back. To show that God exists, he uses a version of the ontological proof, first formulated by Anselm in the eleventh century.²⁹

²⁴ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 3–16.

²⁵ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 23–43.

²⁶ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 43–63.

²⁷ I Cor. 1:19–21; Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 47–54.

²⁸ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 143–173; Gaukroger, *Descartes*, pp. 181–190, 225–228, 290–332.

²⁹ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), I, 126–131.

What Descartes does *not* use in the *Discourse* is the natural theology of later scholastic philosophy. Scholastic natural theology argued from creatures, as God's effects, to their cause, God the Creator, in order to prove God's existence and perfections. As Paul had written, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead."³⁰ Taking his cue from Paul, Peter Lombard gestured at proofs of God's existence and introduced them with the claim that we have "recognition of the Creator through creatures."³¹ Before Thomas Aquinas laid out five arguments – much more explicit but on the same general grounds – for God's existence, he cleared the ground by rejecting Anselm's ontological proof.³² Although Descartes's Jesuit teachers had enshrined Thomas as the supreme theological authority, Descartes bypassed Thomas's five ways for Anselm's ontological proof. Why?

If we follow Popkin's story, the scepticism that Descartes sets out to defeat is mainly Montaigne's, recorded in the "Apology" and filtered through Charron and others.³³ But what the "Apology" politely demolishes is scholastic natural theology, as summarized in the work by Raimond Sebond that Montaigne translated for his father. Hence, Descartes could depend on scholastic natural theology to prove God's existence only if he could salvage enough from Montaigne's demolition of it, which evidently he could not do.

Whether Descartes' *Discourse* was actually shaped in this particular way by Montaigne's "Apology" is surely debatable. In any event, a larger point will hold: in Popkin's story, there is a momentous role for the Renaissance in the historiography of philosophy that is not just *distinctive* but also *effective*. The ancient wisdom revived in the fifteenth century included the sceptical wisdom of Sextus Empiricus. Religious strife in the sixteenth century encouraged study and dissemination of the sceptical texts, preparing the way for Montaigne's corrosive essay. In the seventeenth century, Montaigne's case for scepticism survived the best efforts of Descartes to refute it, letting this discovery of the Renaissance linger as the incubus of modern philosophy.

The discovery was made in Savonarola's convent in the 1490s, but it became publicly effective only after 1562, when Henri Estienne produced the first printed text of Sextus. Examining the motives behind this publication, Popkin concludes that Estienne "did not present himself as a sceptic or a purveyor of scepticism.... [He] saw himself as adding to human wisdom and knowledge."³⁴ Because Popkin

³⁰Romans 1:20.

³¹Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 3.9.1–6.

³²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2.1–3.

³³Above, nn. 25–26, 28.

³⁴Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), p. 36.

himself added so much to human wisdom and knowledge, the same words apply to him as *non-scepticus*.

At the same time, there surely was a Popkin *scepticus*, for whom subversives like Erasmus and Montaigne were congenial characters. In not exactly the same spirit, E.M. Forster once said that he would rather take his laws from Erasmus or Montaigne than from Moses or St. Paul, understanding those amiable renaissance Christians in a gentler way than their religious rigorism would have allowed. Unlike Forster, they could not really “hate the idea of causes.” By the standards of their time, both were prophets of tolerance, but their time was different from ours.

Or maybe not so different. As in our time, so also in the age of Erasmus and Montaigne, and of Savonarola and Luther, faith was a cause good enough to die for – and for others of other faiths to die for. That some heroes of that embattled age promoted a scepticism whose main motive was religious is one – but only one – of the revolutionary insights which have made all citizens of the Republic of Letters Richard Popkin’s debtors. Another famous statement of Forster’s – writing as a novelist, not a social critic – speaks to the generous, persistent and passionate spirit of inquiry that led Popkin down so many paths to so many treasures. In *Howard’s End*, Forster wrote:

Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest.

Popkin’s sermon, of course, isn’t a sermon at all. It’s a magnificent body of history and philosophy. It tells us, as philosophers, historians, thinkers and scholars: “Only connect!” And were we to connect as he did, the work surely would be exalted.³⁵

³⁵These last lines of my essay, including the quotations from Forster, repeat what I said at the end “The Slums of Cosmopolis,” pp. 85–86.

2. À REBOURS: RICHARD POPKIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Allison P. Coudert

Some readers of this essay will be old enough to remember the Shmoo, the cartoon character created by Al Capp. But you may not know that it morphed into a popular toy in the 1940s, which was basically a large plastic balloon in the shape of a bowling pin with a weight in the bottom.¹ Whenever you punched it, it always popped right back up. That is my vision of my friend Dick Popkin in the last, unbelievably productive years of his life: emphysema, pneumonia, failing eyesight – all things that would fell a lesser man – could not keep him down. In 2000, Dick was invited by David Ruderman, the Director of the Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, to the final conference culminating a year of seminars devoted to a subject that Dick had helped pioneer, Christian Hebraism and the relation between Christians and Jews in the early modern period. In the months preceding the conference it was nip and tuck whether he would be up to making the trip from Los Angeles to Philadelphia. But with his new motto, “have oxygen, will travel,” he and his wife Julie arrived in style. And after a day of intense conferencing, without a note or moment of hesitation Dick summed up what had been said by the conferees and suggested areas for further research. It was just one more of Dick’s stunning virtuosic performances.

I met Dick at the Clark Library in 1984, where I worked up the courage over several days to give him offprints of two articles. At that point I had no reason to think that Dick would be any different from most accomplished academics, somewhat loathe to take handouts from unknown scholars, especially

¹“Shmoon” memorabilia generated 25 million dollars in the 1948 (about 300 million in 2003 terms). Denis Kitchen apparently has the largest collection of Shmoon memorabilia in the world: “I collected this stuff myself and it’s across the board. It includes ashtrays, birthday cars, boy’s belts, women’s brooch pins, charm bracelets, drinking glasses, earmuffs, Grape Nuts cereal, household deodorizers, puzzles, glass milk bottles, songs and large plush Shmoo dolls. One of the weirdest ones is fishing lures.” (<http://forum.newsarama.com/archive/index.php/t-1114.html>).

ones working on esoteric subjects like the Kabbalah and witchcraft. But, as I quickly learned, Dick's skeptical and inquisitive bent inclined him to question prevailing wisdom and Whiggish interpretations when it came to understanding the past. Like two other great scholars of the twentieth century, Gershom Scholem and Frances Yates, he saw himself as something of an archeologist, digging deep in what he has described as the "marvelous and varied intellectual world or swamp which lies beneath our present thinking" to ferret out little known figures, whether they be neglected persons from the past or unrecognized scholars of the present. It was at the margins, in the writings of ignored and neglected figures, that Dick found ideas now seen to be central to our understanding of the transition from the early modern to the modern world. His *cri de coeur* from the very beginning was that philosophy has a history; it was not born fully formed like Athena from Zeus's or any great philosopher's head. It cannot be understood unless contextualized, and once this is done our view of the past is radically changed. Good science did not develop when bad religion, bad magic, or bad metaphysics disappeared. Good science was the product of a multitude of events and motivations among which were the recovery of Greek and Roman skeptical texts during the Renaissance, strands of esoteric kabbalistic, hermetic, and neoplatonic thought, millenarianism, and even messianism, all of which combined to produce a heady brew that placed man at the center of the universe. Religion played an essential role in this transformation. From the lowly worm postulated by Luther and Calvin, who could do nothing to mollify an angry God or contribute to his own salvation, mankind took on the pivotal role of restoring the world to its prelapsarian perfection; and science was the means to this end. By focusing on the margins, or at least by bringing the margins into the story, Dick has recovered large chunks of history lost to view, submerged in the swamp, just waiting to be excavated. And this led him to a number of startling and remarkable discoveries. Let me list five of them: (1) Spinoza's possible connection with the Quakers; (2) Cardinal Ximenes learning Aramaic so he could speak to Jesus; (3) two small treatises by Abraham Cohen Herrera on method that anticipated Descartes's discussion of clear and distinct ideas; (4) Isaac de Pinto's dinner with David Hume; and (5) Columbus's connection with Jews and even the possibility of his Jewish ancestry. This last point was developed by Dick in several lectures, one of which he gave at Arizona State University in 1988 with the irresistible title that only he would have dreamed up, "Columbus and Corned Beef."

These and many more equally revolutionary discoveries stemmed from Dick's initial interest in skepticism, the work for which he is undoubtedly most famous. It seems ludicrous now to think that before Dick, no major historian of philosophy was aware that there was a "skeptical crisis" in early modern Europe or cognizant of the role it played in shaping modern philosophy.

Furthermore, no one before Dick was aware of the role that Jewish converts to Christianity and Marranos like La Peyrère played in this skeptical crisis, the French Renaissance, Napoleon's Jewish policy, the emancipation of the Jews, and the assault on revealed religion. Not content with simply tracing the contours of skepticism from the Renaissance onwards, Dick recognized that in addition to Marranos there were whole groups of philosophers, theologians, and scientists left out of the picture, figures like the Cambridge Platonists and Comenius, those described by Charles Webster as "the spiritual brotherhood" but whom Dick referred to as the "Third Force" in early modern history. These thinkers were united in their quest to overcome the skeptical crisis ensuing from the rediscovery of classical texts and the bitter sectarian conflicts accompanying the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The interpretation of the Bible was central to their worldview, and they were deeply influenced by various currents of esoteric and mystical thought. They were united in their deeply held religious convictions, their view of the millennium as imminent, and of science as a crucial tool in hastening its advent. From this Dick came to the conclusion that Christian millenarianism and Jewish messianism were potent creative forces in seventeenth century thought, an idea that has been borne out by subsequent scholars. Henry More, Isaac Newton, William Law, William Whiston, Andrew Michael Ramsey, Hartley, Priestley, Swedenborg, and even Balfour were all part of this Third Force, whose historical influence only began to be appreciated and more fully investigated as a result of Dick's prodding.² Our understanding of early modern philosophy, theology, science, and history has changed radically as a result of Dick's many scholarly endeavors. He has made it clear for all to see how central religion was in the transition from the early modern to the modern world. One of his students quotes him as saying that "the problems of the world are not really political, economic, or social; they are religious. To change the world you must change the hearts of human beings."³ After September 11, 2001 this statement seems uncannily on the mark. So, in addition to Dick's role as incomparable scholar, convener of conferences exceptional, and generous friend and mentor, we can add that of prophet and philosopher in his own right.

²When discussing the "Third Force" I should also mention the "Fourth Force," namely James Force. I recall him driving up to a Clark Conference in his 1960 Oldsmobile convertible and coining the term "Popkinettes" to describe people like us who were so devoted to and influenced by Dick.

³Richard H. Popkin, "Intellectual autobiography: warts and all," *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard H. Popkin*, eds. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988), 146.

In thinking how to define Popkin's contribution to scholarship, I was struck by the family resemblance that exists between his work and that of two other distinguished scholars I referred to earlier, Frances Yates and Gershom Scholem. In significant ways all three were "heretics" inasmuch as they went against the grain of accepted scholarship by emphasizing the centrality of what other scholars had marginalized, denigrated, or ignored. As I mentioned, Dick was fascinated by what he referred to as the "swamp which lies beneath our present thinking." Scholem had a similar penchant for delving into uncharted regions. He was convinced that one had to excavate traditional history to get to the truth hidden below the surface, and he discovered the sources of this hidden truth well beyond the borders of orthodoxy:

There are domains of [tradition] that are hidden under the debris of centuries and lie there waiting to be discovered and turned to good usethere is such a thing as a treasure hunt within tradition, which creates a living relationship to tradition and to which much of what is best in current Jewish consciousness is indebted, even where it was — and is — expressed outside of the framework of orthodoxy.⁴

Scholem was much more interested in what he called "the failures of history" than in its so-called successes. As he said:

If I were called upon to teach, I would try to show that Jewish history has been a struggle over great ideas and the question is to what extent we should be influenced by the degree of success achieved in that struggleAt the same time, I would consider with my pupils the failures of history, matters having to do with violence, cruelty and hypocrisy.⁵

David Biale describes this orientation of Scholem's work as "counter-history," which does not revise history so much as suggest that the vital forces which propel history forward lie in a secret tradition beneath the surface of "mainstream" or "establishment" history.⁶

⁴Cited in David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 210–211.

⁵*Ibid.*, 108.

⁶*Ibid.*, 11–12: "Counter-history" [is] the belief that the true history lies in a subterranean tradition that must be brought to light. Counter-history is a type of revisionist historiography, but where the revisionist proposes a new theory or finds new facts, the counter-historian transvalues old ones. He does not deny that his predecessor's interpretation of history is correct... but he rejects the completeness of that interpretation: he affirms the existence of a "mainstream" or "establishment" history; but believes that the vital forces lies in a secret tradition."

Yates shared this same conviction that true history was subterranean. Like Popkin and Scholem, she saw herself as an archeologist, whose excavations among the ruins of the past revealed the truth that lay beneath what she described as “superficial history.” As she writes in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*:

One way of looking at the explorations of this book is to see them as having uncovered a lost period of European history. Like archeologists digging down through layers, we have found under the superficial history of the early seventeenth century, just before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, a whole culture, a whole civilization, lost to view, and not the less important because of such short duration.

Yates pursued the theme of “lost” history throughout all her work. She describes her quest in poignant terms in her great book *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*:

... history as it actually occurs is not quite the whole of history, for it leaves out of account the hopes which never materialized, the attempts to prevent the outbreak of wars, the futile efforts to solve differences by conciliatory methods. Hopes such as these are as much a part of history as the terrible events which falsify them, and in trying to assess the influence of their times upon idealists and lovers of peaceful activities such as our poets and academicians the hopes are perhaps as important as the events.⁷

Like Yates and Scholem, Popkin turned to what was deemed irrational by many scholars in constructing his own counter-history. I do not use the term “irrational” in the sense of unreasonable but to describe intuitive and essentially religious forms of cognition – rather than those based on empiricism or deduction – which are expressed in symbolic images rather than logical propositions. Scholem was convinced that myth and religion were more important sources of human creativity than reason alone: “Reason is a great instrument of destruction. For construction, something beyond it is required I believe that morality as a constructive force is impossible without religion, without some power beyond pure reason.”⁸ As Biale points out, however, Scholem did not glorify irrationalism, being well aware of its destructive potential: “Scholem believes in the rational regulation of irrationalism, and in his historiography he strives for a rational account of the history of irrationalism.”⁹ I think the same can be said of Frances Yates and Dick Popkin.

⁷Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1947), ch. 10.

⁸Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, 115.

⁹*Ibid.*

In many respects the shared interest of these three scholars in delving beneath the surface to find the unrecognized forces activating the past had its roots in the Romantic fascination with the irrational, the subconscious, and the unconscious.¹⁰ As Popkin pointed out in his introduction to *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought*, interest in subjects like magic, the occult, alchemy, millenarianism, and messianism was reinforced by events in the twentieth century, not least of which were the atrocities of World War I, Nazism, and Communism. Such stark instances of irrationality made scholars like Yates and Scholem, as well as Popkin, more attuned to irrational elements in the more distant past and to the role these elements played in shaping both our enlightened and unenlightened history.¹¹

When one thinks about the factors that drove Popkin as well as Scholem and Yates to direct their historical investigations to areas beyond the borders of orthodoxy, biography becomes important. In his two autobiographical essays Popkin describes himself as by nature “rebellious.” He rebelled against his parents’ dogmatic liberalism, anti-religion, and communist world view. This rebelliousness continued at Columbia, where he rejected John Dewey’s instrumentalism and Frederick Woodbridge’s naturalism. It wasn’t until he discovered Sextus Empiricus that things began to fall into place. As he says in a passage that makes both Francis Bacon and Karl Marx jump to mind:

In my own case, I guess that I feel perpetually an outsider and an outcast, ready to smash intellectual idols at any time. An intellectual anarchist might describe this view, who feels the common human bond would be revealed if our intellectual chains were broken and our deceptive glasses removed. Theories would be seen as myths with no supra-human dimension. Only the supra-human experience found in religious experience and aesthetic experience transcends this. But any interpretation puts one back in Plato’s cave looking at shadows and illusions.¹²

¹⁰For some brief but perceptive remarks on Scholem’s reaction against, yet indebtedness to, German Romanticism, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, ed. Silvia Berti, trans. Maura Masella-Gayley (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1994), 194–196.

¹¹Biale describes Scholem’s rejection of bourgeois liberalism and the rationalism of nineteenth century Germany historiography. “Scholem is,” he says, “unquestionably the product of the romantic revision of the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, which took place in Central and Eastern Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century” (35). For the effect of Germany’s defeat in World War I on German historians and the concept of objectivity and rationalism, see G.G. Iggers, “The Dissolution of German Historicism,” in *Ideas in History: Essays in Honor of Louis Gottschalk by his Former Students*, ed. Richard Heer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1965).

¹²Popkin, “Intellectual autobiography,” 147.

In this same essay Popkin described himself as equally alienated from the irreligion of his parents and traditional Judaism. Somewhat ironically, skepticism came to his rescue by allowing him to connect with an element from the Jewish past that had been marginalized and denigrated, namely the Marranos. He describes the excitement and personal satisfaction with which he discovered this aspect Jewish history:

From Grayzel to Cecil Roth to more scholarly works, I plunged into the world of the Marranos, and literally felt myself growing roots that connected me to this tradition of secret Jews, forced converts, who had functioned in an alien world, always threatened by it. I saw the conception of the Marrano, outwardly conforming to the culture around him but internally guarding the true faith, as most appealing. As I learned that Santa Teresa, San Juan de la Cruz, some of the early Jesuit mystics, were all from forced convert families, I felt an overpowering need to explore this world. The mysticism of Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz seemed closest to what I had experienced.¹³

Scholem had followed a similar path a generation earlier. He too revolted against both the irreligion of his parents and traditional Judaism, but instead of being drawn to Marranos, he was attracted to Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah, or to what the distinguished historian Heinrich Graetz had dismissed as “gibberish” and a “book of lies.”¹⁴ While Popkin described himself as an “intellectual anarchist,” Scholem called himself a “religious anarchist,” but both sought an authentic encounter with Jewish tradition in non-canonical Jewish sources. In a talk in 1939 Scholem described the kind of anarchism he and some of his colleagues experienced:

Our anarchism is transitional ... We are the living example that this [anarchism] does not remove one from Judaism. We are a generation not without commandments, but our commandments are bereft of authority. But I don't have an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the Orthodox. We are no less legitimate than our forefathers, they simply had a clearer text. We are perhaps anarchists, but we are opposed to anarchy.¹⁵

Through his scholarship, Scholem encountered a new kind of authentic Judaism. He was able to show that what had once been viewed as embarrassing aberrations of Jewish culture, namely mysticism and messianism, were potent

¹³ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴ Paul Mendes-Flohr, ed., *Gershom Scholem: The Man and his Work*. SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion (Albany, NY: SUNY/The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

elements in shaping Jewish history. In his view Zionism brought an end to apologetics. Those aspects of Judaism once denigrated had to be reevaluated:

Forces whose value was once denigrated will appear in a different light. Forces which were not considered important enough for serious scholars to research will now be raised from the depths of concealment. Perhaps what was once called degeneracy will now be regarded as a revelation, and what seemed to them [the apologetic scholars of the nineteenth century] to be an impotent hallucination will be revealed as a great vibrant myth.¹⁶

Popkin's scholarly work has contributed to a similar reevaluation of ignored and denigrated areas or research in Jewish and Western history. Like Scholem, he recognized the significance and importance of religious forces in the emergence of the modern world. By 1987, he realized that "the focus of my work was on documenting the religious background of modern philosophy."¹⁷ One thing led to another until a new structure of interlocking intellectual currents emerged, bringing with it a new understanding for the religious roots of modernity:

... what still amazes me is that in running amok in researching different aspects of these subjects, new, encompassing structures emerge. It is not a grab bag of research, but a growing history of skepticism, of Jewish intellectual history, of Jewish-Christian relations, that appears connected, and important in understanding how our present intellectual world emerged, and the sort of tensions it contains. I hope that showing this forces us to consider what we should and can do about it.¹⁸

Like Scholem, Popkin recognized that millenarianism and messianism were key factors in early modern history. But while Scholem distinguished Jewish messianism from Christian on the grounds that Jewish messianists anticipated a cosmic rather than a personal redemption, Popkin studied and encouraged others to study the ways in which Christians and Jewish millenarians and messianists worked in tandem to prepare for a cosmic redemption and in so doing interacted in ways that helped to lay the foundation for enlightenment thought.

Like Scholem and Popkin, Yates' early work linking occultism, Hermeticism, and science was also radical and went against the grain of contemporary wisdom in the history of science. To remind you just how radical her approach was, I quote from George Sarton's three volume *Introduction to the History of Science*, which, although written between 1927 and 1947, was

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁷ Popkin, "Intellectual autobiography," 145. This appears in his article, "The Religious Background of 17th Century Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987): 35-50.

¹⁸ Popkin, "Intellectual autobiography," 146.

still required reading when I went to college. Sarton's unequivocal dismissal of magic reveals his Whiggish orientation:

The historian of science can not devote much attention to the study of superstition and magic, that is, of unreason, because this does not help him very much to understand human progress. Magic is essentially unprogressive and conservative; science is essentially progressive; the former goes backward; the latter forward.¹⁹

Another respected historian of science and magic, Lynn Thorndike, took the same pejorative view of magic. He attributed what he saw as a decline in science during the fifteenth century to the rise of Renaissance humanism and renewed interest in magic and superstition. He consequently pushed the scientific revolution back from the Renaissance to the twelfth century, a move applauded by other historians who accepted Pierre Duhem's claim that the root of modern science lay in the Middle Ages. Interestingly enough, in her autobiographical notes Yates mentions that when she began working on Giordano Bruno and was invited by Edgar Wind to use the Warburg library, the first thing she read was Duhem's work, "from which," she says, "I derived the general idea that science was medieval and the Renaissance and humanism impeded rather than helped it."²⁰ That Yates should so radically reverse her own initial position and in doing so challenge bona fide historians of science is all the more interesting because her field was literature, not science, and not even the history of science, a fact that offended and continues to offend a number of historians of science.²¹

¹⁹ George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, 3 vols. (Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins, 1927–1947), 1: 19.

²⁰ Yates, *Ideas and Ideals in the North European Renaissance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 313.

²¹ The fact that Yates was not a historian of science was held against her and the many other scholars who crossed into the discipline from other fields. As Charles C. Gillispie put it, "The history of science is losing its grip on science, leaning heavily on social history, and dabbling with shoddy scholarship." Cited in Allen G. Debus, "Science and History: The Birth of a New Field," in *Science, Pseudo-Science, and Utopianism in Early Modern Thought*, ed. Stephen A. McKnight (Columbia, SC: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 29. On this issue, see William J. Broad, "History of Science Losing Its Science," *Science* 207 (1980); Paul Wood, "Recent Trends in the History of Science: The Dehumanisation of History," *British Society for the History of Science Newsletter* (September, 1980); Leonard G. Wilson, "Medical History without Medicine," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 35 (1980); Ronald L. Numbers, "The History of American Medicine: A Field in Ferment," *Reviews in American History* 10 (1982): 245–264.

What, one wonders, made Yates jump across accepted disciplinary boundaries and study a subject – namely magic and the occult – that was conspicuously not studied at the time precisely because it was deemed senseless and illogical? As in the case of Scholem and Popkin, biography is useful here. Although the unfortunately few fragments we have of Yates' memoirs don't throw direct light on this question, they do provide suggestive hints. For example, they describe her unconventional education, which during her early years occurred largely at home under the direction of her mother and sisters. She considered this "escape from regular education... a marvellous good fortune."²² When she eventually went to university it was as an external student, which meant she had minimal contact with professors and other students. Even as an internal student working on her M.A., she lived outside of London and claims that "I was largely left to my own devices."²³ There was thus something of the solitary maverick about Yates that conceivably made her more independent-minded than most students and more willing to follow her own insights.²⁴

There are further hints in her autobiographical fragments that provide clues to the unconventional direction Yates' scholarship would take. Writing about the death of her brother during a bayonet charge on October 8, 1915, she says dramatically, "The 1914–1918 war broke our family: as a teenager I lived among the ruins."²⁵ Literally and figuratively Yates did live among "ruins," not only as a teenager but for the remainder of her life, first as a young woman experiencing an irreparable rupture in her own family and the ruin of pre-World War I culture and later as a historian and Warburg scholar. It was, after all, the declared mission of the Warburg Institute to study and document the "survival of the classical tradition." Yates took this injunction to heart. As I have already mentioned, she saw herself as an archeologist, whose excavations among the ruins of the past revealed the truth that lay beneath "superficial history."

There is another important respect in which Yates' scholarship goes hand in hand with Popkin's and Scholem's. I would argue that the most direct and lasting legacy of all three scholars has been two-fold: in helping to integrate Jewish Studies into the wider field of Western history and in stimulating the new field

²² Yates, *Ideas*, 277.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ According to J. Franklin Jameson, one of the avowed ends of the professional training of historians was decidedly not, "to evoke originality, to kindle the fires of genius... but to regularize, to criticize, to restrain vagaries, to set a standard of workmanship and compel men to conform to it." Cited in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52.

²⁵ Yates, *Ideas*, p. 276.

of “Esoteric Studies,” which has fundamentally changed our understanding of the historiography of science. Moshe Idel considered Yates’ willingness to admit the formative role of the Kabbalah in Renaissance and post-Renaissance history “courageous... and quite extraordinary.” He credits Yates with encouraging Jewish studies in the areas of magic, the occult, and Kabbalah and claims that Yates’ work stimulated his own as well as that of other Jewish scholars working on similar subjects.²⁶ Wouter Hanegraaff, one of the leaders in the new field of Western Esotericism, ascribes a similar role to Yates. He described the publication of *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* as “the decisive turning-point for the study of Western Esotericism” and sees her work as legitimizing fields of study which had previously been marginalized, if not ridiculed.²⁷

I think that what we can all see at this point is that Richard Popkin’s work, like Yates’ and Scholem’s, has profoundly influenced our historical view of Jewish-Christian relations as well as our conception of European intellectual history and the history of science. While I agree wholeheartedly with Margaret Jacob that it is too drastic to give up the idea of a scientific revolution,²⁸ we are now in a position to define this revolution in far more nuanced terms, just as we can now more fully appreciate the complexity of the intellectual changes that led from the pre-modern to the modern world. We can do this largely because of the three scholars I have discussed and the work their work has inspired.

²⁶ Moshe Idel, private communication, 1999.

²⁷ *Western Esotericism*, introduction.

²⁸ Margaret C. Jacob, “The Truth of Newton’s Science and the Truth of Science’s History: Heroic Science at Its Eighteenth-Century Formulation.” In *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution*, ed. Margaret J. Osler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 315–332.

3. POPKIN'S SPINOZA

Sarah Hutton

Among philosophers, Spinoza has the unusual fortune that his philosophical pre-eminence is more than matched by a strong non-philosophical following. Notwithstanding the austere, not to say forbidding, analytic rigor of his deductive arguments in his *Ethics*, he is in danger of becoming everybody's favorite philosopher: recognised internationally as a member of the canon of great philosophers; claimed by the Dutch as the foremost Dutch philosopher; seized on by feminists for disposing of the mind-body dichotomy, and as a philosopher of the emotions;¹ lauded by liberal historians as the origin of modern democratic values and the true father of secular enlightenment;² accommodated to Judaism, even if still branded a heretic;³ imagined, historically, as a kind of Socrates *redivivus*, who set himself above the bigotry and back-biting of his age, to lead a life of isolated tranquillity, live his philosophy⁴ – the list is as variegated as it extensive.

Richard Popkin's interest in Spinoza was primarily philosophical. He cast a healthily skeptical eye on the convergence of contradictions that make up Spinoza's latter-day image. Yet he was, at the same time, receptive to many aspects of Spinoza's life and writings which lie beyond the reach of philosophical

¹See, for example, Genevieve Lloyd, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1996); Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²Jonathan Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); idem, *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³Stephen Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and other Heretics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁴Johannes Colerus, *Korte, dog waaragtige Levensbeschrijving, van Benedictus de Spinoza* (Amsterdam 1705), translated into French and English the following year. An example of a modern hagiographic view of Spinoza, see Romain Rolland, *Empédocle d'Agrigente suivi de l'éclair Spinoza* (Paris, 1931), who regarded Spinoza's writings as "à l'égal des Livres Saints pour qu'on croix en eux." As cited in item 194 of the catalogue of the exhibition, *Spinoza. Troisième centenaire de la mort du Philosophe* (Paris: Institut Néerlandais, 1977).

analysis. Popkin's philosophical interest in Spinoza was not, therefore, without its own contradictions. Spinoza was, in his assessment, "an epistemological dogmatist," who did not see skepticism as "the specter haunting European philosophy".⁵ Yet Spinoza figures in his *History of Scepticism* (in editions published from 1979). Consequently Spinoza is in many ways the odd philosopher out in the Popkinian emphasis on the skeptical strand in the history of philosophy. This alone is enough to make Popkin's Spinoza something of a paradox. But there are further paradoxes in the Popkinian account: Spinoza the "super-rationalist" indebted to kabbalism; a Jewish thinker to be understood in terms of Christian thought; a serious bible-scholar who destroyed the truth claims of religion. To most modern readers these appear irreconcilable contradictions, best avoided.⁶ To Richard Popkin, the seeming contradictions were a challenge. He sought to understand the basis of the claims about his subject and to understand how they interconnect. This was not the result of uncritical credulity, nor an attempt to reconcile interpreters. Rather, it was the outcome of a thorough study of Spinoza's life and work. It also, as I shall argue a little later, owed not a little to Popkin's own skepticism. In the final analysis, these disparate aspects of Spinoza hang together – the light Popkin sheds on Spinoza by exploring these apparently disparate strands vindicates his approach.

Spinoza first figures in Popkin's published writings in 1979, with the first expanded edition of his *History of Scepticism*. The extended chronological scope of the study is reflected in its full title: *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Spinoza continued to occupy a significant place in the Popkinian canon of interests, right up to the end of his publishing career: one of his last published books was his *Spinoza* for Oneworld Publications in 2004. This is not to say that Spinoza interested him *only* in the latter part of his career. In fact, Spinoza is present from the very beginning in his earliest work on the history of philosophy: it was on the skepticism of Pierre Bayle, that Popkin cut his historical teeth, and as I shall argue later, there is a direct link between Popkin's interest in Spinoza and his interest in Bayle. As Popkin's research developed, Spinoza came to occupy a more central place in Popkin's work: a chapter on Spinoza was added to the expanded edition of *The History of Scepticism* in 1979, and there is no question that Spinoza was a major interest during the remainder of Popkin's life. From the time when the chapter on Spinoza was added to *The History of Scepticism*, Popkin's view of Spinoza remained

⁵Popkin, *History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 251.

⁶An exception is Margaret Wilson who acknowledges the combination of new and old traceable in Spinoza's philosophy. Nevertheless, she describes them as "bizarre," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 89.

essentially unchanged. Spinoza occupies a key place in *The History of Scepticism*, not because he was a paradigmatic skeptic or anti-skeptic, but because of his importance for understanding how skepticism itself transformed from being a tool of philosophical dialectic to acquiring its modern anti-religious signification. Spinoza's destruction of the scriptural basis of religious truth in *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, struck at the very roots of Christianity, especially Protestantism which had such a huge investment in scripture as the rule of faith. Spinoza the modern bible-critic is not directly part of the history of philosophical skepticism, but it was Spinoza's critique of the bible (by ruthless application of the critical tools of rational humanism) which produced this skeptical result. Although quickly branded an atheist, Spinoza appeared to be immune from skeptical attack. In essentials, the account of Spinoza in the *History of Scepticism* is retained in Popkin's last book on Spinoza. The main difference between the two studies is the amount of circumstantial detail about Spinoza's life, work and reputation that Popkin distilled into this last work. Although a slim volume, it is the product of half a lifetime's scholarship, its richness disproportionate to its brevity.

Spinoza was not just a continuous interest throughout Popkin's working life, but he is a key point of intersection for the many strands of Popkin's intellectual odyssey. So many of the areas of scholarship in which he distinguished himself come together in his work on Spinoza: the history of skepticism, the relationship of philosophy and religion, the history of Judaism, millenarianism, Jewish-Christian relations, bible scholarship. The book on Spinoza confirms that, far from being the odd-man-out of Popkin's philosophical and historical interests, Spinoza is emblematic of those interests. In fact, one of the few topics among Popkin's scholarly interests which has *no* direct link to Spinoza is Isaac Newton. Of course, Newton and Spinoza were in so many ways the polar opposites, not least in their attitude to scripture. Unlike Spinoza, Newton accepted the truth of revealed religion (even if he thought most religions got it wrong). Nevertheless, as Popkin recognised, despite their different assessments of both scripture and religious belief, both these topics are relevant of to the concerns of both men. This itself is an important point of interconnection between the two. Both were close students of the text of the bible, and for each, his conception of God was integrally linked to his understanding of the universe. This point of interconnection is the organising principle of *The Books of Scripture and the Books of Nature*, which Popkin edited with James Force, where Spinoza and Newton figure as twin poles of bible scholarship.⁷

⁷ *The Books of Scripture and the Books of Nature. Recent Essays on the Theology and Biblical Criticism in the Netherlands of Spinoza's Time and in the British Isles of Newton's Time* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994).

History of Philosophy

Popkin's Spinoza is the product of a particular way of investigating the history of thought. In important ways his study of Spinoza represents what Richard Popkin stood for as a historian of philosophy. As Allison Coudert explains in her broader discussion in this volume, Popkin was not the adherent of a narrowly defined method, but rather the product of a particular, twentieth-century intellectual tradition. In his approach to the philosophical history Popkin was certainly not a "method" man and he never formulated a methodology. Nevertheless, his approach to the subject had its methodological distinctiveness, in so far as it entailed particular kinds of question and a broad latitude in the kinds of materials he considered relevant to his enquiries. From the very beginning, Popkin made no assumptions about modernity or what makes philosophy interesting. He also refused to be strait-jacketed by prevailing historical models. For Popkin, the history of philosophy is more than the history of arguments, but requires close attention to the context in which those arguments were produced. To most historians of philosophy now, this seems obvious (for example, Dan Garber's trademark as a historian of philosophy is his insistence on the importance of context). But it is worth underlining the point that Popkin more than most has helped philosophers understand the importance of the non-philosophical context, especially since this was by no means obvious to all self-styled historians of philosophy when Popkin first started publishing in the late 1950s and early 1960s. One thing he understood clearly was that the limitations of the anachronistic rationalist-empiricist model of philosophical history dominant at the time he first started publishing. Endorsing the views of George Boas, he wrote in 1959,

It seems to me... that we have been shackled by a mythology about our philosophical heritage. The German historians of philosophy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century constructed the historical past of contemporary philosophy. They singled out the two great traditions before Kant, that of the British empiricists (Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) and that of the Continental rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Malebranche), with Kant as the synthesizer of the two. This scheme has had, and still has its great virtues... However, this scheme has had the vice of restricting the thinkers and issues that we consider. We gain in simplicity, but lose in richness and variety. More than that, why should we now be tied to the issues and thinking given us by German scholars of a century and a half ago, especially if fresh research indicates other lines of development?⁸

⁸R.H. Popkin, "Did Hume Ever Read Berkeley?" in Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego, CA: Austin Hill, 1980), 277–287, p. 286 (article first published in *Journal of Philosophy*, 56 (1959), 535–545.

The “richness and variety,” which attracted him to early modern philosophy was not just a matter of making border incursions across the rationalist-empiricist demarcation line in order to trace more accurate philosophical pedigrees. It also entailed crossing boundaries into non-philosophical domains. Popkin had a keen sense of the non-philosophical motivations of thinkers of the past, especially of the way their religious beliefs were integral to their thought and shaped their reception of the ideas of others. Although the relevance of religion is now taken for granted by most serious scholars of philosophical history, the point is worth emphasising since, at the time when Popkin entered the scholarly arena, philosophy, and, especially science, were assumed to be fundamentally secular, if not incompatible with religious belief. Furthermore, Popkin took a long view of philosophical history, in which he saw continuities between seventeenth- and even eighteenth-century philosophy going back to the Renaissance. This, too, is worth emphasising in view of standard treatments of Descartes as the first of the moderns, and the concomitant tendency to explain philosophical modernity in terms of rupture with philosophical tradition. Here, Popkin’s exposure to the methods of his teacher Paul Oscar Kristeller shows through, as it does in the essentially multi-disciplinary perspective he brought to the history of thought.

In enlarging the scope of his historical enquiry, Popkin’s purpose came to have more to do with trying to view early modern philosophy in contemporary terms, than simply with expanding the knowledge-base of what, today, constitutes philosophy. As Harry Bracken and Richard Watson observed in their obituary, Popkin spent so long absorbing early modern thinking and ideas that he would joke that he had come to think in seventeenth-century terms!⁹ Popkinian contextualisation in fact is not simply a matter of paying attention to the non-canonical texts of any individual philosopher. Nor is the contextualising philosophy merely a matter of supplying some background information about some of the contemporaries in a particular subject’s field, rather as one might put a frame round a portrait to set off the painting to advantage. The Popkin context is the painting itself, and the landscape he depicts is not one that dry rationalists are likely to recognise – as Susan James acknowledged in her warm appraisal of the infectious appeal of Popkin’s approach:

we are carried along by Richard Popkin’s boundless appetite for all that is liable to strike contemporary students of early modern philosophy as quaint or just plain crazy, by his invigorating insistence on the strangeness of our intellectual past.¹⁰

⁹*Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43.3 (2005), v.

¹⁰Susan James, review of *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (*Times Literary Supplement*, 1st Oct 1993, p. 24.)

To those more familiar with Popkin's universe than the readers whom Susan James was addressing, the strangeness is the other way round – the distorted perspective with which modern eyes view early modern thought. And nowhere is this better illustrated than in his work on Spinoza. And nowhere is this more useful than in understanding a philosopher who went to such lengths to cover his tracks.

Another aspect of Popkin's work as a historian of philosophy was collective – not in the sense that he directed specific projects, but in the sense that he master-minded co-operative scholarly ventures in order to pool a diversity of expertise and give it common focus. In later years Popkin extended his own multi-disciplinary reach by orchestrating a number of collective scholarly ventures that brought the expertise of others besides himself to bear on topics of common interest. A good number of these were particularly relevant to Spinoza: namely, *Menasseh ben Israel and his World*, edited with Yosef Kaplan; *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, edited with Gordon M. Wiener; *The Books of Scripture and the Books of Nature*, edited with James E. Force; *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free Thought in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe*, edited with Silvia Berti and Françoise Charles-Daubert.¹¹ Of course, Popkin, in his turn, drew on the scholarship of others, among whom particular mention might be made of Lesek Kolakowski, Yosef Kaplan, Henri Méchoulan and Jan van den Berg.

Within the broadly shared territory of Spinoza scholarship, a number of distinctive features make Popkin's study of Spinoza stand out from other studies. First of all, in his interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy, Popkin emphasises Spinoza's anti-skepticism. To interpret Spinoza as anti-skeptical was itself novel in the Spinoza scholarship, and is not a universally accepted even now.¹² Spinoza does not, after all, devote significant time and space to refuting skepticism. Popkin dubs him an "epistemological dogmatist" on the basis of 1 *Ethics*, a6 ("A true idea must correspond with that of which it is the idea") and 2 *Ethics*, p43 ("He who has a true idea, simultaneously knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing perceived").¹³ Since

¹¹ *Menasseh ben Israel and his World*, eds. Yosef Kaplan and Richard H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 1989); *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, edited with Gordon M. Wiener (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993); *The Books of Scripture and the Books of Nature* (cit. note 7 above), edited with James E. Force (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994); *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free Thought in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe*, edited with Silvia Berti and Françoise Charles-Daubert (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996).

¹² See, for example, Michael Ayers' review of *The History of Scepticism in British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2004.

¹³ Cited Popkin, *History of Scepticism* (2003), pp. 251 and 250, from the Shirley translation of *Ethica*.

“the very act of understanding as such makes one aware that he knows and knows that he knows,” Spinoza’s philosophy, therefore, entails “a genuinely anti-skeptical theory, trying to eradicate the possibility or meaningfulness of doubting or suspending judgment.”¹⁴ He thereby sidestepped the skeptical issues that pre-occupied Descartes and Montaigne. Furthermore, in Popkin’s analysis, Spinoza’s epistemological anti-skepticism supports his critique of religion (since dubbed religious skepticism) not simply in the obvious, general, sense that scriptural reading does not measure up to rational analysis, but also in the particular sense that doubt is the condition to which those who rely on scripture rather than reason are prone: “Scepticism is both possible and necessary if one does not have a true idea of God” – the true idea of God being not the God of the bible, but the God of the *Ethics*. In *The History of Scepticism*, Spinoza represents an important point in the development of religious skepticism.

Popkin’s approach to Spinoza is not purely philosophical. The second distinctive feature of Popkin’s treatment of Spinoza is his focus on religion – notwithstanding the destructive impact of Spinoza’s analysis of scripture. This aspect of his work is, of course, directly linked to his account of Spinoza’s skepticism. The religious context for Spinoza’s life and writing of course includes Spinoza’s Jewish origins, where Popkin is particularly alive to Spinoza’s Jewish heritage and, especially to his Marrano (“new” Christian) background. But he also examines the contemporary *Christian* context in which Spinoza lived and wrote. He did not confine himself to the biographical circumstance of Spinoza’s “exile” among the Dutch Christian community and his friendship with rational Christians like Adam Boreel and the Collegiants, but he explored the impact of the beliefs of the Christians with whom he had contact, including the millenarian interests his Christian friends and acquaintances. Above all, Popkin takes Spinoza’s bible scholarship seriously – in fact he was one of the first to give *Tractatus theologico-politicus* its due in the history of philosophy. As is evident from his study of the religious context of Spinoza’s thought, a third distinctive feature of Popkin’s study of Spinoza are the multiple perspectives he brings to his subject: along with philosophy he combines a number of disciplinary elements – for example Jewish studies, and seventeenth-century religious history. This enabled him to contribute immensely to the reconstruction of Spinoza’s intellectual milieu, peopling it with figures previously ignored, or unknown, such as Menasseh ben Israel, Orobio da Castro, Uriel da Costa, Isaac La Peyrère, Jacques Basnage, Henry

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 251.

Oldenburg, Margaret Fell, Samuel Fisher, Adam Boreel and Henry Morelli.¹⁵ As a result of his investigations, he disposes of some of the myths that have clouded assessments of Spinoza, e.g. the saintly Spinoza of the early biographies, or that the *herem* pronounced against him was part of a pattern of persecution of Spinoza by the Amsterdam Jewish community.

Such conclusions as these bespeak a strong measure of skepticism towards the established “facts” of history – very much the kind of skepticism that is an asset in good detective work. Viewed in chronological sequence Popkin’s researches have all the hallmarks of the professional sleuth, as he ferrets out more information about his subject (for example about Spinoza’s visit to the Prince de Condé, and on the so-called Three Imposters, on Spinoza’s contact with early Quakers).¹⁶ To this enterprise he brought that essential component of the detective’s mentality, a skeptical distance both from his subject and, especially, the opinions of others. The resulting open-mindedness towards possible connections enabled him to unearth new clues, for example on some of Spinoza’s Jewish links. He established that Spinoza’s acquaintance, the physician Henry Morelli, had a Sephardic background.

Spinoza and Bayle

Popkin’s scholarly career may have ended with Spinoza, but it began with that other *enfant terrible* of the seventeenth century, Pierre Bayle. However, his interest in both was not unconnected. Bayle is, arguably, a key figure for Popkin’s Spinoza, and recognition of this goes some way to explaining why Spinoza should figure in *The History of Scepticism*. Furthermore, many of the questions about Spinoza which he set out to answer – and his answers to them are neatly summarised in his last Spinoza book – originated with Pierre Bayle.

Already in the *History of Scepticism*, Popkin touched on Spinoza’s influence and reputation – endorsing the view that he was instrumental in setting

¹⁵Many of these figures were subjects of separate studies which of themselves constitute important ancillaries to his Spinoza project: “Spinoza and Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac La Peyrère,” *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 8 (1974): 59–63; “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam,” *Quaker History*, 73 (1984), 14–28; *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676). His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 1987); Popkin and Michael Signer, *Spinoza’s Earliest Publication? The Hebrew Translation of Margaret Fell’s a Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham Among the Jews* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987); “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers,” *Quaker History*, 73 (1956), pp. 142–128.

¹⁶“Serendipity at the Clark: Spinoza and the Prince of Condé,” *Clark Newsletter*, 10 (1986), pp. 4–7. Berti, Charles-Daubert, Popkin, *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free Thought*; Popkin, “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam;” Popkin and Signer, *Spinoza’s Earliest Publication?*

the agenda for Enlightenment hostility to religion. The only critic of Spinoza he discusses (in the final edition of the *History*) is Pierre Bayle, whose article "Spinoza" is one of the longest in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique and Critique*, and who was the only skeptic to attack Spinoza. At a conference in Mexico, in 1963, Popkin gave his assessment of Bayle's method that lays the groundbase for his subsequent treatment of Bayle:

Here [in *Zeno*], and in *Rorarius* and *Spinoza* and in other lengthy examinations of philosophical issues, Bayle is a philosopher's philosopher. He is prolix. He is precise and careful beyond measure. He explores problems minutely. Each step brilliantly leads to the next. Each dilemma forces the opponent into another and less resolvable one. Theory after theory is destroyed, ridiculed, and dissected, until the skeptical result emerges. Bayle leaves no bits or details aside. He wants no loopholes for his opponents to escape through. And, he wants, above all, to make sure that he cannot be accused of misrepresenting the problems or the theories he is dealing with.¹⁷

This excerpt shows that Bayle's philosophical deconstruction of philosophers and their systems impressed Popkin early on. What this passage doesn't show is that he was equally, perhaps more, impressed by the fact that Bayle seems not to have been able to destroy Spinoza's arguments by his usual skeptical method. In *Spinoza* he repeats the view stated in *The History of Scepticism* that every attempt by Bayle to understand Spinoza's philosophy ended in failure: in Popkin's *History*, Spinoza is the philosopher who found an answer to skepticism by, in effect, ignoring it. In the early *Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*, Spinoza omitted to comment on Descartes' methodological skepticism for arriving at truth, while in his mature philosophy, "there are no real sceptics, only ignoramuses."¹⁸ Spinoza's immunity to skeptical critique perhaps explains why Popkin didn't change his view of him as a "super-rationalist." Perhaps, too, Bayle's failure intrigued him sufficiently to enquire further into his account of Spinoza. He was certainly impressed by Bayle's efforts to establish the facts about Spinoza's life.

Bayle made a strenuous effort to find out the actual facts of Spinoza's life. He read a manuscript of an early biography that no longer exists, he questioned people who knew Spinoza, he challenged the hagiography that had grown up about Spinoza by questioning the so-called nobility of Spinoza's rejection of a proposal of a post at Hedelberg and his refusal to visit the prince of Condé.¹⁹

¹⁷R.H. Popkin, "Bayle and Hume," in *High Road to Pyrrhonism*, p. 153 (article first published in *Transactions of the XIIth International Congress of Philosophy*, 10 vols (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1964), 9: 317–327.

¹⁸*History of Scepticism* (2003), p. 251.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 298.

Even if Bayle was successful in tarnishing the hagiographical image of Spinoza deriving from his earliest biographers, his scrupulous historical investigations helped to build up a positive portrait of a man who led a commendably moral life, despite being (in Bayle's view) an atheist. The contrast between this and the hostility of Bayle's analysis of Spinoza's system, lead Popkin to wonder what was "the real message" of the article, "Spinoza." But this did not diminish his respect for Bayle's scholarship. On the contrary, many of Dick's productive lines of enquiry into Spinoza's life and philosophy follow Baylean leads: the story of his encounter with Condé, for example, and Spinoza's acquaintance Dr. Morelli (whom Popkin identified as a Sephardic Jew with links to English free-thinking circles). Another topic where Bayle was an important source is his account of the *herem* which ostracised Spinoza from Amsterdam Jewry: according to Bayle, this was pronounced only *after* Spinoza had left the Jewish community, and only *after* Spinoza himself had broken the tie. Bayle wrote that this alienation from Judaism was not sudden, but gradual ("Il ne s'aliéna ... que peu à peu de leur synagogue").²⁰ Bayle specifically mentions that he had researched this carefully, though without success ("J'en ai rechercher les circonstances, sans avoir pu les déterrer"), and he gives a privileged source for the information he has ("Tiré d'un Mémoire communiqué au Libraire").

In his own account of the excommunication of Spinoza, Popkin picked up on Bayle's report that Spinoza had discussed some of the views later expressed in the *Tracatus Theologico-Politicus* in an unpublished manuscript written in Spanish (a view supported by references to "le livre de Monsr. Van Til" and "Le Journal de Leipsic" of 1695). Popkin was under no illusions about the potential consequences of ostracism from the Jewish community in Amsterdam at this time (illustrated most painfully in the cases of Uriel da Costa and Juan de Prado), but he did not regard Spinoza as a victim of persecution. In his judgment, the available evidence did not point that way. And Bayle's account is one of the main sources on which he based his view. But he did not do so without, in his turn, trying to "déterrer" the reasons for the *herem*. Nor was he uncritical in his use of Bayle: he checked Bayle's sources, questioned some and found more. In his pursuit of information about Spinoza's life and opinions, Bayle was himself something of a seventeenth-century sleuth. Popkin follows this detective model of investigation. Like Bayle, he sought out original sources and documents. And like Bayle he brought into play his skepticism about received opinions – so much so, that he succeeded in putting paid to a good many of the "facts" about Spinoza on which Bayle had based his account.

²⁰ Bayle, *Dictionnaire Philosophique and Critique* (1740), 4: 255.

Popkin, like Bayle, could be ironic and also provocative. An example is his suggestion that this arch-rationalist may have owed something to Jewish kabbalism. Popkin opined that kabbalism is an important aspect of Spinoza's Jewish heritage which should be taken seriously.²¹ He contradicts Spinoza's own dismissal of the kabbalists as nonsense, noting that Spinoza did in fact acknowledge that he had read kabbalistic writings. He claimed, furthermore, that there are echoes of Abraham Cohen Herrera in Spinoza's work and that, "Spinoza, when looked at in terms of what he called the third kind of knowledge, can be read as a rational kabbalist shorn of its imagery and numerology."²² In the absence of firmer evidence, this is a reading of Spinoza that is easy to dismiss. Yet there are few philosophers with the breadth of reading who are in a position to mount a real challenge. It is easy to overlook the fact that Popkin himself did not reduce Spinozism to kabbalism – he merely observed that there appear to be similarities between them. In making his kabbalistical suggestion, Popkin was issuing a typically Popkinian challenge – a challenge to his readers' assumptions about philosophical compartmentalization, and a challenge to Spinoza scholars to explore more thoroughly the uncharted territory of the early-modern Jewish intellectual traditions of which Spinoza was heir.

Legacy

By comparison with the time when the first edition of *A History of Scepticism* appeared, nearly half a century ago, Spinoza studies have changed. It is now standard to treat *Tractatus theologico-politicus* as an integral and important part of Spinoza's *oeuvre*, and not just as an adjunct to his more serious philosophical thinking.²³ Spinoza's intellectual relationship both to his Jewish background and to seventeenth-century Holland are now a standard part of any account of his life and works. Richard Popkin contributed significantly, though not uniquely, to this shift. Others certainly played their part – for example Hubertus Hubbeling, K.O. Meinsma and, more recently, Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggeman, Theo Verbeek, Silvia Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert, Wiep van Bunge, and Stephen Nadler.²⁴ It is particularly the younger

²¹ R.H. Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?" in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lena Goodman (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1992).

²² R.H. Popkin, *Spinoza*, p. 83.

²³ See his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*.

²⁴ K.O. Meinsma, *Spinoza et son Cercle* (Paris: Vrin, 1983); Henry Méchoulan, *Amsterdam au temps de Spinoza: argent et liberté* (Paris: PUF, 1990); idem, *Être juif à Amsterdam au temps de Spinoza* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991); Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

generation of scholars who acknowledge the inspiration and encouragement of Richard Popkin. It is a paradox which Pierre Bayle would have appreciated that the defender of Spinoza as an arch rationalist should have done so much to restore Spinoza to his religious context. Popkin's Spinoza is more than an interpretation of an early modern philosopher. His investigations of Spinoza's life and work offered an approach to the history of philosophy, which was unquestionably fruitful, and will remain a benchmark for future generations of scholars. His statement of his views is often challenging – but challenging in the sense that they are an antidote to complacency about his subject. Richard Popkin wrote on Spinoza with insight and authority, but never claimed to have said the final word. He would have been the first to agree that, for all his investigations, Spinoza remains in many ways enigmatic and elusive. But Popkin's work has certainly added "richness and variety" to our knowledge and understanding of Spinoza and his philosophy.

4. ASSESSING THE WORK OF RICHARD H. POPKIN FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Peter K. J. Park

I met Dick and Julie Popkin in the spring of 1999, when I and other graduate students were enjoying a drink at UCLA's Faculty Club with Peter Reill. Dick Popkin rolled in on his motorized wheelchair. Julie followed behind. Peter invited them to join us. They pulled up to our table. Dick pulled up right next to me. It wasn't clear to me how well Dick could see. I had heard that his vision was very poor. However, it was absolutely clear that his attention was focused on the conversation. As I had very recently read *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, I wanted to talk about skepticism, but didn't quite know how to talk about it with the expert himself. What could I tell him that he didn't already know? I mentioned that some were studying skepticism in Asian philosophy. He responded that there was a conference in Israel recently taking up the subject. What didn't he already know?

In 2002–2003, I was at the dissertation stage of my studies at UCLA and was scheduled to teach an undergraduate seminar on the comparative history of skepticism in the spring term. It was also the year when I became one of Dick's research assistants. During my tenure as his assistant from October of 2002 to October of 2004, we worked a few hours every week on an anthology of skeptical philosophy, which was a collaboration with José Maia Neto, or on the new book project: a history of the reception of Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki's anti-Christian polemic, *Chizzuk Emunah*. On the two afternoons of the week when I worked with Dick at his home, our routine began with my reporting on what I found in the local research libraries or Dick's reporting on his investigative breakthrough during a prior evening. I sat myself in front of his computer to read incoming emails to him and to type out his replies. With the help of his assistants, he maintained a busy correspondence with many friends, scholars, and librarians in the U.S., Europe, South America, and Israel. Sometimes, our session began with catching up since the past week or discussing the day's political or family news. The conversation was infused with Dick's classic humor (it was classic to me). Other times, our workday began with an open-air lunch at Mort's (the deli restaurant around the corner from

the Popkin residence), where conversation and humor were aided by cabbage soup, corned beef, a garden burger (for me), and coffee. At Mort's or during our 4-o'clock break, Dick would recount an episode from his life in La Jolla, St. Louis, Iowa City, New York, Connecticut, or Amsterdam. Some of these stories were about his relationships with other famous philosophers, which helped me – a mere 30-something – to feel connected to the older (and passing) generation of American philosophers.

Early during my assistantship, I worked with Dick mainly on the skeptical anthology. When we needed a skeptical excerpt from a modern philosopher, Dick usually had a clear idea of which text, and sometimes also which part of the text, he wanted to excerpt from. Since Dick couldn't see well and was restricted in his movement, I was his eyes and legs. He directed me to the bookshelf or to the part of the house where the sought-after book could be found. I brought it back to the dining table (where we usually sat) and read to him the table of contents or searched in the index. In this manner we located the appropriate passages to excerpt. I then copied out the passages, sometimes manually and sometimes with a text-scanning program which visually impaired persons such as Dick used.

Later during my assistantship, Dick's attention turned toward the *Chizzuk Emunah* project. I know something of the background. Dick had attended a panel on the circulation of clandestine texts in the eighteenth century at the 2003 congress of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies held in Los Angeles. Dick must have said something to this panel about Jewish anti-Christian polemical texts. He mentioned that the panelists invited him to contribute a piece to be included in a joint publication.

We began work on the *Chizzuk Emunah* project by looking up Dick's old articles on the heretical Karaite Jews (including the rabbi who wrote the *Chizzuk Emunah*) and on Jewish-Christian relations in the early modern era. On his instructions, I read his old articles back to him. (I put on my best accent to read the one that was in French.) He then asked me to look up his articles on Menasseh ben Israel, Jacques Basnage, and related topics. Conveniently, off-prints of most of his articles were at arm's reach. He was refreshing his memory in preparation for the research and thinking about what would go into a new essay. On his instruction, I got on his computer and searched library catalogs. I then went to the UCLA Research and Clark Libraries and to the Hebrew Union College library to gather books or make notes. We requested other books through Inter-Library Loan. On Dick's instruction, I typed an email to Ulrich Johannes Schneider in Wolftenbüttel to ask him to look up a hard-to-find seventeenth-century book in the Herzog August Library. He replied with a report and arranged for Dick to receive a microfilm of the relevant pages of this book. When it arrived, I took it to the microfilm department at the Research Library and printed the document onto paper. When I returned to the Popkin dining

table, I spot-translated some of the passages of this German text for Dick. I then typed up Dick's (spoken) notes in a computer file. There was also an occasion when I typed out and sent a request to Sarah Hutton in London. Dick wanted to ask her to go to the British Library and look up the letters of a Christian missionary writing from his post in southern India. We had read in one account that the missionary complained in his letter that the *Chizzuk Emunah* had a great influence over Jews in the region. Sarah went to look and reported in an email what the Missionary Society of London archives held, but to pursue this line of the investigation would have required a research trip to London. I worked some hours reading through numerous secondary works and read some of their contents to Dick. We read selectively in order to conserve Dick's energy.

As with his other publications from late in his career, Dick wrote in his head. He worked from what I read to him out of books or computer files containing notes on books or articles that we assistants had typed up. During nights, Dick's mind would compose several paragraphs, and in the following session with his assistant, he would be ready to dictate them. I typed out a partial draft of his essay on the *Chizzuk Emunah* in early or mid-2004. I read the draft, or sections of it, back to him. He ordered changes. He dictated another section. In this manner and in the course of several weeks, he augmented and improved his manuscript. Dick passed away in April of 2005, before his essay, "Four Centuries of Influence: Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki's *Chizzuk Emunah*," appeared in print.¹

Even before I became his research assistant, I had a history with Richard H. Popkin. The remainder of this paper is a history of my own intellectual development combined with an account of Popkin's impact on history of philosophy scholarship. This will require me to take you to a region of academia not usually associated with Richard Popkin. It requires me to show you what has been happening in the field of Buddhist hermeneutics.

I entered Hampshire College in the fall of 1991 not completely sure what I wanted to study – I was 19 years old – but I was attracted to a course offered in the School of Cognitive Science.² Judging by the course title – "Convention, Knowledge, and Existence: European and Indo-Tibetan Perspectives" – I gathered that the course would consider philosophical topics from European and Asian perspectives. It was to be taught by Jay Garfield, an analytic philosopher who received his Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh, where Wilfrid Sellars was one of his teachers. Professor Garfield's interests, as listed in the course

¹ In Richard H. Popkin, *Disputing Christianity: The 400-Year-Old Debate over Rabbi Isaac Ben Abraham Troki's Classic Arguments* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2007).

² Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass., did not have a separate department for philosophy.

catalogue, were cognitive science, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, metaphysics, and epistemology. He had written a dissertation in cognitive science and the philosophy of mind, which he submitted in 1986. Then, at some point during the late 1980s, he encountered Buddhist philosophy. By the time I was a student in his course, Garfield had gone to India and had consulted with Tibetan Buddhist monks. He had begun to acquire reading ability in the Tibetan language and had started work on an English translation, with commentary, of the Tibetan version of the Sanskrit text *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way*) by Nāgārjuna, an Indian Buddhist monk who lived sometime between the second and third centuries.³ He was the founder of the Mādhyamika (“Middle Way”) school of Mahāyāna Buddhism.⁴ His corpus includes texts addressed to lay audiences, letters of advice to kings, and a set of metaphysical and epistemological treatises that form the foundations of an important Buddhist philosophical tradition.

Mūlamadhyamakakārikā is Nāgārjuna’s greatest work.⁵ It is a philosophical treatise in verse form. The text is divided into 27 chapters in which Nāgārjuna analyzes the aggregates that compose the self, the elements that compose the universe, the relation between substance and attribute, the nature of the self and subjective experience, the status of the external world, the relation of the self to objects, as well as central Buddhist tenets. Separate chapters are devoted to the analysis of motion, the senses, causation, essence, the self, time, and generation and destruction. However, the central topic of the text is *sūnyatā* (“emptiness”) – the Buddhist technical term for lack of independent existence, inherent existence, or essence in things. Over the centuries, this text has inspired a huge commentarial literature in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. Divergences in interpretation of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* often determine the split between major philosophical schools.⁶

³The title of the Tibetan text is *dBu-ma rtsa-ba shes-rab*. Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson give “circa 150–250 c.e.” as the time frame in which Nāgārjuna’s life fell (*The Buddhist Religion: An Historical Survey* [Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth, 1997], 88). More cautiously, Ian Mabbett places Nāgārjuna’s life between the first and fourth centuries (“The problem of the historical Nāgārjuna revisited,” in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 118:3 [July, 1998], 332ff).

⁴The Mahāyāna (“Greater Vehicle”) traditions of Buddhism have survived in Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan after dying out in India around the thirteenth century.

⁵In Sanskrit, *mūla* means “fundamental,” *madhya* means “middle,” *madhyamaka* is a superlative meaning “the radical middle,” and *karika* means “verse.”

⁶Jay L. Garfield, *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24–25. This volume contains reprints of Garfield’s articles and essays published between 1990 and 2003.

To us uninitiated students of either Western or Eastern philosophy, Garfield proposed to compare Western philosophical skepticism to what he considered to be the skeptical outlook of Mādhyamika philosophy. He assigned texts by Sextus Empiricus, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Saul Kripke's essay *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* so that we could discover what skepticism was. We learned that ancient skepticism was a practical-wisdom philosophy whose goal was imperturbability (*ataraxia*) and that the skeptic employed an array of arguments to confute all knowledge claims. At the same time, the Greek skeptic did not assert that the theories of the dogmatists were false. Rather, he withdrew from making any assertion about the world beyond what appeared to him to be the case. Regarding what the dogmatists asserted about the world, he suspended judgment.

I took delight in the mayhem that Sextus caused with his drawing of the distinction between appearances and reality, his arguments for the variability and disagreement among the appearances. All things, Sextus pointed out, were under dispute, while proofs were impossible and propositions based on a hypothetical inadmissible. Sextus showed that the dogmatists desperately needed a criterion of truth, but none was available. He made nonsense out of the physical notions of causes, bodies, and change so that in the end we had to admit that we did not apprehend these things. He also showed us that what we call the self was likewise impossible to apprehend. But Sextus claimed that this lack of certain knowledge did not paralyze the skeptics in life. He said they lived tranquilly with the appearances. In ordinary life, they were guided by nature and their feelings, the tradition of laws and customs, and the instruction of the arts. Professor Garfield was especially keen to emphasize the practicality of the skeptics.

Garfield's course was partly intended to show us that skepticism had not been refuted and continued to pose serious problems for dogmatic philosophers into modern times. We saw how the Anglo-Irish philosopher George Berkeley, who wrote in the early eighteenth century, brought out familiar skeptical arguments confuting the existence of an external world independent of perception. In Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, published in 1713, the character Hylas is forced to admit that he knows nothing of the external world and that all he ever sees is the world of appearance. I was incredulous, but I did understand that this was Pyrrhonian skepticism in the modern period. It never came up in class discussion that Berkeley had insisted he was not a skeptic!⁷

⁷Berkeley believed that he had found the solution to skepticism and that this solution lay in the distinction between things and ideas. He therefore denied this distinction, claiming that the world of perception is the real world.

Next we read parts of David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, a work published in 1739–1740. The discussion focused on Hume's analysis of personal identity and causation. We took Hume to be a perfect Pyrrhonist as he had much in common with the ancient followers of Pyrrho. He reduced the self, external objects, causes and effects to impressions and ideas with no necessary connection. But as an original thinker on these old topics, he added that custom, memory, and imagination lent constancy and coherence to the objects of our perception so that they seemed to have an independent and continual existence. But aside from this, his position regarding entities was the same as that of the skeptics. Garfield did not forget to emphasize that Hume also was not paralyzed by his skepticism: he dined, played backgammon, conversed, and made merry with his friends.⁸

It would not be until eight years later that I discovered that a large and rich historical literature on skepticism existed, beginning with Popkin's *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, which I read for the first time in March of 1999. I had gone through all four years of college and four additional years without knowing that *someone* decades ago had established that Hume was arguing from a Pyrrhonist position and that skepticism was a major issue in Berkeley's time. As I then learned, the philosopher and historian Popkin discovered in the 1950s that Berkeley had at his disposal Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* and that the bishop utilized skeptical arguments found in the articles "Pyrrho" and "Zeno of Elea" in that work.⁹ Popkin showed that Berkeley was, in the spirit of Malebranche, trying to rescue the existence of an external physical world from skeptical attack after recognizing the failure of the Cartesian demonstration for the same. In a 1952 article, Popkin showed that Hume was engaged in a real-life conversation with François Fénelon, Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay, Andrew Baxter, and Jean Pierre de Crousaz, who had all written answers to Pyrrhonism.¹⁰ I learned from reading *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* that Pyrrhonism was a

⁸David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London; New York: Penguin, 1984), 316. Hume continues, "Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life.... I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles."

⁹Richard H. Popkin, "Berkeley and Pyrrhonism," *The Review of Metaphysics* 5 (Dec. 1951): 223–246; reprinted in Richard H. Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego, Calif: Austin Hill, 1980), 297–318. The articles "Pyrrho" and "Zeno of Elea" provided Berkeley and, later, Hume with skeptical arguments for the non-reality of secondary as well as primary qualities of objects.

¹⁰Richard H. Popkin, "David Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy," *The Review of Metaphysics* 6 (Sept. 1952): 65–81; reprinted in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 133–147.

problem for European philosophers starting in the sixteenth century and that modern European philosophers have been greatly preoccupied with skepticism. Popkin began establishing this as early as 1953–1954 with a three-part article in *The Review of Metaphysics*, on “The Sceptical Crisis and the Rise of Modern Philosophy.”¹¹

Jay Garfield could thus take for granted that there was a long tradition of philosophical skepticism in the West, that Hume was a Pyrrhonist, and that Berkeley’s immaterialism was the result of a skeptical analysis. He took this for granted in the sense that the thing had been established. He did not need to review the evidence amassed through historical investigation, which placed the texts of Sextus Empiricus in the hands of modern European philosophers even prior to Descartes. In any case, for the analytic philosopher Garfield, the text-internal arguments of Hume were what mattered in identifying him as a Pyrrhonist. I wouldn’t learn who Pierre Bayle was until years later. I wouldn’t know who Richard Popkin was until years later.

Our survey of Western skepticism ended with Kripke’s essay, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, which appeared in 1982. In this well-regarded interpretation of the later Wittgenstein’s thought, the Austrian-born philosopher is characterized as a skeptic questioning whether the meaning of a word (and the truth of a sentence) can be verified by reference to an object or facts about the world. At one point in the essay, Kripke formulates Wittgenstein’s “sceptical paradox” in dramatic terms: “There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word.”¹² Kripke goes on to describe Wittgenstein’s “sceptical solution” to his skeptical paradox. The solution was to view the philosophical assumption that words correspond to extra-linguistic realities, and that *meaning* consists in this relation, as a confusion. If such a relation did obtain, a “private language” (a hypothetical situation in which a language is known to one person), instead of being impossible as Wittgenstein argued, would be possible. The meaning of a sentence is decided not on the basis of corresponding facts about the world, but on the basis of how the sentence is employed

¹¹Richard H. Popkin, “The Sceptical Crisis and the Rise of Modern Philosophy [Parts 1, 2, and 3],” *The Review of Metaphysics* 8 (1953–1954): 132–151, 307–333, and 499–510. More recently it has been suggested that Pyrrhonism may have caused concern among Church authorities already at the end of the fifteenth century; see Brian Copenhaver’s article “Doubt and Innovation in the Renaissance,” in Richard H. Popkin, ed., *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 316, and Richard H. Popkin, *History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), Ch. 2.

¹²Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 55.

by the community of language-speakers. Why did Kripke characterize this solution as a “sceptical solution”? Because he saw an analogy to the solutions offered by Berkeley and Hume to their own skeptical problems:¹³

What is a ‘sceptical’ solution? Call a proposed solution to a sceptical philosophical problem a *straight* solution if it shows that on closer examination the scepticism proves to be unwarranted; an elusive or complex argument proves the thesis the sceptic doubted. Descartes gave a ‘straight’ solution in this sense to his own philosophical doubts. An *a priori* justification of inductive reasoning, and an analysis of the causal relation as a genuine necessary connection or nexus between pairs of events, would be straight solutions of Hume’s problems of induction and causation, respectively. A *sceptical* solution of a sceptical philosophical problem begins on the contrary by conceding that the sceptic’s negative assertions are unanswerable. Nevertheless our ordinary practice or belief is justified because—contrary appearances notwithstanding—it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable. And much of the value of the sceptical argument consists precisely in the fact that he has shown that an ordinary practice, if it is to be defended at all, cannot be defended in a certain way. A sceptical solution may also involve—in the manner suggested above—a sceptical analysis or account of ordinary beliefs to rebut their *prima facie* reference to a metaphysical absurdity.¹⁴

Berkeley’s denial of the existence of matter, of objects independent of the mind did seem to defy common sense, but the bishop insisted that he was not attacking the common man’s belief in material objects. According to Kripke, Berkeley was instead attacking the theory that our knowledge of objects is derived from our sensory perception of objects in the external world. It is this philosophical view and not the common-sense belief in the existence of material objects that Berkeley argued was incoherent. Kripke explains, “Rather than repudiating common sense, [Berkeley] asserts that the conflict comes from a philosophical misinterpretation of common language – sometimes he adds that the misinterpretation is encouraged by the ‘superficial form’ of ordinary speech.... For Berkeley this philosophical strategy is central to his work.”¹⁵

¹³Kripke (p. 68) characterizes the skeptical solution in Hume with regard to causation: “After the sceptical argument has been seen to be unanswerable on its own terms, a sceptical solution is offered, containing all we can salvage of the notion of causation. It just is a feature of this analysis that causation makes no sense when applied to two isolated events, with the rest of the universe removed. Only inasmuch as these events are thought of as instances of event types related by a regularity can they be thought of as causally connected.”

¹⁴Kripke, 66–67.

¹⁵Kripke, 65.

Similarly, in *A Treatise of Human Understanding*, Hume analyzes common notions, such as causality, and arrives at paradoxes, but he denies that he is rejecting these common notions, which are, moreover, impossible to reject. “Asked whether he ‘be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain’, Hume’s reply was ‘that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person, was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion’.”¹⁶

In the 1980s, Kripke was not alone in interpreting Wittgenstein as a Pyrrhonian skeptic. In his book *Wittgenstein*, Robert J. Fogelin writes, “Setting aside questions of actual influence... what philosophical movement does Wittgenstein’s later philosophy most resemble? My answer is Pyrrhonian scepticism.”¹⁷ Fogelin noted that Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s private language argument is very similar to his own. He agreed with Kripke that “[t]he Pyrrhonists had no interest in challenging common beliefs modestly held.... Classical scepticism was not a call for the suspension of common belief, for it recognized that, for the most part, it is neither in our power to do so nor useful if it could be accomplished. Classical scepticism was a critique of philosophizing and the anxieties it generates.”¹⁸

It is important to note that Wittgenstein never accepted the label “skeptical” – indeed, he is supposed to have said some things against skepticism, as Kripke and Fogelin admit.¹⁹ Yet, these philosophers interpret Wittgenstein as a skeptic. How is this interpretation possible? Or, to think historically, how did this interpretation *become* possible? It became possible because Kripke and Fogelin already had a complete acquaintance with the Western skeptical tradition.

Modern skeptical philosophy, either Berkeley’s or Hume’s, was never one of Kripke’s areas of research, so far as I know, but he could rely on established knowledge. Modern skeptical philosophy has on the other hand been a research pursuit of Fogelin’s. He has written and edited books on Hume’s and Berkeley’s thought and has taken a “neo-Pyrrhonian” position on contemporary theories of knowledge and justification. Skepticism was not one of Garfield’s areas of research, although he greatly benefited from the scholarly research on and discussion of skepticism in recent decades, as I will soon show.

Garfield’s class then turned to the Buddhist philosophy. We students were in over our heads. Many of us had not recovered from reading Hume. We had to take it on faith that Hume was a master stylist of English. I had fallen behind

¹⁶ Kripke (p. 63) quoting Hume, in L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1888), 183.

¹⁷ Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (New York; London: Routledge, 1987), 226. Fogelin has also written on *Hume’s Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (New York; London: Routledge, 1985).

¹⁸ Fogelin, 233.

¹⁹ Kripke, 63; Fogelin, 226.

on the writing assignments. But there was no jumping overboard, no abandoning ship, since we knew we were approaching the climax of the course. We were now confronted with the terse and cryptic verses of an ancient Indian philosopher, who wrote in Sanskrit.

In this last segment of the course, we relied heavily on Professor Garfield. Indeed, more so than ever. At the very least we knew that we were looking for skepticism in Nāgārjuna's text *śūnyatāsaptati* (*Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*).²⁰ Garfield explained that Nāgārjuna, like Sextus, emphasized the therapeutic aim of their philosophy. Skepticism was good medicine – a metaphor used also by Sextus and Wittgenstein. In a 1990 article titled “Epochē and śūnyatā: Scepticism East and West,” Garfield writes,

[A]ll sceptical philosophers from Sextus and the historical Buddha to Wittgenstein and contemporary Mahayanists have regarded sceptical philosophy as a form of therapy: the goal is not simply the search for truth for its own sake, or the critical appraisal of arguments, or intellectual entertainment. The goal is rather to cure the philosopher of the confusion attendant upon the fundamental misconceptions underlying dogmatism ...²¹

Garfield points out further commonalities:

Nāgārjuna, like Western sceptics, systematically eschews the defense of positive metaphysical doctrines regarding the nature of things, arguing rather that any such positive thesis is incoherent and that, in the end, our conventions and our conceptual framework can never be justified by demonstrating their correspondence to an independent reality.²²

Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti [seventh-century commentator], like Western sceptics, are concerned to develop sceptical problems and sceptical solutions thereto regarding personal identity and the existence of the external world, the self, morality, and meaning.²³

But there is more. Similar to the situation of Western skepticism, Mādhyamika has been misinterpreted by its traditional opponents and, more recently, by Western scholars, as “a thoroughgoing nihilism about phenomena.” Garfield writes,

²⁰ Sonam Rinchen, Tenzin Dorjee, and David Ross Komito, *Nāgārjuna's Seventy Stanzas: A Buddhist Psychology of Emptiness* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1987).

²¹ Jay L. Garfield, “Epochē and śūnyatā: Scepticism East and West,” *Philosophy East and West* 40 (1990): 3, 285–307; reprinted in Garfield, *Empty Words*, 13.

²² Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlāmadhyamakakārikā*. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 88.

²³ Garfield, *Empty Words*, 5.

In this respect, *Mādhyamika* philosophy has suffered from the same fate as much Western sceptical philosophy, including that of the Pyrrhonians and of Hume and Wittgenstein, all of whom were at considerable pains to warn readers against interpreting them as denying the existence of ordinary entities, but all of whom have been repeatedly read as doing so.²⁴

Garfield was convinced that in Pyrrhonism and in *Mādhyamika* we were looking at the same outlook, same rejection of dogmatism, and same middle position.

Garfield believed that the comparative study of *Mādhyamika* and Pyrrhonism could clear up the obscurities of the one or the other. He noted that the Buddhists were “a bit more explicit about certain features of the sceptical method than their European counterparts”²⁵:

The ... Buddhists refer to their opponents as “extremists” connoting just about what Sextus has in mind when he refers to his opponents as “dogmatists.” They identify, for each philosophical problem subject to sceptical treatment, a reificationist and a nihilistic extreme.... Reificationism, in this philosophical taxonomy, asserts the ultimate reality of something whose reality ... the sceptic denies (for example, of material substance, of a persistent self, of an independent realm of mathematical or moral truth ... or of primitive semantic facts). Nihilism is the philosophical denial of the existence of that which—at least in some sense—clearly exists, or more accurately of the warrant of what are in fact clearly warranted claims. A nihilist hence might deny that any of our statements about external objects, about ourselves or our moral responsibility, or about the meanings of words are true or warranted, or that one can make sense of any of the practices associated with such beliefs.²⁶

According to the Buddhists, the “root delusion” and the main impediment to liberation from the suffering of cyclical existence is the ignorance of the true nature of things. “That delusion consists in confusing existence with essential existence and issues inevitably in one of the two extreme views – reification or nihilism.”²⁷ Garfield explains,

Reification is the root of grasping and craving and hence of all suffering. And it is perfectly natural, despite its incoherence. By understanding emptiness, Nāgārjuna intends one to break this habit and extirpate the root of suffering. But if in doing so one falls into the abyss of nihilism, nothing is achieved. For then action itself is impossible and senseless, and one’s realization [through spiritual practice] amounts to nothing.²⁸

²⁴ Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 300.

²⁵ Garfield, *Empty Words*, 5.

²⁶ Garfield, *Empty Words*, 6.

²⁷ Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 236–237.

²⁸ Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 314.

To counter reification the Buddhists teach that all phenomena are empty, but then to counter nihilism, they teach that phenomena are conventionally real. It is only through extensive meditation on the emptiness of phenomena and on the nature of this emptiness that liberation is attained.

Garfield's commentary and translation of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* appeared in 1995 with the title *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*.²⁹ By this time, the comparative study of Mādhyamika and the philosophy of Wittgenstein had entered its fourth decade. Just as the interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought benefited from the post-war research on skepticism (beginning with Popkin's work in the early 1950s), the interpretation of Mādhyamika philosophy benefited from contemporaneous advances in Wittgenstein studies. Andrew P. Tuck offers an account of the impact of Wittgenstein studies on the interpretation of Mādhyamika:

As soon as terms such as “language game,” “family resemblance,” “private language,” “form of life,” and “ordinary language” started to filter into the conversations of students of Indian philosophy, Nāgārjuna's name was immediately, and repeatedly, linked with Wittgenstein's[A] new generation of scholars began to read his *Mādhyamakakārikā* as if it were an explanatory gloss on [Wittgenstein's] *Philosophical Investigations*. In many cases, Wittgenstein's remarks also began to be interpreted as if he might have been a Mādhyamika Buddhist.³⁰

Tuck continues,

The “mutual interdependence” of all reality, the nonreality of isolated particulars (“atomic facts”), the unreliability of any and all types of linguistic constructs for precisely representing the world—these most troubling and slippery of Nāgārjuna's positions—suddenly begin to make sense (and more importantly, sound familiar) to the younger scholars who had read as much of Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, Sellars, and Kuhn as they had of Russell and Ayer.³¹

According to Tuck, the earliest and most influential proponent of a Wittgensteinian interpretation of Mādhyamika was Frederick Streng.³² In *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (1967), Streng uses a description of Wittgensteinian language philosophy to explicate the Buddhist philosopher:

Nāgārjuna's use of words for articulating Ultimate Truth would find champions in contemporary philosophers of the language analysis school.... Words

²⁹ Full citation at note 22.

³⁰ Andrew P. Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 75.

³¹ Tuck, 76.

³² Tuck, 79.

and expressions-patterns are simply practical tools of human life, which *in themselves* do not carry intrinsic meaning and do not necessarily have meaning by referring to something outside the language system. Wittgenstein suggests that language is like a game, and the meaning of a word or phrase depends on the “rules” which one learns “to play this game.” ... Throughout the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argues that metaphysical inferences are simply fabrications based on a misconceived notion about how meaning is available. The proper role of philosophy is to clarify the use of words as they are used in specific contexts rather than build “castles in the air.” ... In a manner similar to the contemporary language analyst, Nāgārjuna denies that all words gain their meaning by referring to something outside of the language system; he maintains that the relationship between words in a statement (e.g., subject and predicate; the person acting, the action, and the object acted upon) are only of practical value and not indicative of ontological status.³³

Tuck comments on Streng: “For the first time Mādhyamika was being read as a metaphilosophical critique of the language of philosophy.”³⁴

Streng was followed by several others offering Wittgensteinian interpretations of Mādhyamika with titles such as *Wittgenstein and Buddhism* (1977), “Nāgārjuna and Wittgenstein on Error” (1981), “Philosophical Nonegocentrism in Wittgenstein and Candrakīrti in their Treatment of the Private Language Problem” (1980), and “Wittgenstein and Nāgārjuna’s Paradox” (1985).³⁵ The third article listed is by Robert Thurman, who has interpreted Nāgārjuna as arguing for the conventionality of language. To support this reading of Nāgārjuna, Thurman resorted to extensive quotations from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* and *The Blue and Brown Books*.³⁶

³³ Frederick Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville, TN; New York: Abingdon, 1967), 139–141.

³⁴ Tuck, 80.

³⁵ Chris Gudmunsen, *Wittgenstein and Buddhism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Nathan Katz, “Nāgārjuna and Wittgenstein on Error,” in Katz, ed., *Buddhist and Western Philosophy* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1981); Robert Thurman, “Philosophical Nonegocentrism in Wittgenstein and Candrakīrti in their Treatment of the Private Language Problem,” *Philosophy East and West* 30 (1980):3, 321–337; T. Anderson, “Wittgenstein and Nāgārjuna’s Paradox,” *Philosophy East and West* 35 (1985):2, 157–170. Other studies applying Wittgensteinian insights to the interpretation of Mādhyamika are I. Waldo, “Nāgārjuna and Analytic Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West* 25 (1975):3, 287–298; I. Waldo, “Nāgārjuna and Analytic Philosophy II,” *Philosophy East and West* 28 (1978):3, 281–290; C. W. Huntington, “A Non-Referential View of Language and Conceptual Thought in the Work of Tsong Kha-Pa,” *Philosophy East and West* 33 (1983):4, 325–340; and C. W. Huntington, *The Emptiness of Emptiness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).

³⁶ Tuck, 87.

Garfield acknowledged that there was a trend in Buddhist hermeneutics of comparing *Philosophical Investigations* to Mādhyamika. He said he differed only in that he would add the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to those works by Wittgenstein that were useful to the interpretation of Mādhyamika.³⁷

Garfield also was not the first to make comparisons between Pyrrhonism and Mādhyamika. In 1982, Thomas McEvelley, an art historian at Rice University, published a groundbreaking article on “Pyrrhonism and Mādhyamika.”³⁸ Another skeptical, yet divergent interpretation is presented by Jonardon Ganeri.³⁹ However, critics of the skeptical interpretation of Mādhyamika have addressed themselves mainly to Garfield. One such critic, David F. Burton, disagreed with the characterization of Nāgārjuna as a skeptic because, as he saw it, the Mādhyamika philosopher did advance specific truth-claims.⁴⁰ Burton also claimed that while Nāgārjuna did not intend for those claims to be nihilist, his arguments nonetheless unwittingly entail nihilistic conclusions. Another specialist, Dan Arnold, while noting that Burton seemed to presuppose a modern or “dogmatic” sense of skepticism, still agreed with him that Nāgārjuna was not aptly characterized as a “skeptic” because the Mādhyamika philosopher did make important truth-claims – that entities are empty, that they are dependently co-arisen, and that emptiness is itself empty.⁴¹ Against the Pyrrhonian interpretation, according to which Nāgārjuna does not offer any claim or thesis whatsoever, Arnold interprets Mādhyamika as presenting metaphysical arguments on the model of Kant’s transcendental arguments.⁴²

McEvelley gives an extended treatment of the historical and philosophical connections between Pyrrhonism and Mādhyamika in his work of thirty-years-making, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (2002).⁴³ Only an author with training in classics and Indology (Sanskrit studies) and expertise in Greek and Indian philosophies and histories could have produced such a work. McEvelley’s book deals with the question, how indebted to each other are Greece and India for their philosophies?

³⁷ Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 114n26.

³⁸ Thomas McEvelley, “Pyrrhonism and Mādhyamika,” in *Philosophy East and West* 32 (1982):1, 3–35

³⁹ Jonardon Ganeri, *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁴⁰ David F. Burton, *Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nāgārjuna’s Philosophy* (London: Curzon, 1999) Ch. 2: “Nāgārjuna and Scepticism.”

⁴¹ Dan Arnold, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 131–142.

⁴² Arnold, 139–142.

⁴³ Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth, 2002).

He answers with an encyclopedic array of textual and archaeological evidence in support of extensive intellectual contact and diffusion, going in both directions, between the eastern Mediterranean and South Asia.

A quarter of the book (Chapters 14–18) is devoted to a detailed comparison of Pyrrhonism and Mādhyamika and to the defense of McEvilley’s historical thesis. Early on in his analysis, the author points out what others have already underlined – that both schools devoted their philosophical activity to undermining the doctrines of other schools and that neither was a system of positive doctrines.⁴⁴ Juxtaposing a series of skeptical and Buddhist quotations, McEvilley contends that the skeptic’s goal is not significantly different from the Buddhist’s. If tranquility (*ataraxia*) in the skeptic follows on non-assertion (*aphasia*) and the suspension of judgment (*epochē*), this is not very different from the mental state that follows on the pacification of concepts and the subduing of desire and aversion, which is the goal of Mādhyamika.⁴⁵ McEvilley notes that the Mādhyamika philosopher Candrakīrti equated this pacification with *nirvāṇa*.⁴⁶

Not only did the skeptics and the Mādhyamikas speak of the same goal, they also shared the same dialectic. McEvilley shows that both Sextus and Nāgārjuna employed the dichotomy-and-dilemma *reductio ad absurdum*, the method of *regressus ad infinitum*, and the denial of partial identity (or the same/not-same dichotomy or disjunctive *modus tollens*) in arguments against origination, destruction, motion, change, potentiality, plurality, and more.⁴⁷ Both Sextus and Nāgārjuna, employing the same/not-same dichotomy, arrived at identical critiques of causality.⁴⁸ Both analyzed cause and effect in terms of temporal succession, concluding that a cause and its effect can exist neither simultaneously nor successively. Finally, both critiques of causality are supported by the infinite regress argument against origination, duration, destruction, and motion, but most powerful is the critique of relational existence, which is “sufficient to undermine any and all assertions about reality.”⁴⁹

Like Garfield and others, McEvilley sees another parallel in the self-canceling effect of skeptical and Mādhyamika dialectic.⁵⁰ Is this not the effect of the emptiness of emptiness doctrine? Is this not the effect of Sextus’s statement that the skeptical mottoes (“No more this than that,” “I suspend judgment,”

⁴⁴ McEvilley, 455–456.

⁴⁵ McEvilley, 456.

⁴⁶ McEvilley, 477.

⁴⁷ McEvilley, 420, 422, 459.

⁴⁸ McEvilley, 459.

⁴⁹ McEvilley, 466, 469.

⁵⁰ McEvilley, 469–473.

“Everything is inapprehensible,” “To every argument an equal argument is opposed”) apply to themselves? Candrakīrti compared Mādhyamika to a medicine that dissolves itself after curing the disease and to a fire which, after the fuel is used up, dies out. Sextus compared the argument for the non-existence of proof to a ladder which, after being used to ascend to a high place, can be kicked away.⁵¹ Similarly, Wittgenstein compared his propositions to a ladder that one uses to climb up on. When one comes to see the world rightly, the ladder may be discarded. A similar meaning is disclosed by the Buddhist imagery of the *Dharma* as a raft, which is thrown away after one reaches the other shore. Nāgārjuna likened his treatise, *Refutation of All Contests*, to a phantom destroying another phantom.⁵² The point seems to be that neither skepticism nor Mādhyamika is a (negative dogmatic) system to be inserted in the place of positive philosophical systems.

The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way received favorable reviews. The skeptical interpretation of Nāgārjuna has established itself as somewhat definitive, due in large part to Garfield’s work. His interpretation also has the virtue of being consistent with the dominant commentarial tradition in Tibet and among the Tibetan exile community. As he states in his preface, Garfield hoped that his translation and commentary would increase Western philosophers’ interest in Buddhist philosophy. He should be glad. For he has succeeded. If you google Nāgārjuna and Sextus Empiricus today, you will find that they are taught along side each other in a number of philosophy departments in the U.S., especially those departments where philosophy and religious studies are combined.

For the analytic philosopher Garfield, skepticism was a bridge between Western philosophy and Buddhism. Garfield, who is currently Doris Silbert Professor in the Humanities and Professor of Philosophy at Smith College, continues to produce translations (in collaboration with Tibetan scholars) and publish articles on Buddhist philosophical topics. He regularly travels to India and teaches Western philosophy to Tibetan students, and hosts Tibetan monks who come to the United States. Skepticism – what it is and what it has meant for modern Western philosophers – was the crucial insight giving Garfield an interpretive foothold on the philosophy of the Middle Way.

In this essay I have recounted how I became haunted by skepticism (or Buddhism?) as a 19-year-old. When I met Dick, I had more in common with him – I had been influenced more by him than he could ever realize. When we were working on the skeptical anthology, skepticism naturally came up in our conversation all the time, but not Buddhism. Then, one day Dick

⁵¹ McEvelley, 470.

⁵² McEvelley, 470–471.

told me that his grandson Gabriel expressed an interest in Buddhism. I could sense from the way he told this that he was a little dismayed. It was not the right time to tell Dick about Nāgārjuna.

The right time came at the end of spring term 2003. I had finished teaching my first seminar on skepticism. I sent Dick electronic versions of two papers written by students in that seminar. One of them was a comparative analysis of Pyrrhonism and Mādhyamika, executed, I thought, with considerable philosophical acumen. He asked his other assistant, Stephanie Chasen, to read this paper to him. When I came around to the Popkin dining table again, Dick wanted to hear more about Nāgārjuna. During that conversation, I could see his mind working to figure out how skeptical philosophy could have been transmitted between the West and India in those ancient times. As I was not aware yet of McEvelley's work, I could not tell Dick that this scholar seriously doubted the belief that Pyrrho, who accompanied Alexander the Great on his campaigns in the East, derived his philosophical views from the sages of India. Because "the essentials of Pyrrhonism were already to be found among the followers of Socrates and Democritus in the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C., well before Alexander's visit to India," McEvelley thought that the Greek dialectic was probably carried to India in the period after Alexander's conquest, perhaps even on the trading ships which sailed between the Greek and Roman empires and India.⁵³

Dick was not a student of Buddhism. It was too late in his life to truly immerse himself in a completely new subject. Nevertheless, in this paper I have tried to trace some of the subtle channels through which Popkin's monumental achievement in the history of skepticism has exerted its influence.

⁵³McEvelley, 495, 500.

5. GILLES DELEUZE: FROM HUME TO SPINOZA (AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE GOOD ON A POPKIN REQUEST)

Knox Peden

Richard Popkin taught intellectual historians that context matters, and that context changes. More to the point, context matters precisely because it is always changing. So, in an effort to pay homage to this methodological disposition, let us begin with some comments about the original, shifting context of this Popkin-inspired inquiry into the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and its debts to Hume and Spinoza, respectively. In the academic year of 2004–2005, the context of my work, a dissertation on Spinoza and twentieth-century French thought, underwent a shift of its own when developments in my personal life brought me away from my home campus Berkeley to Los Angeles for my first year of dissertation work in earnest. During that year, I had the opportunity to work as Popkin's research assistant to supplement my fellowship stipend. Fresh off my Ph.D. exams, I was familiar with Popkin's work on skepticism, and I also knew that in recent years he had devoted serious attention to Spinoza. When I read the notice from UCLA's history department that Popkin was in need of an assistant I sent the revered scholar an eager email, outlining the details of my own work and of course its indebtedness to his. It is only now, when my debts to Popkin are increasingly apparent as I pursue my own research, that I can admit to what was merely nervous exaggeration at the time. As luck would have it, in January 2005 Popkin responded to my message with the news that he was glad to meet me and that he looked forward to working out some sort of research assistance arrangement.

Sadly, the arrangement turned out to be brief, but every moment was delightful and invigorating for me as I had the opportunity first hand to experience this mind in action. I worked for Popkin four afternoons per week, from January until his death in April of that year. The primary effort and discussion centered on the object of his research at that moment, namely the *Chissuk Emunah* of Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki and the geographically wide-ranging legacy of this critique of Christianity through the Enlightenment and into the late nineteenth century. Inevitably, however,

our conversations steered far and wide over the history of philosophy. They usually found their way to Spinoza, and turned to my insistent efforts to have Popkin understand what was historically specific and significant about Spinoza's importance for recent French thought, ranging from certain thinkers in mathematics and philosophy of science, such as Jean Cavaillès, to the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser to, of course, Gilles Deleuze. Popkin would listen to my arguments, and he would check my naïveté often. My efforts to lump various thinkers together under simple formulas always met resistance. He often confounded my expectations for a sympathetic ear when he pressed me on essential questions, asking me why I found Spinoza so attractive and why I thought so many in France did as well. With quick recourse to a hypothesis that I have since come to view as inadequate, I told him that, for me personally as for some of the subjects of my dissertation, it was a reaction against the Hegelian pretension that history is necessarily going somewhere, and, more disconcertingly, that that direction might be discernable to the human intellect. Popkin grunted, and in a phrase I will always remember, he said: "You may not be certain that it's going somewhere, but you can't be certain that it's *not* going somewhere either." Popkin changed my understanding of Spinoza profoundly, and he altered the course of my research by teaching me that, well beyond differences among various thinkers, even the thought of Spinoza himself could not be reduced to a single coherent formula. Popkin's ability to remain committed to a guiding thread in his research – e.g., the challenge of skepticism – yet all the while to remain open to the historical record as a mitigating force on his own hypothesis has served as an inspiration for me in my own research into the persistence of rationalism in twentieth-century French thought. This Popkin stance, this refusal to whitewash, will away, or assimilate apparent tensions and contradictions is captured clearly in his chapter title for Spinoza in *The History of Scepticism*, "Spinoza's Scepticism and Antisepticism."

Spinoza was a hot topic for us, always, and we discussed various readings of his philosophy. Popkin did not express much interest in the Althusserian version of Spinoza, but he did evince a growing interest in Deleuze. I had thought Popkin might find something stimulating in Deleuze, the famed philosopher of difference, who evidently refused the limits of identity to celebrate a sort of pure difference in philosophical work. Over the course of our time together, I would bring in copies of Deleuze's books on Spinoza and read aloud to Popkin. He would close his eyes and listen intently, and after a page or two, he would begin shaking his head, waving his arms, and, tongue between his lips, he would produce a violent raspberry sound. I would take this as my cue that our Deleuze reading was finished for the day, and we should perhaps move on to less obscure matters, such as a sixteenth-century Lithuanian Caraites' critique of Christianity. One day, however, I mentioned to Popkin that Deleuze's

first major work was on David Hume, and that it was published in 1953, well before Deleuze gained any notoriety in France or abroad. I wasn't sure this comment registered, but the next day, when I showed up for work, Popkin asked me about it. He said he was in France in the early 1950s, the period in his own life when he was most focused on Hume and his Pyrrhonism, and that he recalled Hume receiving scant attention in France. He was curious to know how Deleuze came to Hume, and more to the point, if and how Deleuze's interest in and work on Hume was connected with the later importance he attached to Spinoza, two very different philosophers, united, in Popkin's view, primarily if not only by their critique of revealed religion.¹ I fumbled my answer to this question at the time, floundering as I was in the initial stages of my research. The paper that follows is my attempt to make good on this request. The method of proceeding, and the tentative quality of the arguments, are themselves to be read as my own personal tribute to Richard Popkin, and his influence on me at a critical stage in my own education.

The importance attached to Deleuze's work in certain quarters of Anglophone and French academia is matched by the idiosyncrasy of his thought, and the difficulty we have placing it in the trajectories of recent French intellectual history. The temptation, ever since Deleuze burst onto the Anglophone scene with the translation of his "Capitalism and Schizophrenia" volumes co-authored with Félix Guattari, has been to group Deleuze under the heading of "poststructuralism."² Aside from the fact that this term is an Anglophone invention more than a French product, it is misleading in Deleuze's case for two main reasons. First, although his book *The Logic of Sense*, first published in 1969, involved a sustained interrogation of certain concepts prevalent in the French vogue of structuralism – such as genesis, relation,

¹For Popkin's inquiry into the relationship between Hume and Spinoza, see Richard Popkin, "Hume and Spinoza," *Hume Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, November 1979, pp. 65–93. For other useful attempts to gauge the historical utility of reading these two philosophers in dialogue, see the following three essays in Genevieve Lloyd, ed., *Spinoza: Critical Assessments*, Vol. IV: "The Reception and Influence of Spinoza's philosophy" (London and New York: Routledge, 2001): Chapter 8, Wim Klever, "Hume Contra Spinoza?," pp. 138–153 (first published: *Hume Studies* 16, 1990: 89–105); Chapter 9, Wim Klever, "More About Hume's Debt to Spinoza," pp. 154–171 (first published: *Hume Studies* 19, 1993 55–74); and, Chapter 10, Annette C. Baier, "David Hume, Spinozist," pp. 172–187 (first published: *Hume Studies* 19, 1993: 237–252). Klever, in particular, positions his interpretation with regard to Popkin's.

²The two volumes are Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) (first published in English, by Viking Penguin, 1977), and Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

and of course the concept of structure itself – Deleuze’s interlocutors in this study ranged from the Stoics to Lewis Carroll to Edmund Husserl.³ With the exception of Jacques Lacan, the local manifestations of French structuralism do not appear to have exercised Deleuze very much, although he was largely sympathetic to the emphasis on the category of relation within structuralist thought.⁴ Second, unlike so many so-called poststructuralists, not to mention existentialists before him, Deleuze did not devote much energy to Martin Heidegger’s critique of epistemology; in fact he once likened Heidegger’s thought to the ‘pataphysics of Alfred Jarry.’⁵ As Deleuze greatly privileged play over anguish, it should come as no surprise to note that Deleuze preferred the latter.

It is not least of the ironies of Deleuze’s thought that for all of his efforts to demarcate philosophy as a mode of thought distinct from others, knowledge as such was never Deleuze’s primary concern.⁶ Deleuze belongs in the school of modern vitalist philosophers that privileges life against knowledge, that is critical of epistemology as first philosophy and any attempt to achieve “perfect knowledge” as a philosophical goal. This is not to say that Deleuze did not concern himself with literary matters, or mine historical and anthropological volumes in his efforts to produce new philosophical concepts.⁷ To be sure, Deleuze displayed a wide breadth of reading in all of his works, and the historical and anthropological evidence presented, for example, in *A Thousand Plateaus* has come under heavy fire from critics of the co-optation of such Deleuzian concepts as “nomad,” “line of flight,” and “rhizome,” in contemporary

³Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, trans., Constantin Boundas, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁴See his essay, “A quoi reconnaît-on le structuralisme?” in Gilles Deleuze, *L’Île Déserte et autres textes* David Lapoujade, ed. (Paris: Éditions du Minuit, 2002), pp. 238–269. The essay is a reprint of one of Deleuze’s contributions to François Châtelet, ed., *Histoire de la philosophie, t. VIII: le XXème siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1972), pp. 299–335. The other contribution to this project was an entry on Hume, about which see below.

⁵Gilles Deleuze, *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), Chapter 11, “An Unrecognized Precursor to Heidegger: Alfred Jarry,” pp. 91–98.

⁶For the fullest explication of the claim that philosophy entails the production of concepts as a means of confronting chaos, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

⁷For a useful guide to the sheer breadth of Deleuze’s interests, see Stéfan Leclercq, ed., *Aux sources de la pensée de Gilles Deleuze 1* (Paris: Vrin, 2005) (Mons, Belgium: Éditions Sils Maria). The entries cover cinema, architecture, and various philosophers and writers. Ordered alphabetically, they range from “Anaximandre” to “Jacob von Uexküll.”

postcolonial studies.⁸ It is no secret that Deleuze played fast and loose with artifacts of cultural production; but for a philosopher contemptuous of any “representational” model of philosophy, the viability or suitability of his sources was hardly a cause for concern. More important were the effects produced by encounters with such sources rather than any naïve correspondence with historical truth, or any representational accuracy. Never to be restrained by anything as trifling as context, what mattered was creation itself, the inexhaustible production of the new against staid theoretical limits.

This creative approach did not produce itself *ex nihilo*, however. Deleuze once claimed to be the last of a generation “bludgeoned to death,” by the history of philosophy in official French education, the effect of which was to remind students that nothing original need or could be said that had not been said before.⁹ The first fifteen years of Deleuze’s career were devoted to the production of a uniquely Deleuzian, seditious history of philosophy, a highly selective reading of a select group of philosophers who were critical of the “negative,” who cultivated joy and privileged the creative force of life against the closure and strictures of modern knowledge claims.¹⁰ In a characteristically transgressive metaphor, Deleuze once responded to a harsh critic that he conceived of his history of philosophy as a bizarre love affair, in which his philosophical lovers were bugged to produce a monstrous offspring that was at once his product and that of the philosopher in question.¹¹ Despite the rather crude evocation of a Hegelian model here, probably intentional, Deleuze’s *bête noire* in this life-long project was indeed Hegel, an ascendant figure in French philosophy as Deleuze was coming of age. He distrusted Hegel’s dialectic of negation, which did away with the excess that could not be included in the advance of humanity’s knowledge of itself and the world. Of course, a true Hegelian would say it is all included, nothing is left behind in the synthesis; but Deleuze did not see it that way. In the act of sublimation, with its metaphorical movement upward and its claims to transcendence,

⁸See in particular the critique by Christopher L. Miller in his book *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Chapter 6 “Beyond Identity: the Postidentitarian Predicament in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*,” pp. 171–209, and the ensuing quarrel with the Deleuze scholar Eugene W. Holland in the pages of *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, 2003, nos. 1, 3, and 4.

⁹Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 5.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 6. For an analysis of Deleuze’s take on the history of philosophy, see Manola Antonioli, *Deleuze et l’histoire de la philosophie (ou de la philosophie comme science-fiction)* (Paris: Kimé, 1999).

¹¹Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 6.

Deleuze saw limitation and foreclosure, the sacrifice of immanent play to the demands of conceptual labor. Even worse, for all of its talk of difference, Deleuze saw Hegel's logic, and philosophy more generally, tied to a limited notion of identity, which could not accept that identity was always fictive and always fleeting. Repetition of the same was never precisely that, because in the mere act of repetition the thing from before is no longer. Of course we can say $A = A$, as long as we note that the expression is analogical, that when we say that, we are saying two different A's. With this critique of Hegel in mind, we understand better the title Deleuze chose for the supreme statement of his own thought, one of his most notoriously esoteric works, his first attempt to elaborate a philosophy not beholden to the logic of identity, a book titled *Difference and Repetition*.¹²

The philosophers courted in Deleuze's historical critical project leading to this major work included his two key references for understanding temporality and repetition, Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche,¹³ but this phase of Deleuze's career is bookended by two figures who could not be further apart in the conventional history of philosophy, David Hume and Benedict de Spinoza, arch-empiricist and arch-rationalist. Deleuze passed the *agrégation* in philosophy in France in 1948, which was most likely where he first engaged seriously with Hume, a philosopher not foreign to this imposing state examination. Louis Althusser's biographer has noted that, indeed, Hume was a philosopher on the exam in which the 1947–1948 school year culminated.¹⁴ Popkin's recollections notwithstanding, there was an upsurge of published work on Hume in the early 1950s, which, following a bibliographical trend in twentieth-century France that Alan Schrift has aptly noted, can most probably be linked to Hume's presence on the

¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Paul Patton, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹³ The key works are Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1988), and Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Hugh Tomlinson, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁴ Yann Moulier Boutang, *Louis Althusser, une biographie: La formation du mythe, 1945–1956: ruptures et plis* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), p. 400. In a passage where he discusses Althusser's consideration of potential philosophers for his *Doctorat d'État*, Boutang writes: "In 1947, when he had the good fortune to meet the English historian Douglas Johnson during his two-year stay at the École (Normale Supérieure), [Althusser] had asked him for some "tips" on the British specialists on Hume, who was on the program that year, and who interested him as a possible subject" [my translation].

exam in 1948.¹⁵ At any rate, as noted before, Deleuze's first major work was on Hume, and that book, entitled *Empiricism and Subjectivity: an Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, was published in 1953.¹⁶ This is not to say that Deleuze published nothing prior to that year. Oddly enough, in my attempts to procure Deleuze's early works and papers while I was in Paris, I learned that Deleuze had a provision in his will that nothing prior to 1953 was to be included in the collection of his published works preserved at the Dominican library, the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir in the fourteenth arrondissement.¹⁷ It is ultimately not surprising that Deleuze's estate would be preserved by a theological library – more on that later – but more disconcerting for any Popkin-inspired investigation is why this limit imposed on his posthumous reception? No satisfactory explanations have been forthcoming in my own research on this question. Nonetheless, many of these early writings – the published ones at least – are still accessible at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Deleuze provided a preface for Diderot's *La Religieuse* in 1947, and introductory matter for an obscure work, *La Mathèse ou anarchie et hiérarchie de la science* by the nineteenth century doctor of romantic medicine Jean Malfatti de Montereccio.¹⁸ The spiritualist tendencies of this treatise make Deleuze's later untimely celebration of Bergson less surprising. Most notably, he assembled a group of texts to be included in a series designed for young philosophy students, the title of his assemblage paying tribute to his interest in Hume at the time, *Instincts et Institutions*.¹⁹

¹⁵In addition to Deleuze's work, cited and discussed below, see André-Louis Leroy, *David Hume* (Paris: PUF, 1953). For Schrift's argument that the institutional bases of recent French thought in such domains as the *agrégation* bore a determinantal influence on French philosophical trends, see the opening essay in his *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), Part 1, pp. 1–81. Schrift contends that the amount of effort put into the study of a given philosopher for the *agrégation* often led the students who sat that exam to produce a book on that thinker early in their careers.

¹⁶Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: an Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, Constantin V. Boundas, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

¹⁷Personal communication to the author from Stéfan Leclercq, 2 Feb. 2006.

¹⁸Denis Diderot, *La Religieuse*, introduction de Gilles Deleuze, texte intégral (Paris: Collection de l'île Saint-Louis, 1947), introduction pp. vii–xx; Jean Malfatti de Montereccio, *La Mathèse ou anarchie et hiérarchie de la science*, traduction de Christien Ostrowski, introduction de Gilles Deleuze (Paris: Editions du Griffon d'Or, 1946), pp. ix–xxiv. The introduction to the Malfatti volume has been translated into English by Robin Mackay and reproduced in the journal *Collapse*, Vol. 3 (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007), 141–155.

¹⁹Gilles Deleuze, textes choisis et présentés par, *Instincts et institutions* (collection: textes et documents philosophiques: collection dirigée par G. Canguilhem) (Paris: Hachette, 1953).

At this stage, I suspect mainly pride in this posthumous request, as there is nothing in these brief writings that compromises Deleuze's later, more mature philosophical contributions. If anything many of his concerns are already discernable in these early texts, from his praise for literature's positively mystifying aspects in his introduction of Diderot to the desire for a non-representational model of philosophy which marks Deleuze's account of Malfatti's preference for anarchy over hierarchy in the sciences.

In 1952, months before the publication of his own long essay on Hume, Deleuze published jointly with André Cresson a short book entitled, *David Hume: sa vie et son oeuvre* that contains in embryo many of the arguments that Deleuze would develop further in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*.²⁰ So what was Deleuze's take on Hume, this Scottish empiricist who barely had a foothold in a France where rationalism was battling it out with the alluring German import of phenomenology? First off, the conventional opposition of empiricism to the rationalism that preceded it held no water for Deleuze, a fact he was to reiterate again when he returned to Hume later on, in his contribution to François Châtelet's edited history of philosophy in 1972.²¹ Assuming the tones of the alchemist, Deleuze argued that empiricism held other secrets beyond a critique of rationalism; the power of imagination at work in Hume's empiricism made it a sort of science-fiction *avant la lettre*, by emphasizing the created aspect of the universe alongside the creative.²² We can see the future contours of Deleuze's project ourselves in the title of the opening chapter of his Hume book: "The Problem of Knowledge and the Problem of Ethics."²³ The problem, as it were, for Deleuze with the history of modern thought had to do with the attempt to derive the latter, ethics, from the former, as if knowledge itself could ever be established on some solid base. Hume's virtue was to throw out the notion of assured and certain knowledge altogether. As Deleuze states it suggestively, Hume was the first to laicize belief, giving it pride of place over knowledge.²⁴ Lacking knowledge, we are left with belief, which itself derives from repetition and habit. But lest this lead us to the conservative Hume familiar to students of political theory,

²⁰ André Cresson et Gilles Deleuze, *David Hume: Sa vie, son oeuvre, avec un exposé de sa philosophie par Cresson et Deleuze* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952).

²¹ See Gilles Deleuze's entry, "Hume," pp. 65–78 in François Châtelet, op. cit., note 2. This essay is reprinted in Deleuze, *L'Île Déserte*, op. cit., note 4 as well, pp. 226–237.

²² For the fullest explication of Deleuze's relationship to empiricism see Bruce Baugh, "Deleuze and Empiricism," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 24 (1), 1993, pp. 15–31. See as well, chapitre 1, "De la philosophie comme science-fiction" in Antonioli, op. cit., pp. 13–27.

²³ Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, op. cit., pp. 21–36.

²⁴ Ibid., p. ix.

Deleuze moves elsewhere in Hume's thought, not to habit as entrenchment of the old, but, rather, as production of the new.

Deleuze reads Hume to argue that the mind is not and cannot be an object of thought itself, nor is it to be posited as the cause of effects that proceed from it. Clearly there is to be no "transcendental subject" à la Kant in Deleuze's philosophy, but this is not to say that "transcendental" as an adjectival qualifier is to be banished altogether. What Deleuze posits instead via Hume is the heuristic notion of a transcendental empiricism, an oxymoronic phrase to say the least. Empiricism, in Deleuze's reading, becomes a sort of abstracted code word for experience itself, the experience of time and difference, prior to any sort of conceptual unification. Deleuze does not deny that the intellect has a tendency to conceptualize and lead us to perfect knowledge in a Kantian or Hegelian sense. After we sit on enough chairs, we do develop a conceptual, functional definition of what a chair is. But, against this conceptualizing tendency Deleuze posits the latent subversive power of empiricism, a disposition which never confirms, but rather destabilizes. Deleuze uses an example from basic grammar; Hume privileged the infinite, connective power of the AND over the limited, subsumptive power of the IS, that is, in other words, parataxis over hypotaxis. Any attempt to end the phrase in a grammatical IS, will be overturned by the introduction of new, disruptive ANDS.²⁵

The most profound implication of this empiricism, then, concerns subjectivity, the title's second term, which derives in Deleuze's reading from Hume's emphasis on the merely associative, rather than causal, quality of ideas. Deleuze summed up his argument nicely in the preface he wrote to the English translation of his book: "[Hume] created the first great logic of *relations*, showing in it that all relations (not only 'matters of fact' but also relations among ideas) are external to their terms. As a result, he constituted a multifarious world of experience based upon the principle of the exteriority of relations. We start with atomic parts, but these atomic parts have transitions, passages, 'tendencies', which circulate from one to another. These tendencies give rise to *habits*. Isn't this the answer to the question 'what are we'? We are habits, nothing but habits – the habit of saying 'I'. Perhaps, there is no more striking answer to the problem of the Self."²⁶ So, consistent with his distrust of the philosophical concept of Mind, Deleuze wants the self, the "je" to be posterior to a prior, one is tempted to say – though Deleuzian temporality prohibits it – more primordial notion of experience. It seems here that the problem of knowledge and the problem of ethics are predicated on a deeper problem, that of ontology and the nature of Being itself.

²⁵ See Boundas' discussion of this point in the translator's introduction to *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. x.

Here we are flirting with Heidegger's critique of western metaphysics, and the best way to articulate what distinguishes Deleuze's ontology from Heidegger's is to turn to his fundamental resource for thinking through these foundational problems. The philosophical touchstone is of course Spinoza. Deleuze had previously marshaled Bergson's *élan vital* and Nietzsche's "will to power" and eternal return, to develop a non-conceptual or rule-bound notion of time and experience that would continue the disruptive qualities of Hume's sci-fi empiricism. But it was Spinoza who became and remained Deleuze's favored reference in this task, the philosopher who, in Deleuze's own words, always gave him the sense of taking flight on a witch's broom.²⁷ Moreover, unlike others, Spinoza garnered two studies in Deleuze's oeuvre, the minor thesis of his *doctorat d'état*, *Spinoza et le probleme de l'expression*, submitted with the major thesis, *Différence et Répétition* in 1968, and a shorter book in the 1970s, which he augmented in the 1980s, entitled, *Spinoza: philosophie pratique*.²⁸ In his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze broke with French precedent, which in his view had focused too heavily on the rationalist Spinoza of the concept of books 1 and 2 of the *Ethics*, preferring instead to focus on the vitalist Spinoza of affects and passions in the later books.

The Spinoza of the affect was the practical Spinoza Deleuze celebrated in the shorter work, and it was primarily this Spinoza who would go on to inspire multitudinous contemporary ruminations on Spinoza as a resource for a global left politics.²⁹ But it is the thicker volume which contains Deleuze's most sustained engagement with Spinoza's thought. Expression was the key term for Deleuze in his study precisely because Spinoza himself had *not* defined it in the *Ethics*, and yet it occupied the nodal point between the three key terms of "substance," "essence," and "attribute" in Spinoza's ontology; the Spinozist term "mode" being reserved for an argument later in the book about qualitative vs. quantitative intensity. Deleuze's goal was to understand the full richness of expression in Spinoza's philosophy. Substance was the expresser, or *l'exprimant*, and essence was what was expressed, *l'exprimé*. The attribute, however, whether it be thought or thing, does not involve a term in noun form, but is effectively the verbal movement of expression itself. Pierre

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, with Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 15.

²⁸ These two books are available in English translation as Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Robert Hurley, trans. (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1988), and Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Martin Joughin, trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

²⁹ See in particular Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), and their sequel to this volume, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

Macherey in a short article on Deleuze condensed the argument into the following expression, which it helps to quote in the original French: “[l’attribut] est ce ... qui permet à l’exprimant de s’exprimer dans l’exprimé.”³⁰ The stakes involved in this dense formula are those of an effort to avoid an emanative notion of ontology, such as that of Plotinus, where the fundamental quality of Being produces diminishing returns the further we get from the origin.³¹ Deleuze wanted to avoid recourse to origin altogether, something that distinguishes his thinking from Heidegger’s as well, and the latter’s fondness for the concept of origin as *Ursprung*. Nothing ever “springt” from the “Ur” – the *Ur* itself is contained in, part and parcel of, nothing but the “springen” itself. Or, to borrow the phraseology from our discussion of Deleuze’s Hume: there is no content to the *Ur*, or prior Being, apart from the relational aspects involved in the transitive qualities contained in any verb whatsoever, the French *exprimer* or the German *springen*.

Evidently, Deleuze is not so much concerned to maintain a distinction between form and content as to deny the validity of such a distinction altogether by maintaining that since there is no such thing as static form, there can never be any grasp of certain content either. As a result of this view, epistemology and ontology cannot be opposed to each other as contending “-ologies” concerned with different theoretical objects. Everything is collapsed into ontology for Deleuze, and yet, in his work on Spinoza, Deleuze pursues his concern with the twin problems of knowledge and ethics – arguably Spinoza’s primary concerns as well – that occupied the first chapter of his book on Hume. In an evocative passage that he returns to often, Deleuze discusses Spinoza’s discussion in chapter four of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of Adam and his ingestion of the apple.³² According to Deleuze, according to Spinoza, in that moment when God, that is, Nature, revealed to Adam the effects that resulted from eating the apple, Adam, with his limited “human” faculties, mistook the momentary revelation of knowledge – the apple produces bad effects – for a law-like *fiat* from above, a prohibition of evil understood in place of the mere disclosure of something bad. This account is allegorical of course, but it speaks to the knotted imbrication of epistemology, ontology, and ethics Deleuze wants to take from Spinoza. Law, as morality,

³⁰“Deleuze dans Spinoza,” pp. 237–244 in Pierre Macherey, *Avec Spinoza: études sur la doctrine et l’histoire du spinozisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992). In translation, the quotation, found on p. 242, reads, “The attribute is what allows the expresser to express itself in the expressed.”

³¹See Joachim Lacrosse’s entry on “Plotin” in Leclercq, ed., op. cit., pp. 161–169.

³²In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, see pp. 22–25; in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, see pp. 263–265.

wants to be permanent, transcendent, elevated above immediate experience and universally communicable. By contrast, ethics, with positive connotations, is rooted in and indistinguishable from immediate experience, fully immanent in it, and the formation of an idea of that experience that necessarily accompanies it. This is where Spinoza's rationalist notion of the "idea of the idea" jibes with Hume's notion of associative and non-causal ideas, both of which are fleeting, links in an infinite chain of becoming. Is the resultant "knowledge" communicable? Perhaps. Can it be universalized? Not really. The only thing transcendental is the nature of the relation itself.

The point is that ultimately Hume and Spinoza become assimilated in the production of Deleuze's own philosophy, a Spinozist ontology of immanent causality where all is in all and nothing is the same in a Humean logic of relations and associations. Absent from Deleuze's twin invocation of the two thinkers is any sustained discussion of what they most evidently have in common, namely the critique of traditional religion. Popkin himself published an article entitled "Hume and Spinoza" in 1979 where he explored the affinities of their work on this score.³³ But like the French scholar Gilbert Boss, who compared Hume and Spinoza in a mammoth two-volume work, Popkin was content not to force an assimilation of the two wildly different philosophers, but rather to point to the fundamental incommensurability of their thinking as evidence of the myriad ways one can do philosophy.³⁴ Hume privileged order against the inconsistencies of vulgar thought; Spinoza saw order as itself a fictive product of the human intellect. For Hume, skepticism was the antidote to dogmatism; for Spinoza, recourse to the sedated dumbfounded posture of skepticism was not unlike recourse to God, the "asylum of ignorance." A sustained twin reading of Hume and Spinoza reveals many affinities, and of course we must pay attention to the contextual differences of terms such as order, God, and nature in their respective works. Deleuze for his part never denied the selectivity of his readings; in fact he often reiterated it. But is it not disconcerting to find our celebrant of difference forsaking this cherished feature of all existence for an emphasis on the similar, if not the same?

In his post-1968 radicalized work with Guattari, Deleuze was fond of speaking not of desire per se, but rather of "desiring production" and "desiring machines." Desire was a keyword for both Hume and Spinoza of course, and Deleuze shares with them the understanding that although desires are real, they are often themselves the source of error, leading to the confusion of causes and effects, the positing of ends when there are none in nature,

³³ See note 1.

³⁴ See Gilbert Boss, *Les différences des philosophies: Hume et Spinoza*, 2 vs. (Zurich: Éditions du Grand Midi, 1982).

and various other epistemological dead-ends. But in the “desiring-machines” of *Anti-Oedipus*, desire is never reactive but always transformative, and productive. And yet the machine metaphor is apt for Deleuze’s project in general; other thinkers get put through the Deleuze ringer, and they come out as products of the Deleuze machine, shorn of many of their distinguishing characteristics. For all his talk of difference, concepts and figures in Deleuze’s philosophy have an assimilative function, smoothing out space, leveling out the steppes for the nomads on their lines of flight.

Concomitant with Deleuze’s contemporary importance is the depth and value of the criticism his work has received of late, not only for its non-falsifiable theological underpinnings, but also for its lack of any mediation and its resultant lack of any viable concept of political or ethical activity.³⁵ In France, one of Deleuze’s chief interlocutors, Alain Badiou, has come down hard on Deleuze for the inescapable notion of oneness which lies at the heart of Deleuze’s celebration of becoming against being, and infinite production of difference against the sameness of identity.³⁶ This curiosity of Deleuze’s thought is no mystery for readers of *Difference and Repetition*, a book that ends by proclaiming the univocity of Being. Though the term is not to be confused with the closure of unity – Deleuze says “opening is an essential feature of univocity” – all the same, univocity means Being speaks with one voice, in Deleuze’s image, “a single and same ocean for all the drops.”³⁷ Popkin has taught us that the histories of theology and philosophy cannot be distinguished so easily. So perhaps it should not be too disconcerting to see that Deleuze’s other key source for the concept of univocity, alongside Spinoza, was none other than the medieval theologian, John Duns Scotus.³⁸ The fact that the Frenchman now includes two Scotsmen as central to his thought perhaps points to an under-explored Edinburgh/Paris connection. But there are substantive gains too for making sense of Deleuze’s thought through Duns Scotus’s, such as

³⁵The most compelling critique along these lines is also the most complete: Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006).

³⁶Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: the Clamor of Being*, Louise Burchill, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

³⁷Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 304.

³⁸See *Ibid.*, p. 303. Note too Stéfán Leclercq’s entry “John Duns Scot” in Leclercq, ed., pp. 61–66. For John Duns Scotus’ definition of univocity, see Thomas Williams, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 58n14: “I call that concept ‘univocal’ which is so unified that its unity is enough for a contradiction in affirming and denying it of the same subject; it also is enough to play the part of a middle term in a syllogism, so that the extreme terms are united as one in the middle so that their unity with one another can be deduced without a fallacy of equivocation.”

the evident influence of the latter's distinction between *haecceity*, or thisness, and *quiddity*, or whatness, which we can map onto to Deleuze's preference for the AND over the IS. Perhaps too, despite the fact that Duns Scotus was a Franciscan, the location of Deleuze's collection at a predominantly Dominican theological library now makes more sense too. Finally, it is suggestive to note that Duns Scotus was known for bringing together various antithetical theological arguments; like Deleuze he would make commensurate those things which evidently did not belong together without any pretense of logical resolution. This predilection led to much opposition in his own day, a resistance that led to the coinage of a term to designate his followers, which persists in our modern lexicon. I can certainly imagine it as Popkin's reaction to Deleuze's concept of difference that knows no distinction, his philosophy of extremes, margins, and peripheries. But in light of the sustained attack on "common sense" and "good sense" throughout his oeuvre, I can also imagine Deleuze's delight to hear it. Today the name of Duns Scotus reverberates in the corners of posterity as *dunce*.

PART II
RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

6. RICHARD H. POPKIN'S CONCEPT OF THE THIRD FORCE AND THE NEWTONIAN SYNTHESIS OF THEOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY IN ISAAC NEWTON AND SAMUEL CLARKE

James E. Force

How precious [are] our teacher's teachings.
Time flies swiftly in this garden of learning.
So swiftly [/soon] after all these years
We must part. Goodbye.¹

Introduction

In 1960, Richard H. Popkin published his paradigm-shattering *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* in which he described the effects of the rediscovery of the writings of the Greek Pyrrhonian sceptic, Sextus Empiricus, upon the intellectual ferment of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Popkin showed both how early modern adaptations of Sextus' arguments subverted the possibility of obtaining certain knowledge from the senses, reason, or authority and how some early modern philosophers in the rationalist and empiricist traditions addressed the ensuing "sceptical crisis" in religion, philosophy, and science. By 1981, when he was the Willam Andrews Clark Library Professor at UCLA, Popkin was embarked upon the project of widening his historical analysis beyond the canonical rationalists and empiricists of the traditional schools of early modern philosophy. He began to analyze non-traditional writers who characterized a strand of early modern thought which he christened the "Third Force." Popkin showed how a wide variety of reinterpreted, traditional, early modern thinkers, as well as non-traditional, early modern thinkers, attempted to defeat scepticism by combining elements of traditional philosophy with arguments and ideas drawn from such supposedly non-rational, non-philosophical arenas as Jewish messianism, Christian millenarianism, eschatology, and the interpretation of biblical prophecy.

¹Song from *Tampopo*, directed by Juzo Itami, 1986. Transcribed from <http://www.friesian.com/review.htm>.

Popkin argued that by focusing exclusively on the traditional “line of development in European intellectual history from Erasmus and Montaigne to Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, and the French Enlightenment..., we have lost track of one of the most vigorous sets of ideas that influenced the world view of Europeans.”²

In this paper, I wish to analyze the attempt by Isaac Newton and Samuel Clarke to craft their particularly Newtonian response to scepticism and to show how they both attempt to defeat it through a uniquely Newtonian synthesis of a providentialist and voluntaristic God, drawn from both natural and revealed religion, and traditional scientific epistemology. The Newtonian synthesis of religion and science epitomizes what Popkin meant by the “Third Force.” Popkin often told me that some of the best history of philosophy done in the 1970s and 1980s was done by historians of science but that too often historians of science anachronistically ignored what scientists really thought and what they really did in the religious contexts of their time because such views might seem to be “oddball, crankish, or irrelevant...”³ Popkin often gently poked fun at Whiggish historians who resolutely ignored or apologized for Newton’s religious views. Of Newton, Popkin once ironically suggested that the question should not be “why one of the world’s greatest scientists should have spent so much time thinking and writing about religious matters,” but “why did one of the greatest anti-Trinitarian theologians of the 17th century take time off to write works on natural science, like the *Principia Mathematica*?”⁴

By integrating the overlooked or ignored or underemphasized “Third Force” elements of Newton’s thought with his scientific methodology, a new version of Newton emerges which stands in marked contrast to the traditional picture of Newton as the “first mover” of the modern scientific revolution.⁵ Newton and his disciple Samuel Clarke (and to a lesser degree, William Whiston) craft a version of Newtonianism which explicitly synthesizes ALL of the

²Richard H. Popkin, “Foreword,” in James E. Force, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. xviii.

³Popkin, “Foreword,” p. xviii.

⁴Richard H. Popkin, “Newton’s Biblical Theology and his Theological Physics,” in *Newton’s Scientific and Philosophical Legacy*, eds., P. B. Scheuer and G. Debrock (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), p. 81. This essay is reprinted in Richard H. Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 172–188.

⁵See James E. Force, “From the Scientific Revolution to Newton (And Back Again): The Nature of Newton’s ‘Holy Alliance’ Between Science and Religion: Reconsidering Newton and the Scientific Revolution,” in *The Canonical Imperative: Rethinking the Scientific Revolution in Memory of Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs*, ed. Margaret J. Osler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 247–270.

standard apologetic arguments of the day – the design argument, the argument from prophecy (especially millennial prophecy), the argument from miracles, and the cosmological argument – with the epistemology of the New Science.

*The Argument FROM Design and the Argument TO
Design in Newton and Clarke*

One of the most characteristic arguments of Clarke and Newton in natural religion is the design argument which they use to illustrate the general providence of the creator who, in the beginning, designed and brought into being the realm of nature. The design argument has two versions: the argument **FROM** design and the argument **TO** design.⁶

In the argument **FROM** design, the premises of the argument are those observed natural phenomena, especially regular planetary motion, which seem to imply (for proponents of this argument) an extra-mechanical Divine Architect as the cause of such observed, clock-like motion. This version of the argument proceeds by analogy *from* the observed orderliness in the phenomena of the heavens *to* a first cause sufficiently skilled and powerful to produce the observed celestial order.

In the argument **TO** design, on the other hand, the premises of the argument are based upon observations of the seemingly purposive natural contrivances often observed in the biological realm. *From* the observed teleological design of men and animals, proponents of this argument argue *to* a cause who purposively designed these contrivances. Thus, the design of the eye-socket is designed with the goal of permitting the eye to swivel and “track” an object.

While useful, this distinction should be used with caution because both arguments move by analogy *from* empirical observations *to* a cause sufficient to produce the observed phenomena. The argument **FROM** design moves *from* observed orderly phenomena in the heavens *to* a divine artificer just as the argument **TO** design moves *from* the observed purposiveness of biological phenomena *to* a contriver of the observed teleological behavior in the natural realm. The argument **FROM** design emphasizes the observations of non-purposive but orderly arrangement usually (although not always) in celestial phenomena while the argument **TO** design emphasizes the seemingly purposive orderly relationships usually (but not always) in the parts of biological or unnatural organisms.

⁶Robert H. Hurlbutt, III, *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), originates this incisive distinction in this groundbreaking book. See, for example, p. 10. I am greatly indebted to Hurlbutt's book throughout this section of the paper.

Whether one emphasizes the teleological nature of natural biological structures or the empirically observed regularity in the starry heavens, both versions of the argument rely upon the assumption that nature is uniform with respect to causes. The uniformity of causes in nature is stated by Newton in his second rule of reasoning according to which “*the causes assigned to natural effects of the same kind must be, so far as possible, the same.*” Hume, of course, later puts this principle into the mouth of his character, Cleanthes, in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, who supposes that “this principle” – “That like effects arise from like causes” – is the “foundation of all religion.”⁷

The argument **FROM** design appears in Clarke’s first set of Boyle Lectures, delivered in St. Paul’s Cathedral in 1704. Clarke wonders what Cicero would have made of the “*Modern Discoveries in Astronomy*” which display such “*Exquisite Regularity*”:

The *Immense Greatness* of the World; (I mean that Part of it which falls under our Observation); which is now known to be as much greater than what in His Time they imagined it to be, as the World itself, according to their System, was greater than *Archimede’s Sphere*? The *Exquisite Regularity* of all the Planets Motions, without Epicycles, Stations, Retrogradations, or any other Deviation or Confusion whatsoever? The *inexpressible Nicety* of the Adjustment of the Primary Velocity and Original Direction of the *Annual Motion* of the Planets, with their distances from the Central Body and their force of Gravitation towards it? The *wonderful Proportion* of the *Diurnal Motion* of the Earth and other Planets about their own Center, for the Distinction of Light and Darkness; with that monstrously disproportionate Whirling of the whole Heavens, which the Antient Astronomers were forced to suppose? The *exact accommodating* of the *Densities* of the Planets, to their Distances from the Sun, and consequently to the Proportion of Heat which each of them is to bear respectively; so that neither those which are nearest to the Sun, are destroyed by the Heat, nor those which are farthest off, by the Cold....⁸

⁷For Rule II, see Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, A New Translation by I. Bernard Cohen and Julia Budenz (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p.795. In his classic statement of the design argument, Cleanthes shows the efficacy of this Newtonian rule for the purposes of the design argument. [See David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis, IN: Library of the Liberal Arts, 1947), p. 143.] Philo “supposes” that Cleanthes makes this Newtonian rule, the “foundation of all religion.” (See, Hume, *Dialogues*, p. 170.)

⁸Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, More Particularly in Answer to Mr. Hobbes, Spinoza, and Their Followers*, in *The Works of Samuel Clarke, D.D., Late Rector of St James’s Westminster* (London, 1738; Garland Series of “British Philosophers and Theologians of the 17th and 18th Centuries,” A Collection of 101 volumes ed. René Wellek, New York, 1978), 4 vols., 2:570. (Cited hereafter as *DBAG*.)

The argument **TO** design also appears in Clarke's first set of Boyle Lectures where he points out to "Atheists" that the intricate and purposive design in physiological structures provides the basis for arguing to the intelligent and wise nature of the divine artificer:

If Galen so many Ages since, could find in the Construction and Contrivance of the parts of a Human Body, such undeniable marks of Contrivance and Design, as forced him Then to acknowledge and admire the Wisdom of its Author; What would he have said, if he had known the Late Discoveries in Anatomy any Physick, the Circulation of the Blood, the exact Structure of the Heart and Brain, the Uses of Numberless Glands and Valves for the Secretion and Motion of the Juices in the Body; besides several Veins and other Vessels and Receptacles not at all known, or so much as imagined to have any Existence.⁹

In the *General Scholium*, which dates from the second edition of his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1713), Newton famously describes the beautiful orderliness of the solar system:

The six primary planets revolve about the sun in circles concentric with the sun, with the same direction of motion, and very nearly in the same plane. Ten moons revolve about the earth, Jupiter, and Saturn, in concentric circles with the same direction of motion, very nearly in the planes of the orbits of the planets. And all these regular motions do not have their origin in mechanical causes, since comets go freely in very eccentric orbits and into all parts of the heavens.

From this detailed description of the orderly structure which he has observed in the solar system, Newton infers the existence of a divine architect sufficiently powerful and intelligent to cause this observed effect:

This most elegant system of the sun, planets, and comets could not have arisen without the design and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being.... He rules all things, not as the world soul but as the lord of all. And because of his dominion he is called the Lord God *Pantokrator*. For "god" is a relative word and has reference to servants, and godhood is the lordship of God, not over his own body as is supposed by those for whom God is the world soul, but over servants. The supreme God is an eternal, infinite, and absolutely perfect being; but a being, however perfect, without dominion is not the Lord God.¹⁰

⁹ Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:570.

¹⁰ Newton, *The Principia*, pp. 940–941.

In a fragment of conversation which David Gregory reports from December, 1691, Newton explains why he prefers to rely more heavily upon the argument **FROM** design: it is “easier” and more “Universall.” Gregory records that:

In Mr. Newton’s opinion a good design of a publick speech (and which may serve well at one Act) may be to shew that the most simple laws of nature are observed in the structure of a great part of the Universe, that the philosophy ought then to begin, and that Cosmical Qualities are as much easier as they are more Universall than particular ones, and the general contrivance simpler than that of Animals plants etc.¹¹

Nevertheless, Newton does, in fact, resort to the argument **TO** design, with its pointed teleological emphasis and its grounding in physiological structures, especially in his unpublished manuscripts. In a manuscript entitled “A short Schem [sic] of the true Religion,” Newton writes that:

Whence is it that the eyes of all sorts of living creatures are transparent to the very bottom & the only transparent members in the body, having on the outside an hard transparent skin, & within transparent juyces with a crystalline Lens in the middle & a pupil before the Lens all of them *so truly shaped & fitted for vision*, that no Artist can mend them? *Did blind chance know that there was light & what was its refraction & fit the eyes of all creatures after the most curious manner to make use of it?* These & such like considerations always have & ever will prevail with man kind to believe that there is a being who made all things & has all things in his power & who is therefore to be feared.¹²

In an unpublished draft to the first edition of his *Opticks*, Newton again argues that the teleological symmetry evident in the physiological structure of animals points to a designer who had a particular purpose in mind for his designs:

Nothing is more curious and difficult to frame of the eyes for seeing and of the ears for hearing and yet no sort of creatures has these members to no purpose. What more difficult than to fly? and yet was it by chance that all creatures can fly which have wings?¹³

¹¹Cited in Henry Guerlac and Margaret C. Jacob, “Bentley, Newton, and Providence,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30, No. 3 (July–Sept., 1969), p. 317.

¹²King’s College, Cambridge, Keynes Ms.7. See Newton Project, <http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/texts/viewtext.php?id=THEM00007&mode=normalized>. I have added emphasis in this text with italic type.

¹³Cited in J. E. McGuire, “Newton’s ‘Principles of Philosophy’: An Intended Preface for the 1704 *Opticks* and a Related Draft Fragment,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 5 (1970), p. 183.

Newton's most famous statement of the argument **TO** design, and of his reliance upon it to demonstrate God's existence and nature, occurs in the *General Scholium* alongside another statement of the argument **FROM** design. After insisting that we can never form any idea of the "substance of God," he concludes that:

We know him only by his properties and attributes and by the wisest and best construction of things and their final causes....¹⁴

The Argument from Prophecy in Newton and Clarke

For its Newtonian proponents, the design argument of natural religion demonstrates that God's nature is that of a supremely powerful Architect-Creator who, in the beginning, created the "book of nature" as the new scientists have described it in their investigations. Central to the thought of both Newton and Clarke is the conviction that, in the most accurate interpretations of Moses' history of creation in *Genesis*, in the scriptural record of other historically fulfilled prophecies, and in the crucial core of yet unfulfilled prophecies in the books of *Daniel* and *Revelation*, God's plan for natural history (what Newton called "the world natural") and for human history (what Newton called the "world politique") is extensively revealed to the "wise."

In an early treatise on the apocalypse, Newton urges a parallel methodology for understanding both the book of nature and the book of scripture. Just as Newton had urged in the first rule of reasoning in the first edition of the *Principia* that – when we interpret the book of nature – "*No more causes of natural things should be admitted than are both true and sufficient to explain their phenomena.*"¹⁵ so, too – when we interpret the book of prophetic scripture – we should also see that God "is pleased with Simplicity" and resolve:

To choose those constructions which without straining reduce things to the greatest simplicity. The reason of this is manifest by the precedent Rule. Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, & not in the multiplicity & confusion

¹⁴Newton, *The Principia*, p. 942. As Florian Cajori explains in the Appendix to his edition of the *Principia*, Newton uses the term "final causes" in this text in a thoroughly Aristotelian sense: "the purpose, aim, or end for which a thing is made." See *Sir Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and His System of the World*. Translated into English by Andrew Motte in 1729. The translations revised, and supplied with an historical and explanatory appendix by Florian Cajori. 2 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1934), "An Historical and Explanatory Appendix by Florian Cajori," 2:670.

¹⁵Newton, *The Principia*, p. 794.

of things. As the world, which to the naked eye exhibits the greatest variety of objects, appears very simple in its internall constitution when surveyed by a philosophic understanding, & so much the simpler by how much the better it is understood, so it is in these visions. It is the perfection of God's works that they are all done with the greatest simplicity. He is the God of order & not of confusion. And therefore as they that would understand the frame of the world must indeavour to reduce their knowledg to all possible simplicity, so it must be in seeking to understand these visions. And they that shall do otherwise do not onely make sure never to understand them, but derogate from the perfection of the prophesy; & make it suspicious also that their designe is not to understand it but to shuffle it of & confound the understandings of men by making it intricate & confused.¹⁶

Ultimately, our understanding of "Newtonianism," as it is found in Newton and Clarke, at least, must include an understanding of the way that they integrate their natural religion with the revealed religion of scriptural interpretation. God is the God of Order whether exhibited in the book of nature or the book of prophetic revelation.

Newton's progress in understanding God's book of nature was legendary in his own lifetime. In his notes toward a biography of Newton, his niece's husband, John Conduitt, elaborates on the excitement generated among the learned by Newton's progress in deciphering the book of nature:

What can be more becoming an intelligent being, than to enquire into the increase of Natural discoveries to consider the various revolutions in the Commonwealth of Knowledge the Period of one *Hypothesis* System & the rise of *another*,^[3]a new system; to travell with those speculative Conquerors who have extended the limits of humane science & opened new worlds to our understanding; & to pay a due homage & reverence to the great Deliverers who freed mankind from the *bondage*^[4] of Error & Ignorance. Though wee should look around the present age & even go far back into the past, *difficult would it be* to find an instance of one who penetrated farther into the works of the Divine Author of Nature and laid so solid a foundation for a lasting & universal Empire in Philosophy as Sir Isaac Newton.¹⁷

This sentiment was shared by Newton's immediate circle including Whiston and Clarke who hoped that similar advances would soon be made in understanding the books of divinely revealed scripture:

¹⁶Newton, Yahuda MS 1.1, f. 14r. See the Newton Project, <http://www.newton-project.sussex.ac.uk/texts/viewtext.php?id=THEM00135&mode=normalized>.

¹⁷King's College, Cambridge, Keynes Ms. 130.2 is John Conduitt's account of Newton's life before going to university. See the Newton Project, <http://www.newton-project.sussex.ac.uk/texts/viewtext.php?id=THEM00165&mode=normalized>.

Since it has now pleased God, as we have seen, to discover many noble and important truths to us, by the Light of Nature, and the System of the World; as also, he has long discovered many noble and important Truths by Revelation, in the Sacred Truths; It cannot be now improper, to compare these two Divine Volumes, as I may well call them, together; in such Cases, I mean of Revelation, as related to the Natural World, and wherein we may be assisted the better to judge by the knowledge of the System of the Universe about us. For if those things contained in Scriptures be true, and really deriv'd from the Author of Nature, we shall find them in proper Cases, confirm'd by the System of the World and the Frame of Nature will in some Degree, bear Witness to the Revelation.¹⁸

Newton makes clear that he endorses the project of interpreting both God's book of nature and the involvement of God in the course of human and natural history as it is revealed in scripture. Newton writes that:

He that would understand a book written in a strange language must first learn the language & if he would understand it well he must learn the language perfectly. Such a language was that wherein the Prophets wrote, & the want of sufficient skill in that language is the main reason why they are so little understood. John did not write in one language, Daniel in another, Isaiah in third, & the rest in others peculiar to them selves; but they all wrote in one & the same mystical language as well known without doubt to the sons of the Prophets as the Hieroglyphic language of the Egyptians to their Priests.

Again, the Newtonian project of interpreting prophetic language, if one is to avoid the "ffansies & Hypotheses" of false interpreters, is rooted in:

The whole world natural consisting of heaven & earth signifies [illeg] whole world politique consisting of thrones & people... & the things in that world signify the analogous [illeg] in this.¹⁹

As God left a record of his generally providential attribute of omnipotent power inscribed in the "book" of nature (and traced out in the design argument of natural religion) so, too, in the properly interpreted "book" of scripture, there is to be found abundant evidence of God's continuous and direct involvement in human history. Furthermore, scriptural history contains clues

¹⁸William Whiston, *Astronomical Principles of Religion, Natural and Reveal'd* (London, 1717), p. 133.

¹⁹King's College, Cambridge, Keynes Ms. 5, Chap. 1 of the first Book of this ms., which dates from the mid-1680s, entitled "Concerning the Language of the Prophets," p. 1. See the Newton Project: <http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/texts/viewtext.php?id=THEM00005&mode=normalized>.

about the course of the future in both the “world natural” and the “world politique” in those prophecies that have not yet been brought to fulfillment through God’s specially provident intervention. God’s Lordship over his created dominion continues.

To illustrate the entire providential nature of God – his creative power as a wise and powerful divine artificer as well as his continuing specially provident intervention in and guidance of the affairs of men and nature – the Newtonian design theorists necessarily become interpreters of both those scriptural prophecies already fulfilled in natural and human history and those promised for future fulfillment. Instantiating the “Argument from Prophecy” is not a separate enterprise from that of the Newtonian design theorists. The proper interpretation of historically fulfilled prophecy shows another aspect of God’s providence which supplements the general providence of the Lord God of creation illustrated by the design argument of natural religion. The alliance between science and religion consists, for the Newtonians, of a combination of natural religion (the design argument) and the properly objective and scientific interpretation of specially provident divine intervention in both the “world natural” and the “world politique.”

The most specialized use of the argument from prophecy was to interpret messianic prophecies in a way which showed that they had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Newton is much concerned with showing how the messianic prophecy of the 70 Weeks in Daniel 9:24–5 is fulfilled in the historical person of Jesus.²⁰

Regarding those prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled in history, Newton is quite bold in his private speculations. For Newton, the New Jerusalem will be the inheritance of the “mortal Jews” and the resurrected saints. This kingdom of mortals and the “children of the resurrection,” ruled by Jesus, will be the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham “when he promised that his seed should inherit the land of Canaan for ever, and on this (promise) covenant was founded the Jewish religion as on that is founded the Christian.”²¹ He describes, for example, the possible interaction of the immortal “children of the resurrection” with the mortals who share their abode during the millennium and the possibility that they may teleport about the universe:

we are not to conceive that Christ and the Children of the resurrection shall reign over the nations after ye manner of mortal Kings or convers wth

²⁰James E. Force, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian*, p. 73.

²¹Yahuda MS 6, f. 15r, at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem. Yahuda MS 6, including this passage, is excerpted in Appendix B in Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), pp. 126–136. (See p. 130.)

mortals as mortals do with one another; but rather as Christ after his resurrection continued for some time on earth invisible to mortals unless upon certain occasions when he thought fit to appear to his disciples; so it is to be conceived that at his second coming he and the children of the resurrection shall reign invisibly unless they shall think fit upon any extraordinary occasions to appear. And as Christ after some stay in or neare the regions of this earth ascended into heaven so after the resurrection of the dead *it may be in their power* to leave this earth at pleasure and accompany him into any part of the heavens, that no region in the whole Univerſ may want its inhabitants.²²

In his more public pronouncements regarding millennial future prophecies, Newton insists that the “time is not yet come” for understanding this “main revolution” predicted in scripture prophecy. The following passage shows Newton’s typical caution along with his belief that we have a sufficient guarantee of God’s providence in the many prophecies which have already been seen, by a rightly guided Biblical exegete, to be fulfilled. Newton writes that:

There is already so much of the Prophecy fulfilled, that as many will take pains in this study, may see sufficient instances of God’s providence: but then the signal revolutions predicted by all the holy Prophets, will at once both turn men’s eyes upon considering the predictions, and plainly interpret them. Till then we must content ourselves with interpreting what hath been already fulfilled.²³

Newton’s understanding of fulfilled prophecy is governed by rules whose purpose is to evade hypothetical “ffansies” about the nature of God and to show that God owns, possesses, and guides – i.e. has “dominion” over – history (past and future) in the same way that he owns, possesses, and guides – i.e., has “dominion” over – nature.

Though famous as the most astute Newtonian metaphysician, Clarke still retains a special place for the authority of scripture in his philosophical theology. Like Robert Boyle,²⁴ there are, for Clarke, “things above reason” which are knowable only through revelation, e.g., when the world was created and that the world was created in time. Clarke writes:

²² *Ibid.*, f. 19r. I have added the emphasis to show that Newton is only speculating about what the power of God may enable the resurrected saints to do. Cited in Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton*, pp. 135–136.

²³ Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies*, pp. 252–253.

²⁴ Jan Wojcik, *Robert Boyle and the Limits of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 100–107.

That the material world is not self-existent or necessarily existing but the product of some distinct superior agent may, as I have already shown, be strictly demonstrated by bare reason against the most obstinate atheist in the world. But the time *when* the world was created, or whether its creation was properly speaking *in time*, is not so easy to demonstrate strictly by bare reason (as appears from the opinion of many ancient philosophers concerning that matter), but the proof of it can be taken only from Revelation.²⁵

But, when it comes to using scripture to bolster his rationally demonstrated understanding of God's attributes, Clarke is, like Newton, more famous for his use of fulfilled scripture prophecies than for his delineation of truths above reason. Clarke's delineation of the argument from prophecy grows out of his dispute with Anthony Collins, the famous deist, regarding the messianic prophecies which Christians claim are fulfilled by Jesus.

In 1724, Anthony Collins publishes *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*. Collins' work is an attack on William Whiston's *Essay towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament* (1722) in which Whiston argues that scripture prophecies must be interpreted in the most straightforwardly literal manner as possible. Most of the voluminous lists of fulfilled prophecies – in Whiston's Boyle Lectures in 1708 and other works – are designed to illustrate the continuous providential care of the Lord God. In Whiston's view, most fulfilled scriptural prophecies have been literally fulfilled in one particular historical event. A very few prophetic predictions concerning the Messiah, however, seem to require an allegorical level of symbolic meaning if they are to be applied to Jesus. The prophecy in Isaiah 7:10–16 that a son named Immanuel would be born to the House of David is precisely such a case. But, for Whiston, if any prophecies are allowed to have more than one level of meaning, "We can never be satisfy'd but they may have as many as any Visionary pleases," or, as William Nicholls puts this point, "If we should once allow this typical or allegorical way of explaining Scripture, one might as well prove the history of Guy of Warwick out of the first chapters of Genesis."²⁶ For Whiston, the fact that some Old Testament messianic prophecies could not be literally interpreted as having been fulfilled only by Jesus was ample proof that those particular prophetic texts had been corrupted and, in his work of 1722, Whiston sets about recovering what must be the original, uncorrupted texts by using the most ancient texts available to check the standard scripture. In his 1724 polemic, Collins amusingly points out "that a

²⁵ Samuel Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:537.

²⁶ Whiston, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Whiston; Containing Memoirs of Several of his Friends also; Written by himself*, 2 vols. (London, 1753), 1:191.

Bible restored, according to Mr. W.'s Theory, will be a mere WHISTONIAN BIBLE, a BIBLE confounding and not containing *the True Text* of the Old Testament."²⁷

Clarke enters the fray in 1725 with the publication of his *Discourse Concerning the Connexion of the Prophecies in the Old Testament, and the Application of Them to Christ*. In this work, while he agrees that a great many fulfilled historical prophecies in scripture are not allegorical and, in historical fact, have only one literal fulfillment, he argues, against Whiston, that some prophetic texts may indeed have a double signification, one which signifies a fulfillment during the immediate time of the prophet who uttered the prophecy and another one at a later time intended for later readers. As Clarke's biographer, J. P. Ferguson explains: "Thus when Isaiah said of the Jews that they heard with their own ears but did not understand, this was true of the people of his own time, but it was equally true of the people of the Lord's time when Jesus used the same words."²⁸

Regarding the prophecy in Matthew 1:22–3 that the messiah would be born of a virgin, Clarke argues that if Jesus did not fulfill this prophecy, it is impossible for him to be the messiah but that, if he did fulfill it, to prove to later generations that he did requires the demonstration of his divinely appointed "Mission."²⁹ Fortunately, as we live long after the birth of Jesus, by the miraculous facts of his life we are able to see how he fulfilled this particular prophecy, something not apparent at his birth:

But the *Beginning* of the *Life* of Christ, is a very different thing from the *History* of his *beginning* to *Preach* the Gospel. What happened *First* in *Time*, could not but of necessity be *Last* in *Proof*: the *Credibility* of the *Invisible* Miracle of his *Birth*, depending entirely on the *Visible* miraculous Proofs, by which our Lord afterwards gave Evidence of *his* own Commission . . .³⁰

Thus, Clarke tends to favor the argument from miracles as decisive in the proof that Jesus was in fact the prophetically predicted messiah because such events guarantee the divinely prophesied mission of Jesus. Even so, Clarke totally agrees with Newton that only after the fact is it possible to reconcile a prophetic prediction with a particular event in human or natural history. Of

²⁷ Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London, 1724), p. 196.

²⁸ J. P. Ferguson, *An Eighteenth Century Heretic: Dr. Samuel Clarke* (Kington: Roundwood, 1976), pp. 156–157.

²⁹ Clarke, Sermon LXIX, "The Miraculous Birth of Christ," *Sermons on Several Subjects*, in *Works*, 1:427. Cf. Ferguson, *An Eighteenth Century Heretic*, pp. 156–157.

³⁰ Clarke, Sermon LXIX, "The Miraculous Birth of Christ," *Sermons on Several Subjects*, in *Works*, 1:428.

the claim in Matthew that Jesus fulfills the prophecy of the messiah born of a virgin, Clarke writes that, following the events of his life such as his Resurrection:

The Apostle St *Matthew* therefore had a *just Right*, and *good and sufficient Grounds*, to apply to our Lord the *Prophecy* cited by him.... Nor is it of any moment, to what person *Ahaz* perhaps might think it confined; or in what sense even *Isaiah* himself, possibly might understand the words. For the Prophets themselves *saw These* things, but as *through a Glass darkly*; even as the *Apostles* afterwards did, and *We* still do, things that are yet future.³¹

Finally, Clarke believes in the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies about the world to come for those who are saved. God has provided in scripture the promise of salvation and an eternal “conversation” in heaven as well as the threat of future punishment as “rational motives to induce mankind to live virtuously and so gain admittance to the world to come.”³²

Regarding the passage in Romans 11.4 about the election by grace of a “remnant,” Clarke writes that we ought to rest satisfied that it will come to pass as prophesied in a manner that will be congruent with our understanding of the divine attributes even if, now, we do not understand the details of how it will work out. He writes that such passages:

may justly seem to be *hard sayings*, and *Who can hear them?* For if these things be so, *Who then shall be saved?* And how shall this be reconciled with those Divine Attributes, the Goodness, the Mercy, and the Compassion of God; of whom the Scripture declares, that he *would have all men to be saved*, that he *would not that Any should perish*, and that his *tender mercies are over all his Works?* Now to This Difficulty it might be sufficient to answer in general, that at the great day of Retribution, God will abundantly vindicate himself before Men and Angels, and *all Mouths shall be stopped before him*: Stopped, not by Power and Supreme Authority, but by conviction of the Justice, the Reason, the Equity, the Necessity of the Case.... This, I say, in the whole a sufficient ground of Satisfaction, (even though nothing further could be alleged,) to a rational, pious, and modest Mind, who can *trust* God till the final event of Things, to make it appear at last, that *the Judge of all the Earth will do what is right*.³³

³¹ Clarke, Sermon LXIX, “The Miraculous Birth of Christ,” *Sermons on Several Subjects*, in *Works*, 1:429–430.

³² Clarke, Sermon IX, “Of the Omnipotence of God,” *Sermons on Several Subjects*, in *Works* 1:56.

³³ Clarke, Sermon LXIII, “Of the Number of those that shall be Saved,” *Sermons on Several Subjects*, in *Works* 1:389. Cf. Clarke, Sermon LXXXIV, “The Conversation of Christians is in Heaven,” *Sermons on Several Subjects*, in *Works* 1:522.

*The Argument from Miracles in Newton and Clarke*³⁴

For Newton, most of the miracle stories in prophetic scripture have a natural interpretation and, if interpreted properly, merely show that the generally simple, generally uniform production of natural effects by natural causes can, occasionally, be altered by the intervention of some other, less well understood but still quite “natural,” cause. Most historical accounts of miracles are frauds. In an important variant of his manuscript entitled “Paradoxical Questions concerning y^e morals and actions of Athanasius and his followers” (located in the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles), Newton baldly states his view that Athanasius “& his party” feigned miracles through the “magical use of the signe of y^e Crosse” in order to attract a following:

These & such like stories sufficiently open the designe of Athanasius & his party in setting on foot this humour of pretending to miracles. They found by experience y^t their opinions were not to be propagated by disputing & arguing, & therefore gave out that their adversaries were crafty people and cunning disputants and their own party simple well meaning men, and there imposed this law upon the Monks that they should not dispute about y^e success of their cause to y^e working of miracles and spreading of monkery³⁵

Newton is most wary of stories in scripture of miracles, defined as Humean “breaks” in the laws of nature, and famously states that miracles “are not so called because they are the works of God but because they happen seldom and for that reason excite wonder.”³⁶

For Newton, the historical creation of gravity demonstrates God’s general providence but its continuous operation since that moment reveals a sustaining special providence. God’s sustained preservation of the order of nature and natural laws since the creation demonstrates divine special providence because of the very nature of gravitational attraction. Newton claims that “a continual miracle is needed to prevent the sun and fixed stars from rushing together through gravity.”³⁷

³⁴The material in this section is adapted from James E. Force, “Providence and Newton’s *Pantokrator*: Natural Law, Miracles, and Newtonian Science,” in James E. Force and Sarah Hutton, *Newton and Newtonianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004), pp. 71–76.

³⁵Newton, “Paradoxical Questions concerning ye morals & actions of Athanasius & his followers,” under the question: “Whether Athanasius did not start false miracles for his own interest” is taken from the ms. in the possession of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Cf. Newton to John Locke, 16 February 1692, in *Newton Correspondence*, 3:195.

³⁶Cited in Herbert McLachlan, ed., *Newton’s Theological Manuscripts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1950), p. 17.

³⁷*Newton Correspondence*, 3:336.

This point is echoed by Clarke and Whiston. Whiston is most adamant in adopting Newton's stance and asserts that the very fact of nature's continuous operations in accord with natural law proves specially provident divine dominion:

'Tis now evident, that *Gravity*, the most mechanical affection of Bodies, and which seems most natural, depends entirely on the constant and efficacious, and, if you will, the supernatural and miraculous Influence of Almighty God.³⁸

When Newton and Whiston declare that the daily operation of gravity is a miraculous effect of God, they mean that, in obeying natural laws, physical objects continually exhibit signs of God's special providence. But if all instances of obedience to the laws of nature are miraculous in this sense, then the traditional sense of miracles as a special denial or negation or, to use Hume's term, "violation," of the laws of nature is set aside. Obeying the laws of nature becomes, if this view is taken to be the exclusive meaning and range of God's special providence, specially provident and the commonest natural event is itself a miracle. As Whiston says:

I do not know whether the falling of a Stone to Earth ought not more truly to be esteem'd a supernatural Effect, or a Miracle, than what we with the greatest surprize should so stile, its remaining pendulous in the Open Air; since the former requires an *active Influence* in the first Cause, while the latter supposes *non-Annihilation* only.³⁹

Newton and such Newtonian disciples as Whiston certainly often do maintain that most events regarded by the "vulgar" as miracles are not really Humean "violations" of natural law. For these Newtonians, the sustained operation of natural law itself is termed a miracle and illustrates God's providential dominion. Newton observes, and Whiston echoes, that miracles in the traditional (Humean) sense are often simply misunderstandings on the part of the vulgar. Miracles, writes Newton in his most widely known quote on this topic, "are not so called because they are the works of God, but because they happen seldom and for that reason excite wonder."⁴⁰

Despite this general tendency to wariness, the Newtonians also often talk as if they believe at least in the possibility that an event may occur which really does contravene or "violate" nature and which is caused by God's direct will. Newtonians hold out for the possibility that miracles in the ordinary sense, i.e., as understood by the vulgar, may actually happen. It is a question, at this point,

³⁸ William Whiston, *A New Theory of the Earth*, p. 284.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ McLaclan, ed., *Newton's Theological Manuscripts*, p. 17.

of epistemology, of human ability to know and understand God's providential interactions in his created world. Clarke makes this element of the Newtonian understanding of "miracles" most clear.

Clarke is also vitally involved in the debate on miracles.⁴¹ Leibniz famously observes that the Newtonian Lord God of creation so badly mangled the job that, "from time to time," nature wants a "Reformation" – which, for Leibniz, is scandalous. In 1715, he writes to Princess (later Queen) Caroline of Wales of his fears that Newton's notion of God is one of the primary causes of the moral lapses so evident in the England of their day. Clarke responds and the exchange of volleys between Leibniz and Clarke is first published in 1717. In *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, Clarke argues that it is precisely because God can and does providentially RE-interpose himself within the created order of natural law to govern directly his creation as the Lord God of particular providence that Leibniz levels against the Newtonians the charge of reducing God to an inferior clock repairman. "According to this Newtonian doctrine," scoffs Leibniz, "God Almighty wants to *wind up* his watch from time to time: otherwise it would cease to move. He had not, it seems, sufficient foresight to make it a perpetual motion."⁴²

Clarke replies, in general, that Leibniz misunderstands the totality of divine providence due to his *a priori* doctrines of pre-established harmony and windowless monads which leave God without any sort of continuing, i.e., specially provident, dominion following his initial act of generally provident creation and, with it, the programming of the mechanized world order to unfold in accord with God's foreknowledge encoded in the fixed and irrevocable laws of nature. On Leibniz's view, the sins of mankind, for example, are foreseen through God's prescience at the moment of his generally provident creation when he also pre-ordains – programs – the Flood as a just punishment. The only sort of Providence which counts for Leibniz is God's creative general providence which is omniscient and perfect. If one shears this position of its Leibnizian metaphysical trappings, one is left, finally, with an interpretation of Clarke which fits nicely into the "*Medievalist-Rational*" school of interpretation

⁴¹The material in this section is adapted from James E. Force, "Providence and Newton's *Pantokrator*," in Force and Hutton, *Newton and Newtonianism*, pp. 88–90.

⁴²"Mr. Leibnitz's First Paper," in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence, together with extracts from Newton's Principia and Opticks*, ed. H. G. Alexander (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 11. See also *Leibniz Selections*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Scribners, 1951), p. 216. Henning Graf Reventlow has also described this attempt by Newton and Clarke "to leave room for special special providence over against general providence." For Reventlow, "This is probably the most important issue in Clarke's correspondence against Leibniz." See, Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), p. 340.

whose essentially Augustinian position is that “In one way or another the marvelous events set down by Moses in the Pentateuch could be demonstrated to fall within the mechanistic order of nature.”⁴³

However, for Clarke and for all the Newtonians, in contrast, it corresponds much more closely with the true nature of God’s providential dominion that God fabricates the universal natural order so that it may be canceled from time to time and superseded by direct, specially provident, contra-causal, immediate interpositions of the divine will. It is quite true that, ordinarily, the generally provident laws of nature established at creation are all that is necessary, as far as Clarke is concerned, for the governance of the Lord God’s dominion over man and nature. Clarke does in fact argue that “the wisdom of God consists in framing originally the perfect and complete idea of a work, which begun and continues, according to that original perfect idea, by the continual uninterrupted exercise of his power and government.”⁴⁴

Finally, when Leibniz ridicules the Newtonian conception that the everyday operation of gravity is itself an instance of a kind of specially provident miracle,⁴⁵ Clarke does in fact reply that a miracle is what is unusual in nature and so, because the operation of gravity is regular and constant, “tis no miracle, whether it be effected immediately by God Himself, or mediately by any created power.”⁴⁶ Thus, in Clarke’s Boyle Lectures, he occasionally sounds like William Whiston when Whiston states that gravity results from a cause “superior to matter *continually* exerting on it a certain force or power” and thus that the world depends “every moment on some superior being, for the preservation of its frame.”⁴⁷ Clarke similarly asserts that “The Course of Nature truly and properly speaking is nothing else but the *Will of God* producing certain Effects in a continued, regular, constant and uniform Manner which . . . being in every Moment perfectly *Arbitrary*, is as easy to be altered at any time, as to be *preserved*.”⁴⁸

But a continuous “miracle” which “sustains” the laws of nature in their current operation, finally, is only one kind of direct, specially provident interposition of arbitrary, omnipotent Divine will into the generally provident,

⁴³Peter Harrison, “Newtonian Science, Miracles, and Laws of Nature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, No. 4 (October, 1995), p. 539.

⁴⁴“Dr. Clarke’s Second Reply,” in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, p. 22.

⁴⁵“Mr. Leibniz’s Third Paper,” in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, pp. 29–30; “Mr. Leibniz’s Fourth Paper,” *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43; “Mr. Leibniz’s Fifth Paper,” *Ibid.*, pp. 91–95. Cf. *Leibniz Selections*, pp. 227–228, 235, and 275–278.

⁴⁶“Dr. Clarke’s Third Reply,” in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, p. 35.

⁴⁷Clarke, *Works*, 2:601. Cited by H. G. Alexander in his Introduction to *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*.

⁴⁸Cited in Ezio Vailati, *Leibniz & Clarke. A Study of their Correspondence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 141–142.

created order of nature. There always remains, for the Newtonians, the possibility for another sort of direct display of particular providence. As with Newton and Whiston, Clarke never strays from his commitment to the possibility of miracles as the direct and explicit RE-interposition of God's omnipotent will directly back into the world thereby, in an exceptional act, canceling and superseding created natural law. To repeat, in his Boyle Lectures for 1705, Clarke writes that a miracle:

is a work effected in a manner *unusual* or different from the common and regular method of Providence by the interposition either of God Himself, or some intelligent agent superior to man, in the proof or evidence of some particular doctrine or in attestation to the authority of some particular person.⁴⁹

For the Newtonians, God's present dominion – and the ever present possibility of his direct interposition of his power to alter nature and his prophetic promises to re-interpose himself within his creation in the future – is both the anchor for the emotional power of religion and the source of its greatest evidence in the scriptural history of God's particular providence throughout history. Newton's God is present and able, should he decide to do so, to intervene in the generally provident natural laws which ordinarily regulate every sparrow's flight. God listens to prayer and he is able, IF he chooses, to answer directly in a manner quite exceptional to the ordinary coursing of nature. Clarke explains his view to Queen Caroline with an apt political analogy:

As those men, who pretend that in an earthly government things may go on perfectly well without the King himself ordering or disposing of anything, may reasonably be suspected that they would very well like to set the King aside....., so too those who think that the universe does not constantly need "God's actual government" but that the laws of mechanism alone would allow phenomena to continue, in effect to exclude God without the World.⁵⁰

The Cosmological Argument in Newton and Clarke

Newton is justly famous for his statement of the design argument in the *General Scholium*. He is equally famous for his disdain for feigned metaphysical hypotheses.⁵¹ But his disdain for metaphysical hypotheses does not extend to

⁴⁹ Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unalterable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:698.

⁵⁰ Cited in David Kubrin, "Newton and the Cyclical Cosmos," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967), p. 329.

⁵¹ The material in this section is adapted from James E. Force, "Providence and Newton's *Pantokrator*," in Force and Hutton, *Newton and Newtonianism*, pp. 80–83.

the traditional cosmological argument which purports to prove God's existence from an observation of phenomena. In a draft for the *General Scholium*, Newton writes:

He who shall demonstrate that there is a Perfect Being, and does not at the same time demonstrate that he is Lord of the Universe or Pantokrator, will not yet have demonstrated that God exists. A Being eternal, infinite, all-wise and most powerful, and the necessarily existing author of all things; yet the dominion or Deity of God is best demonstrated not from abstract ideas but from phenomena, by their final causes.⁵²

Newton relies upon the idea of cause-and-effect, of course, in his design argument. But Newton verges on the cosmological argument in a manuscript dating from around 1672, when he states that "*natures obvious laws*" are contingent upon the voluntary act of God's will. Newton writes that:

The world might have been otherwise than it is (because there may be worlds otherwise framed than this). It was therefore no necessary but a voluntary and free determination that it should be thus. And such a voluntary [cause must be a God]. Determination implies a God. If it be said the world could be no otherwise than it is because it is determin'd by an eternal series of causes, that's to pervert not to answer the first proposition. For I mean not that the world might have been otherwise notwithstanding the precedent series of causes, but that the whole series of causes might from eternity have been otherwise here, because they may be otherwise other places.⁵³

If the Lord God's power is such that He could create completely different kinds of matter – with different kinds of properties – in "other places" in the universe, it seems to follow that He is not bound or necessitated in any way by the particular laws which he caused to be in effect in this remote corner of the Milky Way. This point is reinforced by Newton's criticism of Descartes's philosophy of nature. Descartes, according to Newton, identified matter with its essential primary quality, extension. Descartes consequently, and most dangerously in Newton's view, considered this essential extension to be eternal and immutable and thus naturally possessed of a sort of innate necessity, a position which led inexorably to atheism by intellectualizing matter and divorcing it from God's causal efficacy. Newton strongly challenges what he

⁵² Newton, "De Gravitatione et Aequipondio Fluidorum," in *Unpublished Scientific Papers of Isaac Newton*, ed. and trans. A. R. Hall and M. B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 363. This passage is quoted by Robin Attfield, *God and the Secular* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1978), p. 73.

⁵³ *Of natures obvious laws & processes in vegetation*, Dibner MSS 1031 B (part), Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology, Special Collections Branch, Smithsonian Institution Branch, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC:

regards as the tendency to atheism implicit within Descartes's theory of matter and asserts against Descartes that matter is always an effect caused by God and that, for all poor old mankind may know, God can cause any sort of matter and any sort of laws to govern it. In his early (ca. 1668) manuscript entitled *De Gravitatione*, Newton asserts that matter:

... does not exist necessarily but by the divine will, because it is hardly given to us to know the limits of divine power, that is to say whether matter could be created in one way only, or whether there are several ways by which different beings similar to bodies could be produced.⁵⁴

This world, and the "whole series of causes" in it, could have been different given the absolute power of the Lord God. Newton hammers home this theme in his *Opticks* toward the end of Query 31⁵⁵ where he repeats his view about the unlimited nature of the providentially causal power of the Lord God:

And since Space is divisible *in infinitum*, and Matter is not necessarily in all places, it may be also allow'd that God is able to create Particles of Matter of several Sizes and Figures, and in several Proportions to Space, and perhaps of different Densities and Forces, and thereby to vary the Laws of Nature, and make Worlds of several sorts in several Parts of the Universe. At least, I see nothing of Contradiction in all this.⁵⁶

"The world might have been otherwise then it is (because there may be worlds otherwise framed then this) Twas therefore noe necessary but a voluntary & free determination y^t it should be thus. And such a voluntary [cause must be a God]. Determination implys a God. If it be said y^e w^{ld} could bee noe otherwise yⁿ tis determined by an eternall series of causes, y^s to pervert not answer y^e 1st prop: ffor I meane not y^t y^e [symbol for the world] might have been otherwise notwth standing the precedent series of causes, but y^t y^e whole series of causes might from eterity [sic] have been otherwise <because they as well as, *deleted*> / because they may be otherwise *inserted* / in other places". [Transcribed and printed by Dobbs, *The Janus Faces of Genius*, pp. 256–270. See p. 266. The transcription apparatus has been slightly modified.]

⁵⁴Newton, *De Gravitatione et Aequeipondio Fluidorum*, Cambridge Ms. Add. 4003. This text is found in *Unpublished Scientific Papers of Isaac Newton*, p. 137. This text is cited by Margaret J. Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy. Gassendi and Descartes on Contingency and Necessity in the Created World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 152, who kindly pointed it out to me.

⁵⁵The first edition of the *Opticks* was published in London in 1704; it contained sixteen queries (1–16.) A second edition in Latin, the *Optice*, was published in 1706 with seven new queries (17–23.) Another eight queries were added to the second English edition in 1717. Quaestio 23 of the second Latin edition became, at that point, Query 31.

⁵⁶Sir Isaac Newton, *Opticks or A Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections & Colours of Light*, based on the fourth ed. London, 1730, with a Foreword by Albert Einstein, an Intro. By Sir Edmund Whittaker, a Preface by I. B. Cohen, and Analytical Table of Contents prepared by Duane H. D. Roller (New York: Dover, 1952), pp. 403–404.

Because the created world of nature is so clearly contingent upon God's original casual will and because there is no necessity in nature which forces God to choose what to create and what not to create, who are we to claim that the Lord God, who created nature and "*natures obvious laws*" (and who is so powerful that He could have created any other sort of nature which He chose), no longer possesses sufficient power to re-intervene directly in that order? If such an act of will is conceivably a part of God's power, and it clearly is for Newton, then it is possible. Newton sees "nothing of Contradiction" in such a conception of God's power.⁵⁷

Clarke is the most famous Newtonian exponent of the cosmological argument. Just as Whiston devotes his Boyle Lectures to instantiating the argument from prophecy, Clarke devotes his first series of Boyle Lectures to tracing out the cosmological argument. Delivered at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1704, the year when Newton's *Opticks* is published, Clarke entitles his first set of Boyle lectures *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. For Clarke, the cosmological argument is an *a posteriori* empirical argument. It begins not with observations of order or purposiveness in nature (as in the design argument) but with the simple existence of the world of contingent nature. From the observation that "Something NOW is,"⁵⁸ Clarke argues to both the causal principle and the causal chain:

Whatever Exists, has a Cause, a Reason, a Ground of its Existence; (a Foundation, on which its Existence relies, a Ground or Reason why it doth *exist*, rather than not *exist*...⁵⁹

Clarke goes on to argue that, in exploring for the possible cause of the existence of contingent nature, i.e., of the "temporary phenomena of nature" as it falls under our current observation, we trace effect to cause until we come eventually to an eternal, unchangeable, independent being or First Cause:

To suppose an *infinite Succession* of changeable and *dependent* beings produced one from another in an endless Progression, *without* any Original

⁵⁷Newton writes in his manuscript *Of natures obvious laws & processes in vegetation* "Of God" that:

"What ever I can conceive without a contradiction [sic], either is or may (effected *deleted*) / bee made / by something that is: I can conceive all my owne powers (knowledge (*illegible word, deleted*) activating matter &c) without assigning them any limits Therefore such powers either are or may be made to bee." [Cited in Dobbs, *The Janus Faces of Genius*, p. 166.]

⁵⁸Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:524.

⁵⁹*Ibid.* This text is cited, and this point is first made, by Michael J. Buckley, S. J., *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 176.

Cause at all; is only a driving back from one step to another, and (as it were) removing out of Sight, the Question concerning the Ground or Reason of the Existence of Things.⁶⁰

Clarke goes on to derive God's various attributes, beginning with self-existence in Prop. III and arriving finally at Infinite Goodness in Prop. XII, from the fact of the existence of the current, contingent natural order and from the causal maxim. Clarke never makes the ontological argument, i.e., he never argues that we can know that God exists simply through an examination of our concept of God. A Newtonian, not a Cartesian, Clarke begins with what we now observe to exist and uses a causal analysis of these "temporary phenomena of Nature"⁶¹ to derive the necessary, self-existing First Cause and all of his attributes. Clarke directly rejects the Cartesian ontological argument when he writes that:

*Our first Certainty of the Existence of God, does not arise from this, that in the Idea our Minds frame of him (or rather in the Definition that we make of the word, God, as signifying a Being of all possible Perfections,) we include Self-Existence.*⁶²

Clarke is specific that merely having the idea of a self-existing First Cause is insufficient to prove that such a First Cause exists:

The bare having an Idea of the Proposition, *There is a Self-Existent Being*, proves indeed the Thing not to be impossible; (For of an impossible Proposition, there can be no Idea;) But that it actually is cannot be proved from the Idea...⁶³

Even though Clarke begins in an *a posteriori* fashion with experience of the current existence of contingent nature and even though he also rejects any

⁶⁰ Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:526.

⁶¹ Clarke, *The Answer to a Seventh Letter Concerning the Argument A Priori*, in Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailaiti, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 119.

⁶² Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:529. See Buckley, *At the Origins*, p. 180.

⁶³ Clarke, *DBAG*, 2:530. See Buckley, *At the Origins*, p. 180. For a detailed analysis of Clarke's criticism of the Ontological Argument, see William Rowe, *The Cosmological Logical Argument* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 187ff. For an argument that Clarke's language is sufficiently equivocal to justify the charge that Clarke occasionally writes of the "antecedent necessity" of God "as if it were an ontological reality itself," see James P. Ferguson, *The Philosophy of Dr. Samuel Clarke and Its Critics* (New York: Vantage, 1974), pp. 94–95.

ontological argument which begins with the *a priori* definition of God, there is yet an element of the *a priori* in his argument. Clarke presumes that Hume's causal maxim, "*whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of its existence,*"⁶⁴ is a necessary truth, intuitively certain, and, hence, not in need of demonstration.⁶⁵ In a later edition of his published lectures, Clarke cites, at this point, the "*well illustrated*" example of the causal maxim made by William Wollaston. Wollaston urges his readers to suppose that:

...a Chain hung down out of the Heavens, from an *Unknown Height*; and, though Every link of it gravitated toward the Earth, and what it hung upon was not visible, yet it did not descend, but kept its situation: And, upon This, a question should arise, *What supported or kept up this Chain?* Would it be a sufficient Answer, to say, that the *First* or Lowest Link hung upon the *Second*, of That next above it; the *Second*, or rather the *First and Second together*, upon the *Third*; and so *in infinitum*? For, *What holds up the Whole?* A Chain of *ten links*, would fall down; unless something, able to bear it, hinder'd. One of *twenty*; if not staid by something of a yet Greater Strength, in proportion to the Increase of Weight. And therefore One of *infinite links*, certainly; if not sustained by Something *infinitely* strong, and capable to bear up an infinite Weight. And Thus it is in a *Chain of Causes and Effects*; tending, or (as it were) gravitating, towards some End. The Last, or Lowest, depends, or (as one may say) is *supposed* upon the Cause above it. This again, if it be not the First Cause, is suspended, as an Effect, upon Something above it, &c. And if they should be *infinite*; unless (agreeably to what has been said) there is some *Cause*, upon which *All* hang or depend; they would be an *infinite Effect*, without an *Efficient*. And to assert there is any such Thing, would be as great an *absurdity* as to say, that

⁶⁴David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. with text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 78.

⁶⁵Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument*, p. 73. Rowe (*Cosmological Argument*, pp. 3–4) makes it quite clear that, while the Cosmological Argument has elements of an *a posteriori* argument, it would be "misleading" to conclude that: "the really basic principles appealed to in the Cosmological Argument are *a posteriori*. The proponents of the Cosmological Argument insist that the fundamental principles appealed to in the argument are necessary truths, known either directly or by deduction from other *a priori* principles that are known directly." The *a priori* causal principle, or the Principle of Sufficient Reason, is, for Rowe, the "pivot" of this *a posteriori* argument. Cf. Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, II:569, where Clarke insists that he is using, in his Cosmological Argument, the argument *a priori* instead of the argument *a posteriori*. Also, see *DBAG*, in *Works*, II:573, where Clarke discusses the one possible *a posteriori* objection to what he calls his "*a priori*" argument. (The objection is the problem of evil and Clarke's response is the same as that of the character Demea in Part X in Hume's *Dialogues*.)

a *finite* or *little Weight* wants something to sustain it, but an *Infinite one* (or the *Greatest*) does not.⁶⁶

Wollaston is not the only philosopher who urges the causal maxim in connection with empirical experience of the existing natural order. Hume, for example, lists “Mr. *Hobbes*,” “Mr. *Locke*,” “Dr. *Clarke* and others” as philosophers who rely upon a cosmological/causal argument to demonstrate God’s existence and attributes.⁶⁷

For Clarke, the foundation of his argument is the now existing world. The method which he follows to deduce God’s existence and attributes is an “endeavour by One clear and plane Series of Propositions necessarily connected and following one from another, to demonstrate the Certainty of the Being of God, and to deduce in order the Necessary Attributes of his Nature, so far as by our Finite Reason we are enabled to discover and apprehend them.”⁶⁸ After moving from a consideration of what now exists to the necessary being which first caused it to exist, Clarke moves on, beginning in Prop. IV, to argue that the self-existing first mover who is demonstrated to exist in the first three propositions has the attributes of the Lord God of Israel as described in scripture. It is in this second stage of his deductive argument that Clarke brings in the arguments **FROM** and **TO** design which he considers to be a part of the deductive chain of reasoning in his cosmological argument.⁶⁹

⁶⁶William Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London, 1724), p. 67. Cited in Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument*, p. 73.

⁶⁷Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 80–81, notes. The “others” with whom Hume lumps Clarke as proponents of an *a posteriori* approach to theology may possibly include Colin Maclaurin, *Account of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophical Discoveries* (London, 1748); Daniel Waterland, *Dissertation Upon the Argument a Priori* (Cambridge, 1734); and Phillips Gretton, *A Review of the Argument A Priori* (London, 1726.)

⁶⁸Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:524.

⁶⁹Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument*, p. 4, explains the main differences between what I call the Design Argument and the Cosmological Argument as follows:

- (1) “...the fact about the world from which the [Design Argument] begins is vastly more complicated and, therefore, more difficult to establish by experience than is the fact from which the Cosmological Argument proceeds.”;
- (2) “...the [Design Argument] is an inductive argument; its premises, if true, may lend considerable support to its conclusion, but do not demonstrate or establish its truth.”; and
- (3) “...the [Design Argument] does not purport to be a complete argument for the existence of the theistic God. At best it may render it probable that the cause of the world has a high degree of intelligence and power.”

Clarke argues that infinite power is an attribute of the self-existent because he alone is self-existent and the powers of all subordinate beings are dependent upon him. Clarke writes that:

The Self-Existent Being, the Supreme Cause of all Things, must of Necessity have infinite Power. This Proposition is evident, and undeniable. For since nothing (as has been already proved) can possibly be Self-Existent, besides himself; and consequently all Things in the Universe were made by Him, and are entirely dependent upon Him; and all the Powers of all Things are derived from Him, and must therefore be perfectly Subject and Subordinate to Him; 'Tis manifest that nothing can make any Difficulty or Resistance to the Execution of his Will; but he must of Necessity have absolute Power to do every thing he pleases, with the perfectest Ease, and in the perfectest Manner, and once and in a Moment, whenever he Wills it.⁷⁰

The causal steps (or propositions) which Clarke traverses in his deductive Cosmological Argument culminate in Proposition XII: "*The Supreme Cause and Author of all Things, must of necessity be a Being of Infinite Goodness, Justice and Truth, and all other Moral Perfections; such as Become the Supreme Governour and Judge of the World.*"⁷¹ For Clarke, God's power to order matter as he pleases is a deducible attribute. Samuel Clarke thus faithfully promotes Newton's view⁷² that, because the concourse of the world depends entirely on God's will, that any "Alteration," including total "Annihilation," is possible to conceive without a contradiction. Clarke writes that:

For whether we consider the *Form* of the World, with the *Disposition* and *Motion* of its Parts; or whether we consider the *Matter* of it, as such, without respect to its present Form; every Thing in it, both the *whole* and every one of its *Parts*, their *Situation* and *Motion*, the *Form* and the *Matter*, are the most Arbitrary and Dependent Things, and the farthest removed from Necessity that can possibly be imagined.⁷³

⁷⁰ Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:553. Cf. Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:573, where he states that it is because of his infinite power that mortals offer prayers to God:

... the Divine Nature is under no Necessity, but such as is consistent with the most perfect Liberty and freest Choice; (which is the ground of all our Prayers and Thanksgivings; the Reason, when we *pray* to him to be *good to us and gracious*, and *thank* him for being *just and merciful*; where no Man *prays* to him to be *Omnipotent*, or *thanks* him for being *Omnipotent*, or for *knowing all Things*.)

⁷¹ Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:573.

⁷² See the end of Query 31 in the *Opticks*. Cf. Note 55 above.

⁷³ Clarke is controverting, in this passage, Spinoza who claims that the world is necessarily existent. See Samuel Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, II:531.

In sum, after first positing that nothing might exist and next observing that something does exist, Clarke asks why there is this something rather than nothing?⁷⁴ He answers that this world, as we observe it, exists because God freely chose to exercise his infinite power to bring this particular world into existence and not some other possible world. The essence of genuine free will, divine or human, is "...having a continual Power of *choosing*, whether he shall *Act*, or whether he shall *forbear Acting*." Clarke goes on to make clear that we are unable to know, in advance, how God will choose to act:

GOD is, by *Necessity of Nature*, a *Free Agent*: And he can no more possibly *cease* to be so, than he can *cease* to exist. He must of *Necessity*, every moment, either *choose* to *act*, or *choose* to *forbear acting*; because *Two Contradictories* cannot possibly be true at once. But *Which* of these Two he shall *choose*, in This he is at perfect *Liberty*: And to suppose him *not to be so*, is *contradictorily* supposing him *not to be the First Cause*, but to be *acted* by some *Superior Power*, so as to be *Himself* no *Agent at all*.⁷⁵

Popkin's "Third Force"⁷⁶

Now is perhaps the appropriate moment to summarize the results of the various Newtonian attempts to understand the being and, especially, the ubiquitous power of God through the use of the arguments from (and to) design, prophecy, miracles, and the existence of this particular world, i.e., through theology, natural and revealed.

For Newton and Clarke, the design argument shows a supremely powerful architect-creator who, in the beginning, created order and purposiveness in nature just as the new scientists have discovered and described.

For Newton and Clarke, the argument from prophecy shows that just as God left a record of his attributes of omnipotent, generally provident creative power inscribed in the "book" of nature so, too, in properly interpreted scripture prophecies, there is abundant evidence of God's continuous and direct

⁷⁴ Clarke asks, "What is it that has from Eternity determined such a Succession of Beings to exist, rather than that from Eternity there should never have existed anything at all?" Clarke, DBAG, in *Works*, 2:527.

⁷⁵ Clarke, DBAG, in *Works*, 2:566.

⁷⁶ I have adapted this section from James E. Force, "Jewish Monotheism, Christian Heresy, and Sir Isaac Newton," in *The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After*, eds. Robert Waddington and Arthur H. Williamson (New York: Garland 1994), pp. 259–280; and from James E. Force, "Newton, the Lord God of Israel and Knowledge of Nature," eds. Richard H. Popkin and G. M. Weiner, *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), pp. 131–158.

involvement in natural and human history as well as hopeful hints – for Newtonian scientists-cum-biblical interpreters with ears to hear and eyes to see – about the course of the future in both the “world natural” and the “world politique.” Newton is convinced that God will intervene in the future, as he has forecast in scripture prophecies yet unfulfilled, just as he has done in the immense record of historically fulfilled scripture prophecies, a prospect which ravishes Newton’s imagination.⁷⁷

For Newton and Clarke, it redounds to the greater glory of God that, after fabricating the universal natural order, he may also cancel and supersede its laws through direct, specially provident, immediate, miraculous interpositions of omnipotent divine will. The problem with modern deists,⁷⁸ says Clarke, is that they conclude, from the general regularity of the “course of nature,” that it is impossible for nature to be altered by divine fiat and, hence, that fulfilled prophetic miracles, as well as future miracles, are impossible. Clarke makes very clear that miracles, i.e., unusual phenomena caused by the “immediate operation of *original, absolute, and undervived Power*,” are well within God’s power.⁷⁹ For Clarke, the chief problem which arises in connection with miracles is not whether God has the power to change

⁷⁷ In Newton’s view, for example, during the millennium, the “children of the resurrection,” his term for the resurrected saints and martyrs who will rule with the returned Jesus, God’s vice-regent, in the New Jerusalem over the “race of mortal Jews,” may possibly go transporting about among the stars in company with the Holy Ghost. See James E. Force, “Jewish Monotheism, Christian Heresy, and Sir Isaac Newton,” in *The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After*, pp. 268–270. The Newtonians assume that, because it takes omnipotent, specially provident, miraculous, divine intervention to empower chosen prophets to foresee the future, fulfilled historical prophecies are themselves miraculous interventions. Hume is one of the first writers to point out the fact that a fulfilled prophecy is, in fact, miraculous. I remember when Popkin and I read the relevant passage from Hume’s first *Enquiry*, in the essay “Of Miracles,” in the fall of 1977. It was in a classroom and we both looked at each other and said, “Oh, ho, this is an interesting facet of Newtonianism!” See James E. Force, “Hume and the Relation of Science to Religion Among Certain Members of the Royal Society,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, No. 4 (Oct.–Dec., 1984), pp. 517–536; reprinted in *Philosophy, Religion and Science in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Library of the History of Ideas, Vol., 2, ed. John W. Yolton (Rochester, MN: University of Rochester Press, 1990), pp. 228–247.

⁷⁸ On the alleged “deism” of the Newtonians, see James E. Force, “Science, Deism, and William Whiston’s ‘Third Way,’” *Ideas and Production. A Journal in the History of Ideas, Issue Seven—History of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology, 1987), pp. 18–33.

⁷⁹ Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeableness Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (London, 1705), in *Works*, 2:697. (Cited hereafter as *DCUONR*.)

the generally provident natural order by an immediate act of will: he most certainly does. Rather, the chief problem in connection with an unusual phenomenon of nature is an epistemological one: how are human beings to determine whether an unusual phenomenon in nature is caused directly by a particular act of divine, special providence or indirectly by one of God's "subordinate Intelligent Beings," e.g., angels? Clarke concludes that observers of nature can simply "never be *certain*, that the miraculous Effect was beyond the Power of all created Beings in the Universe to produce."⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Clarke repeatedly emphasizes the complete power of God to interpose his will and directly to alter the laws of nature:

The Course of Nature, truly and properly speaking, is nothing else but the *Will of God* producing certain Effects in a continued, regular, constant and uniform Manner: Which Course or Manner, being in every Moment perfectly *Arbitrary*, is as easy to be *altered* at any time, as to be *preserved*.⁸¹

Finally, the cosmological argument becomes, for Newton and, especially, Clarke, an effective way to demonstrate not only the existence of God, but also God's most important attribute: his infinite, absolute omnipotent power to create this particular world as we now observe it. All of the Newtonians agree with Clarke's final position that God "must of Necessity have absolute Power to do every thing he pleases, with the perfectest Ease, and in the perfectest Manner, and once and in a Moment, whenever he Wills it."⁸²

Taken together, the most important attribute of God, for the Newtonian scientist-theologians, is God's omnipotent power to create existing nature, in all of its manifold beauty, to change it at will, and to empower selected prophets to know in advance the course of the future and to leave their divinely given foreknowledge as a legacy to interpreters who are as skilled in interpreting the book of scripture as they are in interpreting the book of nature.

Newton and Clarke ardently believe that the New Science supports the inference to a supremely powerful divine architect who also, as their prophetic-historical researches show, simultaneously fulfills prophecies and performs miracles. But can these theological views possibly have anything to do with Newton's science qua science? One prominent approach to answering this question has led simply to severing or disconnecting the religious aspect

⁸⁰ Clarke, *DCUONR*, in *Works*, 2:697.

⁸¹ Clarke, *DCUONR*, in *Works*, 2:698.

⁸² Clarke, *DBAG*, in *Works*, 2:553.

of Newton's science from his more respectable work in science.⁸³ Newton's science, after all, is recognizably modern and fits neatly into the standard framework against which we view the history of philosophy in the early modern period. As Popkin has characterized this still widely prevalent interpretative framework:

As heirs to the Enlightenment, we have seen the development of modern thought in terms of what led to the Age of Reason—scientific empiricism, and rationalism turning against the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁸⁴

Because of the inability of interpreters within the standard interpretative framework to take seriously the Newtonians' concern with, for example, the argument from prophecy, in general, or the millennial prophecies, in particular,

⁸³In contrast to Popkin, some Newton scholars share an explicit assumption "that Newton's characteristic metaphysical theory of the nature of what he calls the "Lord God," though perhaps "important" to Newton psychologically, contains no necessary internal connection with Newton's science or, indeed, with any of the other diverse aspects of his thought—either with his Arianism and millennialism or with, to choose an arcane example, his curiosity about the exact dimensions, in true Biblical cubits, of the Jewish temple. For a detailed description of what I have often called the "Disconnectedness Thesis," see, for example, James E. Force, "Newton, the Lord God of Israel and Knowledge of Nature," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, pp. 151–152, n. 6. The inability to take seriously, for example, the millennialism of the Newtonians has led Charles Webster into the "quandary" of how to connect the science of Newton and Newtonians to their immediate Puritan predecessors. As James R. Jacob and Margaret C. Jacob long ago pointed out, Webster fails to see any connection because he disconnects the Newtonians and their science from their millennialism:

That Newton and many of his associates were also millenarians, that they shared an intensely religious and social vision of science, that they held to distinct political positions - albeit different from the millenarian, religious and political interests of Puritan scientists during the 1640s - all this is still not enough to enable Webster to see the link between his science and theirs". [See James R. Jacob, Margaret C. Jacob, "The Anglican Origins of Modern Science: The Metaphysical Foundations of the Whig Constitution," *Isis* 71, Issue 2 (June 1980), p. 251.]

Stephen D. Snobelen has become the most prominent supporter of the view that Newton's religion and science are intimately connected. See, especially, the following articles by Snobelen: "'La Lumière de la Nature': Dieu et la philosophie naturelle dans l'Optique de Newton," *Lumières* 4 (2004), pp. 65–104; "'To discourse of God': Isaac Newton's heterodox theology and his natural philosophy," in *Science And Dissent in England, 1688–1945*, ed. Paul B. Wood (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 39–65; "'God of Gods, and Lord of Lords': The Theology of Isaac Newton's *General Scholium* to the *Principia*," *Osi-ris* 16 (2001), pp. 169–208; and "Isaac Newton, Heretic: The Strategies of a Nicodemite," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32 (December 1999), pp. 381–419.

⁸⁴Richard H. Popkin, "The Third Force in 17th-Century Philosophy," in *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres* I (1983), p. 63. This article is the first statement of Popkin's notion of the "Third Force" to see print.

Popkin typically proposed a new interpretative framework. As always, he started with the problem of tracing the historical impact of the rediscovery of scepticism in the early modern period. This "sceptical crisis," as he had showed in *The History of Scepticism*, led the rationalist and empiricist philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to their various attempts to defeat, or at least to ameliorate, the corrosive effects of scepticism. But, as Popkin came to see by 1983, there was far more to the story of early modern thought than the continental rationalists and the British empiricists. According to Popkin, all sorts of important figures, especially from the seventeenth century, are left out of this standard interpretative framework such as, for example, Herbert of Cherbury, Ralph Cudworth, Kenelm Digby, and Comenius. Many thinkers in this era simply do not fit into either the rationalist or empiricist camps because of their "irrational" interests in, for example, millennial prophecy. While doing research at the Clark Library on the Quaker, Samuel Fisher, Popkin began to trace the development of what he called the "Third Force" in seventeenth-century thought. He writes that:

...I believe I have found another line of reaction to the 17th-century sceptical crisis, which helps account for some of the strange combinations of new science and theology that develop during the century, and flower in the Royal Society of England, and especially in the thought of its most famous member Sir Isaac Newton. This group of views, which for want of a better name, I have called "the third force" since it seems to be neither rationalist nor empiricist but combines elements of both with theosophy and interpretation of Bible prophecies.⁸⁵

The Newtonian Synthesis of Theology with Scientific Epistemology

In the remainder of this paper, I will show how Newton does indeed combine his theology with his science to produce the ultimate flowering of Popkin's "Third Force" in early modern thought. I have long argued that Newton's conception of the Lord God serves as the foundation of his scientific epistemology because, for Newton, the whole of creation is "subordinate to [God], and subservient to his Will."⁸⁶

Twenty-six years prior to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Newton, from a vastly different metaphysical and theological starting point, implies, in the second edition of the *Principia* (1713), that the future need not resemble the past simply because of the Lord God's absolute power and that, consequently, we must mark all of the consequences of this fact in regulating our expectations about what sort of human knowledge scientific empiricism can

⁸⁵ Popkin, "The Third Force," p. 36.

⁸⁶ Newton, *Opticks*, Query 31, p. 403.

provide. Natural laws, as we have understood them on the basis of our experience, and “Rules” to guide human expectations about future experience work in general and for the present moment but, in a miracle tomorrow or in the millennium to come, the old natural laws and regulative “Rules of Reasoning” need not apply.

For Newton, even the scientific knowledge which empirically grounded induction is able to provide is limited to the current nature of things which, in turn, is utterly dependent – both for its generally provident creation and its specially provident continued operation in its normal, causally connected fashion – upon the absolute, arbitrary will and power of the Lord God of supreme dominion described in the *General Scholium*. Scientific knowledge – which is confined strictly to empirically discovered, and empirically verified, probationary “Principles,” or natural laws – depends on God leaving the current natural order well enough alone.⁸⁷

As we have seen above, it is, for Newton and Clarke, thoroughly possible for God to intervene directly in this created natural order. There is nothing in Newton’s conception of matter or natural law – no inherent, unlimited necessity, Cartesian or otherwise – which might impede God in the free exercise of his will. For these Newtonians, God indeed may effect a Humean “violation” of the laws of nature.

Newton takes the absolute power of God to alter nature, at any moment, into account in his “Rules of Reasoning.” Encoded in these “Rules” is Newton’s cautious and cautionary method which ought to enable natural philosophers to integrate God’s absolute and arbitrary power into their scientific

⁸⁷Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pp. 134–135, well describes the familiar sort of religious scepticism which proponents of the “Disconnectedness Thesis” (see note 83) often seem to attribute to Newton:

“But when we look beyond human affairs and the properties of the surrounding bodies: When we carry our speculations into the two eternities before and after the present state of things; into the creation and formation of the universe; the existence and properties of spirits; the powers and operations of one universal spirit, existing without beginning and without end; omnipotent, immutable, infinite, and incomprehensible: We must be far removed from the smallest tendency to scepticism not to be apprehensive, that we have here got quite beyond the reach of our faculties. So long as we confine our speculations to trade, or morals, or politics, or criticism, we make appeals, every moment, to common sense and experience, which strengthen our philosophical conclusions and remove (at least in part) the suspicion, which we so justly entertain with regard to every reasoning that is subtle and refined. But in theological reasonings, we have not this advantage; while at the same time we are employed upon objects, which, we must be sensible, are too large for our grasp, and of all others, require most to be familiarized to our apprehension”.

accounts of natural phenomena. The "Rules of Reasoning" were published in Newton's *General Scholium* to the *Principia*. In the first edition of 1687, Newton published only three rules. The first is the rule of simplicity:

No more causes of natural things should be admitted than are both true and sufficient to explain their phenomena.

As the philosophers say: Nature does nothing in vain....⁸⁸

Newton is fond of the proposition that "Nature does nothing in vain." In Query 28 of the *Opticks*, he gives this proposition as an example of the sort of question that it is the "main Business of natural Philosophy" to answer by arguing "from Phaenomena," i.e., it is a speculative question: "Whence is it that Nature doth nothing in vain...?"⁸⁹ To ascertain the answer, Newton states that we must argue from phenomena and not from speculative metaphysical hypotheses.

In Rule II, Newton states that "*Therefore, the causes assigned to natural effects of the same kind must be, in so far as possible, the same.*"⁹⁰ As noted above, Hume immediately recognized this rule to be at the foundation of the design argument and that it is in fact the "foundation of all religion."⁹¹

In Rule III, in a manner reminiscent of Descartes describing the innately known, necessary essence of matter, Newton states that:

*Those qualities of bodies that cannot be intended and remitted [i.e., qualities that cannot be increased and diminished] and that belong to all bodies on which experiments can be made should be taken as qualities of all bodies universally.*⁹²

These first three "Rules of Reasoning" are first published in 1687 in the first edition of the *Principia*. In the second edition of 1713, Newton added his famous fourth "Rule":

In experimental philosophy, propositions gathered from phenomena by induction should be considered either exactly or very nearly true notwithstanding any contrary hypotheses, until yet other phenomena make such propositions either more exact or liable to exceptions.

⁸⁸Newton, *The Principia*, p. 794.

⁸⁹Newton, *Opticks*, Query 28, p. 369. Cf. William Whiston, *Sir Isaac Newton's Corollaries from his own Philosophy and Chronology; in His Own Words* (London 1729), p. 5.

⁹⁰Newton, *The Principia*, p. 795. This rule is Newton's variation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason which is the foundation of the Cosmological Argument. See William L. Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), chap. II.

⁹¹Hume, *Dialogues*, p. 170. Cf. Note 7 above.

⁹²Newton, *The Principia*, p. 795.

This rule should be followed so that arguments based on induction may not be nullified by hypotheses.⁹³

Why, in the second edition of the *Principia*, does Newton add the fourth rule? I believe that Newton realized that his first three rules are too rationalistically rigid and, if not modified by the fourth rule, lead to the elimination of the possibility that God may reorganize nature if, when, and how he chooses. Built into the foundation of Newton's scientific method, as regulated and corrected by the addition of the fourth rule, there is an explicit openness to the possibility that God may miraculously contravene his own natural laws in the future.⁹⁴ In a "new heaven and a new earth," or here and now, or, perhaps, tomorrow, anything is possible given the ubiquitous and total freedom and power of the Lord God of absolute dominion. Newton's view about the contingency of human knowledge, in the light of God's absolute power and dominion over every aspect of creation, seems to parallel that of Robert Boyle who writes that:

in this very phenomenal world of partial regularity, at any moment all our science may be upset by the elimination, or change of regularity through the operation of Him who is the guider of its concourse. For the most optimistic investigator must acknowledge that if God be the author of the universe, and the *free establisher* of the laws of motion, whose general concourse is necessary to the conservation and efficacy of every particular physical agent, God can certainly invalidate all experimentalism by withholding His concourse, or changing those laws of motion, which depend perfectly upon His will, and could thus vitiate the value of most, if not all the axioms and theorems of natural philosophy. Therefore reason operating in the mechanical world is constantly limited by the possibility that there is not final regu-

⁹³Newton, *The Principia*, p. 796.

⁹⁴E. A. Burt is clearly aware of Newton's openness to the possibility of miracles in his scientific methodology but he distinguishes between a passage such as Rule IV, "when the theological basis of Newton's science was uppermost in his mind," and Newton's "strictly scientific paragraphs." I answer that dividing Newton, by paragraphs or in fact, into a theologian, on the one hand, and a scientist, on the other, is impossible. See E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, Rev. ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1954), p. 219. Of Pythagoras, F. M. Cornford has written what is equally true of Newton: "The vision of philosophic genius is a unitary vision. Such a man does not keep his thought in two separate compartments, one for weekdays, the other for Sundays." Cornford continues with good advice for scholars of Newton (as well as of Pythagoras): "We begin to understand Pythagoras when we see that the two sides of his philosophy meet in the conception of harmony—a conception that has a meaning both in the spiritual and in the physical world." See Cornford, *Before and After Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 66.

larity in that world, and that existential regularity may readily be destroyed at any moment by the God upon whom it depends.⁹⁵

Moreover, Newton's reading of prophecy leads him to expect a "new heaven and a new earth" when, in addition to the current laws of nature, the first three regulative "Rules" governing our future expectations within the current system may no longer apply. Here and now, experience, through the judicious use of the methodology of science,⁹⁶ has taught us that gravity obeys the inverse square law and, further, that we may justifiably expect that, in the future, "like effects show like causes" as they have regularly done in the past. Tomorrow, however, God's power is such that new experimental data may invalidate both this natural law and this regulative "Rule." For Newton, the primacy of God's "specially provident" power results in a distinctive contingency in the natural order even while Newton acknowledges the virtual necessity of that order in its ordinary, "generally provident," current operations. Newton's fourth "Rule" is, in my opinion, founded upon his view that the whole of creation is "subordinate to [God], and subservient to his Will."⁹⁷ Because the future need not resemble the past, we must regard both natural laws established by analysis and synthesis and regulative "Rules" governing our expectations about nature to be only "very nearly true...until yet other phenomena make such propositions either more exact or liable to exceptions".

To conclude, in the 1960s, Richard H. Popkin changed the course of the history of modern philosophy by restoring to our understanding of that era

⁹⁵Robert Boyle, *Reconcilableness of Reason and Religion*, in *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, 6 vols., ed. Thomas Birch (London, 1772), 4:161. I have emphasized the phrase "free establisher" in this passage.

⁹⁶Newton, *Opticks*, Query 31, pp. 404–405, states how his two-part method of Analysis and Synthesis works:

"As in Mathematicks, so in Natural Philosophy, the Investigation of difficult Things by the Method of Analysis, ought ever to precede the Method of Composition. This Analysis consists in making Experiments and Observations, and in drawing general Conclusions from them by Induction, and admitting of no Objections against the Conclusions; yet it is the best way of arguing which the Nature of Things admits of, and may be looked upon as so much the stronger, by how much the Induction is more general. And if no Exception occur from Phaenomena, the Conclusion may be pronounced generally. But if at any time afterwards any Exception shall occur from Experiments, it may then begin to pronounced with such Exceptions as occur. By this way of Analysis we may proceed from Compounds to Ingredients, and from particular causes to more general ones, till the Argument end in the most general. This is the Method of Analysis: And the Synthesis consists in assuming the Causes discover'd and establish'd as Principles, and by them explaining the Phaenomena proceeding from them, and proving the Explanations."

⁹⁷Newton, *Opticks*, Query 31, p. 403.

the centrality of the “sceptical crisis” in its religious context.⁹⁸ In 1983, Popkin then went on to revitalize one of the most important, but overlooked, responses to this “sceptical crisis” in the work of the thinkers he classified as representatives of the “Third Force.”⁹⁹ Newton and Clarke represent the fullest flowering of this early modern response to scepticism in their distinctive manner of combining their empirical method with often little noted or under-appreciated aspects of religion. The primary hindrance to interpreting the Newtonians as an example of Popkin’s “Third Force” has been precisely because of the way in which Newton and Clarke blend elements of “modern” scientific empiricism with elements which many modern scholars have seen as irrational and which they have Whiggishly ignored or disconnected from his positive scientific method. But Newton’s metaphysical conception of the Lord God is at the foundation of his scientific method. Both scientific reason and revelation agree that the creator, owner, and operator of nature – as revealed by the theological arguments from design, prophecy, miracles, and cosmology in synthesis with the methodology of the New Science – is the Lord God of supreme dominion. While it is true that Newton’s point that the future need not resemble the past foreshadows Hume, Newton makes this point about the future within the religious context of Popkin’s “Third Force.” Newton arrives at the Humean conclusion that the future need not resemble the past because, for Newton, natural laws and regulative “Rules” for guiding our reason in understanding nature, work for the moment but tomorrow, or in the millennium and beyond, the “children of the resurrection” will live in a “new heaven” and a “new earth” where both the old laws of nature and the old “Rules of Reasoning” need not apply IF God ordains it.

⁹⁸Richard H. Popkin, “The Religious Background of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25, No. 1 (Jan., 1987.)

⁹⁹Richard H. Popkin, “The Third Force,” *passim*.

7. THE THIRD FORCE REVISITED

Martin Mulsow

I Stimulations

I first met Dick Popkin in Leiden as one of the participants of his four-week seminar on the celebrated anti-religious tract *The Three Impostors* in 1990. I just had finished my doctoral dissertation on a Renaissance topic, and I had run out of money. I knew nothing about the three impostors, nor did I know anything about clandestine literature, but my teacher Eckhard Kessler, a member of Constance Blackwell's Foundation for Intellectual History, helped me secure this one-month stipend. So I traveled to Leiden and was looking forward to my month of paid education. These four weeks changed my life – if I may use this emphatic phrase. Initially, it was not even Dick's personality that made an impression on me. At that time he was simply a foreign professor to me, who was much better acquainted with most of the other participants. But when I was talking to Silvia Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert, and others, I soon discovered that research on the liberal and radical fringe of the early German enlightenment was just beginning, if it even existed. Almost nothing was known about intellectuals and their debates in Germany at that time, not to mention the circulation of clandestine manuscripts and publications. The Leiden seminar was an intensive course on the Radical Enlightenment for me, and I would spend the next sixteen years clearing the ground in that particular area – a project I am still working on.¹

It was only in 1994 that I came in closer contact with Dick. I had found a Jewish anti-Christian manuscript, written in Portuguese, which circulated in Germany in the early years of the eighteenth century, and I told him about my find. Dick's way of answering my letters made a great impression on me. I had

¹My Leiden piece was "Freethinking in Early Eighteenth-Century Protestant Germany: Peter Friedrich Arpe and the 'Traité des trois Imposteurs'", in Silvia Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert, Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free Thought in Eighteenth-Century Europe. Studies on the "Traité des trois Imposteurs"* (Dordrecht/London/Boston: Kluwer, 1996), pp. 193–239.

never before encountered such generosity and such a willingness to address my issues personally in such a detailed fashion. After Dick had pointed me to reference catalogues, I soon was able to identify the author of my manuscript, Moses Raphael d'Aguilar.² Thereafter, we stayed in close contact and debated topics ranging from Rittangel, Wachter and van Helmont to Socinians and Spinozists. In 1995 I read and reviewed the essay collection *The Third Force* with great enthusiasm, because it made me better understand the intellectual context of the Hartlib circle, which I had come across already.³ I traced the impact of Campanella's thought in this circle and focused especially on two friends and collaborators of Comenius, Georg Ritschel and Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, who have been underestimated thus far.⁴ Viewing them as members of the Third Force opened up new perspectives to me. I did further research on Bisterfeld and had a closer look at a text that had been falsely attributed to him, the *Clavis apocalyptica* of 1651.⁵ This is how I arrived at the millenarian issues that fascinated Dick so much.

It was still in 1995 that I discovered, on a trip to Cracow, two letters that were written around 1710 by a Frenchman who was converted to Judaism in Amsterdam.⁶ Most fascinating was that these letters provided an account of the motives for his conversion: a skeptical crisis, triggered by the young man's reading of Descartes, which he overcame through the search for religious certainty in Judaism as the first and most "rational" religion. I informed Dick

²See Martin Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund. Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland 1680–1720* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2002), Chapter 2: "Ambivalenzen der Gelehrsamkeit. Ein jüdisches antichristliches Manuskript und sein Weg durch die deutsche Frühaufklärung." I dedicated this book to Dick.

³See Martin Mulsow, "Libertinismus, Cartesianismus und historische Kritik. Neuere Forschungen zur Formation der Moderne um 1700", *Philosophische Rundschau* 42 (1995), pp. 297–314.; idem, "Die dritte Kraft im Denken. Wege der frühen Neuzeit zur Toleranz: Mit der Moderne sind sie durch die 'Arbeit am und' verbunden", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 Feb. 2000, p. N6.

⁴See my article "Sociabilitas. Zu einem Kontext der Campanella-Rezeption im 17. Jahrhundert", *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 1 (1995), pp. 205–232, and Martin Mulsow, "Metaphysikentwürfe im Comenius-Kreis 1640–1650. Eine Konstellationsskizze", in Martin Mulsow and Marcelo Stamm, eds., *Konstellationsforschung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 221–257.

⁵See "Who was the author of the 'Clavis apocalyptica' of 1651? Millenarianism and Prophecy between Silesian Mysticism and the Hartlib Circle", in John Ch. Laursen and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture: Continental Millenarians: Protestants, Catholics, Heretics* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), pp. 57–75.

⁶See my "Cartesianism, Skepticism and Conversion to Judaism. The Case of Aaron d'Antan", in Martin Mulsow and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Secret Conversions to Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 123–182.

about it, and he was tantalized: “The story”, he wrote me, “definitely is what I secretly hoped was going on in many minds of the time.”⁷ It was Dick, then, who suggested that we edit a collection of case studies like mine.⁸

Presently – to end my brief personal introduction – I am trying to spread Dick’s thought in Germany. His two autobiographical articles are currently being translated into German and they will soon be published as a book.⁹ I am hoping that this might increase the German audience’s appetite for his *History of Scepticism*, which has been translated into so many languages, but not yet into German.

The variety of stimulations that Dick’s books and articles provide – and provided for me – makes it difficult to focus on one particular area of his legacy. I have decided to choose the issue of what he labelled “the Third Force” and would like to focus on four points. First, I would like to make some observations on the very notion of “Third Force”; then, I would like to stress the benefits as well as the problems that are encountered if the concept of the Third Force, which is very much centered on England, is applied to other countries – in my case, to central Europe and Germany. Third, I would like to address the problem of containment or delimitation: who belongs to the Third Force and who does not? Finally, I would like to try to connect research on the Third Force with what I call “constellation analysis.”

II Two Third Forces

While Richard Popkin was the Clark Professor from 1981 to 1982, he developed, in dialogue with the invited scholars at the Clark Library, the concept of the Third Force.¹⁰ It was – and James Force and others know this much better than I do – Sascha Talmor’s book on Glanvill that directed his attention to Henry More, who led him to Joseph Mede. Charles Webster’s book *The Great Instauration* was important for Popkin in his attempt to make intellectual sense of this group of thinkers, whose connectedness became more and more obvious to him. “Some of the group of thinkers whom I shall consider”, he wrote, “have been called ‘the spiritual brotherhood’ by Charles Webster. I am not sure this is the most appropriate name, since some of them were

⁷Richard H. Popkin to Martin Mulsow, letter of 15 May 1995.

⁸Martin Mulsow and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Secret Conversions to Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (footnote 6).

⁹Richard H. Popkin, *Mit allen Makeln. Erinnerungen eines Philosophiehistorikers* (Hamburg: Meiner, Forthcoming).

¹⁰See the autobiographical notes on this stay in the Introduction of Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth Century Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 2f.; idem, “Warts and All”, in James Force and Richard Watson, eds., *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988).

not so spiritual or brotherly. For want of a better name, I have called them ‘the third force’. As we shall see, all of them tend to combine elements of empirical and rationalist thought with theosophic speculations and Millenarian interpretation of Scripture. All of these elements were used to overcome the sceptical challenge.”¹¹ This passage comes from an article written in 1982, which appeared as the title essay in his 1992 volume, *The Third Force*.

What I am interested here is, first of all, the catchword itself, the notion of the Third Force. It is, as Popkin himself noted, an empty phrase, used “for the want of a better name.” Its function was precisely to avoid overhasty associations with spiritualism and religious enthusiasm. Space should be left for Bible critics or religiously indifferent people. On the other hand, though, the Third Force received a quite clear definition: as the overcoming of scepticism by scholars and scientists through the belief in, or better, the methodologically founded knowledge of Biblical prophecies. As Christopher Hill already noted in 1972, these thinkers wanted above all scientific certainty: “It was in a *scientific* spirit that scholars approached Biblical prophecy. It was the job of mathematicians and chronologers, like Napier, Brightman, Mede, Ussher and Newton. Such men believed in the possibility of establishing a science of prophecy, just as Hobbes believed in the possibility of establishing a science of politics.”¹² What Hobbes and Descartes had achieved in their own way, namely to overcome skeptical questioning of all knowledge by an infallible method, the thinkers of the Third Force hoped to do as well. This linking of the group with the skeptical crisis seems to me the main feature in which Dick exceeds Webster’s and Turnbull’s analysis, and it allowed him at the same time to extend the analysis to an even larger group.¹³

However, thirty-three years before the publication of Popkin’s book, a book had appeared in German under the title, *The Third Force (Die dritte Kraft)*. Its author was Friedrich Heer, an Austrian intellectual historian.¹⁴

¹¹Richard H. Popkin, “The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought: Scepticism, Science and Millenarianism”, in idem, *The Third Force in Seventeenth Century Thought* (footnote 10), pp. 90–119; pp. 90f.

¹²Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down. Radicalism During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 92.

¹³Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration. Science, Medicine and Reform 1626–1660* (London: Duckworth, 1975); George H. Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius. Gleanings from Hartlib’s Papers* (London: University Press of Liverpool, 1947).

¹⁴Friedrich Heer, *Die dritte Kraft. Der europäische Humanismus zwischen den Fronten des konfessionellen Zeitalters* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1959). On Heer, see Richard Faber ed., *Offener Humanismus zwischen den Fronten des Kalten Krieges. Über den Universalhistoriker, politischen Publizisten und religiösen Essayisten Friedrich Heer* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005); Richard Faber and Sigurd P. Scheichl, eds., *Die geistige Welt des Friedrich Heer* (Böhlau: Wien, 2006).

I was curious and asked Dick if he had taken his title from Heer's book, but he denied it: "I never read or heard of Friedrich Heer's book. The term may be something that is mentioned in Charles Webster's book."¹⁵ To be sure, Heer's book is not about millenarians and theologically interested scientists of the seventeenth century, but about a group of thinkers from a century earlier. His Third Force is located not between rationalists and empiricists, but between Protestants and Catholics. "The Third Force", Heer wrote, "was the struggle of European humanists and reformers between 1500 and 1550 to save Europe from the imminent splitting-up into the ghettos of the recent centuries, in church states, state churches and nation states."¹⁶ He wrote this on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, as a clear statement of a member of the Catholic Church in favor of a liberalization of Catholicism.

Hence there is certainly a big difference between this Austrian liberal Catholic, who rediscovered the irenic humanists, and the secular Jew Popkin, who rediscovered the millenarians and messianists of the seventeenth century. But still there are connections between Heer's Third Force and Popkin's. If we follow the extension of the irenic circles of a Castellio, Aconcio or Ochino to the time around 1600, we find cosmopolitan Socinians like Martin Ruar or Florian Crusius, liberal late humanists like Matthias Bernegger, or independent spiritualists and hermeticists like Raphael Egli. From there, it is easy to draw further lines to several members of the Hartlib-Comenius circle. The fate of standing between all lines and searching for ways of tolerance and understanding by transcending all prevalent categories is shared by both Third Forces, the one from the sixteenth and the one from the seventeenth century.¹⁷

III *The German Branch*

Richard Popkin's studies on the Third Force have proved seminal for other research. I only need to mention here the books by James Force and Howard Hotson, in which the intricate relations between Biblicism and science, between

¹⁵ Richard H. Popkin to Martin Mulsow, letter of 8 July 1996.

¹⁶ Heer, *Die dritte Kraft* (footnote 14), p. 7.

¹⁷ On the thinkers mentioned, see Delio Cantimori, *Italianische Häretiker der Spätrenaissance* (Basel: Schwabe, 1949); Otto Fock, *Der Socinianismus nach seiner Stellung in der Gesamtentwicklung des christlichen Geistes, nach seinem historischen Verlauf und nach seinem Lehrbegriff* (Kiel: Schröder & Camp, 1847); Wilhelm Kühnemann, *Gelehrtenrepublik und Fürstenstaat. Entwicklung und Kritik des deutschen Späthumanismus in der Literatur des Barockzeitalters* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1982).

prophecy and politics have further been illuminated.¹⁸ In order to provide just one example of how suitable for a broader application this concept actually is, I would like to take a look at similar currents in central Europe, especially in Germany. We encounter there the crucial combination of millenarianism, empirical thought, and theosophical speculation in many thinkers, such as Johann Heinrich Alsted, Abraham von Frankenberg, Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, Hans Theodor von Tschesch, and dozens of others. They are often Calvinists, but there are Lutherans among them as well. The main problem in the case of Germany is that at first sight the empty phrase “Third Force” does not seem to work there. A wealth of catchwords or labels, under which the phenomenon ostensibly can be subsumed, exist already in Germany, such as “radical spiritualism”, “Silesian mysticism” or “Böhme-reception”.¹⁹ Accordingly, research is dominated by church historians. But the apparent advantage of this situation turns out to be a disadvantage if it is compared to recent research on the Hartlib circle and the Third Force. In the process of this research, as we know, the analysis is done in an interdisciplinary way, incorporating scientific, economic and political aspects with theological or theosophical ones.

Such an unbiased equilibrium would be needed for research on Germany as well. There one encounters numerous circles, in which mathematicians, alchemists, court people and theologians were equally fascinated with millenarianism and exchanged their ideas with each other. A systematic investigation into the question of whether they all experienced a skeptical crisis, however, is still missing. Some clues point in this direction. During the years prior to 1621, von Tschesch, for example, developed more and more doubts regarding the dogmas of the church, until he had a kind of “conversion” to a new way of spirituality, which led him to study extensively the works of Jakob Böhme.²⁰ Johann Heinrich Alsted went through a severe crisis during the first years of the Thirty Years’ War. He overcame this “eschatological crisis” by his turn to millenarianism. The crisis, to be sure, had a complex nature,

¹⁸James H. Force, ed., *The Books of Nature and Scripture: Recent Essays on Natural Philosophy, Theology, and Biblical Criticism in the Netherlands of Spinoza’s Time and the British Isles of Newton’s Time* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994); idem and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Essays on the Context, Nature and Influence of Isaac Newton’s Theology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990); Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted 1588–1638. Between Renaissance, Reformation, and Universal Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000); idem, *Paradise Postponed. Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001); idem, *Commonplace Learning. Ramism and its German Ramifications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁹See Siegfried Wollgast, *Philosophie in Deutschland zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung 1550–1650*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie, 1993).

²⁰See Wollgast (footnote 19), pp. 762ff.

and it was triggered mainly through the experience of war, which destroyed Alsted's former astrologically based optimism and his hope for an imminent General Reformation. After the Synod of Dort at around the same time, the shift of the Calvinist Church to a stricter orthodoxy forced him to conceal his hermetic sources under the surface of a pure Biblicism.²¹ Popkin's picture of a skeptical crisis becomes more complex through case studies like this, but it becomes blurred as well. Has there been a multitude of different types of crises, each contributing to the genesis of the Third Force?²²

Let us try a different path by looking at the reception of Mede's *Clavis apocalyptica* in central Europe. The book was read, for instance, in the circle of the Austrian chiliast Johann Permeier in Preßburg (today's Bratislava), together with Alsted's *Diatribes de mille annis* and a certain "extract from Bisterfeld's book against Crell".²³ This is Bisterfeld's *De uno Deo*, which was written against the Socinianism of Johann Crell and which contains in chapter 8 of the first section of book one remarks on the Book of Daniel that attracted considerable attention in Europe.²⁴ Passages like this were copied and circulated among like-minded friends. Already in the early 1630s, Permeier was a millenarian and had founded the utopian society, "Societas regalis Jesu Christi."²⁵ In 1642 he sent a

²¹ Hotson, *Alsted* (footnote 18), p. 95ff.

²² This problem resembles the discussion about the "general crisis of the seventeenth century". See the volume edited by Trevor Aston, *Crisis in Europe 1560–1660* (New York: Doubleday, 1967); for Theodor Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Popkin's "skeptical crisis" was an important model. See p. 39f.: "Perhaps most significant was the revival of skepticism, which had lain dormant in antiquity, but which aroused new interest in the sixteenth century and experienced a real flowering in the generation of Montaigne and his immediate disciples. It is no coincidence that the organization of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century thought that most closely parallels my own is in Richard Popkin's authoritative history of skepticism. For the skeptics simply made more explicit and precise what was obviously a basic concern to their contemporaries. And whereas Popkin sees religious antagonism as the cause of the uncertainty, I see its origins in a broad range of conflict and change. Yet the end result was the same."

²³ See Balint Keserü, "In den Fußstapfen der Rosenkreuzer. Johann Permeiers Tätigkeit und Vorhaben im Karpatenbecken", in *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica*, ed., *Rosenkreuz als europäisches Phänomen im 17. Jahrhundert* (Amsterdam: In de Pelikan, 2002); Noemi Viskolcz, *Válság és publicisztika. Egy heterodox csoport olvasmányai a harmincéves háború idején* (Szeged, 2000).

²⁴ Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, *De uno deo patre, filio, ac spirito sancto* (Leiden: Elsevier, 1639); see my article "Bisterfelds 'Cabala'. Zur Bedeutung des Antisozinianismus für die Spätrenaissancephilosophie", in Martin Mulsow, ed., *Spätrenaissance-Philosophie in Deutschland 1570–1650* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, forthcoming).

²⁵ Richard van Dülmen, "Prophetie und Politik. Johann Permeier und die 'Societas regalis Jesu Christi' (1631–1643)", *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte* 41 (1978), pp. 417–473.

copy of Mede's work to Abraham von Frankenberg, and Frankenberg in turn may have passed it to Michael Gühler, a mathematician and tax collector at the court of Brieg, who then wrote his own *Clavis apocalyptica*, which was heavily influenced by Mede.²⁶ Permeier, however, had at this time become already somewhat sceptical towards millenarianism and published in the mid-1940s an "Unbiased Censure" of Bisterfeld's passages.²⁷ He was now under the influence of Florian Crusius and had become more moderate.

Our brief view of parts of the German reception of Mede has sufficed to show that millenarianism in seventeenth century Germany was a variegated phenomenon of different local groups, which were partly in contact with each other, but which were also partly critical of each other. This still constitutes a wide open field for future research, especially if this research is separated from a purely church-historical interest in the history of spiritualism, and is instead conceived more generally as a reconstruction of the underground in Germany in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.²⁸ It is now possible to rely as a starting point on the publications by Kühlmann and Telle on the Paracelsian networks, on the correspondence editions of Franckenberg and others, as well as on the CD-rom edition of the Hartlib papers.²⁹ If we remember Popkin's remark that some of the members of the Third Force "were not so spiritual or brotherly", we may ask which oppositional circles used the Biblical language only as the cover on the surface, while much deeper trans-confessional or indifferent opinions were hidden below.³⁰ We may also ask which of these circles were more isolated and which have had a greater impact.

²⁶[Michael Gühler,] *Clavis apocalyptica, or / A Prophetical KEY, by which the Great Mysteries in the Revelation of St. John, and in the Prophet Daniel are opened [...]* (1651); the original German version was published under the title: *Apocalypsis RESERATA / das ist / Geöffnete Offenbarung / Joannis [...]* ("Christianstadt", 1653). See Mulso, "Clavis apocalyptica" (footnote 5).

²⁷[Johann Permeier,] *Unpartheyische Censur und ferner nachrichtliche Bedencken über Jo. Henr. Bisterfeldii explication der göttlichen Vision Dan. 7* (1644).

²⁸For this general project, see Martin Mulso, "Die Transmission verbotenen Wissens. Über den Untergrund der deutschen Aufklärung", to appear in Ulrich Johannes Schneider, ed., *Kulturen des Wissens im 18. Jahrhundert* (forthcoming).

²⁹*Corpus Paracelsisticum*, ed. Wilhelm Kühlmann and Joachim Telle (Tübingen: Niemeyer 2001ff.), so far two volumes; *The Hartlib Papers Project*, CD-rom-Edition. On the project, see the conference volume edited by Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor, *Samuel Hartlib & Universal Reformation. Studies in Intellectual Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³⁰On transconfessional attitudes see the volume *Interkonfessionalität – Transkonfessionalität – binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität. Neue Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungsthese*, eds. Kaspar von Greyerz, Mafred Jakubowski-Tiessen, Thomas Kaufmann and Hartmut Lehmann (Heidelberg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003).

IV Containment and Delimitation

The example of the German branch of the Third Force points to a difficulty that seems to me central for our dealing with the concept of the Third Force: the difficulty of containment or delimitation. Who was part of the Third Force, and who was not? The Third Force, as Popkin conceived it, with its protagonists Mede and More, Hartlib and Comenius, Dury and Whichcote, Conway and Newton, is defined both by its typical ideas and the personal contacts of its members. If we follow the definition by ideas, we may have to exclude many persons which were otherwise in close contact to these circles, but who were no millenarians. This would, however, undermine the second component of the definition, in terms of personal contacts. A further difficulty with the definition by millenarian ideas may consist in the fact that “scientific” treatment of Biblical prophecy did not necessarily lead to millenarianism. On the contrary, it could lead to the conviction that the Biblical prophecies, especially those by Daniel, had been fulfilled already in the past. The late Arno Seifert has published an important book about this “retreat of Biblical prophecy from history” that Popkin did not know.³¹

If we look at the networks not only in England, but also in central Europe, we encounter many small, often local groups, which were connected only very loosely to the Hartlib-Comenius circle, but for which nonetheless theosophy, Bible prophecy and empirical thought were still central. When do the contacts of these circles become too loose or their ideas too different for them to be considered to be members of the Third Force? Can Mersenne still be counted as a member, since he was a friend to several of those in the Hartlib circle, even though he was also a mechanist and an intimate friend of Descartes? Are there quantitative criteria of “density of correspondence” for belonging to the Third Force? Is the criterion of self-description of that group crucial? One instance would be, for example, the lists Comenius made of people to whom he wanted to send his books or whom he intended to be part of his academy projects.³² As we see, future scholarship needs to be able to draw on precise definitions if the concept of the Third Force is to be more than a mere stimulus for a research that would soon surpass it.

³¹Arno Seifert, *Der Rückzug der biblischen Prophetie von der Geschichte. Studien zur Geschichte der Reichstheologie des frühneuzeitlichen deutschen Protestantismus* (Köln/Wien: Böhlau, 1990). I once asked Popkin if he knew the book, but he said he did not.

³²See Richard H. Popkin, “The First College for Jewish Studies”, *Revue des études juives* 143 (1984), pp. 351–364.

V Constellation Analysis

In this regard, I would like to offer some proposals. I have already talked about the advantages of an empty phrase. An empty phrase facilitates the balancing act that we perform when we define the Third Force by both its intellectual profile and the network of actors. I think that this balancing act explains the reason why this concept is so appealing, but it is also the cause of specific problems. How can the two things – the reconstruction of networks and the analysis of ideas – coexist? In order to answer this question, I have recently edited a collective volume under the title “constellation analysis” (*Konstellationsforschung*).³³ It draws on ideas that Dieter Henrich has developed for the analysis of small groups in the earliest phase of German Idealism, from which spread the first impulses to take Kantian thought in new directions.³⁴ A constellation, according to this account, is a small creative group of persons in face-to-face contact or at least in correspondence with each other. Through their interchange emerge theories, which could not be understood by looking only at the development of the members of the group separately. Dieter Henrich has invested much energy in order to reconstruct in a precise way the step-by-step progression of thought inside these constellations. This includes a reconstruction of possible conversations, through an examination of letters or diaries, but also through a precise determination of what these people could have read at a certain point in time: if in week x a specific article or review has appeared, then it was possible that person y and person z had a conversation about it and in the course of their discussion, they may have revised their opinions.

Research on the Third Force surely is still far away from this level of precision, except, perhaps, for research on Newton. But I believe that it may be a good candidate for a constellation analysis.³⁵ There are, however, problems to be solved in advance, especially problems of scale. I return here to the problem of containment that I have already discussed. The Third Force, conceived as essentially the network of the Hartlib-Comenius circle, with some additions, is certainly a big network, consisting of dozens, even hundreds of people. As such it is far too big and diffuse for the kind of precise research

³³Martin Mulsow and Marcelo Stamm, eds., *Konstellationsforschung* (footnote 4).

³⁴Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991); idem, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992); idem, *Grundlegung aus dem Ich. Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus, Tübingen-Jena 1790–1794* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004).

³⁵See my attempt to generalize the concept of constellation analysis: “Zum Methodenprofil der Konstellationsforschung”, in Mulsow/Stamm, eds., *Konstellationsforschung* (footnote 4), pp. 74–97.

described above. In addition, as we have noticed, not all members of this network were millenarians. It therefore remains an important objective to single out much smaller constellations – more dense and homogeneous relationships – from this network. This could involve studying small local circles of friends in Amsterdam, London or Hamburg. But it is also possible to think of groups of correspondents, who discussed matters in letters, although they were separated by long distances, as Hartlib and Comenius were for most of their time. Only small groups like these provide enough homogeneity for an analysis in a sufficient way. Howard Hotson, for example, has proposed to examine the region of Danzig and Elbing between 1625 and 1630 with its milieu of uprooted Rosicrucians, spiritualists, enthusiasts, and reformers in order to understand the genesis of Hartlib's and Dury's millenarianism.³⁶

Once the scope of analysis has been reduced this way, research on the Third Force will rise to a new level. At this level, the development of similarities and differences among these thinkers will surface to a much greater extent. Sarah Hutton has sketched a similar outline for research on the Cambridge Platonists.³⁷ For smaller groups of this size, it may then be possible to determine the “framework of thought” (Denkraum), as Henrich has labeled it: the compound of shared premises, basic ideas, basic problems and attempts of solution that characterized them. This will give us the chance to get away from one-sided explanations and to recognize also less visible alternatives. Hotson stated that Alsted's “scientific” interpretation of Bible prophecy is ultimately eclectic.³⁸ For our problem of describing the framework of thought, this means that there are several possible descriptions. Millenarianism can be understood from several different points of view. First, as the case of Alsted suggests, it can be seen as a transformation of hermetic, Lullist and astrological ideas into a language of millenarian interpretation of Bible prophecy. On the one hand, this transformation had some dissimulative features, since after the synod of Dord and the attacks against the Rosicrucians it was no longer prudent to be identified as a hermeticist. On the other hand, it meant a revocation of the original optimism of his astrology of history, which, in the face of the Thirty Years War, was replaced by a mere hope of better times. Second, the genesis of millenarianism can be described, as Richard Popkin did, from the perspective of early modern neo-pyrrhonism, because pyrrhonism's questioning of all knowledge evoked the desire for certainty, even if it is grounded in a special

³⁶ Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted* (footnote 18).

³⁷ Sarah Hutton, “Eine Cambridge-Konstellation? Perspektiven für eine Konstellationsforschung zu den Platonikern von Cambridge”, in Mulsow/Stamm, eds., *Konstellationsforschung* (footnote 4), pp. 340–358.

³⁸ Hotson, *Alsted* (footnote 18).

method of Bible exegesis. Perhaps millenarianism could even be described as having originated from other motives.

These different descriptions show that a “framework of thought” cannot be conceived as a static entity – it is an intrinsically dynamic concept. Above all, internal problems and differences are the cause of the emergence of new attempts of solution. As a matter of fact, the Third Force was, despite all its coherence, a network full of differences. Maybe one should even label the group as a group on the margins and fringes, or a hybrid entity. If we consider Alsted’s case again, his millenarianism resulted from the blending of some marginal alchemical or astrological traditions with impacts from more scholastic or mainstream theology and philosophy. Similar statements could certainly be made about Mede, More, or Comenius. A “group on the margins” also describes the spatial structure of the Third Force, since it emerged on the fringes of the Thirty Years War, from Transylvania through Poland, Scandinavia and Holland to England.³⁹ These fringes were filled with refugees who brought their traditions and ideas, and often – as in Poland or Transylvania – the borderline position of the country made it harder for orthodoxy to control it.⁴⁰

One difference among many in the hybrid entity of the Third Force was the question of whether empirical research was more important than theosophical speculation, or vice versa. Let us look at a letter in which the physician and scientist Cyprian Kinner complains to Hartlib about the philosopher Georg Ritschel: “How can he compose his ideas of things in a complete and sound way, if he does not recognize the ponderosity of nature; even if he copies thousands of Bacons, Herberts, or other important philosophers?”⁴¹

A cause of a new dynamic in a constellation could be the arrival of a new person. Examples would be the appearance of Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont in Cambridge Platonism, or the impact of Herbert of Cherbury on the Comenius circle. Such new impacts have created disturbances, which had to be processed in a productive way.⁴²

³⁹ On this spacial aspect, see Mulsow, “Bisterfelds, Cabala” (footnote. 24).

⁴⁰ See Graeme Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier 1600–1660. International Calvinism and the Reformed Church in Hungary and Transylvania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Kinner to Hartlib, 23.I.1647, Hartlib Papers 1/33/6A-B: “At quomodo [...] suas Rerum Ideas vere, plane, ac harmonice, conscribet, ponderis Naturae ignarus? In aeternum hic haerebit: licet vel mille Verulamios, Herbertos, aliosque summos Philosophos, transcribat.” See Mulsow, “Metaphysikentwürfe” (footnote 4), p. 247f.

⁴² On Van Helmont see Allison P. Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century. The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); on Herbert of Cherbury and Comenius, see Mulsow, “Metaphysikentwürfe” (footnote 4), p. 245f.

Popkin's central argument concerning the skeptical challenge would, in the language of constellation analysis, be an argument about the initial dynamic of certain constellations inside the Third Force. It would have to be described in a precise way in its relation to other dynamics or other challenges, which could certainly relativize its importance. Furthermore, its significance would have to be specified in regard to certain constellations, and then again distinguished from others.

A last and final suggestion: It does not seem a coincidence to me that many thinkers of the Third Force were extremely mobile during their life. Comenius, van Helmont, Hartlib, Alsted, Bisterfeld, Dury: they all were migrants, partly for intellectual reasons, partly for economic reasons, but mostly because of war or persecution. The changes that migrants undergo when they have to replace one cultural context for another, are explored today under the labels of "cultural exchange" or "cultural translation", with considerable conceptual effort. Research on cultural exchange is especially attentive to cultural misunderstandings, mistranslations, conceptual change, and intermediary functions.⁴³ Even if millenarianism was a real international movement, there were, if we look closely, significant differences of local, confessional, or natural traditions and contexts. Therefore, the reading of Alsted in England or of Mede in Germany could mean an altering of original intentions. The *revolutio* of Alsted's astrological history became in Civil War England suddenly a "revolution", and in turn the predictions of English millenarians were read in Germany against the background of the military invasions of the Spaniards or Swedes.

Thus in the end there remains the conclusion that Richard Popkin's concept of the Third Force has been an immensely fruitful stimulus for research, and I believe that it will endure as an important framework of studies, if we enhance it with new developments in intellectual history, new conceptual schemes, and especially if we transfer it to a new level of precision, by dividing it into unities of a smaller scale, which can be explored in a much more subtle way.

⁴³See Peter Burke and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, eds., *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2007); Peter Burke, *Kultureller Austausch* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000); Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts. Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe e XIXe siècle)* (Paris, 1988); Wolfgang Schmale, ed., *Kulturtransfer. Kulturelle Praxis im 16. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck: Wiener Schriften, 2003). I have tried to use these concepts for understanding Socinianism. See: "The 'New Socinians'. Intertextuality and Cultural Exchange in Late Socinianism" in Martin Mulsow and Jan Rohls, eds., *Socinianism and Arminianism. Antitrinitarians, Calvinists, and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth Century Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 49–78.

8. THE STUDY OF THE *MISHNAH* AND THE QUEST FOR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND: COMPLETING A NARRATIVE INITIATED BY RICHARD POPKIN

David B. Ruderman

Richard Popkin left an enormous impact on my life and my career as a Jewish historian. I first met Dick soon after I had assumed my first academic position as an assistant professor of history at the University of Maryland, sometime after 1974. He was visiting his friend Leonora Cohen Rosenfeld and he wanted to meet me. Why so distinguished an historian would seek me out in the first place, I hardly understood then. Years later, I came to appreciate how many others like me were identified by Popkin, invited to engage him in conversation, and to ultimately connect with each other intellectually and socially. From this first meeting many others followed. I greatly valued the interventions of Dick in bringing Jewish history into the mainstream of historical scholarship. In those days when Jewish studies scholars still felt insecure in the academy, unsure if their colleagues would care at all about their subject and what they brought to the table, Dick became a legitimating support to argue that Jewish studies did count. Together with George Mosse and Natalie Zemon Davis, two other senior scholars who reached out to me and many other younger scholars, Dick became a critical intermediary between Judaic learning and the humanities.

Our relationship remained strong for many years. Dick was the reader for my science book for Yale press. His David Levi article, unpublished until I insisted he publish it in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, was the inspiration for my book on the Jewish enlightenment in England. The crowning moment of our relationship took place in May 2000, when Dick joined 40 other scholars at a conference at Penn's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies culminating in a year of study on Christian Hebraism. It was a wonderfully exciting year and the conference was a gem. Its high point came as Dick addressed the enthusiastic audience in its concluding session, speaking about his own journey in studying the subject of Jewish-Christian relationships for more than forty years and how he had been a solitary figure when he began but at this conference he was embraced by an entire community of scholars. Both the conference and the subsequent volume the fellows produced were dedicated to Dick Popkin. It was a touching moment for all who were present.

All who know Dick's work will recall his fascination with the *Mishnah* project of Adam Boreel, Rabbi Leon Templo, Menasseh ben Israel and others. As recently as 1999 in the conference proceedings celebrating the library of Narcissus Marsh, Dick waxed eloquently about two rare editions of Boreel's vocalized *Mishnah* of 1646 found in the library. The book was published without the name of any Christian despite the great involvement of Boreel, Dury, Hartlib and others. Efforts to translate the *Mishnah* into Spanish and Latin had begun in Cambridge by Isaac Abendana but they were never completed until the end of the century. The culmination of almost of century of interest in the text for Christian usage was William Surenhusius's complete translation of the *Mishnah* in a handsome folio edition accompanied with translations of Maimonides, Bertinora, and Surenhusius's own work, a remarkable achievement of Christian rabbinic scholarship at the end of the seventeenth century.¹

In honor of Dick's memory, I would like to continue the story where he left off because indeed the story has a long and fascinating history after Boreel's death in 1661 and well into the eighteenth century both in Holland and in England. I can even see the gleam in his eyes as I embrace a subject so close to his heart.²

I begin my own narrative with a heated public debate that broke out in England in 1722. In that year William Whiston (1667–1752), the enthusiastic but eccentric advocate and popularizer of Newtonian cosmology and author of numerous works on mathematics, physics, and astronomy, published a book entitled *Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament and for Vindicating the Citations Made Thence in the New Testament*. Within a very

¹ See David S. Katz, "The Abendana Brothers and the Christian Hebraists of Seventeenth Century England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40 (1989), 28–52; Jan Wilhelm Wesselius, "I Don't Know Whether He will Stay for Long: Isaac Abendana's Early Years in England and His Latin translation of the Mishnah," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 22 (1988), 85–96; Israel Abrahams, "Isaac Abendana's Cambridge Mishnah and Oxford Calendars", *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 8 (1915–1917), 98–121; Ernestine van der Wall, "The Dutch Hebraist Adam Boreel and the Mishnah Project," *Lias* 16 (1989), 239–263; Richard Popkin, "Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges in Holland and England 1640–1700," in *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Studies and Documents*, eds. Jan van den Berg and Ernestine van der Wall (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1988), pp. 8–11, and Richard Popkin, "Two Treasures of Marsh's Library," in *Judaeo-Christian Intellectual Culture in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Allison Coudert, Sarah Hutton, Richard Popkin, and Gordon Weiner (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), pp. 1–12.

² The following narrative is a shortened version of the account found in my book, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth Century England* (Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

short time, the work triggered an enormous storm of controversy throughout England and even beyond.³

Whiston's basic position with regard to biblical prophecy had long been evolving prior to 1722. As early as 1707, he presented the core of his argument within the framework of the distinguished Robert Boyle lectures and then published them a year later in London a book called *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies*. From the outset, Whiston emphasized how critical the study of prophecy was in demonstrating the Christian faith because of the inadequacy of the design argument in convincing deists and unbelievers that God existed and actively intervened in the world. Employing the methods of an experimental scientist, he claimed that the more proofs of prophecy he could muster from the Bible and even extra-biblical works like the Sibylline oracles, the more solid the foundations of Christianity would become. There was simply strength in numbers. His system of prophetic hermeneutics could only work, however, if each prophecy he identified had only one fulfillment, and that was in Jesus Christ.

Whiston knew well that his insistence on a literal understanding of prophetic fulfillment without recourse to allegorical interpretations or to the possibility that prophecies might apply simultaneously to more than one object was controversial and went against the grain of generations of Christian exegesis. But upholding this one to one correspondence between the Old Testament Prophecy and its outcome in Christian teaching was the only way in which the validity of Christianity could be upheld, so he maintained.

The problem Whiston soon discovered was that finding a one-to-one correspondence between prophetic statements in the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the New was not as easy as it appeared. Some prophecies could not easily be interpreted to apply exclusively to Jesus. If indeed his allegedly scientific project of Christian prophetic hermeneutics could not be properly carried out, all Christian claims of divine truth might be called into question. There was accordingly only one conceivable way of explaining the gap between the two Testaments: the original Hebrew text had been corrupted. This was the inevitable conclusion Whiston reached in his 1722 publication. Since the present Hebrew copies of the Old Testament do not quite correspond

³On Whiston, see Stephen D. Snobelen, "Whiston, William (1667–1752)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29217>; James E. Force, *William Whiston, Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Maureen Farrell, *William Whiston* (New York: Arno, 1981); Stephen D. Snobelen, "William Whiston: Natural Philosopher, Prophet, Primitive Christian," Ph.D. Dissertation (Cambridge University, 2000).

to the texts “cited by our Saviour, his Apostles, and the rest of the Writers of the New Testament, out of the Old”, it stands to reason that over the course of the years the present version of the Hebrew Bible was altered and the culprits in this falsification were none other than the Jews.⁴

The argument thus framed was a frontal attack against the Jews for consciously and purposefully corrupting their own sacred text. They took this radical step since “they had therefore no other possible Way of stopping the farther Progress of the Gospel among them, in their own Power, but this, of altering and corrupting their own Copies.” Since Christians subsequently did not study the Hebrew language, and “that, by Consequence, the original Sacred Books were alone in the Jewish Hands,” Christians were easily deceived.⁵

Whiston insisted that his argument was legitimated by the remarkable strides in the study of the texts of extra-biblical literature of antiquity now being edited and published in his day including the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Apostolic Constitutions, the Greek Psalms, and especially Josephus, all of which provided alternative readings of the Hebrew text of the Bible. Some forty years prior to the ambitious project of Benjamin Kennicott and Robert Lowth to create a Christian version of the Hebrew Bible, Whiston was already calling for a similar initiative whereby “a great search should be made in all Parts of the World for Hebrew Copies, that have never come into the hands of the Masorets.”⁶

Almost from the moment that Whiston’s book appeared, his critics were lining up to challenge his highly controversial conclusions. This rising tide of opposition appeared to make Whiston more defiant and ready to take on each and every one of his detractors. In 1724, the stakes were raised considerably when Anthony Collins entered the public arena with a scathing attack against Whiston. Anthony Collins (1676–1729), the well-known freethinker associated with both John Toland and Matthew Tindal, entered the fray

⁴William Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament and for Vindicating the Citations Made Thence in the New Testament to Which is Subjoined a Large Appendix* (London, 1722), pp. 220 (proposition xii), and 281 (proposition xiii).

⁵Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text*, pp. 223–224.

⁶Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text*, p. 333. On the project of Kennicott and Lowth, see David Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry’s Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), chaps. I and II, and David S. Katz, *God’s Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

surrounding William Whiston in 1724 when he published *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*.⁷

While he claimed he was a believing Christian, his enemies labeled him a skeptic, a cynic, a deist, even an atheist. Modern scholarship on Collins is similarly divided in trying to assess his true convictions. Whatever they actually were, the tempest over his *Discourse* was spectacular, evoking no less than 35 responses in print.

Collins clearly understood the predicament Whiston had addressed and presented it in even starker terms. At present, he claimed, Old Testament prophecies referred to in the New Testament often did not correspond with their originals. These prophecies meaningfully can only refer to one object which is an event in the life of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they can only be understood literally, not figuratively and not allegorically to have any real meaning. If indeed there is a gap between the two testaments, either Christianity is foundationless and false, or alternatively, the text we presently have of the Old Testament is corrupted and unreliable. If we could construct its original text, we would again find full correspondence between the two documents.

But Collins found the notion that the Old Testament is corrupted absurd and unfounded. The Jews had no reason to corrupt the text, as Whiston had asserted. If they had, Collins added, the ancient Christians would have detected their forgeries long ago. Furthermore, even if Whiston was correct that the present text of the Old Testament is false, he will never have been able to restore a better text, based on extra-biblical literature such as Philo or Josephus, who are even more unreliable. His conclusion utterly mocked the pretentious effort of Whiston to discover a new Hebrew Bible to replace the present one: "So that I will venture to say that a Bible restor'd, according to

⁷ On Collins, see J. Dybikowski, "Collins, Anthony (1676–1729)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5933>; James O'Higgins, S. J., *Anthony Collins: The Man and his Works* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); David Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain from Hobbes to Russell* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), chap. 3, pp. 70–87, and his "Deism, Immorality, and the Art of Lying," in *Deism, Masonry, and the Enlightenment, Essays Honoring Alfred Owen Aldridge*, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1987), pp. 61–78; Pascal Taranto, *Du deisme à l'atheisme: la libre-pensée d'Anthony Collins* (Paris: Champion, 2000); and Stephen Snobelen, "The Argument over Prophecy: An Eighteenth-Century Debate between William Whiston and Anthony Collins," *Lumen* 15 (1996), 195–213.

Mr. Whiston's Theory, will be a mere Whistonian Bible, a Bible confounding and not containing the true Text of the Old Testament."⁸

Collins had seemingly succeeded in undermining Whiston's entire scheme. If Christianity rested on a scientific method of reading prophecies literally based on a direct correspondence between the New and Old Testament, but the correspondence was hopelessly impossible to retrieve, Christians had reached a dead end, or in Collins' words: "For if the Grounds and Reasons for Christianity, contained in the Old Testament, were lost, Christianity was then lost."⁹

The only recourse for saving Christianity was to adopt an allegorical reading of prophecy. There was no reason to believe that when the New Testament cites the Old, it always does so in a literal way. Christianity need not rise and fall on the arbitrary and rigid notions of Whiston's system. At this point, Collins offered an alternative way of solving the hermeneutical impasse Christians faced. He relates that he recently learned of an entirely novel approach proposed by a distinguished professor of Hebrew studies at the University of Amsterdam named William Surenhusius. Surenhusius "has made an ample Discovery to the World of the Rules, by which, the Apostles cite the Old Testament, and argu'd from thence in a Treatise ... wherein the whole Mystery of the Apostles applying Scripture in a secondary or typical or mystical, or allegorical Sense seems unfolded." Based on the English report of the journalist Michel de la Roche of Surenhusius' book published in 1713, Collins related the following background. Surenhusius met a rabbi in Amsterdam, "well skill'd in the Talmud, the Cabbala, and the allegorical Books of the Jews," Surenhusius shared with the rabbi his exegetical predicament of not knowing how to understand the lack of correspondence between the passages cited in the Old and New Testaments. The rabbi, to his surprise, had no difficulty in reconciling these passages based on his intimate knowledge of rabbinic literature and rabbinic modes of reading and citation. By reading the New Testament by the rules and practices of rabbinic writing, the text becomes fully comprehensible, he maintained. Surenhusius was initially reluctant to consider the manner the rabbis cited biblical passages until "I saw St. Paul do so too, my anger was appeas'd."¹⁰

Collins could not help but offer a note of sarcasm in noting how a rabbi had apparently offered a solution to Christians on how to read and appreciate

⁸Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion in two parts ... The second containing an Examination of the Scheme advanc'd by Mr. Whiston in his Essay towards restoring the true text of the Old Testament, and for vindicating the Citations thence made in the New Testament* (London, 1724), p. 225.

⁹Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds*, p. 112.

¹⁰Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds*, pp. 53–58.

their own scriptural tradition. This meeting between Surenhusius and the rabbi was analogous, so it seemed, to that between Luther and the devil: "The Rabbin establishes Christianity; and the Devil Protestantism." Collins offered a generous sampling of examples of how the rabbis cited the Bible and how this directly illuminates a similar method of citation employed in the New Testament. The conclusion was thus inescapable: "Christianity is the allegorical sense of the Old Testament, and is not improperly called mystical Judaism." Collins unabashedly remarked that perhaps the glory of Christianity rests on allegory, not criticism, and that Christianity is ultimately confirmed by rabbinic learning.

Among contemporary scholars who have written on Collins, all see him as insincere in attempting to offer a serious alternative to the quandary Whiston had created for Christianity. Having demolished Whiston's system of literal prophecy as the foundation of Christian belief, he then discovered an odd-ball named Surenhusius to demonstrate cynically the futility of an allegorical reading. He would enhance the ludicrousness of his argument by offering a comical scenario of a great Christian scholar consorting with a suspect Jewish rabbi, just as Luther had consorted with the devil, to supposedly resolve the critical problem of Christian exegesis. The allegorical solution was not only ineffectual; it was tainted by its "mystical", "cabbalist", and Jewish origins. In trying to assert their own independence from Jewish modes of interpreting Scripture, the Christians, Collins claimed, had no other recourse than to return to the rabbis for their exegetical deliverance. The scoundrel Collins could not have invented a better script than this!

I do not wish to challenge this general opinion about Collins's ultimate motives regarding Surenhusius but rather to read Collins in a different way, in relation to his sources, that is, to the narrative of Michel de la Roche upon which he based his summary of Surenhusius' book, and in relation to Surenhusius himself. And I would also like to ask another set of questions: Whether Collins took Surenhusius seriously or not, did La Roche take him seriously, and were there others in Collins's era who might not have regarded him as the kook contemporary scholars seem to take him to be? What might appear patently absurd to recent historians of Collins's thought might have seemed somewhat more credible and worthy of consideration by at least some of Collins's readers. Collins might indeed have been disingenuous in approvingly presenting Surenhusius's method, but this need not deny the fact that others approved it, that it was deemed innovative by some in utilizing previously unexploited hermeneutical tools for understanding foundational Christian texts, and that Surenhusius and his project were ultimately a significant part of a larger defining moment in the history of Christian thought and scholarship and in the history of Jewish-Christian interactions at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Michel de la Roche (c. 1680–1742) was a French Huguenot who settled in England via Holland. In 1701, he was received into the Anglican Church and naturalized as an English citizen soon after. In subsequent years, he traveled widely in Europe, sustained a long relationship with Pierre Bayle, and even translated a part of his *Dictionnaire* into English. His primary contribution to cultural life was his literary journals produced both in French and English, serving as major conduits of scholarly information through highly informative reviews of books on the Continent for English readers and visa versa, for French readers. In all of these journals, the *Bibliothèque Angloise*, the *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*, *Memoirs of Literature*, *New Memoirs of Literature*, and *A Literary Journal*, La Roche consistently advocated toleration and freedom of thought, attacking religious persecution wherever he found it. He was particularly eager to publicize the well known cases of Catholic and Calvinist intolerance such as those of Michael Servetus and Sebastian Castello, as well as the less known Nicolas Anthoine, as we shall see shortly. Through his European travels, he established contact with a wide range of intellectuals with similar political and religious proclivities, especially the leading members of the Huguenot community in London. He was clearly connected ideologically with the Latitudinarians in England, especially Samuel Clarke, William Whiston, and Benjamin Hoadly, and was in sympathy with their unorthodox views.¹¹

Even a quick perusal of some of the many reviews in his journals provides the distinct impression of his remarkable interest in biblical and Hebrew studies, as well as religious history and theology.¹² He was well aware of the Whiston-Collins debate, and although a friend of Whiston, treated the broad issues both men raised with fairness, notwithstanding his own role in the controversy regarding Surenhusius.

¹¹ On Michel de la Roche, see R. Julian Roberts, “Roche, Michael de la (c. 1680–1742),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23913>; Uta Janssens-Knorsch, “Michel de la Roche,” in *Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Dutch Philosophers* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2003), 2: 845–847; Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (New York: Octagon Books, 1930), pp. 196–199; Margaret D. Thomas, “Michel de la Roche,” *Dictionnaire des journalistes*, ed. Jean Sgard (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999); Margaret D. Thomas, “Michel de la Roche: A Huguenot Critic of Calvin,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 238 (1985), 97–195; George King, “Michel de la Roche et ses Mémoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 15 (1943), 298–300.

¹² See *Memoirs of Literature* 3 (London, 1722), pp. 351–359 and 7 (London, 1722), pp. 393–397; *Memoirs of Literature* 2 (London, 1722), p. 317; *Memoirs of Literature* 4 (London, 1722), pp. 11–14; *Memoirs of Literature* 4 (London, 1722), pp. 314–319; *Memoirs of Literature* 7 (London, 1722), pp. 82–87; *New Memoirs of Literature*, 3 (London, 1726), pp. 102–107; *New Memoirs of Literature*, 5 (London, 1727), pp. 14–16.

Prior to publishing his long review of Surenhusius's study of rabbinic hermeneutics that caught Anthony Collins' eye, La Roche reviewed the six volume edition of the *Mishnah* Surenhusius had published several years earlier, which included the original text, a Latin translation of the text as well as the commentaries of Bertinoro and Maimonides, and the learned comments of Surenhusius himself. La Roche described the entire six tomes, giving full credit to the early translators of various tractates upon which Surenhusius had relied in finishing his edition. La Roche does not completely hide his biases with respect to the rabbinic tradition. Nevertheless, he fully appreciated the value of this work, especially in understanding Christian Scripture.

Some nine years he published his review of Surenhusius' groundbreaking study of rabbinic exegesis. He devoted considerable space to it and published it in three installments. From the very beginning, La Roche seemed generally excited by this book. "Who would have thought," he writes, "that Rabbinical and Talmudical Learning would have occasioned such an excellent Performance? Mr. Surenhusius may be said to have raised a Noble and Magnificent Building out of Materials which appeared very contemptible and insignificant."¹³

La Roche proceeded to offer a detailed summary of the preface to the work, explaining how Surenhusius was perplexed by the differences between the citations of the Old Testament in the original and in the New Testament, how he had spent considerable time with learned Jews discussing the problem, and how some had even volunteered to convert to Christianity if he could find a way of reconciling these seemingly corrupt citations. He finally met the rabbi learned in Talmud and Cabala, who had tried to convert to Christianity but returned to Judaism, but most importantly, did not believe the New Testament was a corrupted book. Surenhusius then asked the rabbi to help him solve the impasse of citation that challenged so seriously the credibility of the New Testament. The rabbi proposed the following: "to peruse a great part of the Talmud, and the Allegorical and Literal Commentaries of the most Ancient Jewish Writers; to observe their several ways of quoting and interpreting the Scripture, and to collect as many Materials of that kind as would be sufficient for that Purpose."¹⁴

Surenhusius was inspired by the rabbi's ambitious project and he launched a broad investigation presented in four sections to his readers. He focused on the

¹³Memoirs of Literature 6 (London,1722), pp. 110–118. The citations are on pp. 110–111. Surenhusius' book is entitled: המורה ספר השוה *sive in quo secundum veterum Theologorum Hebraeorum Formulas allegandi, & Mosos Intepretandi Conciliantur loca ex. V. in N.T. allegata Auctore Guililelmo Surenhusio, Hebraicarum & Graecarum Literarum in Illustri Amsteliaedamensium Athenaeo Professore* (Amsterdam, 1713).

¹⁴*Memoirs of Literature* 6: 113.

different ways in which the rabbis cite biblical passages, how they refer to God, why passages are alleged to have been cited without being cited previously, and why some traditions are simply forgotten. Surenhusius soon realized how the Jewish exegetes took certain liberties in referring to the Old Testament, how “the authors of Gemara and ancient Allegorical writers change the literal sense into a noble and spiritual sense,” and how they idiosyncratically presented their genealogies. What became evident to him the more he mastered his subject was that the writers of the New Testament “have done nothing in the present Case but what was practiced by the ancient Hebrew Theologians.”¹⁵

If one might object to the use of later rabbinic literature to elucidate the New Testament’s narrative form, Surenhusius would answer that the Jewish rabbinic tradition remained relatively intact since its inception; the later materials had indeed preserved its ancient forms. Furthermore, there existed such conformity between the matter of quotations in the New Testament and in rabbinic literature, it was simply impossible that it could have happened by chance. La Roche, despite his reluctance to appreciate rabbinic literature in its own right, has nothing but praise for this endeavor: “The Readers will admire the great Labour and Industry of the Author, and wonder that a Writer so full of Talmudical and Rabbinical Learning should have such a clear Head, and express himself with so much Perspicuity. I add that they will thank him for those very things which they do not approve.”¹⁶

In the second installment of his review of Surenhusius, La Roche takes an unusual turn, by introducing a subject close to his heart but hardly relevant, so it seems, to the Amsterdam scholar’s work. Here is his justification for the digression:

“As I was going to give a further Account of Mr. Surenhusius’s Book . . . , it came to my Mind, that Nicolas Anthoine forsook the Christian Religion, and embraced Judaism, for no other Reason, but because he could not reconcile those two Genealogies, and the Quotations of the Evangelists and Apostles. A Book, like that of Mr. Surenhusius, would doubtless have prevented his Apostasy. I shall insert here the History of that Man that everybody may be the more sensible of the Usefulness and Importance of Mr. Surenhusius’s Work; and I am apt to believe the second Extract of his Book will be more acceptable to the Readers, after they have read the following Piece.”¹⁷

This was not the first time that La Roche had publicized the fascinating story of the Catholic Nicolas Anthoine who had attempted to convert to

¹⁵ *Memoirs of Literature* 6:115,117.

¹⁶ *Memoirs of Literature* 6:117.

¹⁷ *Memoirs of Literature* 6:131. This entire installment runs from pp. 131–154. On Nicholas Antoine, see Julien Weill, “Nicolas Antoine: Un Pasteur protestant brulé à Genève en 1632 pour crime de Judaïsme,” *Revue des études juives* 36 (1898), 161–198; 37 (1898): 161–180.

Protestantism, then consulted Jews in Metz, Venice, and Padua before secretly converting to Judaism on his own, and was finally executed by the Church authorities of Geneva in 1632. In fact, he had published the story no less than four times, three times in English and once in French. La Roche had so been fascinated by the story that he collected several contemporary accounts of it, including material from the Geneva archives, presented them both in French and in English translation, and clearly advocated more humane treatment for those deviating from orthodox Christianity.¹⁸

In the present instance, La Roche linked the Anthoine story to the challenge of understanding the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment in the New. Anthoine's immoral treatment at the hands of the Calvinist authorities was the reason La Roche was initially moved to write about his case. Having reported how the young man struggled to find meaning in his Christian identity and adopted Judaism instead, even after being spurned by contemporary Jews, La Roche struggled to understand why the Christian faith had failed the man in the first place. If indeed Surenhusius was capable of making the New Testament credible by contextualizing it within rabbinic modes of interpretation and quotation, he had done a marvelous service to his fellow Christians, far more significant than solving a scholarly problem.

La Roche fully understood that Christianity rose or fell on the matter of how the promises of biblical prophecy were fulfilled through its teaching. Christians had failed doubly in treating this bewildered man in his search for divine truth by murdering him and by previously not offering him the proper theological and exegetical guidance to return him to the right path. Defining Anthoine's failure to find meaning in the Christian faith as a matter of flawed exegesis and offering the solution of Surenhusius made perfect sense for an editor consistently fascinated by the study of Hebrew and the Bible, and committed to publicizing these matters in the pages of his journals.¹⁹

Whatever Collins was to make of this method, there is no doubt that he had read a full report of it from a highly faithful and sympathetic reporter. If there was indeed deception on his part in presenting Surenhusius' book as a serious solution to the crisis of Christian exegesis, it did not come from La Roche, who overcame his aversion to rabbinic literature to treat Surenhusius respectably and even enthusiastically. His insertion of Nicolas Anthoine's life story represented an even stronger endorsement of Surenhusius' new and bold scholarly tools to make sense of Christian Scripture. Indeed the sad case of Anthoine underscored dramatically the urgency of such a project!

¹⁸ See Thomas, "Michel de la Roche," especially pp. 160–162.

¹⁹ Compare Thomas, "Michel de la Roche," p. 163, who questions the sincerity of La Roche's praise of Surenhusius, viewing the Anthoine story "as a counter to Surenhusius' work".

Collins would also have been hard pressed to imply that the scholar William Surenhusius (1666–1729) he had seemingly recruited for his cause was anything other than a highly learned and original authority, one increasingly noticed by his contemporaries both in England and on the continent. He was in fact a scholar's scholar, hardly interested in participating in the polemical exchanges Collins and his contemporaries pursued almost as sport. He preferred instead the life of the mind, of editing texts and commenting about them in endless detail, in reading books, and in collecting a remarkable private library containing most of the major classical and contemporary Hebrew writings of Jewish authors.²⁰

In many respects, the beautiful folio volumes of the Surenhusius *Mishnah* represent a culmination of over a hundred years of Christian scholarship on the classic Jewish code. Surenhusius built on the foundations of several earlier translators whose work he graciously acknowledged. He faithfully translated the two most important Jewish commentaries of the text, and then added his own elaborate one. His oration on the value of the study of the *Mishnah* rings with a deep appreciation of the rational methods of the rabbis who should be compared with those of Roman law. He also elicits a deep sense of Christian commitment which is the driving force behind his decision to devote a lifetime of study to rabbinic texts. For Surenhusius, the *Mishnah* was the word of God. While Christians and Jews found different ways to express the divine will, they were ultimately connected in their faiths. A Christian Hebraist should not use his knowledge to vilify the Jewish tradition but should embrace the good fortune of having discovered this remarkable resource for the Christian faith. Surenhusius was proud of his close relations with Jews, and that they had been well treated in his native city. He was also in favor of Christian preaching among Jews so that Jews would also come to know and appreciate Christianity more fully.²¹

²⁰The auction catalogue of his private library is extant and was published in Amsterdam in 1730 as *Bibliotheca Surenhusiana*. Even a casual look at its contents suggests the remarkably high level of Surenhusius' Hebraic knowledge. What is especially impressive are the titles of sixteenth and seventeenth century books in all fields from halacha, to kabbalah, science, history, moral literature and more.

²¹Giulielmus Surenhusius, *Mischna sive Totius Hebraeorum Juris, Rituum, Antiquitatum, ac Legum Oralium Systema, cum clarissimorum Rabbiorum Maimonides & Barrnotae Commentariis Integris*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam, 1698–1703), especially vol. 1 "Praefatio ad Lectorem". On Surenhusius and his work on the *Mishnah*, see the Dutch article by Peter van Rooden, "Willem Surenhis' Opuatting van de Misjna," in Jan de Roos, Arie Schippers, and Jan W. Wesselius, eds. *Driehonderd jaar oosterse talen in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Juda Palache Instituut, 1986), pp. 43–54, and the almost identical English article by the same author, "The Amsterdam Translation of the Mishnah," in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, ed. William Horbury (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), pp. 257–267.

In the final analysis, Surenhusius believed that rabbinic literature was more than a pragmatic scholarly resource to better understand Christianity's historical roots. The *Mishnah* especially was part of the divine revelation, offering the key to reconciliation between Jews and Christians. Since ultimately the New Testament and the *Mishnah* ushered from the same divine source, Christians and Jews would join in the same faith through their mutual study. Surenhusius had not only brought Christian rabbinic learning to a new scholarly level; he had made textual study the ultimate spiritual task for Jewish-Christian rapprochement. Through the *Mishnah* Christians would be better able to recognize their true faith and Jews would come to understand as well that their rabbinic digest of laws ultimately conveyed a Christian truth. In Surenhusius, a new engagement in Jewish sources had provided Christians with a profound way of apprehending the testimony of their own faith through that of the Jews. By studying the *Mishnah*, a Christian might come to learn that the New Testament was indeed the fulfillment not the falsification of the Old. Centuries of acrimonious dispute could now be overcome through mutual study and respectful dialogue. In the end, the ultimate conversion of the Jews would be inaugurated through the efforts of the Christian scholars of Jewish texts.

Whether Collins fully appreciated the achievements of Surenhusius or not, whether he had been favorably convinced by the positive appraisal of La Roche, he found the notion that rabbinic study could enrich Christian self-understanding to be at least worthy of mention, and he basically reported it to his readers as a reasonable alternative to Whiston's approach, without distorting or falsifying what La Roche had provided him. It is true that he could not help himself from embellishing his narrative by comparing Surenhusius' meeting with the rabbi to Luther's pact with the devil. And while Surenhusius' project has little to do with the "cabbalists," Collins had no hesitation in equating the figurative or typical way of reading Scripture to cabbalism, a kind of Judaic madness which Christian exegetes had willfully adopted. Collins may have stretched the truth somewhat to bring out a more cynical reading of his source, but his was still a relatively accurate and fair accounting of what La Roche had said. It had been embraced by a man, theological liar though he may have been, who valued Jewish sources, read Jewish books, and even secured valuable Jewish manuscripts for his personal library.

One need not make the case that Collins was sincere in his use of Surenhusius to appreciate, nevertheless, that this Dutch scholar had built a serious reputation among certain clerical circles throughout Europe. More importantly, when Collins wrote, the study of rabbinic texts was very much a passionate interest for a growing number of scholars, especially in England. They cited Surenhusius, they continued to apply and refine his methods, and they even initiated the difficult task of translating the *Mishnah* into the English language. By the first decades of the eighteenth century, the Christian study of rabbinics

had been transformed from a relatively esoteric field of antiquarian scholarship to a more primary means of re-invigorating the study of Christianity itself. No serious Christian scholar could ignore this fact unless he was willing to face the peril of imperfectly understanding the foundations of his faith.

The primary exponent of the methods of Surenhusius on English soil was William Wotton (1666–1727). Wotton was a child prodigy, especially gifted in learning languages. He later acquired proficiency in Arabic, Syriac, and Aramaic, along with a broad education in several disciplines at Cambridge. In 1694, he gained considerable recognition in English and European learned society with the publication of his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, a thoughtful discussion of the merits of the moderns over the ancients in a variety of academic fields and literary endeavors, as well as a spirited defense of the Royal Society of which he was a fellow. Wotton's role as a student of rabbinics is particularly interesting when considered in the light of his self-consciousness about living in a modern age, vastly superior to previous ones.²²

Wotton's primary achievement in enhancing Jewish learning in England was the publication of his learned English translation of two tractates of the *Mishnah*, including a long excursus on the value of rabbinic learning for Christians. While he labored on this project primarily on his own, he received the enthusiastic support of two of his close friends and colleagues, Simon Ockley (1679–1720), primarily known as an historian of Islam at Cambridge, and David Wilkins (1685–1745), chaplain of William Wake, the archbishop of Canterbury.²³

Wotton's *Miscellaneous Discourses Relating to the Traditions and Uses of the Scribes and Pharisees in the Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ's Time* was published in London in 1718. In the preface, Wotton explained the genesis of the work in

²² On William Wotton, see David Stoker, "William Wotton (1666–1727)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30005>; Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustine Age* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); A.R. Hall, "William Wotton and the History of Science," *Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences* 9 (1949), 1047–1062.

²³ On Ockley, see Peter M. Holt, "Ockley, Simon (bap. 1679, d. 1720)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20494>. Azza Kararah, "Simon Ockley: His Contribution to Arabic Studies and Influence on Western Thought," Ph.D. Dissertation (Cambridge University, 1955); and Arthur J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays: Portraits of Seven Scholars* (Richmond, Surrey, 1977), pp. 11–47; On Wilkins, see the entry by Alastair Hamilton, "Wilkins, David (1685–1745)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/articles/29/29417>, and David C. Douglas, *English Scholars 1660–1730* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939, 1951), pp. 212–220.

a conversation he had with “a very ingenious Gentleman” about the origins of the observance of the Sabbath, and specifically among Christians. Dissatisfied with the existing literature on the subject, “I determin’d therefore to examine into the Traditions of the Elders, and to see how the Scribes and Pharisees in our blessed Saviour’s Time commanded the Sabbath to be observed”. When he examined their ancient texts, he was pleasantly surprised to find the *Mishnah* to be a most substantial work, notwithstanding the degree of contempt it has received from many learned men.²⁴ He extolled the work’s integrity and reliability, so that “wherever it gives light to any Custom, Passage, or Phrase mentioned in the Old and New Testaments, its light may certainly be depended on.”²⁵ He not only insisted on the *Mishnah*’s reliability; he saw it as a major source of understanding the phraseology and the larger background of the New Testament. He was thoroughly convinced that Josephus could not provide a more reliable witness than the rabbis and provided an important confirmation of this opinion by the learned David Wilkins.²⁶

Wotton also paid his full respect to an entire community of scholars who had preceded him in his appreciation of the *Mishnah*, especially Edward Pococke, John Lightfoot, and John Selden.²⁷ In so doing, he carefully situated himself in a living tradition of Christian scholars, proudly regarding his own scholarship a direct continuation of all of theirs. He not only referred to them throughout his text but assigned both a special chapter and a closing appendix for listing each of their contributions. The work of the early eighteenth century scholars of the *Mishnah*, as Wotton and certainly Surenhuisus saw it, was to continue what the pioneers of the previous century had begun. The case has already been effectively made by these seventeenth-century polymaths for the scholarly importance of rabbinic scholarship in illuminating ancient Christian literature and religion. It was up to Wotton and his colleagues to complete the task.

²⁴William Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses Relating to the Traditions and Uses of the Scribes and Pharisees in the Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ’s Time*, 2 vols. (London: William Bowyer, 1718), pp. i–iv.

²⁵Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, pp. v–xxvi.

²⁶Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, p. xlvii.

²⁷Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, p. xlix. On Pococke, see Gerald J. Toomer, “Pococke, Edward (1604–1691),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22430>. On Lightfoot, see Newton E. Key, “Lightfoot, John (1602–1675),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16648>. On Selden (1584–1654), see Paul Christianson, “Selden, John (1584–1654),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25052>; and especially Jason Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England’s Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Yet despite their acknowledged dependence on their scholarship, Wotton and his contemporaries, writing more than half a century after Pococke, Lightfoot, and Selden had produced their impressive scholarship, were not merely replicating what has been done before them. In fact, one might argue that they were self-consciously aware that their publications represented an advance over those of the previous generation. In the first place, they wrote with a greater self-assurance that their new work was significant because of its linkage with the efforts of the giants who preceded them. They were not creating a new field; they were continuing a scholarly tradition that had been fully legitimated and regularized within the scholarly community in which they participated. At the same time, they produced their work with a greater urgency than in previous generations because they felt, more than ever before, that Christianity could only be fully understood and legitimated through their scholarship. In the wake of the exegetical crisis engendered by historicism and philology so dramatically displayed in the public debate between Whiston and Collins, they understood more acutely than ever before the immense value of rabbinic learning for Christian self-understanding. And most importantly, by beginning the process of translating the *Mishnah* into English, they also grasped the import of their work in reaching beyond the coterie of scholars who wrote in Latin to a wider readership of vernacular literature. Selden and his colleagues had written to elite Latinists. In the new cultural world of the early eighteenth century, their findings along with those of their successors now accessible in English were to reach a wider lay readership through the efforts of Wotton and his circle of collaborators.

Following Wilkins' note, Wotton presented a letter from Simon Ockley, dated March 15, 1717, a letter he had expended considerable effort to solicit. The letter is important as an unambiguous and powerful endorsement of the study of rabbinics by Christians and I wish to cite it in full. Wotton was surely overjoyed by the directness in which Ockley composed his remarks and by the personal support he had received from his distinguished friend:

"We are obliged to you, for having evinced beyond all Contradictions that Hebrew Learning is necessary for us Christians. If I had ever had an Opportunity, I wou'd most certainly have gone thro' the New Testament under a Jew... that they understand it infinitely better than we do. They are thoroughly acquainted with all the Forms of Speech, and all the Allusions, which (because they occur but rarely) are obscure to us, tho' in common use and very familiar among them; as has been admirably demonstrated by the learned Surenhusius in his *Reconciliator*. I remember having read in F.[Richard] Simon... in the Appendix to Leo Modena, that he once offered the Epistle to the Hebrews in Hebrew to a learned rabbi in Paris, who "after he had perused it, without taking any manner of notice of the difference in Religion, said, that whosoever was the Author of that Book, he was a great Mekubbal [a Jewish mystic] and

thoroughly versed in all the Traditions of the Jewish Nation.”...We do not make use of the Opinions of modern Rabbis, nor their uncertain Conjectures for the Confirmation of any Thing. But when we find Expressions and Allusions exactly the same with those in the New Testament; several Petitions in the Lord’s Prayer; and some of our Lord’s Parables in the Talmud: Are we to suppose that they came thither by Chance; or which is most ridiculous, that the Jews borrow’d them from the Christians; or rather which is the only true way of accounting for them, that they were in familiar Use among the Jews in our blessed Saviour’s Time?...The Misna is undoubtedly a very venerable piece of Antiquity; collected with great Judgment, and digested with utmost exactness by that great and learned Rabbi, Judah, a Person, than whom none since the Destruction of the Temple, that we know of, had greater Advantages both of Wisdom, Learning, Riches, and Interest to furnish him with all the Materials necessary for the completing so great a Work.”²⁸

This is the most conspicuous and earnest affirmation of the Surenhusius project we have seen from any contemporary, articulated in the most provocative of language, sure to be noticed by even the most indifferent of readers. Ockley referred to Surenhusius’ book only four years after its publication, and seven years before Collins’ endorsement would give it the notoriety its author had never sought. But it was not merely the mention of Surenhusius and his hermeneutical program that was tantalizing. It was Ockley’s goading assertion that Jews could understand the New Testament “infinitely better than we do,” and that if Ockley ever had the opportunity, he would most certainly have chosen a Jew to teach him the foundational text of his faith.

If Anthony Collins had written these lines, it would surely have been offered as testimony of his cynicism by modern historians. But this was Simon Ockley, distinguished Cambridge professor, who purposely avoided high society because of his lack of ease in the company of politicians and socialites and sometimes expressed concern about how he was perceived in the public eye. Even Wotton himself could not have expected such a bombshell. Ockley stated more bluntly than any Christian theologian before him how critically Christians needed Jews and their religious traditions to understand themselves.

²⁸Wotton, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, postscript of Mr. Simon Ockley, professor of Arabic at Cambridge, at the end of the preface. He refers to the edition of the Venetian rabbi Leon Modena’s compendium of Jewish life published in French translation by Richard Simon and then published in English by Ockley himself. On Simon see, Justin Champion, “Pere Richard Simon and English Biblical Criticism 1680–1700,” in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in His Honor*, eds. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 39–61

I wish to close this discussion of Wotton's fascination with the *Mishnah* by considering one additional work he composed in which he underscored even more dramatically his wish that rabbinic study by Christians might become the common property of clerics far beyond his limited circle of friends and colleagues. In a book entitled *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method of Studying Divinity* (written only a few years before his *Miscellaneous Discourses* had appeared, but only published posthumously in 1734) Wotton turned his attention to the matter of theological education. He was just as emphatic in this context as he had been in his special work on the *Mishnah* regarding the critical importance of Hebrew and rabbinics in the education of the Christian divine. Writing only a short time after Surenhusius' book on rabbinic hermeneutics had appeared, he eagerly recommended it to students of the clergy. But first he mentioned his edition of the *Mishnah*: "If he (our student) has a mind thoroughly to understand those Traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees, for which they are so severely rebuked by our blessed Saviour in the Evangelists, he will find a compleat System of them in Surenhusius's Edition of the Misna with the Commentaries of Maimonides and Bartenora . . . It is a noble and authentick Collection of what the Jews have built upon Moses's Law in every particular."²⁹ Later, he prominently featured Surenhusius' second work:

"There he particularly shews how our blessed Saviour and his Disciples prov'd what they said out of Moses, and the Prophets, and why they quoted every Passage that they thought proper for their Purpose, in the particular Manner in which we see it alleged. He compare their Methods of Argumentation with those which are used by the Jewish Masters; and thereby demonstrates the Cogency of many Arguments produced by St. Paul which have perplexed most Christian Interpreters, and so shows the Connections between the Covenants in a fully and convincing Manner. And tho' his design led him to quote the Hebrew Text at every Turn, yet his Work is so contrived, that those that do not understand Hebrew, need not be frightened since most of his Allegations are exactly translated, and by that Means the Thread of his Arguments may be very easily comprehended."³⁰

That Wotton had familiarized himself with Surenhusius's work so soon after its publication is impressive enough. That he recommended it so emphatically as part of a curriculum for students of theology, even if they cannot read Hebrew, offers eloquent testimony of its importance for Christian pedagogy. But reading Surenhusius's works is only a small part of the Jewish education

²⁹William Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method of Studying Divinity* (London: William Bowyer, 1734; Dublin and London, 1751), pp. 385–386.

³⁰Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, p. 398.

Wotton sought to impart to his potential students. The education of the Christian cleric in Judaism was to include both mastery of ancient literature along with a familiarity with contemporary Jewish life gleaned from recent Christian handbooks.³¹

Yet reading the secondary accounts of the primary sources of ancient Judaism and Christianity were not sufficient for Wotton to demonstrate the profound interrelationship between the two faiths and their respective literary traditions. Wotton returned again to consider the *Mishnah* edition of Surenhusius, this time to provide hands-on advice on how to use this resource as one reads the New Testament. In reading these amazing instructions, we have moved from the realm of theory to practice, from the setting of theological discussion and debate to that of a teacher and his classroom. Here are Wotton's specific instructions to students:

"I would advise him to read the respective Titles in the Misna in the order of which they lie in the Pentateuch without any regard to the Order in which they be in the Misna itself. As for instance, when the Chapter of the Waters of Jealousy, in the fifth of Numbers, or that of taking a Brother's Wife, in the 25th of Deuteronomy, are read in the Pentateuch; then the titles Sota and Jevammoth which correspond to those Laws, shou'd be read in the Misna, and so of the rest. The Misna and its Commentators will appear very dry, and perhaps ridiculous at first to men wholly unacquainted with that Learning, but Use will soon conquer that, and the Benefit which will thence arise towards the Understanding of the Mosaic Law, will abundantly compensate the Pains; and I speak from Experience, that all the Christian Commentators put together (at least those I have used) will not get a tenth Part of the Light to the Understanding the Law of Moses, that may be had by the Help of the Jewish Traditions."³²

Wotton cautioned, however, that this method should be tried only on advanced students of the Pentateuch so that "it will then be easier, pleasanter, and more profitable."³³ The rest of Wotton's instructions on clerical education are taken up with bibliography in other fields, such as books against the deists, Catholics, and other enemies of the Church. Nevertheless, the conspicuous place Wotton afforded Judaic education, and specifically the study of the *Mishnah* is striking. He clearly had not compartmentalized his interest in the subject to one well researched book but considered it a vital dimension of Christian education in general, as this fascinating pamphlet readily illustrates.

³¹Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, pp. 386, 398.

³²Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, pp. 399–400.

³³Wotton, *Some Thoughts Concerning a Proper Method*, p. 400.

As Wotton well understood, he and his colleagues had brought to fruition the pioneering work of Adam Boreel, Rabbi Leon Templo, Menasseh ben Israel, and the many others who had labored to introduce the value of rabbinic literature for the self-understanding of Christians. In completing this story introduced so brilliantly and enthusiastically by the late Richard Popkin, I wish to acknowledge his pioneering efforts in this ripe field of scholarship and to underscore how his scholarly legacy continues to stimulate a younger generation of scholars for whom he has led the way.

PART III
POPKIN AND THE SKEPTICAL TRADITION

9. POPKIN'S SKEPTICISM AND THE CYNICAL TRADITION

John Christian Laursen

The philosophical heritage of ancient Greece has come down to us in several streams of traditions. The Platonic and Aristotelian traditions are the two best known. After them, I suppose the sophists, stoics, and Epicureans are next in terms of public and scholarly recognition. Ancient skepticism has only made a comeback in the study of the history of philosophy in the last fifty years or so, and I do not have to tell readers of this volume that this comeback was largely inspired by Richard Popkin. In this chapter I want to set up his achievement in recovering the tradition of skepticism as the background for a further exploration. What about other traditions of ancient philosophy, such as the cynics? Why did Popkin ignore them, and why do most students of ancient philosophy pass over them so quickly, if they are aware of them at all?

There are several answers to these questions. One is that Popkin had enough on his hands in dealing with skeptics, millenarians, and Jews.¹ No one can do everything. This is possible, of course, but I would rather see a more principled reason. Another is that in our specializing society, you do not need to know anything about the cynics to be a specialist on the skeptics, or Plato, or Aristotle. A third is that philosophy understood as metaphysics and epistemology will not have much respect for schools that reject metaphysics and epistemology: "they are not philosophers". A fourth is that we do not have much information about the cynics: just a few works and fragments. The last three answers were the same sort of reasons that militated against treating ancient skepticism as philosophy, and Richard Popkin overcame these objections. So I ask again, why didn't he include cynicism in his *Umwertung aller philosophischer Wertungen*?

Let us start with Popkin's achievement. When he began, very little modern scholarship had been written about the ancient skeptics, and most of it was

¹ See David Katz and Jonathan Israel, eds., *Skeptics, Millenarians, and Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

disrespectful. There were few and fragmentary sources: Cicero's *Academica*, Sextus Empiricus, and Diogenes Laertius, along with some of the early Church Father enemies of skepticism. Competing for attention with the Platonic or Aristotelian corpus was an uphill battle. Skeptics were accused of being unphilosophical. Thus Jean-Pierre de Crousaz in the eighteenth century could claim that they were hopelessly confused² and Nicholas Rescher in the twentieth century could say that he just wasn't interested in any one with so little confidence in rationality.³ Yes, the skeptics were anti-philosophers in the sense that they were not interested in parsing rationality; but rationalist philosophers should still have an answer for them, not just run away. They were still philosophers in the larger sense if philosophy is living right and teaching it by example, like Socrates.⁴ But then Myles Burnyeat could claim that a skeptic could not live his skepticism because that would imply a contradiction.⁵ Skeptics were also accused of implying conservative or reactionary politics, or else radically subversive politics.⁶ And many things had come to be described in ordinary language in modern times as skeptical that had nothing to do with the ancient traditions.

Competing moral philosophies had done their best to bring down skepticism. Let me start with the Christian tradition's treatment of skepticism, which began with "refutations" by Church fathers such as Lactantius and Augustine. By the time we get to the early modern period, a relatively unbiased historiography of skepticism was possible. Early historians of skepticism such as Thomas Stanley in England (1655) and Johann Jakob Brucker in Germany (1742–1744) gave respectful attention to the skeptics: Stanley even translated large portions of Sextus Empiricus. But something of a reaction set in, in many quarters. Jean-Pierre de Crousaz's immense refutation of Pierre Bayle and other skeptics of 1733 was largely a refutation from their presumed consequences for

²Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, *Examen du Pyrrhonisme ancien et moderne* (The Hague: De Hondt, 1733).

³See J. C. Laursen, "Skepticism, Unconvincing Anti-skepticism, and Politics" in *Scepticism et modernité*, eds. Marc-André Bernier and Sébastien Charles (Saint-Étienne: Publications de la Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005), 167–188.

⁴See, e.g., Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

⁵Myles Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live his Skepticism?" in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Burnyeat (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 117–148. See J. C. Laursen, "Yes, Skeptics Can Live Their Skepticism and Cope with Tyranny as Well As Anyone" in *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought*, eds. R. Popkin and J. Maia Neto (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 201–223.

⁶But see John Christian Laursen, "Tame Skeptics at the Prussian Academy", *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe siècle*, vol. 12, 2008 for examples of skeptics who were neither reactionary nor radical, but just moderately progressive.

Christianity and morality.⁷ Swiss scientist Albrecht von Haller refuted skepticism as a matter of Christian apologetics, not philosophical insight.⁸ By the time William Enfield translated and abridged Brucker's history of philosophy in the late eighteenth century, he felt it necessary to omit much of the philosophical analysis of the skeptics and simply attacked them *ad hominem* for weak-mindedness, laziness, moral turpitude, and their threat to Christianity.⁹ Joseph Priestley's *Doctrines of Heathen Philosophy* of 1804 followed up on this apologetic history of philosophy, and was read by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. I could multiply these examples throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in French and German as well as English.

The Christian moral objection to skepticism has been widely accepted, even by those who would be horrified to know that that is what they are doing. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, approves of the death penalty for skeptics. I quote: she denounces "how profoundly selfish, indeed solipsistic the sceptic program is... If philosophy is only capable of making the individual practitioner feel calm, then Socrates's enemies would be right: philosophy is a dangerous form of self-indulgence, subversive of democracy, and its teachers are corruptors of the young."¹⁰ This is not the place to go into the point that skeptics are probably no more selfish on average than dogmatic moralists, and that even if the self-righteous moralists think they are less selfish than skeptics, they might be perceived by others as even more selfish. Nor shall we go into the question of whether dogmatic philosophies are any less subversive of democracy. I will just point out that Nussbaum suggests that skeptical Weimar Republic intellectuals had to cave in to Hitler and would have behaved better if they had held strong moral opinions.¹¹ But Martin Heidegger was a dogmatist and did all of the things that Nussbaum says we should do in order to reach strong moral opinions. He collaborated with the Nazis. By contrast, one of the rebels in the Czech movie "Closely Watched Trains" (1966) plays the skeptic in asking a German official "why, why, why?" instead of accepting

⁷Crousaz, *Examen du Pyrrhonisme*; see J. C. Laursen, "Swiss Anti-skeptics in Berlin" in *Schweizer im Berlin des 18. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Martin Fontius and Helmut Holzhey (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), 261–281.

⁸See J. C. Laursen, "Political Virtue and Anti-skepticism in Albrecht von Haller's Political Novels", in *Republikanische Tugend: Ausbildung eines Schweizer Nationalbewusstseins und Erziehung eines neuen Bürgers*, eds. Michael Böhler, Etienne Hofmann, Peter Reill, and Simone Zurbuchen (Geneva: Slatkine, 2000), 263–281.

⁹See J. C. Laursen, "Enfield's Brucker and Christian Anti-skepticism in the History of Philosophy", *Intellectual News* No. 16, 2007–2008.

¹⁰Martha Nussbaum, "Equilibrium: Scepticism and Immersion in Political Deliberation" in *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition*, ed. Juha Sihvola. *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, vol. 66, Helsinki, 2000, 194.

¹¹Nussbaum, "Equilibrium", 192.

any dogma. This skeptical rebel reacts against the Germans on the basis of gut feeling or impulse, like any good skeptic, not on the basis of philosophical dogma.¹² It is worth observing that one recent social scientist argues that living by gut feelings is usually the best way to live.¹³

My point is that Popkin overcame all of these objections, at least as far as getting many other people to take the skeptics seriously. Many have followed in his footsteps of exploring the Renaissance and early modern reception of ancient skepticism.¹⁴ Some have gone back to examine medieval uses of skepticism that he did not find.¹⁵ One of the most interesting movements has been the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus as an original philosopher, pioneered by such scholars as Emidio Spinelli, Richard Bett, and D. L. Blank.¹⁶ Popkin began with the claim that Sextus Empiricus was “an obscure and unoriginal Hellenistic writer” and not a philosopher in his own right, but by the last edition of *The History of Scepticism* he had added that “A recent study by Richard Bett suggests that Sextus was a somewhat original thinker”.¹⁷ Popkin and the many scholars who followed him into this area also survived the charges that skeptics must be politically conservative and immoral, largely by showing that there was little philosophical or historical evidence for these claims, and plenty of evidence to counter them.

I hope I have made at least a *prima facie* case for the claim that Richard Popkin’s achievement was that of inspiring the recovery of an entire neglected school of ancient Greek thought and defending it against its critics. And that brings me back to the earlier question: why didn’t he do the same thing for the cynics?

¹² I owe this example to Vicente Sanf elix.

¹³ Gerd Gigerenzer, *Gut Feelings: The Intelligence of the Unconscious* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007).

¹⁴ To mention only a few recent collections: Gianni Paganini, ed., *The Return of Skepticism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003); Popkin and Maia Neto, eds., *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought*; Johan van der Zande and Richard Popkin, eds., *The Skeptical Tradition Around 1800* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998); Bernier and Charles, eds., *Scepticisme et modernit e*.

¹⁵ E.g. Cary Nederman, “Toleration, Skepticism, and the ‘Clash of Ideas’: Principles of Liberty in the Writings of John of Salisbury” in *Beyond the Persecuting Society*, eds. J. C. Laursen and C. Nederman (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 53–70.

¹⁶ Emidio Spinelli, *Questioni scettiche* (Rome: Lithos, 2005); Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents and His Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists*, ed. and tr. Richard Bett (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians*, ed. and tr. D. L. Blank (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

¹⁷ Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), 19; Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18.

As a preliminary matter, readers may wonder who the ancient cynics were, and may have some cognitive dissonance caused by the prevailing ordinary language use of “cynic” for a lying, manipulative, selfish pig – or politician. Antisthenes (446–366 BC) was the first to adopt the staff, cloak, and wallet that identified the cynics.¹⁸ He gave the cynics a genealogy by claiming to adopt the cynic way of life from Socrates’s hardihood and disregard of feeling, and asserted that he got the idea that pain is a good thing from Heracles and Cyrus.¹⁹ Diogenes of Sinope became the most famous model cynic. He was not a liar or manipulative. He was selfish in a way, but not at the expense of others. He was the very opposite of a politician: he did not hold any office. Many sources contain anecdotes about him. Perhaps the most famous is the occasion when Alexander the Great came to him and offered to do him a favor. “Get out of my sunlight!” he answered. He is also famous for walking around with a lamp in daylight, saying “I’m looking for an honest man”.²⁰ He lived in a tub or a barrel, and performed all of his natural functions in public. Because of this he was called a “dog”, and proudly adopted the name, which is “kuno” in ancient Greek, and the source of the name “cynic”.

Diogenes was a moralist, attacking materialism and urging a sort of movement “back to nature”. He was a critic of political establishments whose ideas verged on anarchism. He spoke as he pleased (Greek *parrhesia*), and claimed independence (*autarkeia*) precisely because he cultivated self-denial (*askesis*). He was known for the slogan “deface the coinage!”, a metaphor for rejection of conventional social customs and institutions. Less familiar are the later cynics such as Monimus (4th c. BC); Onesicritus (fl. 330 BC); Crates (fl. 326 BC) and his wife Hipparchia (c. 300 BC), who lived with him in public; Menippus, who wrote satires and lent his name to what is known as Menippean satire; and Menedemus.²¹

We have only a handful of substantial sources about ancient cynicism. The groundwork is laid in Book VI of Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives of the Philosophers*.²² The orator Dio Chrysostom (Dio of Prusa) lived as a cynic for part of his life,

¹⁸Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1925), vol. 2, 15. See Luis E. Navia, *Antisthenes of Athens: Setting the World Aright* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001).

¹⁹Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, 5.

²⁰Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, 43.

²¹Intriguingly, Popkin did include a racy selection from Bayle’s article on Hipparchia in his edition of selections from Bayle’s *Dictionary* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), 95–103. But there is no indication that he did this because of an interest in cynical philosophy.

²²Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, 2–109.

and has sympathetic portraits of Diogenes in many of his discourses.²³ Dio is anti-war, ascetic, anti-materialist, anti-glory. His Euboean Discourse may be the first extended case for environmentalist back-to-nature living.²⁴ Perhaps the best-known moral philosopher to transmit cynical teachings was Epictetus. He left us a stoicized Diogenes in his Discourses, and has been described as the most cynic of the stoics,²⁵ but he could just as well be described as the most stoic of the cynics.

As in the case of the skeptics, one of our best sources was actually an enemy, at least of false cynics. Many of Lucian's dialogues make fun of pretended cynics. One of his dialogues, "Demonax", has been read as the story of the ideal cynic, but it has also been read as a subtle put-down. Lucian reports that Demonax makes fun of effeminates, the weak, mourners, and cripples.²⁶ Cynical critical humor, yes, but with poorly chosen targets. When the dialogue reports that when he died many philosophers accompanied him to the tomb, that is susceptible of more than one interpretation: maybe some could not rest until they were sure he was dead and buried.²⁷ Only one of Lucian's dialogues, "The Cynic" (Kynikos), seems to be unequivocally in favor of the cynics, and for that reason it is often assigned to Pseudo-Lucian.²⁸

Cynicism was never really lost, and many of our sources were available in late antiquity and the medieval period. The materials were developed substantially in the Renaissance. Erasmus of Rotterdam included some 350 cynical sayings in his *Apophthegmata*.²⁹ Rabelais reveled in Menippean satire. Montaigne's friend Etienne de la Boétie adopted cynic methods of teaching such as invective, irony, word-play, and paradoxes to provoke thought and to

²³Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1932–), esp. vol. 1, the fourth discourse "On Kingship", "A Libyan Myth", "The Isthmian Discourse", "Diogenes, or Tyranny".

²⁴Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, vol. 1, 285–373.

²⁵Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1925–1928), Book 3, ch. 22. "The most Cynic of the stoics": Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: 1671–1713* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 149. See also A. A. Long, *Epictetus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁶Lucian, tr. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1913), vol. 1, 141–173.

²⁷David Glidden, Review of R. Bracht Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, eds., *The Cynics*, in *Ancient Philosophy* 18, 1998, 440–458, at 452.

²⁸Lucian, tr. M. D. Macleod (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1967) vol. 8, 379 (translator's note).

²⁹Michèle Clément, "'Abrutis, vous pouvez cesser de l'être': Le Discours de la servitude volontaire et la pédagogie cynique", *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe siècle*, 7, 2003, 110.

castigate the lazy.³⁰ Montaigne mentioned or quoted Antisthenes 14 times, Diogenes 18 times, and Crates 8 times in his Essays. It has been customary to debate whether Montaigne passed through stages as a skeptic, a stoic, and an Epicurean; it is curious that so little has been said about his cynicism, despite so many references to cynics.³¹

Despite this major presence in the early modern period, until recently there has not been much modern scholarly literature on the cynical tradition. D. R. Dudley's *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the Sixth Century AD of 1937* was the first modern work to take them seriously.³² This was followed by the detailed and important *Cynic Hero and Cynic King of Ragnar Höistad in 1948*.³³ Neither of these can count as the cynics' Popkin, because they were limited to the ancient materials and did not cover the Renaissance and early modern period. That role was taken by Heinrich Niehues-Pröbsting's *Der Kynismus des Diogenes und der Begriff des Zynismus* (1979; second ed. 1988).³⁴ Niklaus Largier performed the distinguished service of reprinting 75 texts of transmission of cynical ideas and sayings from Valerius Maximus sometime after 31 AD through medieval, Renaissance, and early modern times to Christian Wernicke in 1701, together with a monograph-length introduction.³⁵ Philosophical study of the ancient cynics was given a boost by André Comte-Sponville's *Valeur et vérité* (1994).³⁶

Jeffrey Goldfarb, William Chaloupka, and others have introduced the cynics to the attention of contemporary cultural critics, but they only spend anywhere between a paragraph and a few pages on anecdotes from the ancient tradition, and rapidly move on to contemporary usage of the word, without making much of a connection between the two.³⁷ Some have used the word

³⁰ Clément, "Abrutis, vous pouvez cesser", 105–119.

³¹ See Michèle Clément, *Le cynisme à la Renaissance. D'Erasmus à Montaigne* (Paris: Droz, 2005), ch. 8.

³² D. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the Sixth century AD* (London: Methuen, 1937; 2nd ed. 1998).

³³ Ragnar Hoistad, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King* (Lund: Blom, 1948).

³⁴ Heinrich Niehues-Pröbsting, *Der Kynismus des Diogenes und der Begriff des Zynismus* (Munich: Fink, 1979, 2nd. ed. 1988).

³⁵ Niklaus Largier, *Diogenes der Kyniker: Exempel, Erzählung, Geschichte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit. Mit einem Essay zur Figur des Diogenes zwischen Kynismus, Narrentum und postmoderner Kritik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997).

³⁶ André Comte-Sponville, *Valeur et vérité: Etudes cyniques* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994).

³⁷ Donald Kanter and Philip Mirvis, *The Cynical Americans* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1989); Jeffrey Goldfarb, *The Cynical Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991); William Chaloupka, *Everybody Knows: Cynicism in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Wilber Caldwell, *Cynicism and the American Dream* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006).

in book titles with no reference at all to the tradition.³⁸ For detailed scholarly background, we had to wait until R. Bracht Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé edited *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy* for the University of California Press in 1997 which brought together much recent work on the cynics and seems to indicate that they have finally arrived in the English-speaking world. And perhaps most striking as an indicator of the resurgence of ancient cynicism in the history of modern philosophy, Michel Foucault made the ancient cynics one of the chief topics of his last lectures at Berkeley, published many years posthumously as *Fearless Speech*.³⁹ It is testimony to his intellectual honesty that, setting out to find a genealogy of political activism and the critical tradition in the West, he concludes rather soberly that we have no good way of distinguishing the real truth-speakers from the chatterers, the flatterers, the bad, the immoral, the self-deluded, and the ignorant.⁴⁰ The cynics are part of his self-subverting genealogy.

I mentioned that Niehues-Pröbsting was the cynics' Popkin because he drew attention to the cynical tradition in the Renaissance and early modern period. But it turns out that he only scratched the surface. He does not know anything about Pedro de Valencia, John Upton, Johann Friedrich Struensee, or several others that I have found who contributed to the cynical tradition, and neither does Largier.⁴¹ Like a young Popkin feeling his oats, I am finding cynicism everywhere.

Other scholars might say that they find lots of cynics, too, but that they have little to do with *Diogenes of Sinope*. Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) made a useful distinction between what he conceived of as the healthy cynics of ancient and early modern times and the unhealthy cynicism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴² The latter is the self-ish, manipulative, exploitative cynicism we can read about in the newspapers every day. The latter is the source of most cynic-bashing, which is usually ignorant

³⁸ E.g. Ronald Arnett and Pat Arneson, *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte, 2001).

⁴⁰ See J. C. Laursen, review of Foucault, *Fearless Speech, Perspectives on Politics* 1, 2003, 589–90.

⁴¹ J. C. Laursen, "Scepticisme et cynisme dans l'oeuvre de Pierre de Valence", *Philosophiques* 35, 2008, 187–206; "Humanism vs. Cynicism: Cosmopolitan Culture and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century Denmark", in K. Haakonssen and H. Horstbøll, eds., *Northern Antiquities and National Identities: Perceptions of Denmark and the North in the Eighteenth Century* (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2008), 145–162, 336–339.

⁴² Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) [orig. *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983)].

of the tradition of ancient cynicism. More recently, David Mazella has given us an account of the change in meaning from the ancient tradition to modern cynicism in English culture, dating the main transition to the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth.⁴³

Now, cynics have been subjected to the same treatment as the skeptics from Christians and other competing moralists. This is not surprising. The seventeenth century libertines took up cynicism with glee because they could use it against both church and state.⁴⁴ Apologists reacted with the same sort of diatribes against the cynics as Christian apologists and Martha Nussbaum have used against the skeptics. It is remarkable that Nussbaum cites the cynics as models of cosmopolitanism in her essay on "Patriotism and cosmopolitanism" without mentioning that some of their other ideas and practices would probably "subvert democracy" and "corrupt the youth", just like those of the skeptics.⁴⁵

Readers will have noticed many parallels between the cynics and the skeptics here. We have only a small handful of substantial sources about the ancient skeptics and cynics, overlapping in the cases of Diogenes Laertius and some of the early Church Father enemies of both cynicism and skepticism. Like skepticism, cynicism played a renewed role in the Renaissance, among others at the hands of Erasmus and Montaigne. Skeptics and cynics have both been accused of being unphilosophical, and of being immoral. Both have been accused of entailing conservative or reactionary politics, and in both cases this is wrong. And many things have come to be described in ordinary language in modern times as skeptical or cynical that have nothing to do with the ancient traditions.

Popkin's achievement in bringing back ancient skepticism overcame all of these hurdles on behalf of the skeptics. So the fact that the cynics faced similar hurdles would not have fazed him. So why, I ask again, did he ignore them?

Popkin was something of a parrhesiast (or fearless speaker), and certainly independent-minded (*autarkeia*), so he shared that much with the cynics. But he was neither a moralist nor an ascetic, and these two points may explain a good deal of his neglect of the cynics. Popkin was not much of a dogmatic moralist. By this I do not mean to say that he did not have strong moral feelings, but he did not wander around town upbraiding people for their mistaken morals, as Diogenes did. Unlike skeptics, cynics have strong commitments to

⁴³David Mazella, *The Making of Modern Cynicism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

⁴⁴Jean-Michael Gros, "La place du cynisme dans la philosophie libertine", *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe siècle*, 7, 2003, 121–139.

⁴⁵Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" in M. Nussbaum et al., *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1996), 6–7, 16–17.

moral teaching. And this is why, despite the many things the cynics and skeptics have in common, you probably cannot have skeptical cynics or cynical skeptics in the same sense you can have stoical cynics or cynical stoics. The reason is that both sides of the psyche of the cynical stoics or stoical cynics are moralists, believing and living by their moral stances, which they have succeeded in making converge. But skeptics cannot be moralists in the same sense. They have to suspend judgment every time one or another moral position is taken to be definitive. They can live by cynical customs or impulses, I suppose, but without any commitment to them as truths. And cynics cannot suspend judgment about everything: part of what it means to be a cynic is to live by your beliefs. So, if Popkin shared the skeptical ethos – and there is plenty of evidence that he did – then he could not have been very enthusiastic about the cynics.

The second point concerns the third point on the crown of cynicism: aske-sis or self-denial. This was just not Popkin's temperament. He enjoyed life, and indulged in friendship, good food, and creature comforts. This is another reason for Popkin's neglect of skepticism's sister school.

It may be pointed out that a researcher need not adopt the behavior of his research subjects. Popkin studied millenarians but never became a millenarian. So in order to have studied the cynics, he did not have to become a cynic. That pushes us back to the possible explanation mentioned above right at the beginning: he was busy enough with skeptics, millenarians, and Jews and simply did not have the time or interest to branch out into yet another subfield. Sometimes there is no more sophisticated explanation for decisions like this, no more principled basis for choice of research topics than that one cannot do everything.

10. CHARRON AND HUET: TWO UNEXPLORED LEGACIES OF POPKIN'S SCHOLARSHIP ON EARLY MODERN SKEPTICISM

José R. Maia Neto*

Introduction

Richard Popkin's work on the role of ancient skepticism in modern philosophy is quite influential in the fields of the history of philosophy, ideas, science and literature. But when it comes to the particular philosophers he enrolled in the history of early modern skepticism, the reception and fortune of his work has been more diverse. His view that Descartes's philosophy is a response to the skeptical challenge of his time is extremely influential.¹ Other philosophers related to the early modern skeptical tradition such as Bayle, who was little studied before Popkin, now receive much more attention from scholars.² The two philosophers examined in this paper, Charron and Huet, still receive, however, very little attention in relation to their importance.

There are a number of coincidences concerning Charron and Huet which shed light on Popkin's interest in them. Both were French skeptics who became

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¹See Thomas Lennon, "Descartes, Huet and the Objection of the Objections" in J. R. Maia Neto and R. H. Popkin (eds.) *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), p. 124: "It is difficult for us at this stage of history to appreciate just how much [Popkin's] reading of Descartes has become the standard interpretation. We take it in with our mother's milk, and it is just assumed in virtually all literature."

²Among the recent studies on Bayle from the viewpoint of skepticism which were influenced by Popkin's scholarship—even if in some cases disagreeing with some aspects of his interpretation, see Gianni Paganini, *Analise della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1980); Frédéric Brahami, *Le Travail du Scepticisme: Montaigne, Bayle, Hume* (Paris: PUF, 2001) and Jose Maia Neto, "Bayle's Academic Skepticism" in James E. Force and David S. Katz (eds.) *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin. Essays in His Honor* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 263–276.

priests at a relatively old age: Charron in 1576 at the age of 35, Huet exactly 100 years later, in 1676, at the age of 46. Both had their Christian faith put on doubt (though Charron's much more than Huet's). Both were key figures in the history of early modern skepticism, very influential at their time, but both were later overshadowed by two greater contemporary skeptics whom they personally knew: Charron by Montaigne and Huet by Bayle.³ Both flourished at key moments of the history of early modern skepticism, the first at the very beginning of the seventeenth century, the second at its end. Between them was the major early modern philosopher who made the most decisive contribution to the fate of modern skepticism: René Descartes. The first edition of Popkin's *History of Scepticism*⁴ ended with Descartes because the central event of this history was how Descartes used the skeptical doubt of his time for his own philosophical purposes and how this use immediately led to the perception that instead of refuting skepticism, Descartes's philosophy strengthened it. The last edition of Popkin's *History of Scepticism* published in 2003 carries this history to Bayle.⁵ The new chapters 11 (on Pascal and More), 13 (on Wilkins, Boyle and Glanvill), 16 (on Malebranche, Locke and Leibniz), 17 (on Foucher and Huet) and 18 (on Bayle) show how Descartes is crucial in late-seventeenth-century skepticism. Popkin called attention to the relevance of Charron in pre-Cartesian and of Huet in post-Cartesian early modern skepticism. Recent research has shown that their role is even greater than the pages dedicated to them in the *History of Scepticism* indicate.

³Charron was a follower of Montaigne but developed a kind of skepticism different from the skepticism held by the author of the *Essays*. See José R. Maia Neto, "Charron's Academic Skeptical Wisdom," forthcoming in Gianni Paganini and José Maia Neto (eds.) *Renaissance Scepticisms*. Huet met Bayle at one occasion. In a letter discovered by Popkin, Bayle expressed to Mme Blondel de Tilly his great admiration for Huet. Huet did not value much Bayle's *Dictionnaire* as a scholarly work and, as Popkin indicates, apparently did not perceive the strength and originality of its skepticism. See R. H. Popkin, "An unpublished letter of Pierre Bayle," *Nouvelles de la République de Lettres* (1981–1982), 193–197. However, J. Avenel, J. Avenel cites a letter from Huet to Gravius where he speaks favorably of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*: "multa in eo sunt solerter excogitata, scripta eleganter, erudite collecta" (J. Avenel, *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Pierre-Daniel Huet évêque d'Avranches*. Mortain: A. Lebel, 1853, p. 241).

⁴Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960).

⁵Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). The following quotes from Popkin's classic work are from this edition.

Pierre Charron

Pierre Charron was an extremely influential philosopher in the first part of the seventeenth century.⁶ But from the mid-seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century, Charron's influence progressively decreased because of his scholastic style and, above all, the growing conviction that his main work, *Of Wisdom*, was plagiarized from Montaigne's *Essais*.⁷ Popkin was one of the first to undo this historical injustice by pointing out that although he was a disciple of Montaigne, Charron introduced at least one modification in the standard skeptical position of the time that turned out to be crucial in modern philosophy. The article "Charron and Descartes: the fruits of systematic doubt," published in 1954, is in my opinion one of Popkin's masterpieces.⁸ It exhibits one of the strongest aspects of Popkin's historiography of philosophy: his ability to open new research programs. He sheds light on the birth of modern philosophy by showing that Cartesian methodic doubt is much closer to Charron's use of skepticism to achieve human wisdom than to ancient skepticism or that of Montaigne. Montaigne remains to this day the main reference of Cartesian scholars discussing the historical background of Cartesian doubt.⁹ But Popkin shows that Descartes takes from Charron not only the conception of a methodical doubt but also his provisional morality, for it is a morality employed during the exercise of doubt, despite the different goals they pursue through doubt. Gianni Paganini has recognized the importance of Popkin's

⁶Michel Adam, *Etudes sur Pierre Charron* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1991), pp. 198–202 reckoned 34 editions of *De la Sagesse* at the Bibliothèque Nationale in the period from 1618 to 1634.

⁷Bayle cites Sorel (*Bibliothèque française*, p. 92) claiming that "Charron a pris beaucoup de sentences philosophiques mot pour mot des *Essais* de Montaigne" (*Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, article Charron, note O).

⁸Popkin's main works on Charron is the article "Charron and Descartes: the fruits of systematic doubt," *Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1954), 831–837, and chapter 3 of the first edition of his *History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960). The articles and books on Charron arguing for his originality vis-à-vis Montaigne were published after these two Popkin's works: Jean Charron, "Did Charron plagiarize Montaigne?," *French Review* 34 (1961), 344–351; Renée Kogel, *Pierre Charron* (Genève: Droz, 1972); Françoise Kaye, *Montaigne et Charron: du plagiat à l'originalité* (Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1982) and Michel Adam, "Charron a-t-il copié Montaigne de façon délibérée?," *Revue française de l'histoire du livre* 62–63 (1989), 273–293.

⁹Leon Brunschvig, *Descartes et Pascal lecteurs de Montaigne* (New York: Brentano's, 1944); Edwin Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 1–20; and—in the case of ancient skepticism—Janet Broughton, *Descartes's Method of Doubt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 78–82.

discovery, developing the contrast between ancient and modern (Cartesian) doubt, whose voluntary character was first introduced by Charron.¹⁰

Popkin pointed out the direction and a new discovery and additional research has confirmed his view of the influence of Charron on Descartes's methodic doubt and carried it to the point that even the basic difference he saw between them does not seem to hold.¹¹ The new discovery was that of an exemplar of Charron's *Wisdom* dedicated to Descartes by a certain Jesuit named Molitor in the German winter of 1619, that is, at the time of Descartes's discovery of the "fundamentum inventi mirabilis."¹² This finding plus the verification that Descartes's provisional morals match exactly some of the general rules of Wisdom proposed by Charron,¹³ lead G. Rodis-Lewis to take seriously Descartes's claim in the *Discourse* that everything he says there in parts II and III was actually thought out during this famous night.¹⁴ My own research shows that not only Descartes's methodic doubt and provisional morals come from Charron, but most of the content of parts I, II and III of the *Discourse*: the diagnosis of philosophical *diaphonia*, the separation of philosophy from theology, the criticism of the pseudo-sciences and of pedantic education, the criticism of authority in philosophical investigation, the recommendation to doubt everything, the restriction of this doubt to inward thoughts, the recommendation that the method of doubt be not followed by scholastic pedants and vulgar men, and the first methodic rule to avoid preconceptions and rashness.

Two other early unfinished philosophical works of Descartes also reveal Charron's influence on him. In the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, the most important subject of investigation – on which the method is most required – is "the problem of investigating every truth for the knowledge of which human

¹⁰ Gianni Paganini, *Scepsi Moderna: interpretazioni dello scetticismo da Charron a Hume* (Cosenza: Busento, 1991), pp. 27–32.

¹¹ Popkin opened research fields which, once pursued, in some cases lead to conclusions different from some of his own, what pleased him, for one aspect of his own skepticism was that he was not attached to his own views but more interested in furthering new research. "Skeptic" etymologically means "inquirer".

¹² Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. M. Adam and P. Tannery, 11 vols. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1996), vol. X, p. 216.

¹³ In the same context of his remark on the discovery of the wonderful invention, Descartes says that "dicta sapientum ad paucissimas quasdam regulas generales possunt reduci" (AT, X, 217). The title of book II of Charron's *Wisdom* is "Instructions et Regles Générales de Sagesse."

¹⁴ See note by F. de Buzon in the *Archives de Philosophie* 57 (1992), 1–3, and G. Rodis-Lewis, "Descartes et Charron," *Archives de Philosophie* 59 (1994), 4–9 and her book *Descartes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), pp. 71–76.

reason is adequate – and this, I think, is something everyone who earnestly strive after good sense should do once in his life – he will indeed discover by means of the Rules we have proposed that nothing can be known prior to the intellect.”¹⁵ Charron gives as the basic rule for those who strive to achieve wisdom – and in the *Rules* Descartes identifies *bona mentis* with *sapientia* (AT, X, 360; CSM, I, 9) – to examine everything which falls within the scope of natural reason, an examination which, according to Charron, will lead to the discovery of the only certain thing that truly belongs to the wise man, namely, his own intellectual integrity.¹⁶

Charron’s *Sagesse* is the source of the opening paragraph of Descartes’s *Recherche de la Vérité*, a passage which has puzzled Descartes’s editors.¹⁷ This dialogue of Descartes was highly appreciated by Popkin since it presents a lively picture of an Aristotelian being confronted with the new methodic doubt and taking it as completely skeptical. And perhaps because the dialogue is unfinished, only the part of Cartesian philosophy concerning doubt and the *cogito* is present in the text, although the text announces a much broader presentation of Cartesianism. The absence of the metaphysical doctrines proper to Descartes makes the text superficially similar to the skeptical texts in the period, in particular La Mothe Le Vayer’s skeptical dialogues. Its similarity of form to La Mothe’s “De la philosophie sceptique” (the names of the characters are quite similar) led Popkin to agree with Pintard’s view that La Mothe was the main source of Descartes, a view recently challenged by Edouard Mehl.¹⁸ Whatever the case, if La Mothe was not the original source, the philosopher who according to Popkin most influenced La Mothe, namely Charron, is certainly a major source. Descartes’s dialogue opens with the claim that to recover the integrity of reason one

¹⁵Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Writings*, 2 vols., translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Vol. 1, p. 30. “Si quis pro quaestione sibi proponat, examinare veritates omnes, ad quarum cognitionem humana ratio sufficiat (quod mihi videtur semel in vita faciendum esse ab ijs omnibus, qui serio student ad bonam mentem pervenire), ille profecto per regulas datas inveniet nihil prius cognosci posse quam intellectum” (AT, X, 395).

¹⁶Charron, *De la Sagesse* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), book II, chapter 2, pp. 389–405.

¹⁷In his edition of Descartes’ philosophical works, F. Alquié finds “curieux qu’en ce texte [the opening paragraph of *Recherche*] la mise en jeu de celle-ci [the recovery of the integrity of the natural light] soit attribué a un grand naturel ou aux instructions de quelque sage” (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, Paris: Bordas, 1992, 2: 1106n2).

¹⁸See R. Pintard, “Descartes et Gassendi,” *Travaux du IXe. congrès internationale de philosophie*, II, part ii, 1937, pp. 115–122; Popkin, *History*, p. 344n26, and E. Mehl, “Le méchant livre de 1630” in A. Mckenna and P-F Moreau (eds.) *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe. Siècle* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 1996), pp. 53–67.

must possess “un grand naturel ou les instructions de quelque sage, tant pour se défaire des mauvaises doctrines dont il est préoccupé, que pour jeter les fondements d’une science solide.”¹⁹ The source of this passage is either the preface to *De la Sagesse* or book I, chapter 43. In the preface Charron says that there are two means to achieve wisdom: “le naturel” (the means of those who were born naturally disposed to wisdom) and “l’acquis,” acquired through philosophy. In chapter 43 he specifies that this acquisition is made through universal doubt.²⁰ Note that according to Descartes, Charron’s rules of wisdom are necessary not only to get rid of all previous beliefs – and this unequivocally proves Popkin’s view that Charron’s skepticism is the source of Descartes’s doubt – but also to introduce the foundation of the new philosophy, the *cogito* itself. Indeed, my study of Charron has pointed out that methodic doubt is not provisional for Charron, a doubt maintained only while the philosopher is deprived of supernatural truth, but the mean by which the philosopher recovers his own moral and intellectual integrity. Descartes perceived this and found in Charron’s doubt the way to construe a new philosophy immune from the skeptical problems that haunted all previous dogmatic philosophies. Through the hyperbolic skeptical arguments (absent from Charron) that put in doubt the existence of an external material world, including the body of the philosopher, Descartes gives a metaphysical turn to Charron’s moral skeptical sage, depriving him of his practical trust and turning him into a disembodied mind.

The more I read Descartes with Charron’s *De la Sagesse* in the back of my mind, the more I see how fruitful Popkin’s article “Charron and Descartes” was.

¹⁹AT, X, 496. “must have very great natural talent, or else the instruction of a wise teacher, in order to get rid himself of the bad doctrines that have filled his mind, to lay the foundations for a solid science” (CSM, II, 400). Note the English translators’ additions to Descartes’ text which reveal their effort to solve the puzzle: they take “great natural” as an adjective to “talent,” word which is not at all in the text, and they take “wise” as an adjective to “teacher,” which, again, is not only absent from the text but contrary to its meaning. “Wise” is Charron’s wise man and “natural” is one of the ways according to Charron to achieve wisdom.

²⁰J. R. Maia Neto, “Charron’s *epoché* and Descartes’ *cogito*. The skeptical base of Descartes’ refutation of skepticism,” in G. Paganini (ed.) *The Return of Skepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), pp. 81–113. This chapter of Charron’s also appears in Rule XII when Descartes says that two kinds of people do not see that there is no difference of grades of obscurity in things, those who “proclaim their own conjectures as true demonstrations” (which correspond to Charron’s pedant ones) and those “more modest” who “refrain from investigating many matters ... simply because they deem themselves unequal to the task” (Charron’s vulgar) (CSM, I, 50, AT, X, 428). This same passage also appears in the second part of the *Discourse*: these are the two sorts of people who shall not endeavor Descartes’s universal doubt (CSM, I, 118; AT, VI, 15).

The full extent of Charron's influence on early modern philosophy still waits to be discovered. I have established elsewhere that Pascal's apology for the Christian religion has Charron's wisdom as its his main target,²¹ Gianni Paganini has shown the importance of Charron to Bayle,²² and I am convinced that one can show his strong influence on another major early modern philosopher: Locke.

Pierre-Daniel Huet

I turn now to the second figure in Popkin's *History of Scepticism* addressed in this paper. While Popkin's contribution to the understanding of Charron's importance is more philosophical, his legacy concerning Huet is more historical. Popkin's work on Huet exemplifies his tremendous ability to plunge into the manuscript collections of libraries all over the world and come out with new and important discoveries. The first thing of great value concerning Huet is Popkin's discovery of the intellectual richness of Huet's vast correspondence, preserved in the Ashburnham collection at the Laurenziana Library in Florence.

In the chapter on Foucher and Huet included in the 2003 edition of the *History of Scepticism*, Popkin writes that "[a] vast amount of [Huet's] writing and correspondence still remains unpublished. It shows that he was a central figure in the republic of letters of the time, one who deserves much more attention than he has been given" (p. 281). Popkin's work on Huet has had more continuity than his work on Charron. Thomas Lennon published an English translation of Huet's *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae*, in which he takes into account the manuscript notes added by Huet in his copy. He has also published a number of articles on Huet's skepticism and is currently working on a book on Huet's criticisms of Descartes.²³ April Shelford,

²¹"Sagesse Chrétienne chez Pascal versus sagesse sceptique chez Charron", paper presented at the conference "Pyrrhonien, géomètre, chrétien. Pascal, le scepticisme et l'honnêteté", Caen, 26/27 February 2004.

²²Paganini, Gianni. *Analisi della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1980).

²³Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Against Cartesian Philosophy* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003). Lennon has published the following articles concerning Huet: "Foucher, Huet, and the Downfall of Cartesianism" in Thomas M. Lennon (ed.) *Cartesian Views. Papers Presented to Richard A. Watson* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 117–128; "Huet, Malebranche and the birth of skepticism" in Gianni Paganini (ed.) *The Return of Scepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle* (Kluwer: Dordrecht, 2003), pp. 149–165; "Huet, Descartes, and the Objection of the Objections" in José R. Maia Neto and Richard Popkin (eds.) *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), pp. 123–142, and "The Skepticism of Huet's *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain*" in Marc André Bernier et Sébastien Charles (eds.) *Scepticisme et Modernité* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005), pp. 65–75.

who received part of Popkin's research notes on Huet's correspondence, has published an article on Huet's *Demonstratio Evangelica* in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.²⁴ Elena Rapetti has published a book on Huet and, more recently, another one based on some important letters to Huet by critics of Descartes preserved in the Huet collection at the Laurenziana.²⁵ Rapetti's last book is the first systematic use of an archive whose importance was first pointed out by Popkin. Jean-Robert Armogathe's and Julia Belgioioso's recent researches on the downfall of Cartesianism, to cite the title of Richard Watson's first book based on a dissertation directed by Popkin,²⁶ have pointed out that Huet's influence was considerable during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in German universities and in non-academic philosophical French and Italian circles.²⁷ Sébastien Charles is currently working on the Regis/Huet debate, working on some unpublished manuscripts of Huet's, and I myself have been working on the *Traité* for the last several years.²⁸

Popkin collaborated with my research on Huet, first, through e-mail, helping me to find my way out through Huet's manuscript materials at the Bibliothèque National in Paris, and then by sending me his research notes concerning Huet. This personal legacy I received in 2004 in a box containing: (a) his personal dispersed annotations, on scraps of paper; (b) photocopies of some of Huet's

²⁴April Shelford, "Thinking Geometrically in Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63:4 (2002), 599–617.

²⁵Elena Rapetti, *Pierre-Daniel Huet: erudizione, filosofia, apologetica* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1999) and *Percorsi anticartesiani nelle lettere a Pierre-Daniel Huet* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2003).

²⁶Richard A. Watson. *The Downfall of Cartesianism 1672–1712. A Study of Epistemological Issues in Late Seventeenth Century Cartesianism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), revised edition *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanity Books, 1987).

²⁷See Julia Belgioioso, *La variata imagine di Descartes: gli itinerari della metafisica tra Parigi e Napoli* (Lecce: Milella, 1999). J-R Armogathe has done research on the reception of Descartes in German universities during this same period and has indicated the role of Huet in this reception. See also Carlo Borghero, "Discussioni sullo scetticismo di Descartes (1650–1712)," *Gionarle critico della filosofia italiana*, 6^a. serie, vol. 18, ano 77(79), 1998, pp. 1–25.

²⁸Another important publication on Huet is the proceedings of the Colloque de Caen (12–13 Novembre 1993), edited by Suzanne Guellouz, in *Biblio 17, Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* (Paris, Seattle: Tübingen, 1994).

correspondence; (c) annotations of part of Huet's marginalia²⁹; (d) Popkin's careful annotations of his second major discovery concerning Huet, viz. an autograph manuscript copy of the *Traité philosophique* he discovered in Rotterdam; and (e) an unpublished introduction to this manuscript.³⁰ A letter by the late Polish Huet scholar Mme Damska to Popkin which also came in the box indicates that Popkin's presentation of the manuscript was designed for publication in a volume on Huet's *Traité*, intended to for publication in the International Archives of the History of Ideas series (founded by Popkin and Paul Dibon), containing a study of Huet's *Traité* and a critical edition of the text by him and Mme. Damska.³¹ In what follows I quote from this unpublished introduction of Popkin's. (I add some further information to Popkin's footnotes in square brackets.)

The sole French manuscript of Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Traité sur la Faiblesse de l'Esprit Humain* that has come to the light so far is in the collection of the Remonstrantskerk of Rotterdam, housed since the bombing of Rotterdam in the Municipal Library there. Although it is listed in the printed catalogue, there is no indication given that it is by Huet.³² In fact, the manuscript is in his own hand. I came across it by accident in the winter of 1957–58, while a Fullbright research scholar at the University of Utrecht, and because I had

²⁹“In the books that [Huet] donated [to the Parisian Jesuits] there are many, many marginalia by Huet; some, like his notes on Pascal and Malebranche, have genuine historical, philosophical interest. Jose Maia Neto and I have published these items, but there are a grate many others still to be brought to light, as well as many drafts of Huet's own writings, which he kept revising.” (Popkin, *History*, p. 374n13).

³⁰Popkin's work on Huet had three major moments. (1) a research project on the *marginalia* of Huet's books at the Bibliothèque National de France, in Paris, in 1956, supported by a grant from the American Philosophical Society (R. Popkin, “Report on Grant No. 144—Johnson Fund, the marginalia and correspondence of Pierre-Daniel Huet, Bishop of Avranches in the late seventeenth century,” *Year Book of the American Philosophical Society* for 1957: 364–366, 1958); (2) a research project on Huet's papers (mostly correspondence) in Florence (Biblioteca Laurenziana), Paris (Bibliothèque National), Caen (City Library) and Holland, where he found the French manuscript of the *Traité* in the city library of Rotterdam (he published a report of this research in the *Year Book of the APA*, 1959, pp. 449–453); and (3) the incorporation of Huet into the 2003 edition of *The History of Scepticism*.

³¹In the report of the 1958 research (published in 1959 in the *Year Book of the American Philosophical Society*), Popkin says that “the grantee intends to prepare a note for publication on this manuscript of the *Traité*” (p. 450).

³²*Catalogus van Handschriften op de Bibliotheek des Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam* (Amsterdam, 1869). The entry on p. 49 for item 530 lists “Pluvignac, Théocrite de, gentilhomme de Quercy, Traité de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain et de la verité de la foy”, 121 pages, 40 from the seventeenth century.

been working previously on Huet's papers in France, could easily identify the handwriting. Neither the catalogue nor the document itself give any clues as to its provenance. Apparently there were at least four original manuscripts of the work, probably in both French and Latin.³³ The correspondence with the censor Pirot in 1692 indicates that a French manuscript of it was then examined, [apparently because Huet at that time intended to publish it]³⁴ as a continuation of the *Questiones Alnetanea*.³⁵ Pirot's strong reaction, and his denunciation of it as a "jeu d'esprit" seems to have discouraged Huet.³⁶ Huet, in his defense against Pirot's comments, began by reminding Pirot that he, Huet, had told him that "je n'avois nul dessein de le rendre public, prevoyant bien qu'on en pourroit abuser, et en tirer de mauvaises consequences, quoy que mal livrées."³⁷ He then tried to defend his skepticism and fideism against Pirot's objections. In a letter of August 19, 1715, Huet explained that if the work were printed, it might have dangerous consequences with superficial people.³⁸ Some indications in his correspondence are that a copy or copies were in circulation among his friends.³⁹ When, after his death, the

³³ Cf. the article on the *Apologie de M. l'Abbé d'Olivet* in the *Bibliothèque française*, Tome VIII (1726), p. 69, which states that there were at least four manuscript copies when Huet was alive.

³⁴ This section in square brackets is crossed out in Popkin's manuscript.

³⁵ Pirot letters of May 2 and May 8, 1692 in the Carteggio Huet, Ashburham Collection, Ms. 1866, items 1965 and 1966, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence. I am grateful to the American Philosophical Society for having enabled me to examine this rich collection of over 3,000 items of Huetiana.

³⁶ Carteggio Huet, item 1970, undated and unsigned, is Pirot's 7 page report on to Huet. At the end Pirot said, "je sçais que ce livre que vous aviés intitulé comme le 4^e des questions d'Aulnet n'est qu'un jeu d'esprit que vous ne l'avez jamais voulu publier, et que vous n'y avez travaillé que pour essayer sur la matiere, voyant bien que, si l'estoit publié, les consequences en seroient à craindre, et qu'on en pourroit abuser." This letter of Pirot also appears in the copies of some of Huet's correspondence at Caen, Ms. In-40., 206, Tome II, and is printed from the copy in the Abbé Leon Tolmer's *Pierre-Daniel Huet, 1630–1721, Humaniste-Physicien* (Bayeux, 1949), pp. 552–553. [I found another copy of this letter at the BN, Ms FR 15189. In this copy the letter is dated: 1 May 1692.]

³⁷ The Carteggio Huet, # 1967, first page. This three page document is unsigned and undated, except for "Mercredy matin." It is apparently Huet's copy. Pirot had been difficult about approving Huet's *Demonstratio Evangelica* in 1677, but approved and praised Huet's *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* and *Concordia rationes et fidei* in 1689. Cf. Carteggio Huet, items 1961–1963.

³⁸ *Bibliothèque française*, VIII (1726), p. 69.

³⁹ See, for instance Carteggio Huet, items 281 and 3033. The latter, a letter to Huet, 1 April 1712 discusses the *Traité* and expresses doubts about printing it. The letter is unsigned. [This letter was published by Pélissier, *Documents annotés V. A Travers les papiers de Huet* (Paris: Librairie Léon Técheiner, 1889), pp. 45–46. The letter is signed by a Jesuit from Lyon named Brossette.]

Traité appeared, his nephew, Charsigné insisted that he did not possess the work, and that he was not responsible for its publication.⁴⁰ The discussion with the Jesuits at Trévoux revealed that the Abbé d'Olivet and De Sallengre were responsible for the publication, and that they possessed the holograph Latin manuscript, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (and described above by Madame Dambaska).⁴¹ Nothing in their statements seems to throw any light on the source of the Rotterdam manuscript.

... The major difference between it and the printed text is in the title and the opening paragraph, where it says, first in the title “*Traité de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain et de la vérité de la Foy,*” and in the first sentence “touchant la nature de l'esprit humain, et de la raison, *et de la vérité de la foy*” (italicized phrase not in the printed text. The italics are mine). ...

The variants of the Rotterdam manuscript have been incorporated in the text printed in this volume. Most of them are very minor. The difference in title is the most interesting one. Some of the other clearly suggests that the manuscript was copied from another, when for instance “l'orsque” appears instead of “lorsque,” or when a line or two is missing. Occasionally the manuscript has been corrected, usually so that it conforms to the text that was published.

It would be of some interest to know when and why Huet changed the title. Perhaps the phrase “et de la vérité de la Foy” was added solely in the Rotterdam manuscript because of its original recipient, or maybe (though there is no indication in the discussion with Pirot of this), it was part of the original title and was then dropped. If someday the enormous correspondence of Huet is edited, it may be possible to ascertain the history of the various manuscripts of the *Traité* during his lifetime.

My main goal when I arrived in Paris in January 2004 was to find a second of these “three or four” manuscripts of the French version of the *Traité*. I did not find it, either at the Bibliothèque National or in the catalogues of any other French library. As Popkin indicates, our main source concerning the originals and the context of the publication of the *Traité* is Father Olivet, a friend of Huet's involved in the posthumous publication of the work. He was charged with forgery by the *Journal de Trévoux*, which claimed that the awful skeptical treatise was not by the bishop.⁴² One of the arguments was that there was no copy of the manuscript or reference to it among the papers Huet left in Paris

⁴⁰ Letter of Charsigné to Father Tourmenine, July 15, 1724, quoted in Tolmer, *Huet*, pp. 549–550.

⁴¹ Tolmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 550–552.

⁴² *Journal de Trévoux* 25 (1725), 989–1021, reprinted by Slatkine Reprints, 1968, pp. 250–258.

when he died. Olivet replied to this arguing that the manuscript was not in Paris with the Jesuits because it was sent to Amsterdam before Huet's death.⁴³ He claimed that "two of the three or four copies of the manuscript were from Huet's hands" and that Huet showed it to some intimate friends (he names the Jesuit Fathers De la Rue and Martin), who "had the leisure to read the work both in Latin and in French." There are letters from De la Rue to Huet dealing with the *Traité* but all of them indicate that De la Rue read a Latin manuscript.⁴⁴ Rapetti published two other important letters by two other friends of Huet's – the fathers Du Hamel and Le Valois – with detailed criticism of the work. These letters are from the same period, 1685–1689, when the first version of the work was finished.⁴⁵ There is another much later letter (1712) by another Jesuit, Father Brossette who had in Lyon a copy of the French manuscript. Perhaps there is, besides the Rotterdam manuscript discovered by Popkin, some copy of the French manuscript in France, maybe in Lyon in some library or private collection but not at the Bibliothèque National.

So I did not find what I was looking for, but whereas I expected to find at the Bibliothèque National only one manuscript copy of the Latin version of the *Traité*, the one autograph which was donated to the Royal Library by Father Olivet after the polemic concerning the authenticity of the work, I found another manuscript of the Latin version of the *Traité*, probably copied by some monk of the Aulnai convent of which Huet was abbé at the time he wrote the work. This copy was unknown to nineteenth-century Huet scholars, such as Péllissier, Baudement, Flottes, and Bartholness, and to contemporary Huet scholars. The reason is that it is listed in the BN catalogue as a partial copy of Huet's *Quaestiones Alnetanae*, which it really was, as I explain below. It is an earlier finished version of the *Traité*, probably the first one prepared for publication. This copy was the main finding of my research in Paris. By taking into account Huet's correspondence and by comparing this early copy with (a) the later autograph Latin manuscript owned by Olivet, (b) the published French text, and (c) the autograph French manuscript discovered by Popkin, we can outline in broad lines what Popkin had hoped to discover, namely, "the history of the various manuscripts of the *Traité* during Huet's lifetime."⁴⁶

⁴³"Apologie de M. l'Abbé Olivet de l'Académie Française," *Bibliothèque des livres nouveaux*, July 1726, pp. 44ff.

⁴⁴BN, Ms Fr 15188. Four other letters were published by Rapetti, *op. cit.*, pp. 78–85.

⁴⁵Rapetti, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–78 and pp. 172–196. More on this below.

⁴⁶Some details and some dates may be either corrected or specified through the examination of letters, which I have not been able to examine yet, from and to Huet by people who were aware of the manuscript and which were written during the years when Huet was working on the various versions of the text.

Huet wrote the first version of the *Traité* (it did not have this title at the time) between 1680, when, after finishing his tutoring of the king, he took possession of the abbey of Aulnai, and 1685.⁴⁷ This earlier version that I found is presented as the first book of a larger work in Latin, titled *Quaestionarum Alnetarum*. The manuscript begins with a Syllabus of this work. Five books were planned. The first is “That man cannot attain the truth with certainty” (the text of which is the base of what will become much later the *Traité*); the second, “That man cannot attain the truth with certainty, an example from Descartes’s Philosophy” (a text which is published in 1689 under the title of *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae*); book III: “agreement of reason and faith;” book IV: “comparison of Christian and pagan doctrines;” and book V: “comparison of Christian and pagan morals.” The Syllabus gives not only the titles of the books but also of the chapters of each book and of the sections of each chapter. It also gives the page numbers of each section up to half of book IV, which suggests that that was the part of the work already written by Huet at the occasion the Syllabus was made.⁴⁸ In his *Memoirs*, Huet refers to a “plus grand ouvrage que j’avais le dessein d’écrire.”⁴⁹ Huet considered this his *opera magna*, to be published after the successful *Demonstratio Evangelica* (1679). By the time the Syllabus was made, Huet showed it, together with the already written parts, to some friends: the Jesuit fathers De la Rue and Le Valois (Olivet also mentions Martin but, unlike the others, there is no letter confirming this),⁵⁰ and the former Oratorian, a close friend of Huet who was also from Caen, Jean-Baptiste Du Hamel. Father De la Rue, although claiming to be a disciple of Huet, urged him not to publish what Huet called his “system.” Huet would do better to abandon philosophy and concentrate on his erudite

⁴⁷ See Pierre-Daniel Huet’s *Memoires* (Toulouse: Société de Littératures Classiques, 1993), book V, p. 124 and De la Rue’s letter mentioning the work in 1685 published by Rapetti, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁴⁸ This also corresponds to what is commented by Du Hamel and Le Valois, which indicates they read the parts specified with page numbers in the syllabus.

⁴⁹ Huet, *Memoires*, Livre V, p. 125. See also the editor of *Huetiana* (whose source is Olivet) who “nous apprend, que le *Traité Philosophique de la Foiblesse de l’Esprit Humain* a été composé par Mr. Huet, dans le même tems que ces *Quaestiones Alnetanae*, qui parurent à Caen en 1690.” (Avertissement du libraire [Du Sauzet] in the first publication of the *Traité* (1723), p. vii.)

⁵⁰ I went through a volume containing part of the Huet-Martin correspondence and found no reference to the *Traité*. *Correspondance Inédite avec le père Martin* (S.L.: S. N., 1898, publication of the *Revue Catholique de Normandie*), BN MFICHE 8-Z-15675. Of course this does not mean that Martin did not know the work. Much later, in 1712, a Jesuit named Brossette refers, in a letter to Huet, to the fact that a Jesuit had read the text in Latin at Aulnai.

studies of the Bible and the Church Fathers. If he did not want to ruin his reputation as a great scholar and learned Church man, he should publish only the book against the Cartesians (that is, book II) and the comparison of Christian and Pagan *dogmata* (book IV) as two separate works, that is, excluding books I (the *Traité philosophique*) and III (the agreement of reason and faith).⁵¹ Huet largely followed his friend's advice. He first published book II, which was already ready, as a separate work under the title of *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* in 1689 (the titles of chapters and sections in the Syllabus match exactly the published text).⁵² He then wrote the originally planned book V (the moral comparison), which was probably not yet written at the time the Syllabus was made (it is not detailed in the syllabus and none of the letters of his friends refer to it), and published *Alnetaneas Quaestiones* in 1690 with three books, the first on the *concordia ratio et fidei* (the book III of the earlier version of the work), the second containing the *dogmata comparatio* (former book IV) and the third the moral *comparatio* (the planned book V).⁵³ The autograph manuscript of *Alnetarum Questionarum* at the Bibliothèque Nationale clearly shows the alterations of the work due to Huet's decision to exclude its original first book (that which much later becomes the *Traité*). "PRIMUS" and "SECUNDOS" in the running heads of the manuscript are written above the crossed words "TERTIUS" and "QUARTUS" respectively. The manuscript shows that these two first books plus the introduction are extensively corrected by Huet, whereas the third one contains almost no correction. The reason is that the first and most of the second books were already written when *Alnetarum Questionarum* was drastically cut from the originally planned five books to three, with the exclusion of the *Traité* and the *Censura*, which was published separately as suggested by Father De la Rue. Indeed, the book against Cartesianism had to be published separately because it could only cohere with the others that make up *Alnetarum Questionarum* if the original book I (the *Traité*) was not excluded, for it is a kind of empirical corroboration of the thesis argued for in the *Traité*, that man cannot attain truth with certainty. However, Huet did not follow De la Rue's advice entirely, since he included the former book III on the agreement of reason and faith, a book that exhibits clearly enough the author's skepticism, as was remarked by some of Huet's readers at the time.⁵⁴ This solves three controversies concerning the *Traité*: (1) It was the last published but the first written of the three philosophical

⁵¹ BN Ms. Fr. 15188.

⁵² *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* (Paris: 1689).

⁵³ *Alnetaneas Quaestiones* (Paris: Moette, 1690).

⁵⁴ Popkin indicates that Arnauld, for instance, immediately compares the book with La Mothe Le Vayer's openly skeptical essays. *History*, p. 280.

works of Huet's; (2) it was first written in Latin (Flottes had already proved this)⁵⁵; (3) it was considered by Huet the most important part (book I), containing his own philosophical system, the ground of both his rejection of Cartesianism and of his apology for the Christian religion, of what would be – if it had not been amputated of its most important part – his most important work (*Alnetarum Questionarum* in five books).

Although he removed it from *Alnetarum Questionarum*, Huet did not yet give up the project of publishing what would become the *Traité*. After publishing the *Alnetarum Questionarum* in only three books in 1690, he attempted to publish its former book I as an independent work titled “Fourth Alnetanea Question” (still in Latin). He wrote a preface in which he relates the work to his previous ones and sets the context of a conversation in the gardens of his abbey in Aulnai between him, his former Jesuit teacher Galtruchius, and his friend Father Du Hamel (the same man who commented on Huet's original version of the *Traité*).⁵⁶ The skeptical system of the book is then presented as a report by Du Hamel of the system held by an *érudit* exiled in Caen with whom he, Du Hamel, had conducted philosophical conversations. In the French manuscript sent to the publisher in Amsterdam, a Théocrite de Pluvignac, Seigneur de la Roche, reports the views of an *érudit* exiled in Padua. The editor of the book (Du Sauzet) has a note saying that this *érudit* is Louis de Cormis, whom Huet says in his autobiography led him to study the works of Sextus, who until then he knew only by name.⁵⁷ This Cormis was an important political figure from Aix-en-Provence, who was exiled in Caen in 1661. He most certainly learned about Sextus and ancient skepticism from studying with Gassendi, who was teaching his skeptical anti-Aristotelian course there – an experience that generated Gassendi's first published book, the *Exercitationes* – at the same time Cormis was studying law.⁵⁸ This story,

⁵⁵ Flottes, J-B-M, *Etude sur Daniel Huet* (Montpellier et Avignon: Seguin, 1857), pp. 263–264, denied Du Sauzet's claim that Huet wrote the work first in French and then translated it to Latin. Du Sauzet is the Dutch editor of the two versions of the *Traité*. There also is a French version of the *Censura* which Thomas Lennon, who has been working on this text, thinks is more likely to be the original. The Syllabus suggests the contrary.

⁵⁶ This preface was published in the *Continuation des mémoires de littérature et d'histoire de M. De Salengre*, Tome II, partie (Paris: Simart, 1726), pp. 485–493.

⁵⁷ Huet, *Mémoires*, Livre IV, pp. 90–91. Huet writes from Caen to Ménage in Paris in 15 April 1662: “Mais a propos des pirrhoniens, M. du Perier sçait il bien que M. Le président de Cormis est à Paris? Donnez-lui en avis, s'il ne le sçait pas. C'est un homme de merite, grand sceptique, & je voudrais que vous le connussiez.” (Ménage, Gilles). *Lettres inédites à Pierre-Danile Huet* (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1993, p.106)).

⁵⁸ See Gassendi's introduction to his *Exercitationes adversus aristoteleos* in Bernard Rochot's bi-lingual edition (Paris: J. Vrin, 1959). Gassendi extensively used Sextus's works in this course.

related in the *Traité*, is therefore at least partially true. Some of the skeptical views presented in the *Traité* may actually have been held by Louis de Cormis. 1661 is therefore the year of birth of the embryo of a philosophy which could be published only 62 years later, in 1723.

Huet thus prepared this independent version of the *Traité* and tried to get it published. He finished this slightly modified version of former book I of the originally planned *Quaestionum Alnetanarum* in 1691. This was the occasion on which he showed the manuscript to Edme Pirot, a censor of the Sorbonne, doubtless in order to test the chances of its' being published. Pirot's very negative reaction is related by Popkin in the text above. Huet then decided not to publish the work under his name.

At least seventeen years later – the Latin autograph manuscript allows us to specify that it was after 1708 – Huet once again revises the text, suppressing all the references and passages that could reveal its real author. We can see these modifications in the Latin autograph manuscript conserved at the Bibliothèque National.⁵⁹ In this second revision of the text, Huet makes more substantial modifications than he did when he originally adapted the first book of *Alnetarum Questionarum* to make it an independent work. He includes, for instance, the objection raised by Pirot concerning the “Theological Conclusions,”⁶⁰ and adds a whole new chapter in book II, titled that “faith renders certain what is not so by reason,” clearly replying to Pirot and all those who, like him, doubted that “qu’après avoir oté toute la certitude de la raison, il y ait lieu pour celle de la foi.”⁶¹ This chapter exhibits Huet's effort to make stronger – by citing Aquinas and Augustine – his view that skepticism, unlike the dogmatic philosophies, is compatible with the Christian religion.

This revision of the Latin text was not completed by Huet (at least in the manuscript at the Bibliothèque National). I think that he soon decided to translate the work into French and publish it only in that language. The translation was the occasion of the fourth revision of the text. In his letter from 1712 to Huet, Father Brossette says that while it is true that the style of the earlier Latin version might disclose the author, this was not the case with the new French version. However, Huet did not want to take the risk and sent the French manuscript to a Dutch publisher, Sallengre, under the pseudonym

⁵⁹ BN Ms Lat 6682.

⁶⁰ Conclusions that reason derive from revelation. Pirot argues that Huet's attack on reason destroys these conclusions and therefore faith itself. (Ms Fr. 15189, fols 406–410).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* See in Rapetti, op. cit., similar objections raised by Le Valois (p. 77) and Du Hamel (pp. 173–174).

of Pluvignac, asking that it be published only after his death.⁶² This may have happened around 1718 when this same printer published Huet's autobiography, the *Commentarius de rebus ad eam pertinentibus*. Huet died in 1721 and since Sallengre had died too, the manuscript was taken by another Dutch printer, Du Sauzet, who did not respect Huet's wish for anonymity and published the French text under Huet's name in 1723, causing the previously mentioned scandal.

To sum up, there were at least four versions of the *Traité*. The first dates from 1685/1686, the second from 1691, the third from around 1708/1710, and the fourth, in French, from around 1709/1712. As he moves from one to the next, we see Huet elaborating further some sensitive topics and making a greater effort to conceal the identity of the real author. In the first version Huet himself exposes his system; in the second Du Hamel exposes the view of Cormis in Caen, and in the third and fourth a pseudonymous author exposes the view of a supposed *érudit* from Padua. But contrary to what is usually the case in clandestine libertine works, the modifications Huet made in the text aimed at making his point of the compatibility between skepticism and Christianity stronger. Each version improves on the earlier ones, so that in a sense it is true that the original manuscript (in the sense of the most elaborated version by the author) is the one published in French. The obstacles Huet encountered when he sought to publish the work gave him the incentive to improve it. All this suggests that the autograph copy found by Popkin whose title is not only *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain* but also *de la vérité de la foy* may well be the very last version of the text, when Huet puts in the title the main point he had emphasized more strongly in each of the various revisions of the text, in response to the criticism of readers and because the text was now separated from the other books of the planned greater work which developed the relationship between reason and faith and Huet's own historical/philological Christian apologetics. Indeed, the description of the planned work in Huet's autobiography attests to the adequacy of the title of the Rotterdam manuscript. He writes there that (I cite from the English nineteenth century translation) "as [philosophy] is boundless, wandering into immensity beyond the limits of time and creation, whilst the human mind, cooped within narrow bounds, depressed to earth, and involved in thick darkness, attempts by the aid of its reason to break for into the light, and to seize upon the arduous summits of truth, I proposed

⁶² "Je n'y [in the manuscript] d'autre changement que de mettre le nom de Mr. Huet, à la place du nom supposé de Théocrite de Pluvignac, Seigneur de la Roche, Gentil-homme de Perigord, sous lequel il vouloit se cacher" Avertissement du Libraire [Du Sauzet] to the *Traité philosophique*. The pseudonym Pluvignac was first used by Huet when he wrote a non published reply to Regis' attack on the Censura.

to enquire how high it could raise itself by its own powers, *and what aids were to be sought for it from faith* [emphasis added].”⁶³

Conclusion

I conclude by returning to the history of early modern skepticism. The confirmation that the *Traité* and the *Censura* were originally parts of a single work is important, for it shows how Descartes was influential, both positively and negatively, in Huet’s skeptical philosophy. The *Traité* is a most interesting piece of philosophical skepticism above all because of the extent to which Descartes’s life and doctrines are present in it, albeit reinterpreted to support skepticism.⁶⁴ In the 2003 edition of the *History of Scepticism*, Popkin refers to my interpretation of Huet: “In a most interesting article, “Academic Scepticism in Early Modern Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58:2 (1997), pp. 199–220, José Maia Neto tries to show that Foucher and Huet still admired the methodological contribution of Descartes, although they strove to destroy the ontological dogmatism he had presented. They thought the skeptical method, which Descartes started with, was an important part of philosophical study.”⁶⁵ My interpretation of Huet fits well in Popkin’s view of early modern skepticism, which I will dare to summarize in three points. First, Montaigne, Charron and other Renaissance skeptics overthrow Aristotelian dogmatism. Then comes Descartes who radicalizes this Renaissance skepticism in order to refute it. Finally, at the end of the seventeenth century, Bayle, Foucher and Huet refute the new Cartesian dogmatism and thus renovate skepticism by preserving and developing some aspects of Cartesian doubt. What I would state more explicitly and emphasize is that the dialectically most accomplished triad in this history is Charron – Descartes – Huet.

⁶³ Huet, P-D. *Memoirs of the Life of Peter Daniel Huet, Bishop of Avranches*. 2 Vols. Translated from the original Latin by John Aikin (London: Longman, 1810), pp. 204–205.

⁶⁴ Some of Huet’s most important skeptical arguments are Cartesian: the veil of ideas (chapter 3), the dream argument (chapter 9), and the deceiver (chapter 10).

⁶⁵ Popkin, *History*, pp. 374–375n23.

11. THE QUARREL OVER ANCIENT AND MODERN SCEPTICISM: SOME REFLECTIONS ON DESCARTES AND HIS CONTEXT

Gianni Paganini

Ancient and modern scepticism

Like every original and fruitful research programme, that of Richard Popkin has inspired other interpretations that ended up by appearing as rivals to the *History of Scepticism*. It is certainly not by chance that only after Popkin had rediscovered the importance played by the rebirth of scepticism, an intense debate rose about the differences, the values and the possible superiority of the moderns over the ancients concerning the extent of doubt: a kind of a *querelle des anciens et des modernes* in order to establish whether and how the former or the latter outdid each other in coherence and radicality. One could object that this dispute has already been articulated in our modern philosophical archetypes, going back at least to Hegel and his critic Kierkegaard: the first, as is well known, supported the ancients, claiming in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that Greek scepticism had been much deeper and all-encompassing than Cartesian doubt, whereas the second, starting with Johannes Climacus's pseudoepigraphic work, backed up the moderns, stressing the break between the era of modern and the astonishment or immediacy typical of the Greeks. *De omnibus dubitandum est*: by this Cartesian quote Kierkegaard characterised the modern age whose novelty could be summarised for him in three sentences: "1) Philosophy starts in doubt; 2) Doubt is required in order to practice philosophy; 3) Modern philosophy begins in doubt".¹

In spite of these prophetic anticipations, the full scope of the *querelle* has only recently been re-examined scientifically, thanks to scholars such as M. F. Burnyeat, M. Frede, and J. Barnes (whose papers have been collected in the booklet *The Original Sceptic*), a list to which we should add the names of J. Annas, G. Striker, B. Mates and, most recently, G. Fine, who made a profound critique of Burnyeat's theses. We do not intend to explore the quarrel about

¹ See on this my entry "Scepticism" for *The Classical Tradition*, ed. by A. T. Grafton, G. W. Most, and S. Settis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

the content of ancient scepticism here. Its interpreters disagree about some crucial points, such as whether and to what extent the sceptic might have beliefs, whether relying on phenomena involves having also beliefs about them, and, lastly, whether epoché only attacks philosophical and scientific dogmas or destroys even ordinary life beliefs. With regard to this issue, the “No Belief View” supporters disagree with the “Some Beliefs View” ones, whereas Frede has complicated the question even more, distinguishing two different kinds of assent, and therefore two different ways of having beliefs.

The aspect of the controversy I am interested here in is the modern one, and what concerns me with respect to the ancients is their impact on seventeenth-century thought, and especially their impact on the immediate context of Descartes’s ideas. Reflection on this issue has resulted in what G. Fine has rightly called the “standard modern verdict”. The main tenets of this “verdict” are the following: (1) ancient sceptics disavow belief, whereas the moderns disavow only knowledge; (2) ancient sceptics support only a “property scepticism”, because they do not question whether they have bodies or whether there is an external world, but just whether objects are as they are represented; (3) the scope of ancient scepticism is mostly practical, whereas the modern one, by contrast, is strictly methodological and epistemological. Even though G. Fine contested all three points of this “verdict”, on the whole the result of this comparison is that ancient scepticism appears to be much less radical than the modern variety, and, consequently, that Descartes is said to be the first to articulate this allegedly new version of scepticism.² It should be noted that, despite the contrasts among the interpreters, they concur in shaping the discussion in the

²I am referring here to what Gail Fine has called the “standard modern verdict”, that is the established conviction that ancient scepticism was much weaker than the modern one, and the Cartesian one above all, because it never questioned the existence of the external world. See Gail Fine, “Descartes and Ancient Skepticism: Reheated Cabbage”, *The Philosophical Review*, 109 (2000), pp. 195–234; Ead., “Sextus and External World Scepticism”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 24 (2003), pp. 341–385; Ead., “Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern: The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes” in *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Jon Miller and Brian Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 192–231. Actually, Fine challenges the more common view, according to which Descartes represented a major and dramatic change in the course of scepticism; this view is supported by most interpreters, following the authority of Myles F. Burnyeat. Among his articles, which are the target of Fine’s criticism, see at least: “Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed”, *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982), pp. 3–40; “Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?”, in *The Sceptical Tradition*, ed. by M. F. Burnyeat (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 117–148; “The Sceptic in His Place and Time”, in *Philosophy in History*, ed. by R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 225–254.

form of a direct confrontation between the Cartesian formulations and their alleged ancient sources, avoiding any contextual research about the effective impact and influence of the latter on the former. They thus have the strange effect of transforming an historical issue in a matter of a comparative study.

Compared to this “verdict”, my point of view will be quite different, both in method and in content. With regard to the method, it seems to me that both supporters and opponents of this “verdict”, by directly comparing Cartesian texts to their ancient sources, end up ignoring one of the principal lessons of Popkin’s *History of Scepticism*: the need for a proper contextual analysis that takes into account the actual readings of the authors and the influences that affected them.³

With regard to the content, I shall attempt to demonstrate that the use of doubt by Descartes goes well beyond the limits reached by the classics, especially because he was much more concerned with modern libertine scepticism than with the ancient versions of scepticism. He was engaged in a discussion among moderns about the use of the ancients. However obvious this may seem, it is not universally acknowledged, especially in some current trends in the historiography.⁴

Descartes and Scepticism: “Reheated Cabbage” or Modern Challenge?

The first point to be addressed is Descartes’s effective knowledge of the sceptical texts: from this point of view, his writings are quite disappointing. His explicit references to the sceptics of antiquity are very general: usually, Descartes refers to “sceptici” in general, more rarely to “Academici,” and only in a few instances to “Pyrrhonians.” Even taking into account his usual reticence about his sources, what strikes one is that Diogenes Laertius is never mentioned, nor are Sextus Empiricus or Plutarch. Galen’s case is equally meaningful: no occurrence of *De optimo genere docendi*, which had been printed, in Erasmus’s Latin translation, as an appendix to both the *Hypotyposes* and *Adversus mathematicos*, edited respectively by Estienne and Hervet, and which provided authoritative knowledge of sceptical doctrines. The academic school receives a better fate in Descartes, basically thanks to Augustine’s refutation, which played a significant function for the genesis of the *cogito*.⁵

Besides this, it must be said that even Descartes’s most explicit avowal of his debt to the ancients is ambivalent: he admits to having read “many

³ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴ I developed more this thesis in my book: G. Paganini, *Skepsis. Le débat des modernes sur le scepticisme* (Paris: Vrin, forthcoming) (ch. V).

⁵ On the effective knowledge and utilisation of the ancient sources by Descartes, see the appendix to the book edited by Ettore Lojacono, *Socrate in Occidente* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2004): Franco Meschini, “Descartes e gli Antichi”, p. 283–323.

books on that subject by the Academics and Sceptics”, which we may take to include “Pyrrhonians,” yet he immediately adds that he did this reluctantly: “and though it was not without distaste that I reheated this cabbage, still, I could not avoid devoting one whole Meditation to it”.⁶ The alleged reason for this “duty” is that sceptical texts turn out to be useful in teaching one to doubt about “sensible things”, thus realizing a crucial condition for knowledge that, unlike that concerning sensible things, can be absolutely certain. Moreover, replying to both Bourdin and Hobbes, Descartes stresses the therapeutic character of his sceptical studies: just as Galen and Hippocrates first had to study diseases before treating them, so he considers himself as the first who succeeded to refute sceptical arguments rightly, because he had accurately examined them and taken them to their furthest consequences.⁷ The “reasons for doubting” play a dialectical function, for the truths that result are “sure and ascertained”, inasmuch as they can not be shaken by the strongest doubts one can contrive, namely the “metaphysical ones.”

In conclusion, this brief examination of the main evidence outlines a framework which is neither straightforward nor homogeneous: Descartes is interested in the major sceptical themes, yet he neglects their historical differentiations; moreover, despite showing distaste for what he calls “reheated cabbage”, he does not hesitate to give a newer and a stronger version of arguments that he knows are not “novelties.” Many of these seeming inconsistencies will disappear when we realize that his true interlocutor was not ancient scepticism but the modern version, that is, libertinism.

How to deal with Sceptics: Descartes versus Bourdin

On this point, the importance of libertinism, Popkin’s contribution⁸ is central, even though it needs some revision, as we shall see later. Before the publication of his *History of scepticism*, it was assumed that the authors to whom

⁶ René Descartes, *Responsio ad secundas obiectiones* (AT VII, p. 130): “Cum itaque nihil magis conducat ad firmam rerum cognitionem assequendam, quàm ut prius de rebus omnibus præsertim corporeis dubitare assuescamus, etsi libros eâ de re complures ab Academicis & Scepticis scriptos dudum vidissem, istamque crambem non sine fastidio recoquerem, non potui tamen non integram Meditationem ipsi dare: vellemque ut lectores non modo breve illud tempus, quod ad ipsam evolvendam requiritur, sed menses aliquot, vel saltem hebdomadas, in iis de quibus tractat considerandis impenderent”. Cf. the French translation made by Clerselier: AT IX A, p. 103.

⁷ Cf. *Objectiones Tertiae, cum responsionibus authoris* (AT VII, p. 171–172); *Epistola ad P. Dinet* (AT VII, p. 573 l. 28–574 l. 9).

⁸ See R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism* (2003 ed.) ch. 5, “The Libertins Erudits”, pp. 80–98.

Descartes was responding were essentially Montaigne and Charron.⁹ Instead, Sanches and Le Mothe Le Vayer were very rarely referred to. In recent times, Montaigne's centrality has again been asserted by Edwin Curley in his classical study on *Descartes against the skeptics*.¹⁰ Lately some attempts have been made to reduce the importance of the sceptical crisis and even to oust Montaigne from his privileged stance in this story, as in Michael Ayer's review of the third edition of the *History of scepticism*, which opposes to Popkin a rather mystic and Platonic Montaigne¹¹; on the other hand, Dominik Perler has questioned whether a true "Pyrrhonian crisis" even occurred in the modern age,¹² whereas Charles Larmore has defined as "an exaggeration" the common view that Montaigne underwent a "sceptical crisis" upon reading Sextus. According to him, Sextus's book simply confirmed an outlook Montaigne "was already elaborating on his own".¹³ For her part, Marjorie Grene has denied that Descartes took "the stance of someone heroically combating the terrible threat of the *crise pyrrhonienne*".¹⁴ In actual fact, except for a few contributions by Cavallé, Lojacono and Giocanti,¹⁵ very little has been

⁹Let me take an example, a still essential and unsurpassed text, Gilson's commentary to the *Discours de la méthode*. In this commentary, Pyrrho and Sextus are nearly absent, whereas Montaigne and Charron are considered the main sources for the Cartesian representation of scepticism, and Sanches and La Mothe Le Vayer are rarely referred to (R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*. Texte et commentaire par Etienne Gilson, 4th ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1967).

¹⁰Edwin Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹¹Michael Ayers, "Popkin's Revised Scepticism", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 12 (2004), pp. 319–332.

¹²Dominik Perler, "Was There a 'Pyrrhonian Crisis' in Early Modern Philosophy? A Critical Notice of Richard Popkin," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86 (2004), pp. 209–220

¹³Charles Larmore, "Scepticism", in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 1181, n. 4.

¹⁴Marjorie Grene, "Descartes and Scepticism", *Review of Metaphysics* 52 (1999), pp. 553–571, esp. p. 570.

¹⁵See Jean-Pierre Cavallé, "Les sens trompeurs. Usage cartésien d'un motif sceptique", *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 1991, pp. 3–31; Id., "Descartes et les sceptiques modernes: une culture de la tromperie," in *Le scepticisme au XVI^e et au XVII^e siècle*, ed. by P.-F. Moreau (Paris: A. Michel, 2001), pp. 334–347; Id., "Scepticisme, tromperie et mensonge chez La Mothe Le Vayer et Descartes", in *The Return of Scepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, ed. by Gianni Paganini (Dordrecht, Boston, MA and London: Kluwer, 2003), pp. 115–131; Ettore Lojacono, "Socrate e l'onneto uomo nella cultura dell'autunno del Rinascimento francese e in René Descartes", in *Socrate in Occidente*, cit., p. 103–146; Sylvia Giocanti, "Descartes face au doute scandaleux des sceptiques", *Dix-septième siècle* 54 (2002), pp. 663–673. See more on this topic in my book, *Skepsis*, ch. V "Du bon usage du doute. Descartes et les sceptiques modernes".

done until now to extend the range of Descartes's modern sceptical sources beyond the names of Montaigne and Charron, although some distinguished scholars, such as Rodis-Lewis and Maia Neto, have offered new findings and interpretations that confirm Popkin's insight concerning the latter's centrality for the Cartesian stance.¹⁶

To solve the vexed question of the extent of Descartes's involvement in the *crise pyrthonienne*, we have at our disposal a reliable resource: we can examine the protagonist's direct testimony in order to see how he evaluated and responded to sceptical challenges. Even though it has been quite neglected by historians, we have an exceptional document for this purpose. I am referring to Descartes's polemic against the Jesuit Bourdin. Most of the latter's objections concern a topic which is crucial for our purpose: according to the Jesuit father, Descartes had emphasized the power of doubt too much, thus opening the way, despite his good intentions, to the idea that scepticism can not be refuted. Incidentally, this is also a major aspect of Popkin's assessment: his portrait of Descartes *sceptique malgré lui*¹⁷ seems very close to the image of the philosopher outlined in the *Seventh Objections*.

Regarding these objections, let me remark, first of all, that Bourdin's criticisms are neither as naive as described by Descartes at the beginning of the debate, nor as unfair as he represents them at the end, when he realized that the controversy had turned out to be vain and, what is more, self-defeating for his strategy, which was aimed at gaining credit among the Jesuits. This disappointment is clear in the important letter he later sent to father Dinet, which accompanies the second edition of the *Meditations*. Yet, however unpleasant the result was, in its early stages the confrontation had real importance and Descartes worked carefully to evaluate Bourdin's criticisms, demonstrating the importance he attached to the questions they raised about the evaluation of scepticism.

One passage from this extended debate has particularly attracted the interest of Cartesian scholars: actually, it is one of the few passages from the *Seventh Objections* that is constantly quoted in monographs,¹⁸ whereas very little attention has been devoted to the following passage, where the proper historical context is explained, provided that one can work it out. First, let me briefly recall

¹⁶See, more recently, José R. Maia Neto, "Charron's *Epochè* and Descartes's *Cogito*: The Sceptical Base of Descartes's Refutation of Scepticism", in *The Return of Scepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, cit., pp. 81–113.

¹⁷R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism* (2003 ed.), pp. 158 ff.

¹⁸See Roger Ariew, "Pierre Bourdin and the Seventh Objections", in *Descartes and His Contemporaries. Meditations, Objections and Replies*, ed. by Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 208–225.

the most famous passage. Replying to the objection that he has carried doubt to excess, Descartes develops his famous comparison between the grounds of knowledge and the foundations of a building. Bourdin considers as excessive the claim that Descartes has found a foundation that is “steadier” than that established by anyone else, since, he argues, it would be more reasonable to rely on a basis as firm “as the earth that props us up.” Actually, the author of the *Meditations* suggests that the firmness of foundations should be in proportion to the importance of the building one intends to construct on them. We have already met this comparison in the *Discours*, where Descartes draws a parallel between different kinds of knowledge, on one hand, and, on the other hand, different kinds of supports or foundations, such as “la terre mouvante et la sable” and “le roc ou l’argile”. In the *Seventh Replies*, a graduation takes the place of the opposition. If sand could be considered enough to base a cabin on, nothing less firm than rock will suffice to one who aims at building a tower. The function of scepticism turns out to be evident as soon as we leave the metaphor: Descartes thinks that it would be “absolutely false” (“falsissimum”) if, when laying the “foundations of philosophy”, doubts, the tool with which one must dig until one reaches solid rock, were to be set aside before the “highest certainty”, that is, the greatest certainty one can obtain, is reached. This is the equivalent of the rock.¹⁹ Therefore, mind should not rely “prudenter ac secure” on grounds that are less firm than evidence of which one can not doubt. In contrast to the case of opinions, with regard to knowledge there is no graduation of certainty; since truth is “indivisible”, what is not known to be “summe certum” (“the most certain”) could turn out to be “false”, however “probable” it may appear. Thus far, we are dealing with a principle of caution, already at work in the *Discourse*, and leading to consider as false what one could have the least doubt about, when it is a matter of “contemplatio veritatis”.

The passage that follows this is much less known. In it, Descartes represents scepticism as something alive and modern, neither a ghost of ancient philosophies nor a heritage from previous generations. Scepticism has its own independent existence, a threatening one, outside Descartes’s system. Therefore, historians should not see it only as a methodological requirement within the framework of Cartesian philosophy, some kind of extreme hypothesis by which the meditator ascertains the firmness of his foundations. From Descartes’s new point of view, sceptics are not a “sect nowadays abolished” that one could dismiss with mockeries and tirades, as Bourdin does. Treating the sceptics as “incurable and desperate people” who do not deserve thoughtful consideration, the Jesuit misses the point, that is, the seriousness and dangerousness of modern scepticism, which is in this respect very different

¹⁹ Cf. *Objectiones Septimae* (AT VII, p. 547–548).

from the ancient variety: “Neither must we think that the sect of the sceptics is long extinct. It flourishes today as much as ever, and nearly all who think that they have some ability beyond that of the rest of mankind, finding nothing that satisfies them in the common Philosophy, and seeing no other truth, take refuge in Scepticism”.²⁰

Much of this debate with Bourdin revolves around choosing the right strategy to adopt against these “trendy” sceptics. Whereas the Jesuit worries that following them on the path of excessive doubt could end up by condemning the philosopher to admit the impossibility of answering them, Descartes thinks instead that a dogmatic refusal to follow the dynamics of doubting to the end might be a sign of weakness and even an implicit avowal of defeat. A true refutation can come only through the widest amplification of doubt: otherwise, Descartes asks, “what will he reply to the sceptics who go beyond all limits of doubt?” (“quid respondebit Scepticis, qui omnes dubitationis limites transcendunt?”).

“The Seventeenth-Century ‘Sceptical Atheists’”

So far we have laid out the theoretical nucleus of this debate, but its cultural background is also important. As we have seen earlier, Descartes is declaring that he faces a living scepticism, not a relic of the past. And the confrontation is not only epistemological, because the “mistakes” of this “sect”, which is “in fashion as it has never been before”, are said to be “Atheorum scepticorum errores”.²¹ In fact, the “sceptics of today” require that “one demonstrates to them God’s existence and the immortality of their souls”. The description that follows is very precise: “no sceptic nowadays [*omnes hodierni sceptici*] has any doubt in practice about whether he has a head, or whether two and two make four, and so on. What the sceptics say is that they merely treat such claims as if [*tamquam*] they were true, because they appear [*apparent*] to be so; but sceptics do not believe [*credunt*] they are certain, because no rational argument require them to do so”.²²

²⁰This is the Latin text of Descartes’s reply to the Jesuit: “Et verò, quid respondebit Scepticis, qui omnes dubitationis limites transcendunt? Quâ ratione ipsos refutabit? Nempe desperatis aut damnatis annumerabit. Egregie certe; sed quibus illi eum interim annumerabunt? Neque putandum est eorum sectam dudum esse extinctam. Viget enim hodie quàm maxime, ac fere omnes, qui se aliquid ingenii prae caeteris habere putant, nihil inventientes in vulgari Philosophiâ quod ipsis satisfaciât, aliamque veriolem non videntes, ad Scepticam transfugiunt” (AT VII, p. 548 l. 24–549 l. 3). This passage is rightly evoked also by Popkin, *The History of Scepticism* (2003 ed.), p. 144.

²¹AT VII, p. 549 l. 8–9.

²²“Quippe omnes hodierni Sceptici non dubitant quidam in praxi, quin habeant caput, quin 2 & 3 faciant 5, & talia; sed dicunt se tantùm iis uti tanquam veris, quia sic apparent, non autem certò credere, quia nullis certis rationibus ad id impelluntur” (AT VII, p. 549 l. 10–15).

Who are these “sceptical atheists”? And how could a sceptic be an atheist?

Let me proceed first by exclusion. It is evident that we are not dealing with Descartes’s own scepticism: aside from the question of atheism, which evidently does not fit in with Cartesian metaphysics, these sceptics do not cast in doubt the existence of their own bodies, of the world outside and so on, as happens, on the contrary, in the *Meditations*. It is not a matter of Sextus either: in his writings sceptics do not appear as atheists, but rather as people suspending judgment between the existence of gods and their denial, according to the rule of *ou mallon* and following the precept of the epoché. Far from being impious, ancient sceptics complied with the religious traditions of their *polis*. A third possibility can also be excluded: it is not a question either of Montaigne or of Charron, since neither went so far as to directly cast doubt on God’s existence; at the most, they stressed the limits of every dogmatic representation of God, emphasizing the heavy damage caused by the decay of religion into superstition or fanatical intolerance. Being a follower of the Pyrrhonian conformists, Montaigne turned the accusation of encouraging atheism, not against the sceptics, but against those new dogmatics, like Luther, who with his “novelties” had shaken “nostre ancienne creance”.²³ The discourse we might make about soul is very similar: in this case also, Montaigne’s and Charron’s doubts regard much more the opposing philosophical definitions of the nature of soul than its fate after death according to faith. And even if one notices that, as a sharp observer of human nature, Montaigne stressed the close ties joining the soul with the body, largely resorting to topoi drawn from *De rerum natura*, one should infer that in these contexts Montaigne seems to be rather an epicurean, and therefore a dogmatist, than a sceptic.

After outlining a series of exclusions, might we arrive at some positive affirmations regarding the identity of the sceptics about whom Descartes is speaking? However puzzling the Cartesian phrase may be, it does contain some clues to enable us to solve the problem of the identity of these sceptics. We have seen that the passage from the *Seventh Replies* contains precise hints about the method of “appearances”, which sceptics use to distinguish between the appearances of either ordinary phenomena (one’s own body, for example) or of the most accepted noumena (mathematical truths), on one hand, and, on the other, objects that do not “appear” in the same way, such as God and the soul, which are therefore *adela*, that is “occult” by nature, as the ancients would have said. In the case of these non-visible realities, sceptical atheists make the burden of proof fall on the upholders of their existence: “And since it does not appear to them in the same way that God exists and the human

²³ Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, II, 12 ed. by P. Villey (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), t. II, p. 439. Speaking about Luther’s “novelties”, Montaigne’s father expected that “ce commencement de maladie declineroit en un execrable atheisme”.

soul is immortal, therefore they do not think to be supposed to use them as it were true not even in praxis, unless these propositions are proved more sure than those for which they embrace all the appearances”.²⁴

This reference to the notion and the term of “appearance”, so as to translate the sceptical idea of “phenomenon”, had been introduced by Montaigne in the *Apology*, following an important passage from Sextus Empiricus: a quick comparison with the Latin translation of the *Hypotyposes* made by R. Estienne shows that the humanist had oriented this lexical choice, having used the term “*apparentia*” (instead of the Ciceronian “*visa*”) to render the Greek word *phainomena*.²⁵ Descartes speaks of the sceptics of his time, saying that they follow, or embrace all the “appearances” (“*apparentia omnia amplectuntur*”).²⁶

Anyway, as we have already seen, we can not find either in Montaigne or in his heirs such as Charron this application of the concept of “phenomena” to objects like God or soul. It is in the libertines of the first half of the seventeenth century and first of all in François La Mothe Le Vayer that we eventually meet something like this approach. Usually, La Mothe Le Vayer has been evoked with regard to the controversial matter concerning the *méchant livre* Descartes tells Mersenne about in the letters of 1630–1631. It is still questioned whether this “evil book” was actually the *Dialogues d’Orasius Tubero faits à l’imitation des anciens*, circulated in two parts during these same years, without the author’s name, and with false dates and false imprints, in no more than 30 or 33 copies altogether. The *Dialogues* are the most daring example of libertine scepticism, concealing an aggressive rebellion against any form of dogmatism under ostensible professions of fideism. In reality, my demonstration in this article does not depend on the result of the controversy concerning the identity of the “evil book”, because we are not concerned with the beginning of the 1630s, but with a later stage of Descartes’s life, when he had just published the *Meditations*. We shall soon see that La Mothe Le Vayer’s *Dialogues* develop this method of phenomena, whereas another work of the same author is probably the source for the assertion of the alleged identity between scepticism and atheism: *La vertu des payens*, published in 1641,²⁷ just a year before the second edition of the *Meditations*, which contains the *Seventh Objections and Replies*, with the phrase

²⁴“Et quia non eodem modo ipsis apparet Deum existere, mentemque humanam esse immortalem, ideo his nequidem in praxi tanquam veris utendum putant, nisi prius probata fuerint, rationibus magis certis quam sint ullae ex iis ob quas apparentia omnia amplectuntur” (AT VII, p. 549 l. 15–20).

²⁵For more details on this point, see my book *Skepsis*, ch. I.

²⁶AT VII, p. 549 l. 19–20.

²⁷I discussed more widely the features of Le Vayer’s scepticism and the problem of its relationship with religion in the book, already cited, *Skepsis*, ch. II “Le scepticisme des anciens et des modernes. La Mothe Le Vayer et le ‘pyrrhonisme tout pur’”.

we have quoted before about the encounter between scepticism and atheism. Therefore, bringing together both La Mothe Le Vayer's works, the semi-clandestine one and the official one, we can get an image that matches quite well with the Cartesian portrait of these "sceptical atheists".

La Mothe Le Vayer and the Method of "Appearances"

I shall begin with Orasius Tubero's *Dialogues*. Of the eight pieces contained in the book, which range over topics from marriage to politics, from religion to private life, and even to the merits of the donkey as a symbol of the wisdom of the sceptics, two, *De la philosophie sceptique* and *De la divinité*, deserve special attention. The former takes up Sextus's notion of phenomenon, underlining two aspects to which Descartes's testimony explicitly refers: first, the sceptic conforms to phenomena or appearances as passive affections in the field of ordinary life, a life without dogmas; secondly, he rejects the attempts made by dogmatists to go beyond phenomena towards what is "occult by nature". Even though this dialogue lacks any direct and explicit application to objects such as God or soul, that does not take away much from the daring of the work, because Orasius seems to come very close to debating religious beliefs: thus, he hardly discriminates between "true" and "false" religion, heathen beliefs and Christian ones; he rejoices at listing atheists, either single philosophers or entire populations, and he summarizes the famous paradox of Bacon according to which atheism is preferable to superstition. In the end, La Mothe Le Vayer multiplies the "treacherous parallels" between Christian miracles and heathen wonders, following a naturalistic explanation of the supernatural drawn from sulphurous Renaissance authors such as Pomponazzi and Cardano (the same the "impious" Vanini relied on). Yet, in spite all of that, we must admit that the boldest step, from doubt to atheism, is still missing in this work.

It is left to the other dialogue *On Divinity* to go further: there the notion of phenomenon is skilfully applied to the whole range of religious facts. As the creators of astronomical systems, in formulating their hypotheses, try to "save the phenomena" of the heavenly motions, so religions do the same with the facts of human moral life: "everything we learn about gods and religions is nothing but what the most able men have contrived as the most reasonable according to their discourse for moral, economic and civil life, as well as to explain the phenomena of behaviours, actions and thoughts of the poor mortal, to give him safe rules of life and, as far as it is possible, without absurdities". This comparison extends to the role of the inventors: just as an innovator such as Copernicus arose in astronomy and contrived new hypotheses about heavenly phenomena, so we can not exclude that also in morals and religion, someone "endowed with better imagination" will arise and establish "new foundations or hypotheses which more easily explain all the duties of civil

life". On the whole, concludes La Mothe Le Vayer, "such a religion is nothing but a special system which gives a reason for moral phenomena [*phainomenes morales*] and for all the appearances of our doubtful ethics".²⁸

Although La Mothe Le Vayer takes the precaution of declaring that he has only related what "irreligious people" think, his analysis reveals all the character of an *esprit fort*, a disenchanting intellectual who has mentally "shaken off the yoke" of religion, to employ the clear metaphor widespread among the libertines and which Pascal summoned on his own behalf to describe the attitude of the unbelievers of his times. Yet, in spite of all the open-mindedness of Tubero's *Dialogues*, we have again to admit that an explicit equivalence between scepticism and atheism is still missing even in *De la divinité*. However paradoxical it may seem, it is instead in the 1641 official work that the link between the two attitudes becomes fully explicit.

Pyrrho in Hell

La vertu des payens was written to contest the Jansenistic demolition of the "false virtues" of classical humanism and to support the idea of a similarity between Christian ethics and ancient philosophy. This approach basically aimed at opening the "doors of salvation" to almost everyone, and even to philosophers who did not know either grace or revelation, generously attributing to them a kind of "implicit faith", some anticipation of the fundamental truths belonging to monotheism. As regards scepticism, the result is astonishing and contrary to the position outlined in the *Dialogues*: whereas La Mothe Le Vayer had there asserted the usefulness of doubt as an impulse to Christian faith (following the tradition inaugurated by G. F. Pico, which was continued in the prefaces to the first editions of Sextus's works and sanctioned by Le Vayer himself in his parallels between the "divin Sexte" and saint Paul's passages on folly of philosophy), in the *Vertu des payens* the author instead draws opposite conclusions. Socrates and Plato, Pythagoras and Zeno, nearly all heathen philosophers "are saved". Only one, besides Diogenes the Cynic, is condemned to hell: Pyrrho, whose "salvation – the author says – I consider as desperate". It is worth remarking that Le Vayer's judgement depends upon a balanced analysis of Sextus's passages on religion, acknowledging that they

²⁸ François La Mothe Le Vayer, "De la divinité" in *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens*, ed. by André Pessel (Paris: Fayard, 1988), pp. 330–331. It is a pity that the editors (Roger Ariew, John Cottingham, Tom Sorell) of the book *Background Source Materials: Descartes' 'Meditations'* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) did not quote this passage in their section devoted to La Mothe Le Vayer (section 11, pp. 201 ff.), instead of the fideistic text excerpted, which they judge "relatively tame" (*ibid.*, p. 201).

do not amount to dogmatic atheism; rather, they express a critical stance very close to that ascribed by Descartes to the sceptics of his times.

“The problem is not that sceptics made profession of atheism, as someone has believed. You can see in Sextus Empiricus that they recognize the existence of gods like the other philosophers, giving them the ordinary worship, and that they did not deny providence”. However, beneath these appearances of conformity there is an approach standing at the antipodes to faith, which authorizes the libertine to uncover the irreligious spirit implicit in the sceptical reasoning. La Mothe Le Vayer continues thus: “Yet, besides the fact that Pyrrhonians never made up their minds on acknowledging a first cause, which would have made them despise the idolatry of their times, it is certain that they did not believe anything about divine nature but with suspension of judgment, and did not profess anything but doubt and a willingness to submit to the laws and customs of their time and of the country where they were living”. In conclusion, despite their outer acquiescence, “the salvation of Pyrrho and of the disciples which followed his opinions about divinity” turns out to be “hopeless”, on La Mothe Le Vayer’s own admission.²⁹

Here arises the problem of how one could reconcile this negative evaluation with the appreciation made elsewhere of “the godly Sextus”; suspending the judgment about the author’s sincerity, we shall only note that the theses combined in this “Christian Pyrrhonism” actually represented a highly problematic and unsteady synthesis, always about to turn into its opposite, the “sceptical atheism” that Descartes denounces – and this not so much because of the author’s incoherence or pretense, as because of the strong tension between the method of epoché, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the dogmatic claim typical of any theological belief, most of all of Christianity. As Bayle will have to avow later, the rise of Christian theology, consisting firstly of dogmas and secondarily of ceremonies, would have made a compromise like that of the ancients impossible and required the treatment of doubt as the equivalent of irreligiosity, which is a typical modern attitude.

Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why a philosopher such as Descartes claimed that suspending judgment about the first cause was tanta-

²⁹ La Mothe Le Vayer, *De la vertu des Payens*, in *Œuvres de François de La Mothe Le Vayer* (Paris: chez Augustin Courbé, 1662), t. I, vol. II, second part, “De Pyrrhon et de la Secte Sceptique”, p. 663. The standard work on La Mothe Le Vayer still is René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle*, new edition (Genève et Paris: Slatkine, 1983), esp. pp. 505–538; but see now also Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, *Dis/simulations. Jules-César Vanini, François La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naudé, Louis Machon et Torquato Accetto. Religion, morale et politique au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2002), pp. 141–198, and Sylvia Giocanti, *Penser l’irrésolution. Montaigne, Pascal, La Mothe Le Vayer. Trois itinéraires sceptique* (Paris: Champion, 2001).

mount to professing a true sceptical atheism, despite the seeming contradiction between the noun and the adjective.

Stressing the need of following on their own ground “those sceptics who go beyond all bounds of doubt”, Descartes was thus accomplishing a complex operation: in the quarrel over scepticism he took side with the moderns, convinced that they had surpassed the ancients as to the strength of doubt, having left behind both Sextus’s cautious equidistance (*isostheneia*) and Pyrrho’s wise conformity. On the other hand, by taking as his own the rule that “one should doubt of everything” (“de omnibus est dubitandum”),³⁰ the author of the *Meditations* was turning against the libertines the charge of not having stuck to their program: Descartes complained that they had not thoroughly examined the appearances and had stopped before achieving the highest certainty. Sentences such as those regarding the existence of body and world were not object of investigation by either ancient or modern and libertine sceptics: both confined themselves to phenomena, as becomes very clear in Descartes’s reconstruction. On the contrary, even these seeming truths become, in the *Meditations*, the object of a higher level of doubt, the “metaphysical” one. From this point of view, the philosopher’s distinction between “usus vitae” and “contemplatio veritatis” is only superficially similar to the difference between the two different kinds of criteria, which La Mothe Le Vayer draws from Sextus’s writings.

Descartes and the “No Beliefs View”

Answering the usual charge made against the sceptics, that of causing “a subversion of human life”, the libertine summed up the distinction between two different meanings of criterion: on one hand, the criterion that “judges in last instance and gives certainty to the objects of knowledge”, and is therefore rejected by the sceptics as dogmatic; on the other hand, the criterion that “goes with likelihoods without establishing anything and that is called *to phainomenon*, what appears, that is the criterion of scepticism”.³¹ This distinction corresponds exactly to what Descartes’s “sceptici hodierni” say when differentiating between the field of “praxis”, where they conform to appearances, and the scope of “demonstrations” of which they doubt. We should also notice that La Mothe Le Vayer’s “life without dogmas” opens itself up to probability and likelihood, blending together Pyrrhonian and Academic themes, whereas

³⁰This is the recurring formulation (“universalis dubitatio”, “de omnibus dubitabo”) adopted mainly in Descartes’s *Recherche de la vérité* (AT X, p. 514, 515), which is nearer than the *Meditations* to the libertine and sceptical culture of the time.

³¹F. La Mothe Le Vayer, *De l’ignorance louable* (*Dialogues* cit., p. 243).

Descartes more radically rejects the probable, assimilating it to falsehood, at least in the realm of theory, and precisely for want of evidence, even though he admits it in his provisional morality.

In actual fact, underneath Descartes's pragmatic defence of ordinary certainties for the needs of common life, we can see at work in the *Meditations* a much more radical proceeding than a sceptic as Le Vayer could have accepted it.³² For the French metaphysician, doubt does not really stop on the threshold of common life; it even ends up by invading the field of phenomena (meaning by phenomenon everything that "appears" to the mind). In a philosophy aiming at indubitability, the watershed established between theory and praxis perhaps succeeds in preventing the former from hindering the latter,³³ but surely does not stop theory from investigating practical beliefs from the point of view of their knowledge content. Therefore, Cartesian doubt attacks even matters that an ancient sceptic would have considered as immune to assault, like the evidences about one's own body and the existence of the world outside: according to Sextus, insofar as these beliefs belong to common life (*biotike teresis* or *aphilosophos teresis*), they do not turn into objects of *zetesis*, that is of investigation. On the contrary, when he meditates, Descartes can suspend judgment about them too: that is, he disbelieves them.

It is true that on this very point historians are divided³⁴: some claim that just by virtue of the methodological function of doubt it is understood that scepticism never should stretch to non-dogmatic beliefs of ordinary life. (As

³²On the contrary, G. Fine, "Descartes and Ancient Skepticism" cit., p. 222–223 has emphasized the similarity between Sextus's criterion of action and Descartes's "insulation" of doubts from matters of practice. In any event, she agrees that Cartesian doubts are not completely "idle": "If they were, he would not need to construct his code of conduct" (p. 227).

³³In this sense M. F. Burnyeat has spoken of Descartes and the modern "methodological" sceptic as "insulating" his doubt in the mere realm of theory: cf. his article "The Sceptic in His Place and Time" cit. More subtly, G. Fine distinguishes between "acceptance" and "belief": for example, "when it is matter of action", Descartes "merely accepts (but does not believe) that he has a body. Similarly, we need not to say that, for the purpose of action, Descartes decides to believe that he has a body; rather he accepts (but does not believe) that he does" (G. Fine, "Descartes and Ancient Skepticism" cit., p. 218).

³⁴For an overview of the whole issue, in relation with the ancient sources, see the articles collected in *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*, ed. by M. F. Burnyeat and M. Frede (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997); in a strict connection with the moral problem, see now the apology of the sceptical stance made by John Christian Laursen, "Yes, Sceptics Can Live Their Skepticism and Cope with Tyranny as Well as Anyone," in *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought*, ed. by J. R. Maia Neto and R. H. Popkin (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2004), pp. 201–234.

Descartes says elsewhere, no one of sound mind would doubt in practice whether the world exists.) Among beliefs, only the dogmatic ones pertaining to theory would be affected by the doubt of the *Meditations*, not the merely doxastic ones typical of praxis. Different interpreters, instead, have argued a nearly opposite thesis: for them, the very need of protecting ordinary beliefs from the attacks of “metaphysical” doubt expresses a real and strong sceptical position. When doubt is taken seriously, it is tantamount to a “no beliefs view”, whence the requirements of isolating scepticism from praxis, as the provisional morals rules actually demand. The objection addressed by Descartes to the sceptics of his time, blamed for not really going beyond every bound of doubt and then stopping at phenomena, confirms the latter interpretation and supports even more the superiority of Cartesian doubt over the ancient and the modern ones, inasmuch even the libertine method of appearances relies upon Sextus’s notion of phenomenon.³⁵

In this respect I think that G. Fine is right in asserting that Descartes’s doubt challenged not only knowledge but also beliefs,³⁶ even though he accepted, in the realm of practice, along with Pyrrhonian sceptics, what Fine calls “non-doxastic appearances”. Therefore, it is true that, when Descartes entered the competition, the quarrel over ancient and modern scepticism was already raging as we have seen in La Mothe Le Vayer’s works, but it is undeniable that the author of the *Meditations* imparted to the discussion a dramatic new turn, shifting the whole *querelle* into the realm of metaphysical doubt. The hyperbolic hypothesis of the so called “deceiver God” permits Descartes to cast in doubt the existence of the world outside and of one’s body, a doubt which no Pyrrhonian, neither ancient nor modern (such as La Mothe Le Vayer), would ever have imagined.

In any event, whatever side they take on this controversy, it seems that all the interpreters agree on this point: Descartes’s radicality and the shift of scepticism from an ethical position to an epistemological question would have depended on a deep misunderstanding about moral goals of Pyrrhonism, which aimed not so much at establishing right epistemic conditions as at clearing the mind from passions brought about by dogmatism and thereby

³⁵From this vantage point, I do not agree with Gail’s tendency (who comments the same text of the Seventh Replies I relied upon) to align Descartes with the “modern sceptics” and to consider that neither of them was “more radical than ancient scepticism” (“Descartes and Ancient Skepticism”, p. 234).

³⁶G. Fine, “Descartes and Ancient Skepticism” cit., P. 212. Cf. also p. 233: “Descartes takes scepticism to affect one’s life, in which case it is not strictly methodological”. It is well known that the thesis of the strict methodological feature was put forward by M. F. Burnyeat (see his “The Sceptic in His Place and Time”).

achieving ataraxia. On this last point of the “modern standard verdict” it seems that there is almost no dissent: once they had left this ethical goal and had embraced an epistemological view, moderns (after Montaigne and Charron) would have convinced themselves that the life without dogmas recommended by ancients is essentially impossible.

This way of regarding this issue is not arbitrary and even grasps a significant aspect of the situation; yet the shift promoted by Descartes needs, in my opinion, a different context to be fully understood. Actually, the focus is not so much a change in interests, from ethics to epistemology, as a differing evaluation of the former which brought about a change in aims, rather than the other way around. And once again the decisive factor was the way modern sceptics understood, or better misunderstood doubt, rather than their relationship with ancient sources.

Doubt Instead of Epoché

As R. Bett has recently showed in his study on *Pyrrho, his Antecedents and his Legacy*, notwithstanding the changes occurred in nearly five centuries from Pyrrho to Sextus, scepticism remained faithful to a fundamental principle: against the whole Greek tradition, Pyrrhonians were always arguing that ataraxia and peace of mind spring not from knowledge and judgement of things, but from suspension of assent and then from giving up the quest for knowledge. Despite all their differences, “both Pyrrho and Sextus regard other philosophers as being troubled and tormented because of their readiness to engage in theorizing and their rashness in accepting definite conclusions”.³⁷ Even though one might hesitate to stretch this assessment too far, as G. Striker³⁸ did by making scepticism a special “kind of philosophy” characterized by an “anti-rational” approach, it is true that also this judgment endorses the continuity of the sceptical movement in emphasizing the primacy of ethics.

In light of this, there is no doubt that in modern times the sceptical project could not but undergo a crisis and radical change, when both the links – one between scepticism and ataraxia and that between giving up knowledge and attaining peace of mind – were broken. These decisive changes preceded the shift that occurred with Descartes; they can be attributed to Montaigne. The latter kept the fundamental epistemological objections typical of scepticism

³⁷Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 106.

³⁸Gisela Striker, “Sceptical Strategies,” in *Doubt and Dogmatism. Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*, ed. by M. Schofield, M. F. Burnyeat, and J. Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), pp. 54–83

(as is evident in the famous passages of the *Apology* concerning criterion, dialleles, and regress to infinity), but he subverted its original ethical goals. All things considered, this dramatic turn sprang from the discovery, made by Montaigne, that, by following phenomena and opposing them to each other, scepticism does not so much produce a state of balance (the *isostheneia* the ancient sceptics relied upon) and therefore the premise of peace of mind, as a condition of profound instability, making it impossible to fulfil the standard requirement of ataraxia. Far from being imperturbable, the sceptic seems to Montaigne to be affected by continual change, and thus by perpetual anxiety, since the strength of each new opinion, rather than coexisting with and neutralizing a previous one, as in the famous metaphor of the balance, instead fully supersedes it. In Montaigne's sharp psychological description, the mind passes from one state to the other in turns, without ever reaching the equilibrium preached by sceptics. The last opinion in the mind dominates, taking the place of the previous one: "que la fortune nous remue cinq cens fois de place, qu'elle ne face que vuyder et remplir sans cesse, comme dans un vaisseau, dans nostre croyance autres et autres opinions, tousjours la presente et la derniere c'est la certaine et l'infaillible".³⁹

When in the *Discours* Descartes appeals to "la liberté de douter," stressing at the same time the need to keep one's mind steady ("le plus ferme et le plus résolu en mes actions que je pourrais, et de ne suivre pas moins constamment les opinions les plus douteuses, lorsque je m'y serais une fois déterminé, que si elles eussent été très assurées"),⁴⁰ he draws the ultimate consequences from Montaigne's reflection. Whence he thinks that, in order to counter the sceptical unease and inconstancy, conformity and moderation are necessary, yet not sufficient. Evidently referring to the sceptical ethics coming from both Sextus and Montaigne, Descartes evokes from the first maxim of his provisional morals the benefits of "les opinions les plus moderées, & les plus esloignées de l'excès".⁴¹ In spite of that, having learnt from Montaigne that the condition of the sceptic is imbalance rather than balance, Descartes still thinks that a different philosophy of the subject, based on values such as steadiness and determination, will be necessary. We do not need to add that an heir of the Pyrrhonian spirit like La Mothe Le Vayer branded them respectively as *philautia* and *opiniatreté*, which therefore have to be fought.

Descartes's approach thus takes into account but also overcomes the lesson given by modern sceptics. While warning against considering as "very true and certain" opinions that are in themselves "dubious," he recommends following in

³⁹ Montaigne, *Essais*, II, 12, vol. II, p. 563.

⁴⁰ R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* (AT VI, p. 24 l. 18–22).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23 l. 4–5.

practice a proclivity that Montaigne, in his sceptical anthropology, had described as a fact belonging to human nature. Furthermore, when blaming the behaviour of these “weak and fluctuating spirits”, who pass from an opinion to another,⁴² Descartes is adopting a feature of Montaigne’s sceptic, but also adding on his own behalf a pejorative evaluation, instead of the rather neutral description contained in the *Essays*. In actual fact, at the beginning of the *Second Meditation*, he describes scepticism as a profoundly unsettling experience, and describes how he had fallen “unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool”, so that he “can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top”.⁴³

We might complain that this portrait of the sceptic is too far from the original one and that Descartes’s position turns out to be a misunderstanding of the ancient sources; yet, we should admit at the same time that this reading of Pyrrhonism overwhelmed more faithful interpretations, such as that of La Mothe Le Vayer. After Montaigne and Descartes, doubt not only took the central place previously reserved to *epoché*, but it was also described as an experience producing profound uneasiness and anxiety. We shall quote only one example, but a significant one: Thomas Hobbes. In the systematic catalogue of modern anthropological categories that makes up the first chapters of *Leviathan*, the English philosopher gives a definition of “doubt” that is farthest from balance and closest instead to the rash alternation of impulses and fantasies well described by Montaigne: “the whole chain of Opinions alternate, in the question of True, or False is called DOUBT”, exactly as “the whole chain of Appetites alternate, in the question of Good, or Bad, is called *Deliberation*”.⁴⁴ The difference with Montaigne or Descartes does not consist so much in the diagnosis, as in the therapy, which will not be either sceptical detachment (as in Montaigne) or stoic firmness (as in Descartes), but, for Hobbes, a psychological technique of regulating the chains of reasoning, based on a mechanistic science of man and on stipulative linguistic conventions. In spite of that, all the three authors (Montaigne, Descartes, Hobbes) seem to share a common conviction: doubt and scepticism are a matter of fluctuation, not of equilibrium. Sceptics are people swinging from one extreme to another, not quiet and detached. This shift from the original approach of the ancient sources of Pyrrhonism had enormous consequences for the modern representations of this philosophical movement.

⁴² Cf. *ibid.* p. 25 l. 14–19: “Et cecy fut capable dés lors de me deliurer de tous les repentirs & les remors, qui ont coustume d’agiter les consciences de ces esprits foibles & chancelans, qui se laissent aller inconstamment a prattiquer, comme bonnes, les choses qu’ils iugent après estre mauuaises”.

⁴³ AT VII, p. 23–24.

⁴⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 7, ed. by C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 131.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I shall go back to Popkin's *History of scepticism* and try to draw some lessons from the study of this "quarrel." Firstly, I have validated Popkin's main historiographical insight: Descartes and his contemporaries went through a real sceptical crisis and a much more upsetting one than the ancients had experienced. While considering classical scepticism as obsolete, the French philosopher took the modern sceptical onslaughts very seriously, thinking that they were undermining the theological and metaphysical foundations of knowledge. As we have seen, while considering the topics of ancient sceptics as granted, Descartes thought instead that the modern sceptical attack represented a challenge that could neither be neglected nor undervalued.

Therefore – my second point – it makes little sense to focus the study of this matter on a direct comparison with the ancient texts, the more so since Descartes was scarcely interested in philological discussion of the classical sources (to the point that, according to some interpreters, he never read Sextus Empiricus's writings directly⁴⁵), whereas he was strongly aware that scepticism represented a lively trend of his time. Thus, scepticism was not "reheated cabbage", as he declares in the *Second Replies*, but an issue that "flourishes today as much as ever", as he says in the answers to the *Seventh Objections*. Also on this point, the study of the polemic with Bourdin brings up some elements supporting Popkin's main thesis, according to which: "[n]ot only was Descartes acquainted with some of the sceptical literature, he was also deeply aware of *la crise pyrrhonienne* as a living issue".⁴⁶ In comparison with the modernity of *this* scepticism, the attempts made to link the metaphysical level of the Cartesian doubt with the medieval sources should be taken with much more caution and without giving in to shallow generalizations. On this point I am alluding to Perler's or Bermudez's studies, which explain the global level of the Cartesian doubt by linking it to a kind of sceptical subversion of the *species* medieval theory.⁴⁷ Aside from lacking confirmation in both Descartes's declarations and his contemporary sources, this thesis also clashes with the features of those medieval authors who had never arrived at results

⁴⁵ See Luciano Floridi, "Scepticism and Animal Rationality", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79 (1997), pp. 27–57.

⁴⁶ R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism* (2003 ed.), p. 144.

⁴⁷ See Dominik Perler, "Wie ist ein globaler Zweifel möglich? Zu den Voraussetzungen des frühneuzeitlichen Aussenwelt-Skeptizismus", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 57 (2003) pp. 481–511 (and more recently his book: *Zweifel und Gewißheit. Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt a. M.: V. Klostermann, 2006); José L. Bermudez, "The Originality of Cartesian Skepticism: Did It have Ancient or Mediaeval Antecedents?," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17 (2000), pp. 333–360.

similar to the *crise pyrrhonienne* described by Descartes. In the quarrel over the worth and the progress of scepticism, there was no doubt for Descartes that the moderns would have had an advantage over their predecessors, either ancients or medievals, and that his own version of scepticism would have prevailed in its turn over both of them.

Thirdly and lastly, if the modern framework is the proper context for the *querelle*, we need to revise some points of Popkin's *History of Scepticism*. Having established that La Mothe Le Vayer is the main reference for Descartes's portrait of the "sceptical atheism", it seems to me quite difficult to maintain the assessment of libertinism put forward there. According to Popkin, the sceptical declarations of a libertine like the author of the *Dialogues* would have been compatible with "a certain type of Liberal Catholicism as opposed to either superstitious belief or fanatical Protestantism" and lastly would have expressed "some form of minimal Christian belief".⁴⁸ This evaluation clashes with the double posture assumed by La Mothe Le Vayer: when playing the character of a sceptic, as in the *Dialogues*, he insists on the compatibility between the "godly Sextus" and the Pauline faith, but when he passes on to judging scepticism from the outside, or in an objective way, as in *La vertu*, he cannot help stressing the irreligious, heathen substance of Pyrrho's and Sextus's scepticism, at the borderline with atheism. And if he ever wrote a work inspired by some kind of "liberal Catholicism" (I would prefer to say Christian Humanism), this is exactly *La Vertu des Payens*, with its complex political and cultural program supporting both Richelieu's Gallicanism and Jesuit classical education. We might explain the shift from the *Dialogues* to *La Vertu* in many ways, first of all underlining how the so called "Christian Pyrrhonism" actually represented a highly problematic and unsteady synthesis, always about to turn into its opposite, "sceptical atheism", as Descartes warned. Yet we might also add here that in the *Dialogues* La Mothe Le Vayer was speaking as a sceptic *in sua propria persona*, even though under the veil of a pseudonym: this being an open secret among the cultivated Parisian élite, he certainly needed to hide the dangerousness of his own sceptical bents that were evident in this work. He did not need to do so in *La Vertu des Payens*,

⁴⁸See R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism* (2003 ed.), p. 87; cf. also p. 89: "I think the evidence concerning the *libertins érudits* is more compatible with some form of sincerity and some form of minimal Christian belief". See also, nearly in the same vein, José R. Maia Neto, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism. Scepticism and Faith in Pascal, Kierkegaard and Shestov* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), pp. 5–9, 30–36. For a very different point of view, cf. Tullio Gregory, "Libertinisme erudite in Seventeenth-Century France and Italy: The Critique of Ethics and Religion", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6 (1998), pp. 323–350.

where he was not supporting scepticism as his own stance, so that there he could be much more honest and frank about its problematic relationship to faith. In this official work he eventually was able to play the role of an impartial observer, pronouncing on the religious, or rather the irreligious features of scepticism, a real verdict, that is a *vere dictum*, a truthful sentence.

In conclusion, the study of Descartes's position and of his interlocutors has led me to a position that contrasts both with some anti-Popkin trends in the historiography and at the same time modifies Popkin's assessment of libertinism: two ways of carrying on research on scepticism that Dick, I think, in his open-mindedness, would have appreciated.

PART IV
POPKIN AND THE JEWS

12. RICHARD POPKIN'S MARRANO PROBLEM

Yosef Kaplan*

"In 1958 my intellectual life took a new turn," wrote Richard Popkin in the first part of his *Intellectual Autobiography: Warts and All*, a revealing and moving account of his intense life and his impressive and indefatigable academic activity. Because of the psychological pressure that he was under at that time in his work in the Philosophy Department of the University of Iowa, he suffered a severe breakdown, which affected him profoundly. He added: "When this reached a critical point, I suddenly had an overpowering religious experience."¹

It is difficult to imagine that he suffered this breakdown, and a previous one in March 1957, just while he was immersed in the task of completing his book *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*, which was first published in 1960. Both personal crises resulted in an intensified identification with Judaism, but Popkin seems to have remembered only the one in the fall of 1958 when he wrote his autobiographical essay.² In the difficult period when he was finishing his monumental study on the history of skepticism Popkin began to reflect increasingly on the Jewish origins of several of the first important skeptics of the early modern period: "I began to explore and consider [...] why four early skeptics, Montaigne his cousin Francisco Sanchez, the Jesuit priest Juan Maldonado, and Pedro Valencia, all of Spanish background, and all descended from Jewish forced converts to Christianity, were the ones who made scepticism a living issue in the late sixteenth century."³

* I am grateful to Jeremy D. Popkin for his comments and for the additional information that he provided from the Popkin family archive.

¹ Richard H. Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography: Warts and All," in *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard H. Popkin*, eds. Richard A. Watson and James Force (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1988), 116–117.

² Jeremy D. Popkin, "Richard Popkin and his *History of Scepticism*" (paper presented at a conference on Richard Popkin's intellectual legacy, Brazil 2007).

³ Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography," 117.

Indeed, the reader of Popkin's fascinating book on the history of skepticism will find, in its first version, several brief, factual references to the Jewish parents of Sanchez, "who had become Christians," and to Michel de Montaigne's mother "a Jewess turned Protestant."⁴ But in the revised edition of 1964 Popkin wrote about Montaigne's mother that she was a "Jewish New Christian," and in a footnote on Sanchez he saw fit to hint that in the "boxes of papers of Henri Cazac," located in the Institut Catholique de Toulouse, one might find documents that would "provide many biographical clues, plus suggestions about the sceptical influence amongst the Portuguese New Christians at the Collège de Guyenne that may have affected both Sanchez and Montaigne."⁵

However, the "overpowering religious experience" that Popkin underwent had consequences reaching far beyond the search for the Jewish roots of a few of the forefathers of early modern skepticism. Popkin began to show great interest in Jewish history. He read the works of Solomon Grayzel and Cecil

⁴ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V. – Dr. H.J. Prakke and H.M.G. Prakke, 1960), 39, 45.

⁵ See the revised edition, published under the same title by the same publishers, 39, n. 1, 45. From a series of letters that he wrote in 1960–1 to his close friend Elisabeth Labrousse, the great expert in Pierre Bayle, one notes the increasing interest that he felt at that time in the Marrano background of several of the French skeptics of the sixteenth century. In a letter that he sent to her from Claremont, California on 21 September 1960, he writes:

"Have you read Carvalho's edition of Francisco Sanchez? There is a lot of interesting material plus conjecture, but it is surprising to me that so little 'hard' data seems to have been uncovered about the intellectual milieu in the 16th century at the Universities of Toulouse and Montpellier, and about the career of Sanchez, and his relations with Montaigne. Do you know of any detailed study of the relationships between the Spanish Jewish refugees of the period and the early Reformers? Carvalho quotes a student's report from the late 16th century to the effect that the Marranos were especially numerous in the Reformed Church at Montpellier. I have seen several mentions of the claim that Montaigne's mother was a member of the Reformed Church, but no one gives any specific documentation. It would seem plausible that if the Marranos were forced to maintain a Christian façade in southern France, that they would have preferred to join with the enemies of Catholicism than remain in the Portuguese Catholic churches."

In a letter from 11 October of that year he writes:

"I would like to discuss several points with you about the Marranos in Southern France at the time of Montaigne and Sanchez, and about early Spanish Protestantism."

On April 1961 he writes to her:

"Having worked out my case, I am now beginning to have doubts as to the result of my recherches espagnoles. Many of the forced converts were certainly insincere Christians. Was Spinoza actually the first to doubt not only the religion his family was forced into, but also any and all religious belief?"

Roth and examined more specialized studies of the Jewish past, and especially that of the Iberian Marranos. This was not simply an intellectual experience: "I plunged into the world of the Marranos, and literally felt myself growing roots that connected me to this tradition of secret Jews, forced converts, who had to function in an alien world, always threatened by it." He was fascinated by the Marrano experience, by the fact that the forced converts and their descendants in Spain were forced to live a double life, "outwardly conforming to the culture around them, but internally guarding the true faith."⁶

In addition, Popkin was enthralled by the mysticism of Santa Teresa and of Juan de la Cruz, who seemed to him "closest to what I had experienced." However, above all, the encounter with the history of the Iberian Marranos caused a great shock to Popkin's identity: "The immediate result of all this was that for the first time in my life I became Jewish."⁷ This way of putting it might seem extreme, seeing that Popkin grew up in Jewish surroundings, which, although they were secular, were very sensitive to Jewish issues. Nevertheless, despite the interest that he had previously shown in subjects connected to Judaism, it was only after that "overpowering religious experience" that Judaism began to play a central role for him in an existential manner.

The encounter with the history of the Marrano thinkers of the fifteenth and sixteenth century and with the works of philosophers, theologians, and mystics who stemmed from forced convert families inspired him to consolidate his identity as a modern, assimilated Jew, a Jew who had no direct contact with Hebrew sources or with the basic texts of the Talmudic and rabbinical tradition. Popkin never learned Hebrew, and this fact created a barrier between him and the sources of Jewish culture. The efforts of his friend, Judah Goldin, to persuade him to study Hebrew were in vain. Goldin even sent him a Hebrew grammar book in 1957, and implored him to learn Biblical Hebrew, "to be able to do several chapters of Scripture when the time comes."⁸

Both the Marranos and Popkin were cut off from the Jewish tradition, and their connection with Judaism was paradoxical. Popkin's new Jewish identity then appeared to him in religious terms:

I felt the Marrano experience showed that there was an important contact with divinity in preserving the faith and not assimilating. I became Jewish in spirit, but was not interested in learning Hebrew, in adopting the rules and regulations I had never observed. I made a token compromise – I adopted

⁶Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography," 117.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Letter from Goldin to Popkin, 10 July 1957. This letter, like the others cited in this article, are in the Popkin family archive, copies now at the Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles, CA.

the practices of the Marranos. I did not voluntarily eat pork, and I began observing the Jewish holidays.⁹

The “minimalistic” Judaism that the Marranos in Spain and Portugal were compelled to adopt as a result of mass conversion, which was imposed on them by force, and in consequence of the totalitarian regime and the supervision of the Inquisition, became a voluntary choice for Popkin. His family life also changed, and his children began attending a Jewish Sunday school. In 1964 Popkin was one of the founders of the La Jolla Jewish Community, many of whose members were on the university staff, and most of whom were indifferent, sometimes even antagonistic to Jewish religious customs. Many of them had been living in La Jolla for a number of years, but, like the Iberian Marranos in their day, they hid the fact that they were Jewish. Only after the University of California and the Salk Institute were established, and only after the initiative of Popkin and some of his friends in organizing a Jewish group, did those Jews feel secure enough to “come out of the closet” and identify openly with Judaism. Popkin began to fast on Yom Kippur, because of a feeling of solidarity with the clandestine Judaism of the Marranos, and in 1964, with his wife Julie and some of their friends, he held a Passover Seder at the La Jolla Community Center for more than 90 people who had responded to an advertisement in the local newspaper, the *La Jolla Light*.¹⁰ Although in 1957 he had written a letter to his mother, saying that the family had celebrated its first Passover Seder in Iowa,¹¹ the large group Seder in La Jolla apparently played a decisive role in Popkin’s life. Popkin was the first president of the Jewish community of La Jolla and became the guiding spirit of that organization. He devoted himself to that activity with great energy and utmost seriousness: “Despite my utter lack of Jewish training – others knew more – we created a homemade Judaism. We met in each other’s homes, started a Hebrew school and conducted a barmitzvah.”¹² His secular mother responded with more than a hint of irony to his active involvement in the establishment of a Jewish community: “The news that you’re starting a shul in La Jolla amuses and intrigues me and in my spare moments I speculate on whether you are beginning to run true to Harry Feinberg’s [Richard Popkin’s grandfather, Y.K.] genes. Your grandfather, remember, was a kind of Jewish Johnny Appleseed, scattering new synagogues and Jewish centers wherever he set foot.”¹³

⁹ Popkin, “Intellectual Autobiography,” 117.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹ Letter of 16 April 1957, mentioned in the article by Jeremy D. Popkin in this volume.

¹² Popkin, “Intellectual Autobiography,” 125.

¹³ Letter from Zelda Popkin to her son Richard, 16 March [1964].

The revolution in his identity brought with it a shift in his intellectual and academic activity: "The Jewish interest was to dominate my intellectual concerns from then on."¹⁴ However, for Popkin, Marranism represented the only sort of Judaism that he wanted to identify with, and which he was at ease with accepting. This was a kind of Judaism in spirit, which retained the substance of belief, demanded the observance of only a few commandments, and was not subject to rabbinical authority. Because of the special historical circumstances in the Iberian peninsula, the Marranos had been forced to maintain their separate identity without official leadership and without a religious establishment standing above them. They were also forced to overcome their lack of knowledge of Hebrew sources and create their own "homemade Judaism," despite their "lack of Jewish training."¹⁵

With the intellectual curiosity and the investigative instincts that had always been characteristic of him, Popkin began to investigate the Jewish origins of central figures in the intellectual life of Spain and Portugal: "I bored everyone with endless details about who was Jewish in Spain and Portugal, and as refugees in the rest of the world."¹⁶ However, as a scholar of the history of philosophy and a historian of ideas, the encounter with Marranism was not just an intellectual turning point for him but also gave him a clear feeling that here was a new element, one which was central for understanding the development of modern European thought: "I felt that once I could master what the Marrano experience involved, I would have another key to understanding modern intellectual history."¹⁷

His enthusiasm grew when he realized that in addition to the rich literary material that Marrano thinkers and authors had left behind in Iberia, there were also scores of documents by Marranos who had reverted to Judaism in Amsterdam and in libraries all over Europe. This precious material, very little of which had been studied thoroughly hitherto, attracted him, and in it he hoped to find the Jewish field in which he could establish himself without knowledge of Hebrew, since most of these authors wrote in Spanish and Portuguese and in other European languages, which were accessible to him.

¹⁴ Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography," 117.

¹⁵ Scores of studies have been written on the Marranos, dealing with a wide variety of subjects revolving around their complex religious identity, their Jewish education, and the crypto-Jewish way of life that many of them led. For a broad and comprehensive survey of their history and the various approaches in historiography toward their religious identity, as well as many examples drawn from primary sources regarding the religious customs of the Marranos, see David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: the Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996).

¹⁶ Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography," 118.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In the early 1960s he set out on his first expedition in search of manuscripts and documents in Toulouse, Paris, and Amsterdam, in hopes that this field would occupy a central place in his scholarship in the coming years. He gained the impression that the Toulouse archives contained much evidence to show that the Spanish and Portuguese exiles who had taken refuge in that region from the end of the fifteenth century on “had created a great ferment there.”¹⁸ However, he quickly retreated when it became clear to him that he lacked the patience for detailed archival research of this kind. When he turned toward Paris, with excited expectations at the prospect of examining the Inquisition documents that were preserved in various collections there, he met with disappointment because he lacked sufficient paleographic skill to decipher the sixteenth century Spanish documents. In contrast, the encounter with the manuscripts in Amsterdam excited and gratified him. Here he discovered the treasures preserved in the Ets Haim Library of the rabbinical seminary of the Sephardic community, at a time when the manuscripts and archival material were still preserved together.¹⁹ Dr. Leo Fuks was then the librarian of that rare collection and with great generosity he made its treasures available to Popkin.²⁰ Few scholars had made use of it until then, and those who had consulted it were not aware of all the riches it contained. For a long time, the Sephardic community had been reluctant to open the gates of their library to scholars and visitors, and several rumors circulated as to the reason for that. It seems to me that the most convincing one was the fear of revealing the anti-Christian literature that had been written by Sephardic Jews, including some members of the community. A few years after the Second World War, the Dutch government declared the library a national treasure. It was customary to open it on Sunday mornings, mainly to satisfy the curiosity of Jewish tourists. Popkin was one of the first to get a look at the collection, and he intuitively grasped its value and importance. Not even the leading scholars of the Marranos and of the Sephardic Diaspora were familiar with the treasures it contained. Cecil Roth expressed vehement resentment because he had been

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119–120. On the manuscripts in the Ets Haim library, see the catalogue by L.Fuks and R.Fuks-Mansfeld, *Hebrew and Judaic Manuscripts in Amsterdam Public Collections. II Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos Sephardic Community of Amsterdam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975).

²⁰ He describes the excitement that gripped him when, in the company of his friend, the scholar Paul Dibon, under the guidance of L. Fuks, he first visited it, in a letter to his mother dated 27 June 1961, which is quoted in this volume in the article by Jeremy Popkin.

denied access to the manuscripts and documents of the community when he was writing his book about Menasseh Ben Israel, published in 1934.²¹

Not even Israel S. Révah, the major scholar of Portuguese Marranism, made use of documents from the Amsterdam collection in writing his well known book on Spinoza and Prado, published in 1959. Although it contained various documents about the excommunications of Spinoza and Prado, as well as three works that Isaac Orobio de Castro wrote against Prado (one fragmentary and the other two complete), Révah published these sources on the basis of later copies located in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and in fact he was not at all aware of what he could gain from the Ets Haim Library. In his book, he did indeed quote a few fragments of the manuscript of a work by Mosseh Raphael de Aguilar, which is found in the Ets Haim Library.²² However, the citation was on the basis of quotations found in the book by J. Mendes dos Remedios on the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam.²³ It appears that Révah also quoted the writs of excommunication against Spinoza and Prado from what was published by C. Gebhardt, J. Freudenthal, A.M. Vaz Dias, and J. Meijer rather than from the original documents in the archives of the Amsterdam community.²⁴

As I will explain later, Révah discovered the importance of the Ets Haim Library through Popkin, for whom the encounter with these manuscripts was a formative event:

²¹ C. Roth, *A Life of Menasseh Ben Israel. Rabbi, Printer, and Diplomat* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 5705–1945). See the preface, xi: “This work would inevitably have been more comprehensive had use been made in it of the records of the Spanish and Portuguese community of Amsterdam. In 1927, I went to Holland expressly for the purpose of doing research in the Archives of that famous and ancient body. Like many others before me, I found the doors closed, though the Secretary assured me that he would give me any information which I might require. I explained that I had come to make inquiries into the career of Menasseh ben Israel and his contemporaries. ‘We have nothing in our Archives relating to Menasseh ben Israel,’ the custodian blandly informed me, intimating at the same time that the interview was closed.”

²² Israel S. Révah, *Spinoza et le Dr. Juan de Prado* (Paris and La Haye: Mouton, 1959), 19.

²³ Joaquim Mendes dos Remedios, *Os Judeus portugueses em Amsterdam* (Coimbra: F. França Amado, 1911), 65.

²⁴ Révah, *Spinoza et le Dr. Juan de Prado*, 57–60. Cf. Carl Gebhardt, “Juan de Prado,” *Chronicon Spinozanum* 3 (1923), 273–279; Jacob Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza's in Quellenschriften, Urkunden und Nichtamtlichen Nachrichten* (Leipzig: Verlag von Veit, 1989), 114–116; A.M. Vaz Dias and W.G. Van der Tak, *Spinoza mercator et autodidactus: Oorkonden en andere authentieke documenten betreffende des wijsgeers jeugd en diens betrekkingen* (The Hague, 1932), 33–34; Jaap Meijer, *Encyclopaedia Sefardica Neerlandica*, 2nd part (Amsterdam: Portugees-Israëlietische Gemeente, 5710 [1949–1950]), 62.

For a couple of weeks I had an orgy as I found the courses given in Spinoza's day in ethics, logic, etc., as I found the writings of Orobio, Morteira, Montalto and Isaac Troki against Christianity, and saw that these anti-Christian works used much Spanish scholastic and French Protestant source material and fairly little Jewish material.²⁵

Once again he had a strong feeling that those Jews were intellectually, culturally, and existentially very close to him. Their background was a general European one, their education was philosophical, and their reference to Jewish sources was, as it were, rather limited. Popkin thought that he had found Jews after his own heart and values in the Sephardic Jewish intellectuals of Amsterdam: "The Amsterdam Jewish intellectuals obviously were not locked in a ghetto studying the Talmud. They were European trained philosophers, scientists, and theologians, who were defending Judaism in terms of seventeenth and eighteenth century ideas."²⁶

While examining the manuscripts in Amsterdam, Popkin was surprised to discover that these Jewish writers referred more frequently to Iberian scholastic thinkers or to the writings of Calvin than to the works of Maimonides and other rabbinical authorities. He managed to infect Professor Paul Dibon with his enthusiasm. At that time the latter was serving in Holland as the cultural attaché to the French embassy there. After Popkin showed him some of the material, he concluded with great astonishment that here was proof that there was "un courant juif" in seventeenth century European thought.²⁷

As strange as this may seem, it was Popkin who, shortly afterward, told Révah about the collection of manuscripts in the Ets Haim Library. Révah was a fellow of the Collège de France, but his scholarship was known until then to a small circle of historians concerned with Portuguese culture and the crypto-Jews of Portugal. Révah, who had by then investigated scores of Inquisition files in the Torre do Tombo archives in Lisbon, became a good friend of Popkin's. Their meeting immediately made a mark on Révah's work, for he quickly went to Amsterdam to get a sense of the type of material to be found there. In the following years Révah published his most important study of "la rupture spinozienne" in the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, a work that shed new light on the intellectual ferment among the Marranos of the seventeenth century.²⁸ Few people know that the encounter with Popkin lay behind

²⁵ Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography," 120.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Israel S. Révah, "Aux origines de la rupture Spinozienne: nouveaux documents sur l'incroyance dans la communauté judéo-portugaise à Amsterdam à l'époque de l'excommunication de Spinoza," *Revue des études juives* 123 (1964), 359–431.

the shift in Révah's research regarding the Spinoza and Prado incident and the controversy with Orobio de Castro.

Significantly, scholarship on the Marranos at that time was mainly parochial, genealogical, and still enveloped in large part in the romantic halo that historians had imbued it with, when they invoked the memory of those crypto-Jewish martyrs who had been burned at the stake by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions because of their desire to preserve their Judaism. Some scholarship concentrated on examining the genealogy of prominent people in Spanish and Portuguese history, with an apologetic desire to demonstrate their Jewish origin. Other scholars went out of their way to collect every detail or hint about the "Jewish behavior" of the Marranos, about their Jewish customs and the commandments they observed. The best hispanists, especially Marcel Bataillon and the students and followers of Américo Castro, took note of the literary and intellectual traits of the authors, theologians, philosophers, poets, and playwrights who were central to Castilian literature from the mid-fifteenth until at least the mid-seventeenth century and who were of Jewish origin. Their origin and the discriminatory policy of the decrees regarding *limpiezas de sangre*, which were enforced in Iberia, marginalized them and gave their works particular, subversive critical dimensions. However, their approach to the Marranos was restricted to the Iberian context. Indeed, the lion's share of the historiography of the Marranos dealt with the controversy as to how Jewish or Christian the *Judeoconversos* were. Some historians made every effort to prove their loyalty to the Jewish faith, while others sought to refute that claim and prove that it was baseless, that all the evidence of the Inquisition was fabricated, and that the overwhelming majority of the New Christians identified completely with the Christian religion and sought to assimilate into the old Christian majority.²⁹

Popkin's intellectual curiosity and his philosophical training brought a refreshing breeze into the study of the phenomenon of the Marranos. He transferred the focus of discussion from the particularist niche of Iberia and the history of the Jews of Iberia to the crisis of the European mind in the early modern period. In his eyes the Marranos became central protagonists in the intellectual drama that took place in the Old World.

Popkin's enthusiasm for the intellectual encounter with the world of the Marranos did not dwindle in the years when he was entirely immersed in his energetic and obsessive detective work regarding the Kennedy assassination. However, even before recovering from the emotional effort that he invested to solve the mystery of the president's murder, and a short time after

²⁹ A rather exhaustive summary of the differences of opinion among the historians on this topic can be found in Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 73–96.

the publication of his book, *The Second Oswald* in 1966, Popkin was already directing his full energy and investigative talent toward study of the Marrano phenomenon. As early as 1967 his articles on Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac Orobio de Castro were published in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, while at that very time he was invited by the editors of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* to write a series of articles on Marrano thinkers. The fact that they turned to him on this subject shows that by the late 1960s Popkin had already gained a reputation among scholars in Jewish studies as an authority about the Marranos, although he had not yet published even a single article on them. This is no small achievement, especially if one recalls that the chief editor of that encyclopedia was none other than Cecil Roth, one of the best known scholars of the history of the Marranos.

By dint of intensive reading and incessant searches in many libraries throughout Europe, Popkin managed to gain astonishing expertise on this subject. At the start of this path, he was captivated by several fixed ideas. Columbus's "Jewishness" was one of them, and in fact until the end of his life he dealt with the question of whether Columbus was "secretly Jewish." Popkin collected every scrap of information printed on that subject and read Columbus's letters eagerly until he reached a firm conclusion on the matter: "Reading Columbus's letters, one is struck by the many Jewish themes and ideas."³⁰ More than that, however: Columbus's Jewishness became clear to him against the background of the deep connection that he thought he had found between Jewish messianism and Christian millenarianism in Spain in the late Middle Ages. He wanted to solve the mystery of the connection that had been revealed to him in an intuitive way between the millenarian frenzy of Saint Vincent Ferrer's attempt to convert the Jews so that world history would be transformed, and the messianic hopes that were stirred among both Marranos and Jews between the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the conversion to Islam of the false messiah Shabbetai Zevi. He was deeply convinced that there was a connection in ideas and even a personal connection between Columbus and Don Isaac Abarbanel, "the father of modern Jewish messianism." Popkin's fertile imagination created a link between the messianic activities of the two men: "Columbus and Abarbanel were colleagues in the Portuguese royal court, then had to flee at the same time, and joined the Spanish royal court. Then in 1492, on the day the unconverted Jews were expelled from Spain, Columbus sailed west and Abarbanel east, to become the treasurer of the kingdom of Naples."³¹

³⁰ Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography," 117, 119.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

However, Popkin did not restrict his interest in the Marranos to a defined and limited chronological framework or to a specific geographical or cultural area. He believed that the special encounter that took place between the Iberian Jews who had been baptized during the fifteenth century (and not always against their will!) had fascinating and wide-ranging intellectual and religious significance, and this encounter indeed gave rise to what Paul Dibon called “un courant juif,” with many branches and a variety of undercurrents.

Popkin did not regard the concept Marrano “as equivalent to ‘converso’ or to ‘New Christian’ because there obviously were thousands of converts who became Christians in the full sense of the term.”³² He also did not use that concept as synonym for “secret Jew,” that is to say an apostate or the descendant of apostates from Judaism whose interior was belied by his exterior and whose official Christianity was merely a disguise for his inner and unshakable bond with Judaism. With his well-known intellectual discernment, even in the first stages of his interest, he noted “that there was a broad range of views among the unconvinced converts, ranging from partial Christianity to secret Judaism.”³³ From that perspective, he regarded the Marrano as someone who adopted a non-conformist attitude, sometimes even a subversive one, with respect to Christianity, “without necessarily being accompanied by any actual secret Jewish activity.”³⁴

Following the research of Marcel Bataillon, who emphasized that most of the Erasmians in Spain and Portugal were of Jewish origin, Popkin sought to prove that one could find among some of them “a Marrano rejection of Trinitarianism,” the purpose of which was, among other things, “the presentation of a Christianity more acceptable to Marranos,” or, if you will, a drive toward the “spiritualization of Christianity,” in order to remove the dogmatic and symbolic elements that most deterred some of the converted Jews. For Marranos such as Juan de Valdés, it was important to remove the dogma of the trinity from Christian faith in order to show that “there could be Christianity without the Trinity; there could be Jewish Christianity.”³⁵

In 1979, with the publication of the revised and expanded edition of his book on skepticism, now entitled *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, one could sense quite clearly the influence of Popkin's intense interest in Marranism on the subjects of research that had been central to his earlier

³² Richard H. Popkin, “Marranos, New Christians and the Beginnings of Modern Anti-Trinitarianism,” in *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, eds. Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999), 152*–153*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 153*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169*.

activity from the beginning of his career. In the third chapter, on Michel de Montaigne, he added a note that explicitly sharpened the issue of the connection between Montaigne and Sanchez and their Jewish origins. However, Popkin was constrained to be content with making comments without reaching a conclusion: “Recent researches lead me to believe that it will not be possible to assess the actual religious beliefs of either Montaigne or Sanchez until much more is known about the religious views and practices of the refugee New Christian families of Bordeaux and Toulouse. Were these families crypto-Jews, genuine Christians, nominal Christians, or what?” Although the state of research did not yet permit him to reach a decision, his tendency, in the light of “some of the data” that had come into his hands, was nonetheless to see them as crypto-Jews of one type or another: “Since Montaigne and Sanchez grew up and lived among Spanish and Portuguese New Christians in southern France, their ‘real’ beliefs were probably related to those of the people around them.” In southern France during the sixteenth century, especially in Bordeaux, “almost all New Christian families were suspected of secretly Judaizing.”³⁶

However, the main innovation in this new edition of his earlier history of skepticism in the early modern period was the addition of two new chapters on Isaac La Peyrère and on Spinoza.³⁷ By adding these two chapters, Popkin explicitly, though without declaring it, brought Jews and Marranos to the center of the drama that took place, in his view, in seventeenth century European thought. Although in the chapter on La Peyrère he refrained for some reason from mentioning his well-known conjecture regarding the Marrano origins of the author of the *Preadamitae* (Men before Adam), he briefly presented what he had previously defined in a separate article as “The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère.”³⁸ He returned to that subject at length and in detail in the fascinating monograph that he published in 1989 on Isaac La Peyrère. There he held “that the most likely explanation of La Peyrère’s outlook was that he was of Jewish origins.”³⁹ However, more than he sought to link La Peyrère’s origins to the Spanish or Portuguese Jewish origins of many of the Calvinists of Bordeaux, where La Peyrère was born, he sought to bring out the Marrano character of his thought: “Whether he was or was not a Marrano, his theory, I believe, is best explained as a vision of the world for the Marranos [...] in La Peyrère’s vision, the Marranos (that is, Jews converted to Christianity while

³⁶Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1979), 263, n. 48.

³⁷Ibid., 214–248, 292–299; Chapter XI: “Isaac La Peyrère and the Beginning of Religious Scepticism”; Chapter XII: “Spinoza’s Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism.”

³⁸The article was published in *Studi Internazionali di Filosofia* v (1973), 97–126.

³⁹Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676). His Life, Work, and Influence* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 22.

remaining Jews) are and will be the most important people in the world when the messiah comes."⁴⁰

Popkin regarded La Peyrère's religious and political program as the most sophisticated, well-formed, and explicit exposition of Marrano theology. Not only were the Christians to cease all social and political mistreatment of the Jews, in order to encourage them to become Jewish Christians, or perhaps Christian Jews, it was also incumbent upon the Christians to make Christianity into a religion whose principles and ceremonies could be accepted by the Jews. By emphasizing this point, Popkin sought to bring out the existence of a distinctive Marrano outlook among the Iberian New Christians, the roots of which he thought he had discovered in Erasmian anti-Trinitarian views in the first half of the sixteenth century, which were, as noted, espoused by Marranos such as Valdés. Like the latter, the "Marrano" La Peyrère sought to purify Christianity of all the dogmas that made it offensive to the Jews, so that they could become Jewish Christians: "In so doing they would be in the same situation as the Marranos in that they would be Jewish converts to Christianity who still retained some essential Jewish beliefs."⁴¹ The message for modern Jews is quite transparent: the Marranos, in their fashion, found a way that permitted them to assimilate into the majority society surrounding them while maintaining their distinctive character.

Popkin, who regarded La Peyrère as the father of modern biblical criticism and the man who marked the beginning of religious skepticism, did not find Marrano traces in his skepticism. In contrast, he located Marrano traces in La Peyrère's theology, which emphasized "the centrality of Jewish history in the world" and proclaimed "the recall of the Jews that is about to occur." When they accept Christianity purified of dogma and superstition, as Jewish Christians (that is to say, Marranos!), they will resume the leading position that had been theirs in antiquity, when they were the chosen people of God.⁴²

Popkin's attitude toward Spinoza was always complex and fascinating, but a full account of this topic would demand separate treatment, beyond the limits of the present article.⁴³ Although Popkin always took into account the particular Jewish environment from which Spinoza arose, that is to say, the community of Marranos in Amsterdam who had returned openly to Judaism, he was not tempted to attribute a decisive or formative role to Spinoza's "Marrano roots" in developing his skeptical positions regarding revealed religion and religious knowledge claims. According to Popkin, the "Marrano" La

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 24–25.

⁴³ See Sarah Hutton, "Popkin's Spinoza," in this volume.

Peyrère did have a decisive influence on Spinoza's critical attitude toward the Bible, and Spinoza owned a copy of the *Preadamitae* and used it in writing the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.⁴⁴ However, in contrast, La Peyrère's "Marrano theology" left no impression on him at all.

Popkin assigned a short Quaker period to Spinoza's life, immediately after his excommunication in 1656, and he identified Spinoza with the "Jew at Amsterdam that by the Jews is cast out," who might have been the one who translated the second conversionist tract by Margaret Fell.⁴⁵ It would not be too daring to assume that Popkin believed that the seed of "Marrano messianism" (that is, the desire to attract the Jews to a kind of purified Christianity in order to bring about their redemption) had even been implanted in Spinoza himself; however the flower that grew from that seed was nipped in the bud. In his book about Spinoza, published shortly before his death, Popkin did not abandon the assumption that Spinoza (along with Samuel Fisher) had translated Fell's pamphlet into the Hebrew language, although he hedged the assumption by acknowledging that "this cannot be completely established on present evidence."⁴⁶

Until the end of his life, Popkin remained interested in Marranism and in the connection between the history of the Marranos and the intellectual history of Europe. He took an active part in a series of symposia on these subjects and even was the initiator and guiding spirit of some of them. His interest in Columbus's "Jewishness" and his millenarian-messianic message never waned, and his curiosity regarding the intellectual consequences of La Peyrère's Marranism also remained lively. In the connection of the millenarian

⁴⁴Richard H. Popkin, *A History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, 227; idem, *Isaac La Peyrère*, 84.

⁴⁵Richard H. Popkin, Introduction to *Spinoza's Earliest Publication? The Hebrew Translation of Margaret Fell's 'A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews, wherever they are scattered up and down upon the Face of the Earth,'* eds. Richard H. Popkin and Michael A. Signer (Assen, Maastricht and Wolfeboro: Van Gorcum, 1987), 1; idem, "Spinoza, the Quakers and the Millenarians 1656–1658", *Manuscripta* vi/1 (1982/3): 113–133; idem, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam", *Quaker History* 73 (1984): 14–28; idem, "Spinoza and Samuel Fisher," *Philosophia* xv/3 (1985): 219–236; cf. Yosef Kaplan, review of *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?*, eds. Richard H. Popkin and Michael A. Signer, *Studia Rosenthaliana* xii/1 (1988): 73–75. On this topic see David S. Katz, "Popkin and the Jews," in this volume.

⁴⁶Richard H. Popkin, *Spinoza* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), 41. At the same time, still a year earlier, in his new version of the history of skepticism: *The History of Scepticism from Savanarola to Bayle*, Revised and expanded edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 231, he wrote that the task of translating Fell's treatise "was turned over an ex-Jew, who was apparently young Spinoza [...] It is probably Spinoza's earliest publication and the only text we have that indicates the level of his knowledge of Hebrew."

philo-Semitism of Samuel Hartlib and his circle with some of the prominent figures of the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, primarily Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, who was himself a Marrano from Portugal who had returned to Judaism as a youth, Popkin found new extensions of the presence of Marrano messianism in the intellectual history of the early modern period.⁴⁷ His intellectual thirst and his desire to uncover more and more information regarding these subjects never declined. As long as his health permitted him to fly to the ends of the earth, he continued to visit libraries and archives and to surprise us all with his discoveries of rare manuscripts and books.

However, at the same time, it was possible to sense the chilling of the enthusiasm that had connected him with the Marranos as an existential experience and an essential part of his Jewish identity during the 1960s. He was vehemently critical of the occupation and the outburst of nationalist messianism that swept Israeli society. These political developments provoked strong reactions with respect to his attitude toward Israel and raised questions regarding his Jewish identity. An echo of his state of mind in his later years can be found in words that he wrote in the late 1990s, at the end of the second part of his memoirs: "I should like to be able to spend some time thinking through my own spiritual beliefs, and my position vis-a-vis Judaism and Israel. In the growing rush to adopt more and more traditional Jewish practices, I think the great values espoused by secular socialist Jews in the period before World War II need to be asserted again as a way of providing hope for a better future."⁴⁸

Marranism ceased to serve for him as the life buoy that he had grasped in the 1960s in order to feel "Jewish in spirit" at a time when he felt a religious need to attach himself to Judaism. This feeling was attenuated and gave way to the secular views and values that had characterized his Jewish environment when he was a youth in the Bronx.

Marranism became more and more a metaphor for him, which reflected a universal condition, the plight of minorities struggling to maintain their special character in the face of the pressure exerted on them by the majority culture, which sets the boundaries of what is regarded as accepted and acceptable views and expressions: "All of us, not just Marranos in Iberia [...] learn only too quickly that we have to do what is acceptable, and must get our points

⁴⁷ Richard H. Popkin, "Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges in Holland and England 1640–1700," in *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. J. van den Berg and Ernestine G.E. van der Wall (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), 3–32.

⁴⁸ Richard H. Popkin, "Introduction. Warts and All, Part 2," in *Everything Connects in Conference with Richard H. Popkin. Essays in His Honor*, eds. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), lxxvi.

across within these limits. It is in this sense that the Marrano experience has important meaning for us today, even in the ‘free’ atmosphere of the United States [...] Marrano activity is forced upon us all, if we are not completely homogenized members of the dominant culture.”⁴⁹

For Popkin the Marrano became a metaphor for the outsider, who sees things that an “insider would never notice,” and of the tirelessly subversive, nonconformist, critical intellectual who submits to the necessity of adapting in order to express the Marrano outlook “in a form acceptable to the majority.” However, the Marrano does not surrender to the homogenization of the majority culture. In the 1960s Popkin used Marranism to connect with Judaism and become “Jewish in spirit,” but at the end of his life he preferred to see himself as “Marrano in spirit.” He drew encouragement and inspiration from examples of the Marranos of the early modern period, whom he pictured in his imagination as “spokespersons for a different world of uprooted people, partly cut off from their heritage.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹Richard H. Popkin, “The Marranos of Amsterdam” in his *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 170. An abridged version of this paper appeared in *The New Republic*, May, 1990.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 171.

13. POPKIN AND THE JEWS

David S. Katz

The title of my paper rehearses an in-joke that Dick Popkin and I always repeated. Since I was interested in the borderlands between Christians and Jews, we used to say that whenever I agreed to speak at a conference, I would take a pre-written form letter already printed on University stationery, and simply add to the advertised subject the words, "...and the Jews." In 1987, we were invited to a conference at Cambridge dedicated to the philosopher Henry More, and he thought I'd finally been outfoxed, but I gave a paper entitled "Henry More and the Jews," explaining why he never mentions them.¹

For once, though, the subject "Popkin and the Jews" is rather appropriate. I have come not only to pay tribute to Richard Popkin, but also to unveil an unpublished and unknown 7,500-word article that he wrote, describing his evolution as a Jewish historian of philosophy, not only the sum but also the parts as Jew, historian, and philosopher. The article is headed "Judaism-Katz volume," and was sent to me by email on 1 August 2001, but in a letter of 23 July 2001, Dick says that he wrote it "ten years ago or so." As there is a reference in the piece to how one "should be a Jew in 1992," I take that as the year of composition. I had always wanted to publish a collection of Dick's articles related to Judaism and Jewish history, tentatively called *Popkin His Judaicalls*, but he wanted to include a very large number of articles and rejected my selection as insufficiently comprehensive.² Our original publisher balked at a multi-volume project, and I was never able to interest another one, but not

¹David S. Katz, "Henry More and the Jews," in *Henry More (1614–1687): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), pp. 173–188.

²The reference is to "Moses His Judicials" by John Cotton (1585–1652), the draft biblical legal code he proposed in 1636 for New England: [John Cotton], *An Abstract or the Lawes of New England* (London, 1641).

for lack of trying. So we are left with what might have been the preface to such a volume, the horse without the cart, so to speak.³

Dick used to say that much of so-called history of philosophy was merely plot summary, so I won't do that to "Judaism-Katz volume". There is a lot in there, beginning with Dick's confession that his

serious concern with studying Jewish history developed after an overwhelming mystical experience in 1956 which convinced me then and ever since of the importance of the religious dimension of human experience. A couple of months later I started reading in Jewish history, and felt myself grafted into it.

I want to look at two issues that arise from this text, the first historical in a general sense, and the second directly related to the place Dick saw himself as occupying in the Jewish world.

Two-thirds of the way into his essay, Dick Popkin makes the following statement:

One of the themes I have been writing on is that Zionism was originally a *Christian* Millenarian view, shunned by most Jews until after the failure of Enlightenment Emancipation programs. Jewish existence before the latter part of the 19th century was seen by religious and secular Jews as normally going on in non-Jewish worlds. The massive movement of Jews from Europe to America from 1880 onwards was a shift of locale within this perspective, because Jewish existence was possible in America in a way in which it rarely occurred in eastern Europe. Out of this a Jewish world has developed in the United States unequaled in prosperity, creativity and social and political influence in prior Jewish history. Until World War II, the large majority of American Jews did not see the development of a Jewish state in Palestine as a major desideratum. Only during the war did the major American Jewish organizations become Zionist. And, of course, since 1948, American Jewish investment and involvement in Israel has risen and risen.

Zionism, in brief, is a Christian idea, adopted by Jews only much later. I think that Dick was quite correct, and as time goes by, it is apparent how much of a pioneer and a rebel he was in making this claim.

There is no better place to find the received narrative than the *History of Zionism*, published at London in 1919, and written by Nahum Sokolow (1861–1936), in his time president of the World Zionist Organization and the

³See his earlier "Intellectual Autobiography: Warts and All," in *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard H. Popkin*, eds. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1988), pp. 103–115. Professor Matt Goldish also has a 45,000 word transcript of interviews he conducted with Richard Popkin, mostly about Judaism.

Jewish Agency. The street named after him is parallel to the road on which I live in Tel Aviv. But just as Popkin predicted, the first chapter is all about English *Christian* Zionists.⁴ Long before Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) launched the modern Zionist movement with the first Zionist Congress held at Basel in 1897, seventeenth-century *Christian* Englishmen began to think about the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. One of the earliest was Sir Henry Finch, a renowned lawyer and the author of a highly respected treatise on the common law, who anonymously published a book in 1621 entitled “The Worlds Great Restavration. Or The Calling of the Ievves.” Finch proclaimed to world Jewry that “Out of all the places of thy dispersion, East, West, North, and South, his purpose is to bring thee home againe, & to marry thee to himselfe by faith for euermore.” William Gouge, the famous Puritan preacher in Blackfriars, contributed a signed epistle to the Christian reader.⁵ “This work was written not by a religious maniac,” the late Christopher Hill reminds us, and “the government was clearly alarmed.”⁶ The belief in the imminent return of the Jews to Palestine was a commonplace during the period of the Civil War, and greatly contributed to the readmission of the Jews to England.⁷

Most people see the Balfour Declaration of the British government in 1917, supporting a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, as part of a calculated political gamble related to the progress of the First World War. But if the origins of British Christian Zionism, indeed, of Zionism in general, were far removed from anything resembling rational secular thought, let alone *Realpolitik*, then this was a trend that continued throughout English history. Popkin would have chuckled to learn that Balfour himself was not playing with a full deck. Apart from his interest in the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), was a great believer in communicating with the dead, as evidenced by his prolific thirty-year correspondence via mediums with his late fiancée Mary Catherine Lyttelton, who died of typhus on Palm Sunday 1875. Balfour became president of the Society for Psychical Research in 1893, which did not prevent him from serving as prime minister between 1902 and 1905. Just as millenarianism has been written out of the standard

⁴Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism 1600–1918* (London: Longmans, 1919), with an introduction by Balfour. The first chapter is entitled “England and the Bible;” Chapters 3–7 deal with Menasseh ben Israel; and Chapter 8 covers works by Henry Jessey, John Dury, and Finch.

⁵[Henry Finch], *The Calling of the Ievves* (London, 1621), f. 4r, sig. A2, p. 1.

⁶Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism* (2nd edn, New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1967), p. 203.

⁷See generally, David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603–1655* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), and idem, *The Jews in the History of England, 1485–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 3.

Zionist narrative, so too have Balfour's other supernatural pursuits (apart from Zionism) been swept under the magic carpet.⁸

The second issue in Dick's essay that I want to discuss relates to the direct connection he felt between his own attitude towards Judaism and his research. This is what he says:

In retrospect I can see that the Marrano experience seemed to mirror my own situation. I was *déraciné*, but with a great desire to live in some sense in Jewish history. However, I found that I did not or could not put myself back into normative Jewish history. I was too removed, too rebellious, too humanized and secularized...There were Jews like myself in those times who functioned mostly in terms of Western ideas, but remained Jews in some important sense. Their creative contribution was at least partly the result of their being, like me, between two worlds, that of traditional Judaism and that of the emerging scientific secular modern world.

When Dick was teaching at the University of California, San Diego, he helped organize a Jewish community in La Jolla, "people much like myself, who identified with Judaism, but had no traditional Jewish training. They wanted to participate in some sort of Jewish life while also being rooted in secular American affairs."

Dick's attitude to early modern Judaism was also reflected in his research program:

As I became involved in this kind of fringe Jewish existence, which kept aloof from organized Jewish activities and from traditional ones, I found that my research in Jewish history became a statement of what I was advocating for people like myself. I became an expert on the fringe of Judaism that interacted with the dominant Christian culture, and later with the Enlightenment secular culture. It seemed to me that Jews who found themselves with a foot in each world were able to make a special contribution to the general world. As partial outsiders, they could see the stresses and problems of the dominant world view that insiders did not recognize. (The same could be said about sensing stresses and problems inside the Jewish world itself by partial outsiders.) As partial insiders they were able to express this in terms that most insiders could appreciate and understand. Unlike Jewish criticism of non-Jewish beliefs and ideas, written in Hebrew, and later in Yiddish, these critical evaluations were written in French, Spanish, Portuguese, English and German. The Jewish element of these partial insiders and outsiders gave them a base for a critical moral humanism that enabled them to see the flaws of the prevailing system of ideas. Their participation

⁸ See David S. Katz, *The Occult Tradition From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), p. 125.

in the majority culture gave them a way of seeing Judaism as partial outsiders too. They could seek to explain and accept those features which made sense in terms of features of the general world.

So far, so good, but Dick then developed a more controversial idea, about which we never really agreed, and which (I think) we kept out of *Messianic Revolution*, the millennium book we wrote together and published in 1999.⁹ This was his insistence that some early modern thinkers “created a Jewish Christianity, and others a Christian Judaism.”¹⁰

Dick goes on to explain what he means, relating it to his own personal experience in twentieth-century America:

Given my own point of view, situated on the fringe of the interface of Jewish and gentile worlds in the United States, it seemed to me that it was possible that some kind of genuine interchange and even alliance of philo-semitic Christians and worldly Jews could have taken place in the mid-17th century. If one considered that a serious possibility, then some kind of Jewish Christianity and some kind of Christian Judaism could be delineated at the time. Various Millenarians became Judaizers, adopted Jewish practices, and Jewish views about the nature of the coming Messiah. Why not the reverse, some Jews adopting Christian readings of Judaism?

Dick was especially interested in seventeenth-century Jewish figures such as Menasseh ben Israel and Nathan Shapira:

The attempt to create a College of Jewish Studies in London in 1641,¹¹ the effect of Rabbi Nathan Shapira’s visit to Amsterdam in 1657, the interaction of the Quakers and Jews in Amsterdam and elsewhere, all made sense in terms of the Millenarian agenda. But what about the Jewish participants? Were they trying to help bring about the Millennium and the Second Coming? Or, did they have their own related agenda? Usual Jewish historiography has assumed that Jews could not have been sincere in helping Christians with their plans. Hence, Menasseh’s involvement with the

⁹David S. Katz and Richard H. Popkin, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1999).

¹⁰See also Richard H. Popkin, “Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenarianism,” in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 67–90; and Richard H. Popkin, “Christian Jews and Jewish Christians in the 17th Century,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, eds. Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), pp. 57–72, the proceedings of a conference held at the Clark Library in April 1992.

¹¹Richard H. Popkin, “The First College of Jewish Studies,” *Revue des Etudes Juives* 143 (1984), 351–364.

Millenarians must have been part of a personal ego trip, or a way to help re-establish Jews economically in England, or some such explanation. Rabbi Shapira cannot have shared the views of the Dutch Millenarians, no matter how nicely and politely he fused their views with his own.

Dick saw these men as symbols for “those of us who have consciously made a choice, have opted for a Jewish existence in a non-Jewish world.”

Here, I think, Dick’s personal prism may have distorted what was really happening, and we spent many hours disagreeing on the motivations of people like Menasseh ben Israel, and Nathan Shapira (whom Dick always called “Nate”). The story of Menasseh ben Israel and the readmission of the Jews to England is very well known by now, and the motivations of the key players have been discussed at length, not the least in a breathtaking conference which Dick helped to organize at Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in 1986.¹² Rabbi Nathan Shapira has languished in relative obscurity despite Dick’s efforts to turn him into a pioneer of Christian Judaism or Jewish Christianity.¹³

The background for the mission of Nathan Shapira to Amsterdam was the plight of Palestinian Jewry, which largely survived thanks to the flow of charity from their European brethren. The Chmielnicki massacres, the Cossack revolt, and the Swedish invasions of 1655 put an end to this comfortable arrangement. According to one contemporary report, since that time,

they have been in great extremity of want; insomuch, that in the year one thousand six hundred fifty five, four hundred of their widdows were famished to death, and the taxes laid upon them by the Turks, being rigorously exacted, they were haled into prison, their Synagogues were shut up, their Rabbi’s and Elders beaten and cruelly used.¹⁴

¹²The proceedings were printed as *Menasseh ben Israel and his World*, eds. Y. Kaplan, H. Mechoulam, and R.H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

¹³Richard H. Popkin, “Rabbi Nathan Shapira’s Visit to Amsterdam in 1657”, *Dutch Jewish History* 1 (1984), 185–205.

¹⁴[John Dury?], *An Information Concerning The Present State of the Jewish Nation in Europe and Judea* (London, 1658), pp. 4–5. This pamphlet appears in the 1945 edition of D.Wing’s *Short-Title Catalogue...1641–1700* under the name of John Dury (Wing D2863). In the 1972 edition it was removed from the canon of Dury’s writings and the entry cancelled. But on a copy of the work in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Vet. A 3e. 838) purchased in 1928 is the following notation, written in a seventeenth-century hand: “aut. Jo. Duraeo.” Portions of this important pamphlet were published in the *Miscellaneous Jewish Historical Society of England*, vol. 2 (1935), pp. 99–104. The editor claimed that he reproduced “everything of historical interest in the little work;” in fact, it is a bowdlerized text that omits the pro-Christian sentiments expressed therein by Rabbi Nathan Shapira. The censored text is published in David S. Katz, “Anonymous Advocates of the Readmission of the Jews to England,” *Michael*, 10 (1986), 117–142. Unfortunately, the defective text was the one translated into Hebrew for M. Ish-Shalom, *Christian Travels in the Holy Land* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1965), pp. 354–358.

Within a short time, the Ashkenazi Jews of Jerusalem “were brought,” according to another account, “into great extremity, not only of Famine and nakedness...but also by the imprisonment and scourgings of their Elders and Rabbyes, by their Creditors.”¹⁵ The Ashkenazim decided to send two of their men to Europe to enlist the support of their more fortunate coreligionists. One of these was Rabbi Nathan Shapira, “a man of great learning, and skill in their *Cabala*, and of a very pious, holy and humble disposition.”¹⁶ No further information whatsoever exists concerning the second ambassador; Rabbi Nathan Shapira, however, was one of the most important emissaries of the Jews of Palestine during the seventeenth century.¹⁷

He first journeyed to Italy, and there published in 1655 a book entitled *Tuv haAretz* (“The Goodness of the [Holy] Land”), with the aim of relating to mankind the holiness of Palestine according to the *kabbalah*.¹⁸ From Italy, Rabbi Nathan Shapira travelled to Hamburg, where it was noted in the community records that “he showed us letters in which was described the great distress in Jerusalem as a result of the lack of financial support from Poland, and it was decided to pay him in Venice one hundred Reichsdollars.”¹⁹

It appears that Rabbi Nathan Shapira’s next stop was Amsterdam, where he turned to the famous Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel for help in rescuing the Ashkenazi Jews of Jerusalem. Certainly Menasseh knew of their plight by December 1655, for in the course of his discussions with Oliver Cromwell about the readmission of the Jews to England, he showed him letters from Jerusalem to “other Jews in *Germany*, and *Holland*, &c: sent thither by the hand of *R. Nathan Stephira* their Messenger.” Menasseh’s letters told of the “very great streighs” of the Jews in Poland, Lithuania and Prussia due to the Swedish wars, as a result of which the “yearly Alms to the poor Jewes (of the Germane Synagogue) at *Jerusalem* hath ceased; and of 700 Widows, and poor Jews there, about four hundred have been famished, as a Letter from *Jerusalem* to their friends relates.”²⁰

Rabbi Nathan Shapira was probably also the original source of the accounts of the eastern European Jews that appeared in the London press during the Whitehall Conference, called by Oliver Cromwell in December 1655 to

¹⁵ E[dward] W[histon], *The Life and Death of Mr. Henry Jessey* (n.p., 1671), pp. 69–70. R. Nathan is referred to here as “Nathan Levita.”

¹⁶ [Dury?], *Information*, p. 5.

¹⁷ The name of the second emissary is not given here, nor in the writings of R. Nathan Shapira himself, nor in A. Ya’ari, *Emissaries from Palestine* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1951), where more information on Nathan Shapira appears, pp. 277–281.

¹⁸ Nathan Shapira, *Tuv haAretz* [Hebrew] (Venice, 1655); Ya’ari, *Emissaries*, p. 278.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ [Henry Jessey], *A Narrative of the Late Proceeds at White-Hall Concerning the Jews* (London, 1656), pp. 3–4.

discuss the question of Jewish readmission. In one number, it was reported that the Jews of Poland had presented a petition to the Emperor for protection, as they had “been soundly pillaged, and many massacred in *Poland*.”²¹ In a later issue, it was reported that many Jews had come to Hamburg, having been “ruinated and plundred of all their Goods in Poland.”²² At the same time, a news-sheet announced the impending visit to Vienna of the “Patriarch or Generall of the Jewes” from Jerusalem, connected with the appearance of an “unknown starr very bright going from the East towards the North.”²³

At any rate, sympathetic Dutch Gentiles collected money among themselves in the latter part of 1655, “and by Letters did earnestly press Mr. H.J. to further a Collection in England.”²⁴ The man behind the initials was certainly Henry Jessey (1601–1663), one of the founders of the English Baptist movement, who had been in correspondence with Menasseh at least since 1649.²⁵ Jessey was no fool, and before putting his good name behind the project, he had the commissions of the Jerusalem elders checked with Jewish leaders in Germany and the Netherlands, who testified that they knew the hands that signed those documents, as well as the sterling characters of those men, and added that they themselves had contributed on the basis of the same information. The money itself would be transported and guaranteed by two merchants from Frankfurt who demanded a letter from the congregation in Jerusalem to the Dutch Christians, “both in way of Receipt and Gratitude.” Jessey was sent the original Hebrew commissions, and these arrangements removed any doubts from his mind.²⁶ Three hundred pounds were collected in London and dispatched to Jerusalem in 1656, and a bill of receipt and a letter of thanks returned to Jessey. Some money was also sent to Poland to help the distressed Jews there as well.²⁷ Jessey’s aims were clearly conversionist: along with the money was sent a short proselytising letter from the London

²¹ *Publick Intelligencer*, 11 (10–17 December 1655), p. 169.

²² *Mercurius Politicus*, 289 (20–27 December 1655), p. [5841].

²³ *Ibid.*, 228 (13–20 December 1655), p. 5831.

²⁴ W[histon], *Jessey*, pp. 69–70. Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, vol. 2 (London, 1737–1740), i. 316–318 says that the Dutch Christians sent 500 Reichsdollars.

²⁵ See David S. Katz, “Menasseh ben Israel’s Christian Connection in England: Henry Jessey and the Jews,” in *Menasseh ben Israel*, ed. Kaplan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 117–138.

²⁶ W[histon], *Jessey*, pp. 70–78.

²⁷ *Ibid.* The letter of thanks has since disappeared: it was “an Authentique Copie, written by the said *R. Samuel* [Ben Seth], and signed by all the Elders of the High-Dutch [i.e. Ashkenazi] Synagogue at *Jerusalem*, 1657, April. 22,” and described in [Dury?], *Information*, sigs D-D2v; pp. 5–6. The Hebrew commissions have also not been found. The same source (*ibid.*, p. 5) notes that the Jerusalem Jews received about

ministers to the Jews of Jerusalem.²⁸ Jessey and John Dury sent a personal appeal of their own.²⁹

In a purely financial sense, then, Rabbi Nathan's mission was a resounding success. Sent to Europe by the Ashkenazi elders of Jerusalem, he returned with the funds which were so crucial to ensure the continuing existence of their community. Soon after his arrival in the Holy Land, however, certain disturbing reports began to filter in that suggested that he might have exceeded his brief. He had, after all, been sent to Europe to seek the assistance of *Jews*, not Christians. Rabbi Nathan argued that he had met with a flat refusal from the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam, who pointed out that they were the essential source of charity for the Sephardi Jews of Jerusalem, Hebron, and Safed, and could not commit themselves to the Ashkenazi community as well. They may have also heard of the Ashkenazi unwillingness during the years of plenty to share what charity they had garnered from eastern Europe with any community in Jerusalem but their own. This defence was deemed unsatisfactory, and according to one contemporary report, "yet nevertheless, having heard, that the Christians had assisted *Rabbi Nathan* and his Companion with a Contribution, and suspecting that they had made their application to crave their assistance from the Christians, they were intending to have disgraced him in their Synagogues."³⁰

Worse than that, rumours were beginning to circulate that Rabbi Nathan may have done an injustice to the Jews of the Holy Land in a more fundamental way. For it was "apparent by some passages of the converse of some of our friends with their chief *Rabbi Nathan Saphira*, that the sense which their more understanding Rabbi's have of the *Messiah*, is not so far distant from the Principles of Christianity as we ordinarily have imagined." Indeed, Rabbi Nathan consistently gave the impression to the Christians he spoke with in Holland, "that the frame of their Spirits, at this time is made more susceptible

£1,313 5s. from "the Christians in *Holland*": "With this money they went away; and it availed them only to discharge the Interests of their capital debts, and to make some presents to their great ones, that further time might be granted unto them, and the three hundred ninety Ducats relieved some of their private wants."

²⁸The letter is printed in W[histon], *Jessey*, pp. 72–74.

²⁹Henry Jessey and John Dury, "To the Dispersed of *Judah in Jerusalem* of the *German Synagogue*," London, 22 April 1659; printed in *ibid.*, pp. 75–77 and repr. in Katz, "Anonymous Advocates," p. 142. Both the letter of the Jews and this letter from Jessey and Dury are dated 22 April: this may be the result of confusion in the sources or a conscious attempt to recall the day two years later. It seems from a postscript to this letter that the money was sent in stages: first £40, then £172 enclosed with the letter, and the balance paid later.

³⁰[Dury?], *Information*, p. 6.

of the Truth of Gospel, then at any time heretofore.” This was the secret of his success among the ardent Protestants of Amsterdam and London, and the hopes that he raised among them for the conversion of the Jews in their day simultaneously opened their hearts and their purses.³¹

Among the Dutch Protestants who were most impressed with the apparent Christian inclination of Rabbi Nathan was Peter Serrarius of Amsterdam, that elusive mystical figure who wrote to John Dury in April 1657 recounting the discussions that he had had with Rabbi Nathan and which led him to expect the imminent conversion of the Jews. He explained that he had already seen signs of Christian feeling from Rabbi Nathan, but these were made more manifest when the Jew came unexpectedly to one of their prayer meetings where some portion of Scripture was read and discussed. In the rabbi’s honour it was decided to read that day Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. The Christians read the Dutch and gave Rabbi Nathan the Hebrew translation by Sebastian Münster, asking him what he thought of this centrepiece of the Christian tradition. Rabbi Nathan replied

that therein the ground and fountain of all Wisdom was contained, and that whosoever should keep those Commandments would be more just than he, or his people, and he took notice of some things which he thought were taken out of the most pure and antient Rabbins.

Serrarius recalled that this declaration moved them all to tears, and they offered up prayers for the Jews and for themselves, “that God would blot out our sins and theirs, and remember his Mercy.” Rabbi Nathan on his part showed how these “things seemed very much to move him, and he made no doubt to affirm openly, that if there were but ten men at Jerusalem, who should thus with one heart pray for the coming of the Messiah, that without all doubt he would suddenly come.” Serrarius told Dury that Rabbi Nathan would eat with them and take part in their prayer meetings with the easy familiarity of the regular visitor.³²

By the time that the account of Rabbi Nathan’s apparent inclination to Christianity reached England, it had already been somewhat amplified. In Serrarius’s original letter, the rabbi is shown reproving a Jew who balked at the very name of Christ, saying, “Do not say so, Let come whoever will come, our prayers and wishes are to this effect simply, That God would be pleased to reveal him.”³³ According to Baptist minister Edward Whiston, what actually happened was that

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³² Peter Serrarius to J[ohn] D[ury], April 1657: printed in [Dury?], *Information*, pp. 11–16, and repr. in Katz, “Anonymous Advocates,” pp. 139–142.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 140; and [Dury?], *Information*, p. 11.

Rabbi Nathan himself, the *Jews* Elder and Messenger consented with divers other *Jews* to be present at a religious meeting of Christians, and hearing with what fervour and affection they prayed, said they were certainly holy men, and such as they expected their Nation should be at the coming of the *Messiah*, who would come quickly had they such a spirit of prayer.

These Jews thought so well of Christian devotions and “seeing our love to them, and hope for them would often say, *If Jesus be the Messiah, Oh that he would come! Let him come, Let him come, whoever he be!*” Whiston concluded that many of these Jews “seemed not far from the Kingdom of God”, and noted that if this pleasant path of persuasion had been followed at the Jewish council reputedly held near Buda in 1650 to discuss the question of the messiah, the results could have been similarly dramatic.³⁴

In fairness to Rabbi Nathan, he did take pains to bring up the subject of the poor Ashkenazi Jews of Jerusalem on every possible occasion. When asked how it felt to be a despised Jew, whose life was in danger as he travelled across Europe, Nathan replied that it was nothing compared with “the calamities and extream Straits of the poor at *Jerusalem*.” The interpretation Serrarius made of his remarks was after all not the concern of Rabbi Nathan. “What do you think?” Serrarius asked Dury. “Is it to be believed that Christ is far distant from a soul thus constituted?” Rabbi Nathan’s discussion, even about Christ, remained within the boundaries of the Jewish tradition – just. Was it his fault that Serrarius was so encouraged about the conversion of the Jews? “For my own part,” Serrarius informed Dury, “I confess I think I see Christ in his Spirit; and I cannot but love him, and those that are like him, of which he saith many are at *Jerusalem*: for I esteem them the true brethren of him, that is, our *Christ*.” Rabbi Nathan had achieved his goal: Serrarius, and through him Jessey, Dury and many others, were convinced that Nathan was the harbinger and the representative of a community of Jews in Jerusalem who were one small step away from accepting the pure Christianity of Protestantism and thereby bringing about the Second Coming of the Messiah.³⁵

Rabbi Nathan had therefore in a sense received the money under false pretences. The Ashkenazi Jews of Jerusalem were undoubtedly in a desperate state, but they had no intention of accepting Jesus as the messiah either before or after the charity was received. Dury had the impression “that there is no inconsistency, but rather a Consonancy with the Promise, that Jesus shall be revealed to them as *Joseph* was once to his Brethren.” Rabbi Nathan’s words

³⁴ W[histon], *Jessey*, pp. 77–78. This “Jewish Council” was no doubt a fairy-tale version of the sessions of the Council of Four Lands.

³⁵ [Dury?], *Information*, pp. 15–16.

showed him “that the Lord doth prepare a way for them to be converted unto Christianity,” and the crowning proof of this was

Namely, that some of those afflicted Jews at *Jerusalem* begin now to confess, That their Forefathers did wickedly in putting *Jesus of Nazareth* to death, and that he was a just man, and the Spirit of the Messiah was in him, and that for putting him and others to death, they ought to repent, seeing they cannot attribute this great wrath which is gone forth against them to any other cause so remarkable as to this sin.³⁶

It is surely a debatable point to what extent Rabbi Nathan should be held responsible for the interpretation of his words. In his defence, it was said that “the supply came not by any application of the Rabbi to the Christians; but by the free offering of the Christians to help him without his craving of it.” The anger at Rabbi Nathan’s behaviour seems to have died down with the acceptance of this argument, that “the Rabbi only received what was freely offered.” Furthermore, at least in England it was understood by Dury, Jessey and others that the very fact that the Jews of Jerusalem were willing to take help from Gentiles demonstrated the “greatness of their straits,” more than anything else.³⁷

Rabbi Nathan Shapira’s later career seems not to have been unduly harmed by this flirtation with the conversionist Protestants of England and Holland. In 1657, he signed a letter of introduction given to two rabbis who were sent as emissaries of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem to Italy, to try to continue the fund-raising enterprise that he had begun. More importantly, at the end of 1657, soon after his return to Jerusalem, he himself was sent once again to Italy, and there received from Jerusalem a copy of the famous letter by Rabbi Baruch Gad which purported to contain a message from the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, and was used with great effect by Palestinian emissaries to Europe during this period.³⁸ Of Rabbi Nathan’s private life in Jerusalem all we know is that on the basis of the permission of a hundred rabbis he took a second wife and lived with the two women in the courtyard of the Sephardi synagogue in the city. He wrote several important halakhic works and died in Italy in 1666.³⁹

And so, back to Richard Popkin. In an article about Rabbi Nathan Shapira which Popkin published in 1984, he claimed that

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁸ Ya’ari, *Emissaries*, p. 280. For more on the letter of Baruch Gad, see Katz, “Christian Connection,” pp. 141–142. Curiously, the letter appears as well in I.B. Singer, *Satan in Goray*, Chapter 1.

³⁹ Ya’ari, *Emissaries*, p. 280. Cf. Nathan Shapira, *Sefer Matzoth Shmurim* (Venice, 1660); and idem, *Ma’amar Yayin HaM’shumar* (Venice, 1660).

This most positive appreciation of Jesus that so excited the Millenarians Serrarius, Dury, Jessey and Homes, may also have influenced Spinoza, who after his excommunication was befriended by Serrarius and his associates. The startling views of the Rabbi from Jerusalem must have been known throughout the Collegiant and Millenarian worlds in which Spinoza was living. As yet I have found no evidence that Spinoza knew Rabbi Shapira personally. However, the Rabbi had prepared the ground for Spinoza's view of Christianity – a Jewish version of Christianity, rather than a Jewish denial of it...the final results of the Rabbi's visit may be in Spinoza's interpretation of Christianity, and in the effects of the Sabbatian movement in Holland and England among Christian Millenarians...It may have provided Spinoza with a way of interpreting Christianity positively without becoming a Christian, and it may provide the link between the Millenarian movements in England and Holland the Messianic one developing around Sabbatai Zevi, with effects that we may not yet understand.⁴⁰

I count five “mays” in that last quotation. In “Judaism-Katz volume,” as we have seen, Popkin scolds those misguided souls who argue that “Rabbi Shapira cannot have shared the views of the Dutch Millenarians, no matter how nicely and politely he fused their views with his own.” He means me. For Dick, a man like Rabbi Nathan Shapira was a symbol, a precursor for “those of us who have consciously made a choice, have opted for a Jewish existence in a non-Jewish world”, creating a fusion between Christian and Jewish culture.

We know that at some level, all historians are writing autobiography, which is a problem. How can an academic who has never heard a shot fired in anger write convincingly about warfare? Our academic politics may be vicious as politics in the real world, but only because (as Henry Kissinger famously observed) the stakes are so low.⁴¹ But even so, how can we possibly comprehend the essence of imperial, royal, or presidential diplomacy? One of my hobby horses thirty years ago was that the Christian Hebraists did not really know much Hebrew. Dick chided me that what I was really saying was that they knew less Hebrew than I did. I fully admit that when I read about Rabbi Nathan Shapira, I am overly influenced by what I have seen of Jewish lobbyists and *schmoozers* covering the entire alphabet from AIPAC to the Zionist executive. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert recently flew to America, yarmulke in hand,

⁴⁰Popkin, “Nathan Shapira,” pp. 202–205. In “Judaism-Katz volume,” Popkin writes that “David Katz and I keep looking for actual evidence that the Sabbatai Zevi movement emerged from a Quaker context.”

⁴¹Manda J. Seaver, “A Conversation with Kissinger,” *American Association of Neurological Surgeons Bulletin*, 12 (2003), 41.

looking for American support. On the eve of his visit, Olmert gave an interview to the *New York Times* in which he said that he wakes up every morning and says to himself, “Thank God there is America, thank God there is George W. Bush, thank God there is Condi Rice, the most decent people that I can talk with and take counsel with them and get their advice and get their support.”⁴² In private conversation with President Bush, I wouldn’t be surprised if he even made a passing reference to the teachings of Jesus, suggesting “that therein the ground and fountain of all Wisdom was contained, and that whosoever should keep those Commandments would be more just than he.”⁴³

Dick Popkin was a “close reader” long before people started using the term, and in a time when the prevailing historiographical trend was often going in the opposite direction with regard to the early modern period. In England at least, whose intellectual history occupied so much of Dick’s research in the 1980s and early 1990s, Christopher Hill and his pupil Keith Thomas ruled the roost, and their research method was based on surveying a vast quantity of primary sources, mining them for gobbets of evidence that could be hung on a general framework of argument, like ornaments on a Christmas tree. Many of us trained in this way – and even students in the rival Trevor-Roper camp were usually infected – tended to suffer from New York Syndrome, the nagging unease that whatever you’re doing at the moment is not as interesting as what is going on somewhere else, or in this case, coming up the dumb waiter from the Bodleian stacks.

Dick Popkin was not trained as an historian, and that was a good thing. In many ways, he was a literary critic, in the New Historicist style. Like the best of that school, Dick was able to take a document that others had read before, and understand its overlooked significance. I myself was more than once the victim of his academic x-ray vision. My greatest humiliation was in regard to Spinoza and the Quakers. In the spring of 1984, Dick and I were working in the Friends’ House Library in London. The library was small, but the building was huge, and had the largest and most elaborate rest rooms that we had ever seen. The cafeteria in the basement was Dick’s favourite, because the lady at the till would always enquire, “Are you a Friend?” and reward a positive response with a pound discount. Dick’s daily insistence that he was a “friend of a Friend” tested her commitment to non-violence to the utmost.

Anyway, I was looking at the reports of Quaker missionaries as they tried to convert the Jews in seventeenth-century England and Holland, and came

⁴² Steven Erlanger and Greg Myre, “Israel Will Buy Supplies for Gaza Hospitals, Premier Says,” *New York Times*, 19 May 2006, p. 12.

⁴³ I can imagine Dick shaking his head and saying “fiddlesticks, and pish and tosh,” as he wrote to me on 10 January 1993 in a fax disagreeing with my “crazy view that one cannot do European history in America” because the libraries were inadequate.

across a letter from William Ames to Margaret Fell (Fox), dated 17 April 1657 from Utrecht, concerning a possible translator from Dutch to Hebrew for her pamphlet addressed to the Jews:

there is a Jew at Amsterdam that by the Jews is cast out (as he himselfe and others sayeth) because he owneth no other teacher but the light and he sent for me and I spoke to him and he was pretty tender and doth owne all that is spoken; and he sayde to read of moyses and the prophets without was nothing to him except he Came to know it within: and soe the name of Christ it is like he doth owne⁴⁴:

The thought that this Jew might be Spinoza may have passed through my sub-conscious mind, but if it did, I could hardly believe that someone had not been there before me, investigated and dismissed the suggestion as implausible. When Dick Popkin worked through the same material, he actually read it properly, instead of mining it for historical data and illustration as I was taught to do. Although not everyone agrees with Dick that this “Jew at Amsterdam that by the Jews is cast out” is Spinoza, it is an intriguing idea and always worth repeating.

But that is not the end of the story. Shortly thereafter, I happened to be reading the 27 January 1956 number of the *Jewish Chronicle*, and I came across an article in the magazine section. It was entitled “Quakers and Jews,” and was written by a certain David Carrington, who had gone over the same manuscripts in the same library almost thirty years before Dick and I had our Friend-less lunches there. Carrington in 1956 had already suggested Spinoza as the unidentified Jew in the text, although his article immediately sank into oblivion.⁴⁵ I gave Dick a copy of Carrington’s article, and when he published his book on *Spinoza’s Earliest Publication?*, Dick included a long addendum

⁴⁴ Ames to Fell, 17 Apr. 1657, from Utrecht: Friends’ House Library, MS Swarthmore 4/28r.

⁴⁵ David Carrington, “Quakers and Jews,” *Jewish Chronicle Special Supplement: Tercentenary of the Settlement of the Jews in the British Isles 1656–1956* (27 Jan. 1956), p. 46. The Jew in question translated from a Dutch version into Hebrew the pamphlet by Margaret Fell, *A Loving Salutation to the...Jewes* (London, 1656). Actually, Carrington was not the only one, nor the first to identify Spinoza here: see H.G. Crosfield, *Margaret Fox of Swarthmoor* (London: Headley Brothers, 1913), p. 50n.; W.I. Hull, *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam 1655–1665* (Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College, 1938), p. 205; I. Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism* (London: Longmans, 1949), p. 94; H.J. Cadbury, “Spinoza and a Quaker Document of 1657”, *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (1943), 130–133; *idem*, ed., *The Swarthmore Documents in America* (London, 1940), p. 7; L. Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1958), p. 49; L. Roth, “Hebraists and Non-Hebraists of the Seventeenth Century”, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 6 (1961), 211; J. Van Den Berg, “Quaker and Chiliast: The Contrary Thoughts of William Ames and Petrus Serrarius”, in *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall*, ed. R. Buick Knox (London: Epworth, 1977), pp. 182–183.

citing Carrington, to “give credit where credit is due.”⁴⁶ That was typical of Dick Popkin, who saw research as an ongoing conversation among scholars living and dead.

There is an old joke that says that a typical *hespaid*, a funeral oration, has three parts. The first part is about “*haManoach*”, the deceased. The second deals with “the deceased and me.” The third is just about “me.” I edited two *Festschriften* for Dick Popkin (the first with Jonathan Israel, the second with James Force); Dick and I wrote a book together that failed to make us rich; and our correspondence over twenty-five years takes up a good chunk of a filing cabinet in my office.⁴⁷ In a letter to me, dated 18 October 1993, Dick Popkin wrote:

This holiday season I spiritually adopted the Quaker view – to be a Jew externally is nothing, and to be a Jew internally is everything. So now I am a Quaker in spirit, and probably will become one in fact ere long. External Judaism looks to me now as non plus ultra of idolatry, the worship of the clock, the calendar, the stars, the stomach, the non-food, the food, etc. etc. As a non-idolater I have to stay where the pure moral spirit can function unfettered by you know what.⁴⁸

It may be then, that Dick finally was eligible for that pound discount in the Friends’ House cafeteria, but I think that in his own way he was, as we say in the trade, “a good Jew.” He was also an emphatic American, and in his pilgrim’s progress he exemplified the words of John Bunyan, who reminded his readers “that at the day of doom, men shall be judged according to their fruits. It will not be said then, ‘Did you believe?’ but, ‘Were you *doers*, or *talkers* only?’ and accordingly shall they be judged.”⁴⁹ *Y’hi zichro baruch*.

⁴⁶Richard H. Popkin and Michael A. Signer, *Spinoza’s Earliest Publication?* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987). See Popkin’s earlier work about the Quakers: “Spinoza, the Quakers and the Millenarians, 1656–1658,” *Manuscripta*, 6 (1982), 113–133; *idem*, “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam,” *Quaker History*, 73 (1984), 14–28; *idem*, “Spinoza and Samuel Fisher,” *Philosophia*, 15 (1985), 219–236. See also Richard H. Popkin, “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam,” in his *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 120–134.

⁴⁷*Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, eds. David S. Katz and Jonathan I. Israel (Leiden: Brill, 1990); *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin*, eds. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Katz and Popkin, *Messianic Revolution*.

⁴⁸RHP to DSK, 18 Oct. 1993, fax.

⁴⁹John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 115.

14. THE SPIRIT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY IN THE ANTI-SABBATEAN POLEMICS OF HAKHAM DAVID NIETO

Matt Goldish

I had many conversations with Dick Popkin about Hakham David Nieto and his unique place in the rapidly shifting world of Jewish thought at the turn of the eighteenth century. Dick thought Nieto, as a critic of the Shabbatai Zvi movement, was an anti-enthusiastic sceptic. He was especially interested, however, in Nieto's positive stance toward both science and Kabbalah. Nieto's diplomatic solution to the problem of the age of the *Zohar* places him squarely in the middle of Dick's sceptical tradition. My investigations into Nieto's thought, like everything else I do, are heavily colored by both Dick's advice and his published research. This will be immediately clear to anyone who peruses the footnotes below. *Yehe zikhro barukh*.

Perhaps no passage in the voluminous writings of the Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem is more famous than his comment at the end of his 1937 essay "Mitzvah ha-Ba'ah be-Averah" (translated as "Redemption through Sin")¹ positing a close connection between the messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi, which peaked in 1665–1666, and the rise of Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) and Reform. Describing the Sabbatean believers of the eighteenth century, he comments,

Even while still "believers"—in fact, precisely because they were "believers"—they had been drawing closer to the spirit of the *Haskalah* all along, so that when the flame of their faith finally flickered out they soon reappeared as leaders of Reform Judaism, secular intellectuals, or simply complete and indifferent skeptics.... Men like [the Sabbatean] Wehle intended to use the *Haskalah* for their own Sabbatian ends, but in the meanwhile the *Haskalah* went its way and proceeded to make use of them.... The leaders of the "School of Mendelssohn," who were neither Sabbatians themselves, of course, nor under the influence of mysticism at all, to say nothing of mystical heresy, found ready recruits for their cause in Sabbatian circles, where the world of rabbinic Judaism had already been completely destroyed from

¹ Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 140–141.

within, quite independently of the efforts of secularist criticism. Those who had survived the ruin were now open to any alternative or wind of change; and so, their “mad visions” behind them, they turned their energies and hidden desires for a more positive life to assimilation and the Haskalah...²

Some other recent scholarship, particularly that of Andrew C. Fix, has demonstrated how prophetic, apocalyptic, messianic, or mystical movements, especially in the early modern era, became the direct progenitors of rationalist or secularizing trends.³ Related ideas were expressed earlier in the twentieth century in the field of anthropology through the “cargo cult” model, which articulates the evolution of apocalyptic yearning into modern political consciousness.⁴ The “Yates Thesis” in the history of science, proposing the metamorphosis of astrology, alchemy, and other occult arts into modern science, follows a similar pattern.⁵

The more easily recognizable pattern, nevertheless, is that the forces *opposing* such occult and prophetic “enthusiasm” were those associated with reason, science, and Enlightenment.⁶ The prophets and apocalyptics were painted by their opponents as gullible believers in superstition, parlor tricks, mind games, and charlatanism. The opponents, meanwhile, were most often associated with scientific societies and rationalist branches of the church. It is impor-

²Ibid. On responses to Scholem’s view, see the literature quoted in Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 210 n. 16 and 17.

³See Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁴This model is stripped down to its essentials and explained with particular cogency in I.C. Jarvie, *The Revolution in Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: H. Regnery, 1967). For a discussion of Sabbateanism and the cargo cult model, see Hillel Levine, “Frankism as a ‘Cargo Cult’ and the Haskalah Connection: Myth, Ideology and the Modernization of Jewish Consciousness,” in *Essays in Modern Jewish History: A Tribute to Ben Halperin* eds. F. Molino and P.C. Albert (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1982), 81–94.

⁵See, e.g., Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1964); eudem, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Henry M. Pachter, *Magic Into Science: The Story of Paracelsus* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1951) (for the title as much as the book).

⁶Such an examination is conducted by Michael Heyd, “Be Sober and Reasonable”: *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). See also Hillel Schwartz, *Knaves, Fools, Madmen and that Subtile Effluvium: A Study of the Opposition to the French Prophets in England, 1706–1710* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1978). Note the proximity of the French Prophets’ activity in London to the polemic of Hakham Nieto discussed below.

tant to note that while radical sceptics such as the deists and Spinozists were certainly critics of enthusiasm (a category in which they might have included all religion), most of the anti-enthusiasm activists came from *within* the churches – they saw unsanctioned individual revelation as a threat to establishment religious authority. These opponents marshaled arguments based on historical perspective, science, textual scholarship, and logic to discredit the enthusiasts. Despite the work of Yates, Fix, and Scholem, then, the opponents of enthusiasm rather than its practitioners seem much more likely antecedents of the Enlightenment

It is odd, then, that in the Jewish context it is the Sabbateans who have been proposed as the eager audience for Haskalah and secularism, while little is said of their opponents in this regard. The more vociferous members of this group have been well studied, but I do not think many people have noticed how different they seem from the opponents of contemporary enthusiastic movements in the Christian world of Europe. At least two of the opponents, in fact – Hakhams Jacob Sasportas and Moses Hagiz – were themselves enthusiasts who believed they experienced direct messages from God.⁷ It thus appears that opposition to religious enthusiasm in the Jewish world was not analogous to that in the European Christian world.⁸

There are at least two examples, however, of opponents of the Sabbateans from the second generation who did exhibit more of the rationalist eighteenth-century spirit associated with Christian anti-enthusiasts: Rabbi Jacob Emden and Hakham David Nieto. An outstanding discussion of Emden's relationship with modernizing trends and Haskalah has already been presented by Jacob J. Schacter, laying out the issues involved as well as the positions of Emden.⁹ I will not enter the depths of analysis plumbed by Schacter, but I will mention a bit of what I mean by "the eighteenth-century spirit" before discussing Nieto.

The Cambridge scholar Basil Willey opens his famous book, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, with the comment that, "Whereas for the seventeenth century 'Truth' seemed to be the key-word, this time it is 'Nature'."¹⁰

⁷See Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 51–52; Goldish, *Sabbatean Prophets*, 149–151.

⁸In Goldish, *Sabbatean Prophets*, 141–151, I describe some ways in which Hakham Jacob Sasportas's opposition to the Sabbateans was similar to European opposition to enthusiasm, but there are definite limits to this common ground.

⁹Jacob J. Schacter, "Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1988), Chapters 6–7.

¹⁰Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), v.

Indeed, questions about nature, natural law, natural religion, natural history, the nature of man, and man's place in nature, frame the thought of Western Europe in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth centuries. Renaissance Humanism had diverted attention away from a focus on man's place in the Church toward man's place in the cosmos and the natural world. The ancients were thought to know a great deal about this topic, so ancient literatures (including the Bible) were assiduously studied. Among the outcomes of this research was the development of an interest in the natural history of texts, and in history more generally. The voyages of discovery brought knowledge of worlds previously unknown in Europe, and the scientific revolution brought news of hidden worlds visible through the telescope and microscope. Scientists, or natural philosophers, also identified the universal laws of nature, and many thinkers sought to understand the spiritual world through similar laws. As the scientific, geographical, political, economic, and religious upheavals of early modern Europe destabilized society, this progress in understanding nature became a new haven of stability for many. (Others, as Richard H. Popkin has shown, sought stability in prophecy and apocalypticism, but these almost always ended up contributing to instability.)¹¹ Thus, the study of nature and history were key aspects of the eighteenth-century spirit. It is the development of what might be called the Conservative Enlightenment out of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thought.¹²

For Jews there were additional keys as well. As David Ruderman has pointed out, no institutions existed within the Jewish world to accommodate study of nature or history at that time, so, if a Jew was interested in these

¹¹ Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). On the tension between communal stability and messianism, see Lionel Kochan, *Jews, Idols and Messiahs: The Challenge from History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

¹² Readers of recent literature on the Enlightenment might think it was all radical; see, e.g., Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981); Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). This impression is misleading, though this was surely not the intention of those authors. The term “Conservative Enlightenment” is used by Bernard Cotrett to describe the attitude of Lord Bolingbroke; see *Bolingbroke's Political Writings* ed. B. Cotrett (New York: St. Martin's, 1997). The atmosphere of physico-theology and conservative Anglicanism in Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), while not described as such there, characterizes a conservative early Enlightenment strand. While the conditions and background are quite different, a conservative Catholic Enlightenment might be the effect of Jansenism in France for a period, as described in Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution, from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

areas, it necessarily meant deeper contact with non-Jews, their ideas, and their languages.¹³ Now, there was no novelty in a Jew having close contacts with the non-Jewish world. It may have been more the norm than the exception throughout much of history. A rabbi's deep intellectual engagement with the latest developments in that world, however, might signal a change in attitudes, especially after the thirteenth century in Europe.¹⁴ While I would hesitate to suggest that Hakham Nieto was a precursor of the Haskalah, some of the ideas and attitudes reflected in his anti-Sabbatean polemics indicate that his thought had much more of the eighteenth-century Conservative Enlightenment spirit than that of most earlier and contemporary rabbis.

Hakham David Nieto and the London Community

Hakham David Nieto (1654–1728) had a distinguished career before arriving in London. He was born in Livorno, Italy, to a Sephardic family with *converso* background and was thoroughly trained in traditional rabbinic studies. He also earned a degree in medicine at the University of Padua, one of the few European schools which would accept Jewish students. It was certainly there that he was inculcated with his lifelong love of science and mathematics. In Livorno Hakham Nieto worked as both a rabbi and a physician. In 1701 he was invited to fill the position of Hakham of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' congregation in London, where he replaced Hakham Solomon Aailion, who had left for the more prestigious rabbinate of Amsterdam. Apparently the position of Hakham in London was a full time job, because a proviso in Hakham Nieto's contract forbade him from practicing medicine in London.

The Sephardic community of London, like that of Livorno, was made up largely of *conversos* and their descendants. These were people whose Jewish ancestors had apostatized to Catholicism, either in Spain during the heavy conversionary pressure of 1391 to 1492, or in Portugal during the forced baptism of 1497. These families lived as Catholics, often for many generations, before fleeing the Iberian Peninsula for the freer lands of Western Europe. Some of the London congregants had grown up as Jews because their parents or grandparents had already returned to the Judaism of their forebears; others were first generation "new Jews". The community was heavily focused on commerce and most people had little interest in theological matters, though there were some who did.

¹³Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), Epilogue.

¹⁴See Schacter's detailed discussion of these issues, n. 9 above.

Hakham Nieto had apparently published nothing before arriving in London. Soon after his arrival his book *Pascologia* (1703, in Italian) appeared, explaining the relationship between the dates of Easter and Passover. His next major work, *De la divina Providencia* (On Divine Providence, 1704) has a complex background. Hakham Nieto was accused by a congregant of making the heretical pantheistic claim that nature and God are the same thing. Nieto explained that he made the statement in response to a student who had spoken to others at the yeshivah about deistic opinions he had heard. His purpose was to prove precisely that the term *teva'* (nature) in Hebrew is relatively new to the language, and means nothing other than God's providence in the physical world. The congregant would not accept this, a great dispute ensued, and Hakham Nieto wrote the book to articulate his position more fully. His next great work was *Matteh Da"n ve-Kuzari Sheni* (The Staff of Dan and Second Kuzari; 1714), which appeared in both Hebrew and Spanish. This was a polemic against the strong *converso* tendency to dismiss the rabbinic tradition of oral law and claim that only the written Bible has authority. Soon thereafter, in 1715, he published *Esh Dat* (The Fire of Law), his remonstrance against the Sabbatean adventurer Nehemiah Hiyya Hayyun, which will be discussed below. A polemic against the Inquisition and Catholic theology appeared in 1723–1724. Hakham Nieto published some small sermons and eulogies as well, but these five books were his major intellectual legacy.¹⁵

The Hayyun controversy unfolded on the background of the continued adherence of many Jews to their faith in the messianic mission of Sabbatai Zevi. Although Sabbatai had converted to Islam in 1666 and died in 1676, the movement surrounding him did not disappear. One group of believers in Greece and Turkey converted to Islam in imitation of Sabbatai in the 1680s, and continued their faith in secret. Another group in Italy hosted various prophets who foretold Sabbatai's triumphant return. A third group were students of the Sabbatean theologian and *converso* physician Abraham Miguel Cardoso (d. 1706). A fourth group moved en masse to Palestine under the direction of one Rabbi Judah Hasid in 1700, hoping to force God's hand to

¹⁵ See Jakob J. Petuchowski, *The Theology of Hakham David Nieto: An Eighteenth-Century Defense of the Jewish Tradition* (New York: Ktav, 1954; revised edition, 1970); Israel Solomons, *David Nieto, Haham of the Spanish & Portuguese Jews' Congregation Kahal Kados Sahar Asamaim London (1701–1728)* (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne & Co., 1931; reprinted from "David Nieto and Some of His Contemporaries" in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 12 [1931]).

return the messiah.¹⁶ No disappointment was so great that it could crush the faith of the believers.

It is hard to say how much Nehemiah Hiyya Hayyun (1655–1730)¹⁷ was a believer in the messianic mission of Sabbatai Zevi, how much he was a believer in his own spiritual calling, and how much he was simply a charlatan. Hayyun was a very learned rabbinic scholar who was raised and served as a rabbi in the Balkans, Palestine, and Egypt before openly presenting himself as a Sabbatean visionary around 1711. Thereafter he wandered all around Europe, publishing a book under his own name which had long circulated as the work of Sabbatai Zevi, and forging or falsifying approbations to this and his own books. He promulgated a theology which, though full of learned citations from classical Kabbalah, contained not only older heretical Sabbatean aspects, but also doctrines of a dual or tripartite God who can be measured physically. What had to be particularly troubling for Hakham Nieto was that his predecessor in the London rabbinate, Hakham Aailion (who, as it turns out, was a secret Sabbatean believer) welcomed Hayyun to Amsterdam amidst the outrage of the anti-Sabbatean forces. *Esh Dat* is Nieto's response to Hayyun, but its contents fit a much larger pattern in Nieto's thought.¹⁸

Nieto's Polemics Against Hayyun

The *Esh Dat*, like most of Nieto's major works, is presented in the form of a dialogue. In the first day's discussion between the questioner, Naphtali, and the sage, Dan (an acronym for David Nieto), Nieto rails against Hayyun's forgeries and cites letters of colleagues complaining about Hayyun's underhandedness. He moves on to quote extensively from Hayyun's works and point out the outrageous heresies in them. Embedded in this discussion is a great deal of Nieto's theology, some of it quite novel. Dan also explains to Naphtali why the Kabbalah should be seen as an integral and holy part of the Jewish tradition, despite the gross misuses of it perpetrated by Hayyun. The second day is spent on more defenses of the Kabbalah and Jewish oral tradition. While Hayyun and his errors are the launching point for these discussions, Nieto always

¹⁶On these movements and developments see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973); idem, *Messianic Idea; Sefunot* 3–4 (1960) and *Sefunot* 14 (1971–1977); Abraham Miguel Cardozo: *Selected Writings* ed., trans., and intro. David J. Halperin (New York: Paulist, 2001); R.H. Popkin and Stephanie Chasin, "The Sabbatean Movement in Turkey (1703–1708) and Reverberations in Northern Europe," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94:2 (2004), 300–317.

¹⁷Note that Hayyun was an almost exact contemporary of Hakham Nieto.

¹⁸On Hayyun see Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1988), 412–416. On the controversies surrounding him see Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, Chapters 4–6.

seems more interested in his overweening pedagogical mission: to teach Jews – especially his undereducated former-*converso* congregants – the tenets of Jewish faith through examples from medicine, science, and modern discoveries as well as logic and tradition. Aspects of this dialogue betray a specifically eighteenth-century spirit.¹⁹

One important component in the *Esh Dat* is Nieto's very unusual use of arguments for God's existence and providence *ex consensu gentium*. As Petuchowski points out, this was an extraordinary approach among Jewish scholars, whose arguments had always come from logic and tradition.²⁰ The role of Indians and Africans, who are sometimes in agreement with Jewish tenets of faith and sometimes at odds with them, is especially striking in these passages.

Concerning the existence and power of God, Dan (Nieto) says,

Dan: I call heaven and earth to witness that I have never heard greater heresy than this in my life. For behold, even the men of the East Indies, who are pagans, agree and say that there is a God, the creator of heaven and earth, Who has no beginning; and that it was He who created the minor deities which are appointed over mankind. They are His servants and under his sovereignty. The inhabitants of the Kingdom of China say the same thing. In fact, there is no person in the world laying claim to human intelligence who does not believe that there is a God, the creator of heaven and earth, Who is unique and infinite in His power and ability.²¹

And again,

I call heaven and earth to witness that I have investigated and studied all the religions and practices of the world; and I have found that it is not only the Christians and Turks [Muslims] who believe in our three central principles – the existence of God, Torah from heaven, and reward and punishment (though

¹⁹Petuchowski and Ruderman have noted this point and do a fine job of presenting and explaining Nieto's relationship with contemporary ideas, but there are more aspects of the historical context to be explored. See Petuchowski, *Theology*, especially Chapter 8; Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, 325–331.

²⁰Petuchowski, *ibid.*, 110–112. While Petuchowski claims that the argument *de consensu gentium* is unique to Nieto, I would argue that the twelfth-century Jewish philosophical classic *Kuzari* of Rabbi Judah ha-Levi (the model for Nieto's *Kuzari Sheni*) also uses a form this argument. In Part I, the king of the Khazars decides to invite a Jewish rabbi to present his religion because the Christian, Muslim, and Aristotelian scholars have made so much reference to the origins of their philosophies in the Bible of the Jews.

²¹Nieto, *Esh Dat*, 9r, translated in Petuchowski, *ibid.*, with my minor modifications.

they differ from us in the interpretation)—but even most of the inhabitants of the East Indies and most people of the West Indies. So too do most of the residents of Africa, who are black and barbarians and worship the sun, moon, all hosts of heaven, cattle, wild animals of the field, snakes, crocodiles, creeping vermin, and everything man makes with the craft of his hand out of wood and stone—they believe and announce that after death it will be well for the righteous, but evildoers will be tortured and punished with awful, evil tortures for endless generations.²²

Petuchowski suggests that this argument is related to the contemporary idea of natural religion, and that the reference to China is typical of deist arguments.²³ This is too narrow a view, for the appeal to examples from China and other distant lands, and indeed the idea of natural religion, were by no means the sole province of deists – Latitudinarian divines, physico-theologists, anti-enthusiasts, and authors of all types made use of these tropes. Malebranche wrote an essay on the differences between between Christian and Chinese philosophy, while the Marquis d’Argens produced a fictional set of *Lettres chinoises, ou, Correspondance philosophique, historique et critique, entre un chinois voyageur à Paris & ses correspondans à la Chine, en Moscovie, en Perse & au Japon* (1739–1740) as a way to comment on European society. In his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, Pierre Bayle (1634–1706) dedicated extensive discussions to Japan, India, and China. Amazingly, and perhaps not coincidentally, a large excursus on the Chinese and the Fo sect is located in a footnote to Bayle’s article about the Jewish philosopher Spinoza!²⁴ References to Asians, Africans, and American natives were ubiquitous in the writing and thought of Christian thinkers of the period – but not among Jews.²⁵

Writing further on about belief in an afterlife, whose tenets he thinks Hayyun denies, Nieto makes even more arguments based on beliefs of other peoples. Here he begins to separate the beliefs of Jews, Christians, and Muslims from

²²Nieto, *Esh Dat*, 15v; adapted with many changes from the translation by Petuchowski, *Theology*, 24.

²³Petuchowski, *ibid*, 112.

²⁴Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. and ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 288–293. See also J.G.A. Pocock, “Gibbon and the Idol Fo: Chinese and Christian History in the Enlightenment,” in *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, eds. D.S. Katz and J.I. Israel (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 15–34.

²⁵Figures like Abraham Farissol and Abraham Yagel Gallico, about whom David Ruderman writes, were exceptional, though certainly not unique. See Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981), Chapter 11; *idem*, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

those of “pagans” like the Indians. Naphtali quotes Hayyun saying that if the Jews worship the completely transcendent infinite Godhead (*En Soph*) rather than the God of Israel (which he understands to be a separate entity), they are no better than other peoples. Dan replies that “The Christians and Turks [Muslims] admit that before the masters of their practice [*ba’alei nimusam*; i.e. Christianity and Islam] arrived they were idolaters. But when they did come they taught them to worship the First Cause...”²⁶ The implication is that Christians and Muslims learned correct worship from the founders of their religions, and now they are in agreement with the Jews on this. He is clearly distinguishing between the errors of pagans and the shared truth of the three monotheistic faiths.

Dan turns the tables of Hayyun’s reasoning back on him at this point. Hayyun’s argument had been that if the Jews worship the same deity as other peoples then they must be doing something wrong. By the same logic, says Dan, maybe Hayyun thinks Jews should not believe anything that other nations believe:

Should we not celebrate the holidays of the Lord because they [Christians and Muslims] also have holidays and festivals, each one in its own manner? Should we have no synagogues because they too have houses of worship? Should we not believe in an afterlife of the soul because they believe in it? Should we also not believe in providence or reward and punishment? Is there any stupidity, stubbornness, or evil greater than this?²⁷

Dan: I will further answer you with a question. Why [does Hayyun] believe in metempsychosis [*gilgul*]? For, look — Pythagoras and Plato believed in it, as can be seen in their books! So, too, do many kingdoms in the East Indies, which is why they do not eat any living creature — lest the soul of his father, brothers, or other relatives be found in it. Rather, it is clear that this deceiver [Hayyun] is nothing but a fool, a boor, an evildoer and a heretic, for he does not want us to believe in a deity in the manner of the Christians and Muslims, whose faith in this matter [worship of the one Infinite God] is similar to ours. He would prefer us to believe as do the idolatrous Indians, who say that the Infinite [*En Sof*] neither relates to the lower creatures nor knows of them. He created smaller deities who would make man, for it was beneath His dignity to deal with man, who comes into being and leaves it; and all the more so other creatures...I have heard people say that [Hayyun] was glorified among the Christians because he taught the doctrine of the Trinity among the Jews. But by the life of my head [I say] he has lies and deceit under his tongue, for the approach of the Christians is closer to ours than to his. They believe as we do that God is the Infinite

²⁶ Nieto, *Esh Dat*, 16v–17r.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 17v.

and the First Cause; they differ from us in their claim that He is unified in identity but tripartite in aspects. We say He is absolute and simple unity in every way. But according to him [Hayyun], God is the Second Cause, with which he makes a trinity. If they [Christians] knew that this is his view they would burn him in a perpetual consuming fire, for it is entirely contradictory to their faith.

Naphtali: So, he agrees neither with us nor with them!

Dan: It is indeed so. His faith is neither like ours, nor that of the Christians, nor that of the Muslims, but rather like the faith of the East Indians who are idolaters, or like the Philosopher of Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi who neither knew nor worshiped God.²⁸

When we compare these various passages, Nieto's view of the Indians appears paradoxical. In the earlier sections he represented their theology as sound: they believe in one supreme God and an afterlife with rewards and punishments. In this later passage we learn that they believe not simply in an afterlife, but in metempsychosis – as does Hayyun, and presumably anyone who accepts the Kabbalah, for this is a standard kabbalistic doctrine. But Nieto excoriates Hayyun for his belief in the idolatrous ideas of the Indians, among which he seems to include metempsychosis. Meanwhile, he blames Hayyun for *not* believing doctrines held in common by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Two implications can be derived from this. The first is that, just as Nieto rejects the ancient provenance of the Zohar, he also repudiates the standard kabbalistic doctrine of metempsychosis. Thus, despite his long defense of Kabbalah in *Esh Dat*, his attitude toward it looks distinctly sceptical. Nieto would want to avoid expressing doubt about the veracity and provenance of the Zohar because it had become canonical almost in the way that Talmud and Midrash were. It thus had a status something like the Oral Law tradition, and impugning its legitimacy might lead to a domino effect which would turn the same arguments against the Talmud.

The second implication of this passage is that Nieto believes that the central tenets of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are in agreement; even the Trinity is not far removed from Jewish monotheism. This is distinctly *not* a medieval Jewish attitude, nor even a Renaissance attitude.²⁹ It has more in common with some early eighteenth-century Christian views – and not conservative ones this time. A book by the deist John Toland comes to mind, whose title is *Nazarenus: or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity...* (London, 1718).

²⁸ Ibid, 17r; my translation. The identification of Jewish views with those of Christians and Muslims continues on 17v.

²⁹ There may be a certain affinity with the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* of Jean Bodin (ca. 1590s) or some ideas of the radical French millenarians Guillaume Postel and Isaac de la Peyrère.

In other places he points out that Hayyun's doctrine of a dual or tripartite God has been rejected by the greatest Jewish heretics of all time: Sadducees, Boethusians, and Karaites.³⁰ While this may seem like supporting evidence as unconvincing as that derived from the Christians, Muslims and Hindus, it does have a certain historical logic. Nieto was aware that among the Iberian *converso* sceptics in his community were many who doubted the veracity of the Oral Law tradition, which was precisely the heresy of the Sadducees, Boethusians, and Karaites. He may be arguing that even these sceptics should reject Hayyun. This suggestion may be supported by another appeal Nieto makes to the universal Jewish acceptance of the uniqueness of God throughout all of history, "...and in all the regions of Asia, Africa, and Europe, *especially in Spain and Portugal*."³¹ Here again Nieto ties the anti-Hayyun campaign to his larger project of educating his congregants, this time with a subtle emotional appeal to their heritage. It is a theme that continues in that part of the dialogue.

Nieto's decision to argue *ex consensu gentium* and with examples from Greek philosophy, Christianity, Islam, longstanding Jewish heresies, and "newly discovered" people, is a reflection of the eighteenth-century conservative Enlightenment spirit. It would hardly have occurred to his predecessors or most contemporary rabbis to make such arguments, let alone to believe that they would be meaningful or convincing to a Jewish audience.

Nieto argues throughout the book using examples from medicine and science. Some of these arguments are redolent of the eighteenth century spirit; taken as a group, and combined with the prevalence of scientific examples throughout his oeuvre, they are a sure sign of that spirit. Since David Ruderman has commented on this matter,³² I will confine myself to some examples demonstrating Nieto's keen sense of historical perspective, another key indicator of early Enlightenment sensibilities.

In his book, *Zakhor*, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi points out that a short-lived flowering of Jewish historical writing in the wake of the Spanish expulsion does not signal the birth of modern Jewish historical consciousness.³³ Such consciousness is a critical part of the European Enlightenment, but Yerushalmi and others who have considered it in Jewish thought have not usually found it before the German Haskalah of late eighteenth-century Germany.³⁴ I will suggest that Nieto possessed at least a modicum of critical historical perspective.

³⁰ Ibid, 21v.

³¹ Ibid, 21r; my emphasis.

³² Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, Chapter 11.

³³ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982), 73.

³⁴ See Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*; also Reuven Michael, *Jewish Historiography: From the Renaissance to the Modern Period* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1993);

Petuchowski makes a cogent and subtly argued case that Nieto, despite his extended defense of the Zohar, did not believe the generally accepted view among Jews that it was written in the second century CE. The argument is that Nieto claims the use of the word “*teva*” to denote nature is a recent invention of about the past 400 years (that is, since the late thirteenth century or so). The Zohar appeared in Spain just at that time, and it uses the word “*teva*” to denote nature. Thus, while Nieto never openly disputes the second century authorship of the Zohar, he exposes his true view in this way.³⁵

Now, while Jews participated along with Christians in various aspects of Renaissance culture, they never fostered the Humanists’ skill in text criticism. Very few Jews openly questioned the authority or provenance of the Zohar from the time it appeared until the Haskalah. Elijah del Medigo, Leon Modena, the Frances brothers, and a few others, almost all Italians, had done it. Though Modena used some textual proofs, it is the anti-Sabbatean Emden whom many credit as the first Jew to dispute the ancient dating on the basis of deep textual evidence. Thus, Nieto joins an elite club of early modern Jewish scholars with the historical consciousness and tools to place the Zohar’s authorship in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. The fact that he shares this distinction with Emden again suggests a Conservative Enlightenment spirit among one group of opponents of Sabbateanism.³⁶

Nieto’s historical sense comes out in other ways in the *Esh Dat* as well. When Hayyun implies that maybe the correct belief in God – that is, the one he proposes – was forgotten during the exigencies of exile at the end of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, Nieto counters with proofs both from the Talmud

Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2002). Note that none of these authors has anything much to say about Jewish historical thinking between the late sixteenth- and the late eighteenth centuries. Bezalel Safran has addressed historical consciousness in the writings of one figure; see Safran, “Leone da Modena’s Historical Consciousness,” in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. I. Twersky and B. Septimus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 381–398; and Schacter, “Rabbi Jacob Emden,” Chapters 6–7, mentions the issue in Emden’s case. Naturally Spinoza was a major influence on historical consciousness, mainly in Christian thought. There is a great deal to consider about historical consciousness among Jews in this period that has not been explored.

³⁵ Petuchowski, *Theology*, 26–27.

³⁶ On Zohar criticism see “Boaz Huss, ‘Sefer ha-Zohar’ as a Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives of the Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7:2 (1997): 257–307. On Nieto’s sceptical attitude toward Kabbalah see Petuchowski, *ibid.*

and from two first-century sources: Josephus Flavius and Philo of Alexandria. A medieval Hebrew bowdlerization of Josephus called *Yosippon*, whose author has been curiously transformed from Joseph ben Mattityahu the Priest (the actual Josephus) to Joseph ben Gurion, was used by Jews extensively through the Middle Ages. Josephus himself seems to have been widely known among Christians but not among Jews. Nieto clearly knew the *Josippon* but used the actual works of Josephus, especially his polemic *Against Apion*. This was unusual and fairly new for a Jewish author.

The use of Philo of Alexandria is even more noteworthy. Philo was almost completely expunged from Jewish thought because of his deep Neoplatonic bent and allegorization of biblical tales, though (like Josephus) he remained an important figure in Christian thought. He was brought back into Jewish consciousness by the most humanistic Jewish thinker of the Renaissance, Azariah de' Rossi (d. 1577). De' Rossi used Philo (whom he calls Yedidyah the Jew) extensively as a source on ancient Jewish history and views, and was severely upbraided for it by contemporary rabbis. Nieto's choice to use both the actual writings of Josephus and the writings of Philo for information on first century Jewish beliefs indicates both a strong historical consciousness and a certain iconoclastic spirit with regard to the traditional Jewish polemical canon.³⁷

The historical argument Nieto constructs with these sources and others is also very unusual for a Jewish thinker. He adduces evidence from his authorities to prove generation by generation that the belief in a single, indivisible God never changed from the time of the Second Temple until the Middle Ages. He introduces these proofs with this statement:

I am astounded at how he dares to say that after the days of the later talmudic sages [*amora'im*] the true faith was lost from Israel. For, if we turn our eyes to the chain of generations from top to bottom, up to and including the days of the earlier talmudic sages [*tana'im*], all of them believed with complete faith in the unity of God just as we do today, with no change or difference. Now from 600 years ago until our day, which is 5475 [1715] from the Creation, all authors, from straightforward exegetes to kabbalists, wrote of God's unity...³⁸

³⁷ Petuchowski has pointed out much of this in *Theology*, 28–29. On de' Rossi see Salo W. Baron, *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1964); Lester A. Segal, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah de' Rossi's Me'or 'Einayim* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989); Azariah de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes* trans. and ed. Joanna Weinberg (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

³⁸ Nieto, *Esh Dat*, 18r. The detailed historical argument continues until 21v.

While there is a long tradition of tracing Jewish chronology and the history of Jewish belief, going back to the *Chapters of the Fathers* in the Mishnah, Nieto's project still stands out for its historical consciousness. The sources are one aspect of this, but another is the awareness he expresses of how different Jewish thinkers and movements have differed from each other in substantial ways, while maintaining their essential belief in the unity of God.

Conclusion

While most of what I have done here expands and contextualizes aspects of Nieto's anti-Sabbatean polemic already noted by Petuchowski, I want to emphasize how my conclusions differ from his. Petuchowski saw Nieto's thought on an essentially binary matrix between tradition and Haskalah. He points out when something Nieto says fits with the Deists or other radical sceptics of the early Enlightenment. The extensive recent research on more religiously conservative but equally important changes in European thought during the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth centuries wrought by people like the Latitudinarians and Jansenists presents a more nuanced context for Nieto. He was a staunch defender of the Written and Oral traditions of Judaism, and a strong anti-enthusiast, but he participated in the conservative Enlightenment spirit of the eighteenth century. His strong interests in science and history, his view of a shared theological core uniting Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and his complex attempts to defend Kabbalah but undermine some of its tenets – all these make him look a great deal more like his Christian anti-Enthusiasm counterparts than like either a completely traditional rabbi or a radical Enlightenment sceptic.

PART V
POPKIN CLOSE UP

15. RICHARD POPKIN AND *PHILOSOPHY MADE SIMPLE*

Avrum Stroll

Editor's Note: Evaluations of scholars' work rarely mention publications intended for a general audience. Philosophy Made Simple, the popular introduction to philosophy, and the college philosophy textbook that Richard Popkin co-authored with his longtime friend and colleague Avrum Stroll were nevertheless his most widely read publications. They introduced thousands of non-specialist readers—college students and ordinary people seeking an accessible survey of the discipline—to the main themes of philosophy. In a volume that attempts to survey the full range of Richard Popkin's contributions to philosophy, it seems appropriate to include a discussion of these publications. As the only analytical philosopher who collaborated extensively with my father, Avrum Stroll also offers a unique perspective on his contribution to the discipline they both loved, but that they approached very differently.

Jeremy D. Popkin

Our Collaboration

The story of how Richard Popkin and I wrote *Philosophy Made Simple* is less simple than the book itself. It begins in the early 1950s. Dick was a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, from which I had recently received my Ph.D., and I had just begun teaching at the University of Oregon – my first professional job. I saw Dick before meeting him. Along with about 200 other auditors, I was in the audience at a presentation he was making to the American Philosophical Association. His topic was Hume's philosophy and he was arguing that Hume could best be understood as a radical skeptic and not primarily as an empiricist. After the talk concluded there was the usual question period. I had the temerity to question Popkin's elucidation of Hume. I contended that the standard construal of Hume as influenced by Newton was correct, and cited as evidence the subtitle of Hume's masterpiece, the 1739 *A Treatise of Human Nature*. The sub-title reads: *Being An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*.

Popkin responded that the problem was too complicated to discuss in such a large forum and that if I would meet him later we could talk in detail about our diverse interpretations. After the session ended, I went down to meet him and his first remark to me was a question: Do you play two-handed pinochle? I admitted that I did. Popkin proposed that if I came over to his house after dinner we could play pinochle and also discuss Hume.

I accepted his invitation and though we talked about Hume at length, and played pinochle until the wee hours of the morning, we failed to reach an agreement about how Hume should be understood. That evening started a friendship that lasted until his death in 2005. Our friendship also led to my being invited in 1954 to the University of Iowa (where Dick had a permanent appointment) to be a visiting scholar, replacing Gustav Bergmann who was scheduled to go on sabbatical leave. I spent six months in Iowa City.

The visit had an unexpected, very pleasurable benefit. In Iowa City I met a young woman, Mary Swensen, who was soon to become my wife, a connection that also turns out to be relevant to the story of how *Philosophy Made Simple* came to be published. In Iowa City, Dick and I played pinochle on innumerable occasions, using many of those times to continue our debate about Hume, and without reaching a consensus about that famous philosopher.

In 1955, Dick was approached by a former student who was now an editor at Cadillac Press, a house that published books of questionable distinction. This editor and his management team had the idea of bringing out a new series that would be respectable and would present intellectual topics, such as mathematics, physics, and philosophy, in a format that would appeal to the average person – someone, the editor said, who might be shopping for books in a drug store. They were going to call the prospective volumes, The Made Simple Series, and the first projected title was to be *Philosophy Made Simple*. Always open to the challenge of explaining the incomprehensible in a form that anyone could understand, Popkin said that he would write such a book. He asked me if I would join him in this task and I readily agreed on the ground that philosophy should be made available to as many persons as possible. Cadillac was gratified to have two philosophers, who were already pretty well known by their publications, do the first book in the series. Before we had completed the manuscript, Cadillac sold the series to Doubleday and when *Philosophy Made Simple* was issued it was published by Doubleday.

Dick, who was in Iowa City, and I, by then teaching at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, were separated by about 2,000 miles, and email did not exist at that time. So we communicated by phone and by mail about what such a volume should look like, and with respect to this matter, unlike our inability to reach an agreement about Hume, we came to a common understanding of what was fundamental in philosophy and how those topics should be expressed. We both believed that the entire field of western

philosophy should be covered, and we concurred that the best way of doing this would be to divide it into a number of important sub-areas, such as logic, metaphysics, ethics, epistemology (also called “the theory of knowledge”), political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and contemporary philosophy; and, most important, that each of these should be treated chronologically. This was a unique format for its time and has been copied by many authors since. It explains why this book has been used by so many students as a basic text.

Dick and I also agreed on four other matters: (1) We assumed that we were both competent philosophers and accordingly that there was no necessity to edit each other’s contributions, and (2) that because the book was most likely to be read by shoppers in drug stores, we would not look anything up but simply write the book from memory. We agreed that if we had to do any research on a topic the book would be too complicated for such readers. So with those commitments agreed to, we divided up the sections that each of us would write. (3) As I recall, he selected the chapters on metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and the theory of knowledge, and I wrote the chapters on logic, ethics and political philosophy. We divided the final chapter on contemporary philosophy, with Popkin discussing pragmatism and existentialism, and me analytic philosophy. (4) We agreed that the book should not be too weighty or long; so we aimed for a text that would be less than 100,000 words. When it finally saw the light of day it slightly exceeded this total.

Our intention, never formulated explicitly, was to write the book expeditiously, in no more than six or seven months. This we more than accomplished. Dick wrote and finished his part of the manuscript while en route by ship to Europe and I, having just married Mary, wrote my half while on a three-week honeymoon in Laguna Beach, sitting in the sand and writing on a Hermes portable typewriter. I must confess that I did violate one of the conditions we had agreed to. In writing the chapter on Political Philosophy, I could not remember something that John Stuart Mill had said, so I went to the Laguna Beach library. It was a small branch library that had only three or four books on philosophy, but one of them contained Mill’s essay “On Liberty.” I found the relevant passage, and quoted it in that chapter. As far as I know, Dick abided by our arrangement and wrote all of his material from memory.

We were informed by the publisher that they would give us a flat fee rather than providing us with royalties – a mistake as it turned out since the book sold extremely well. Both Dick and I needed the fee – \$1,000, a huge sum in 1955 – for our various purposes. His was to pay for travel with his wife and two small children, and mine for expenses connected with setting up a new household. Both Mary and I thought at the time that we had done very well financially. Nobody could have predicted that the series would be successful and that *Philosophy Made Simple* would be, in effect, a best seller. The original copyright ran out some years ago, and our literary agent, Juliet Popkin,

Dick's wife, negotiated a better arrangement with Doubleday. The publisher still refused to give us royalties but Julie obtained a large advance that softened the impact of the revenues we had lost on the original contract. At that time, she also negotiated the world wide rights, including royalties, with the British publisher Heinemann; and the royalties over the years have amounted to a substantial sum. In one three-year period, for example, the foreign sales exceeded 25,000 copies.

Philosophy Made Simple has gone through at least three revised editions, the last in 1993, multiple printings (when I last looked about ten years ago it was in its 17th printing), has sold several hundred thousand copies, is a standard text in many universities, and has been translated into numerous languages, among them French, Italian, Czech, Polish, and Russian. I am pleased to say that the book still exists and is readily available.

Philosophy Made Simple was our most popular and influential book. Several well-known philosophers have written me over the years indicating that not only had they frequently recommended it to their students, but also that they had been motivated to pursue philosophy as a career by reading it when they were undergraduates. In April 2006, a friend gave me a signed copy of a book, a publication that further illustrates the impact that it has had on various persons. The book is a novel by Robert Hellenga entitled *Philosophy Made Simple*. It is about a sixty-year old merchant, named Rudy Harrington, pretty much retired, who lives in Chicago. His wife has died and his children, now grown, have fled the coop. Harrington wonders how to spend the rest of his life, and the narrative describes the steps he takes to come to grips with what he sees as his diminishing future. He has been reading a philosophical treatise entitled *Philosophy Made Simple*, written by a character in the novel named Siva Singh, who is an East Indian philosopher. Singh's book, which pretty closely duplicates ours, has caused Harrington to reflect on the meaning of his life. He wonders, for example, after reading Singh's account of the Allegory of the Cave in Plato's *Republic*, if his life has been nothing but an empty shell, an illusion and of little value. In a footnote at the end of the book, Hellenga states that neither he nor Harrington has been influenced by the eponymous book written by Popkin and Stroll, but by the treatise written by Singh. Nonetheless, according to our mutual friend who had had dinner with Hellenga two weeks before I received my copy, Hellenga said that it was our book that influenced him to write his novel. He also said that *Philosophy Made Simple* had caused him to reflect on his own life and to think deeply about what it has meant. Like Harrington, Hellenga was evidently deeply moved by the Cave allegory, and also by our description of Kant's central idea that the human mind structures the perceived world, so that access to the so-called "external world" is always indirect.

For readers who may not know or remember what Plato wrote I will briefly quote him. Socrates is speaking to Glaucon:

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: Behold! human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open toward the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied, and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave.

True, he said, how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they only see the shadows?¹

Like many others, Hellenga and presumably his protagonist in the novel have applied the allegory to their own lives and have drawn the conclusion that they may well have lived in a world of shadows, cut off from the reality which lies outside the cave. I should add that the novel doesn't discuss Singh's *Philosophy Made Simple* in any detail. Nevertheless, the information I have received from our mutual acquaintance makes it plausible that it was our book that influenced Hellenga to write his and to use our title for a novel that is hardly a work in philosophy. Why he picked this title is a mystery to me since the book is basically a romance about Harrington's later life.

Philosophy Made Simple has also received very positive reviews over the years. There was a lengthy review of it in an Italian periodical, *Il Sole-24 Ore* on November, 16, 1997.

¹Plato, *The Republic*, vii, 514, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), 773-774.

I will quote part of this review, which is typical of many that the book has received. The author of the review, Simona Morini, supports the guiding idea of our work. She says:

The title of their work, *Philosophy Made Simple*, does not only refer to the fact that it is a popular work, written in a simple style, amusing and accessible to all, but also to the fact that philosophy can be *useful* to all, in the sense that it can teach everyone to think and to act better. In this sense, the book by Popkin and Stroll is not, thank heavens, impartial. There are obviously disagreements about what it means to think or act better, so that in this domain everything is open to question and divergence of opinion. In other words, we have here a text guided by a particular idea—perhaps debatable but clear and explicit—of what it means to be a philosopher and to do philosophy....The book states that its ultimate aim is to prepare human beings to do philosophy, to develop a critical attitude, and I would add, if possible to aid in *living* decent lives. (Translation by Avrum Stroll).

During our long association, Richard Popkin and I collaborated as authors on six or seven books (I have been unable to pin down the exact number). Besides *Philosophy Made Simple*, these include *Philosophy and the Human Spirit*, *Introductory Readings in Philosophy*, *Philosophy and Contemporary Problems*, and *Philosophy*. Our collaboration began in 1955, with the writing of *Philosophy Made Simple*, and continued through 2002, culminating in the publication of *Skeptical Philosophy for Everyone*. In addition, we were colleagues at the University of California, San Diego, from 1963 to 1973.

After Dick moved from Iowa to Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, California in 1960, and later, while we were together at UCSD, we wrote several of the books I have mentioned. Given that Dick was primarily an historian of ideas and that I was a standard, more or less hard-nosed analytical philosopher interested in the contemporary scene, it is remarkable that two authors with such divergent approaches to philosophy managed to cooperate on so many consensual books. I believe this was possible because of a mutual trust in each other's competence, so that we came to quick agreements about what normally might have been contentious matters. Both of us thought, as the Italian review states, that philosophy can and should play a positive role in helping people think critically, and as a result possibly to live better, so that the usual disagreements among philosophers did not impede our working together.

Interacting with Dick was a lot of fun. He had a great sense of humor and an inexhaustible quiver of jokes. Each of these sessions was a learning experience for me as well. He had an impressive memory and had virtually total recall of every philosophy text that I had ever heard of, and many that I had not. We met frequently while Dick was at Harvey Mudd, and of course even more often after we became colleagues at UCSD, to discuss a future project

and in very pleasant circumstances. We would normally get together, along with our wives, at a small motel, the Andrea Villa, that no longer exists. It was located near the beach in La Jolla, and had a minimal restaurant where we could buy coffee and soft drinks. After an exchange of jokes and a bit of clowning around, Dick and I, seated near a heated pool, would begin to explore various possible scenarios for our next book. We would each advance an idea, no matter how esoteric or idiosyncratic, and discuss it fully. As an ex-Marine, I found that the process of creating a new book by trial and error was like trying to calibrate a rifle. One would take several shots at a target, say 500 yards away, missing either high or low, or wide, and eventually would zero in on the “C-ring” as the sharpshooters call it. I found the technique to be interesting. The discussion would usually last several hours, typically occupying a whole morning.

On reflecting on those past days, I now realize that we were operating with a couple of principles which we presupposed rather than articulating. The most important idea was that any person who read our book should get some knowledge of the whole range of conceptual problems that philosophy deals with. A second was that whatever we wrote should be clear and understandable to a general reader. I think these principles motivated all of the books we wrote together. The Preface to *Introduction to Philosophy* (1961) contains a brief statement expressing these principles:

Our intent in composing this work has thus been to present a synoptic picture of philosophy, written in a simple, nontechnical fashion, and yet within these limits, to achieve a high degree of accuracy in exposition. But, of course, it will finally rest with the reader himself to decide whether we have achieved these aims.²

One of the works to come out of this interaction was the aforementioned *Introduction to Philosophy*, published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Holt had heard of the success of *Philosophy Made Simple* and asked us to write something similar, though of course not identical. We tried several variations on *Philosophy Made Simple*, including some that deviated sharply from that earlier book. By the third edition, we hit on a format that appealed to both of us. It began with a long introduction about the nature of philosophical inquiry and the difference between what a philosopher and a scientist are trying to achieve in understanding the world. I still like much of what we said then. *Introduction to Philosophy* was expensive for its time; it was a hardback unlike *Philosophy Made Simple*, and had a lengthy career, despite having our

²Avrum Stroll and Richard H. Popkin, *Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961), iv.

pictures on the dust jacket. Most textbooks have a run of about five years. Instructors use them for a year or two when they first appear and then turn to later productions. The books are then sold by students as used copies and within three or four years are out of print. *Introduction to Philosophy* went through at least three complete revisions, and was still being used in the late 1980s. It lasted for at least a quarter of a century. Most of our books fell “still born from the press,” as Hume said of his 1739 *Treatise*, so that even counting *Philosophy Made Simple* and *Introduction to Philosophy*, we had hit or miss success overall.

Richard Popkin as Philosopher

Dick was not only one of the best philosophers I have worked with, he was also the most productive. The number of books he published is still not completely ascertained by his various biographers, but according to Julie Popkin it is at least 36. She also estimates that he published more than three hundred papers and articles during his lifetime. Dick’s work completely changed our understanding of the history of philosophy. In *The Skeptic Way*, Benson Mates gave an extensive account of his contributions to the subject. I quote part of what he said:

If philosophical authors were to be ranked in order on the basis of their relative influence on the subsequent history of Western philosophy, Plato and Aristotle would be at the top of the list, no doubt. But a good case can be made that the third place should be assigned to a rather obscure Greek physician of the second century, A.D., Sextus Empiricus. His writings were immensely influential. Due largely to the work of Richard Popkin and his students and associates, it is now clear that the rediscovery and publication of these works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led directly to the skepticism of Montaigne, Gassendi, Descartes, Bayle, and other major figures, and eventually to the preoccupation of modern philosophy, right down to the present, with attempts to refute or otherwise combat philosophical skepticism. (Oxford, 1996), p.4.

In an essay, “Philosophy in a New Century,” (2003) John Searle concurred that skepticism has had a major influence on modern philosophy. As he said in that essay:

The modern era in philosophy, begun by Descartes, Bacon and others in the seventeenth century, was based on a premise which has now become obsolete. The premise was that the very existence of knowledge was in question

and that therefore the main task of the philosopher was to cope with the problem of skepticism. Descartes saw his task as providing a secure foundation for knowledge, and Locke, in a similar vein, thought of his *Essay* as an investigation into the nature and extent of human knowledge. It seems reasonable that in the seventeenth century those philosophers took epistemology as the central element of the entire philosophical enterprise, because while they were in the midst of a scientific revolution, at the same time the possibility of certain, objective, universal knowledge seemed problematic. It was not at all clear how their various beliefs could be established with certainty, and it was not even clear how they could be made consistent. In particular, there was a nagging and pervasive conflict between religious faith and the new scientific discoveries. The result was that we had three and a half centuries in which epistemology was at the center of philosophy.

During much of this period the skeptical paradoxes seemed to lie at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. Unless we can answer the skeptic, it seemed we cannot proceed further in philosophy or for that matter, in science. For this reason epistemology became the base of a number of philosophical disciplines where it would seem that the epistemological questions are really peripheral. So, for example, in ethics, the central question became, "Can there be an objective foundation for our ethical beliefs?" And even in the philosophy of language, many philosophers thought, and some still do, that epistemic questions were central. They take the central question in the philosophy of language to be, "How do we know what another person means when he says something?"

I believe the era of skeptical epistemology is now over. Because of the sheer growth of certain, objective, and universal knowledge, the possibility of knowledge is no longer a central question in philosophy. At present it is psychologically impossible for us to take Descartes's project seriously in the way that he took it: We know too much.³

Searle and Mates are not alone in holding that skepticism has played a central role in philosophy. To be sure, Searle begins with Descartes, whereas Mates and Popkin think the entire history of philosophy, from Plato to the present, is dominated by the need to rebut the skeptic. But they all concur on its general importance.

The quotations from Mates and Searle raise three questions: (1) When did skepticism assume its historical importance? On this point, I agree with Mates and Popkin. In opposition to Searle, we think that it commences as early as

³John R. Searle, "Philosophy in a New Century," Philosophy Documentation Center, 2003.

Plato. (2) There is also the role played by Popkin as a diagnostician of the historical role of skepticism. Searle does not mention Popkin. Again on this point, I agree with Mates' assessment of the importance of Popkin's researches. (3) The third question that needs a response is whether today, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, skepticism still remains a threat, and here Searle and I disagree. The matter is complex, but worth pursuing. Searle and I agree, as against Popkin, that skepticism now lacks the force it was thought to have in previous philosophy. But we differ over what it is threatening. Searle says it is the existence of knowledge. As he writes: "At present it is psychologically impossible for us to take Descartes's project seriously in the way that he took it: We know too much. This is not to say that there is no room for the traditional epistemic paradoxes, it simply means they no longer lie at the heart of the subject." Searle's view is that with the growth of scientific knowledge since the time of Galileo we cannot deny the existence of knowledge. His point is that such propositions as (1) the heart pumps blood, (2) the earth is a satellite of the sun, and (3) water consists of H_2O molecules, have overwhelming evidence in their favor, and further that they are embedded in theories that are so well established that it would be irrational to doubt them. As these remarks indicate, Searle's assumption is that what Descartes is challenging is the existence of knowledge; but in my view this is a mistake. As Popkin used to emphasize in the many conversations we had, it is not knowledge that the skeptic has traditionally challenged but certainty.

A re-reading of Descartes's *Meditations* confirms what Dick was saying. In *Meditation II*, Descartes writes:

Yesterday's meditation has thrown me into such doubts that I can no longer ignore them, yet I fail to see how they are to be resolved. It is as if I had suddenly fallen into a deep whirlpool; I am so tossed about that I can neither touch bottom with my foot, nor swim up to the top. Nevertheless, I will work my way up and will once again attempt the same path I entered upon yesterday. I will accomplish this by putting aside everything that admits of the least doubt, as if I had discovered it to be completely false. I will stay on this course until I know something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least know for certain that nothing is certain. Archimedes sought but one firm and immovable point in order to move the entire earth from one place to another. Just so, great things are also to be hoped for if I succeed in finding just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshaken.⁴

It will be noted that in this passage, Descartes does not speak about the quest for knowledge. It is true that he twice uses the word "know" but the passage

⁴ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993), 17.

makes it clear that what he wishes to know is whether anything is certain. He says he is searching for “just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshaken.” So the emphasis is clearly on certainty and not on knowledge. I think it is fair to say that this emphasis runs through all six *Meditations*. We can find similar quotations from many major philosophers, past and present. G.E. Moore, for example, wrote an entire essay entitled “Certainty.” I am thus on the side of Popkin in this matter.

Searle and I differ from Popkin in assessing the contemporary philosophical importance of skepticism, but Searle and I differ in turn over why it is impotent. It is certainly true that in the recent past such major thinkers as G.E. Moore, Gilbert Ryle, J.L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein have seen it of central import. In various ways, their major works, such as *The Concept of Mind* by Ryle, and *Zettel (Scraps)* and *Ueber Gewissheit (On Certainty)* by Wittgenstein, are dedicated to refuting it. From Searle’s standpoint, the discoveries by science and such theories as atomic theory have made the quest for *knowledge* a resolved topic; but since I see the challenge as concerning *certainty* rather than knowledge my approach differs from Searle’s. It is that radical skepticism is senseless. I hold, with Wittgenstein, that what the skeptic is calling doubt is not really a case of doubt at all. What determines something to be a case of doubt is that it is a practice that is in conformity with communal behavior. I thus distinguish between philosophical doubt and normal or ordinary doubt. It is the latter that conforms to community practice. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein says: “A doubt that doubted everything would not be a real doubt.” My point is that philosophers like Descartes and Moore assume that doubting can go on forever; and that such a practice is significant. Popkin also seems to have held such a view. But I contest this assumption. Like any practice, ordinary doubt has its limits and when these are exceeded the result is nonsense. There is a wonderful example in *On Certainty* (315) that expresses this idea in a powerful way.

It would be as if someone were looking for some object in a room; he opens a drawer and doesn’t see it there, then he closes it again, waits and open it once more to see if perhaps it isn’t there now, and keeps on like that. He has not learned how to look for things....He has not learned the game we are trying to teach him.⁵

The person who keeps looking in a drawer, opening and closing it again and again, searching for a missing object has not learned how to look for things. He has not learned the game of searching. How could one be taught that

⁵Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Ueber Gewissheit* (“On Certainty”) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), entry 315, 40e.

game? Roughly speaking, the answer is by early training, by living in a family as part of a community in which people search for lost objects. One comes to learn as a result of such training that it is *senseless* to continue to open and close a drawer obsessively; nothing can be gained after the first few tries. It is like checking the date by looking at dozens of copies of the same issue of a newspaper. Such an obsessive process lacks a procedure for closure. It is senseless because doubt must come to an end. This is something that neither Descartes nor Moore understood. From my perspective, radical skepticism is like the obsessive searcher. It makes no sense in what it wishes to question. In our *Skeptical Philosophy for Everyone*, published in 2002, Dick and I debated the philosophical merit of skepticism. As with our interpretations of Hume, we could never come to a resolution about the matter. The debate is too lengthy to be reproduced here. I am deeply sorry that Dick is no longer present to continue it.

16. IN HIS OWN WORDS: RICHARD POPKIN'S CAREER IN PHILOSOPHY

Jeremy D. Popkin

For most of his life, Richard Popkin lived in the pre-email age. When he wanted to share news and ideas with friends and family, he sat down and wrote letters. In the years since his death, as I have worked with the librarians at the William Andrews Clark Library at UCLA and with my mother, Juliet Popkin, to sort and organize my father's papers, I have come to appreciate the energy and creativity my father put into his correspondence. Since his research was such a large part of his life, he shared details about it, not only with professional colleagues, but with friends and family members; conversely, he drew his professional acquaintances into his family life and his personal interests. To be sure, these letters do not always include the "warts and all" that my father tried to be honest about in the two autobiographical essays he published before his death.¹ His letters sometimes gloss over the personal problems he mentioned in those later accounts, and record what was sometimes a difficult family life as a series of amusing anecdotes. Nevertheless, there is no better source for capturing the flavor of my father's personality. His letters reflect his boundless enthusiasm for whatever he was interested in at the moment, his gifts as a story-teller, and his unique sense of humor. In a few instances, they also make it possible to correct statements in his autobiographical essays.

Reading these letters proves something that everyone who knew him can attest to: Richard Popkin was anything but an ivory-tower academic. Throughout his life, he was always vitally concerned with politics, gossip, and the fortunes of the Brooklyn (later Los Angeles) Dodgers baseball team. Wherever he taught, he was always furiously engaged with departmental and campus

¹Richard H. Popkin, "Intellectual Autobiography: warts and all," in Richard A. Watson and James E. Force, eds., *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard H. Popkin* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1988, 103–149, and "Introduction: Warts and All, Part 2," in James E. Force and David S. Katz, eds., *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), xi–lxxvi.

affairs. His life as a philosopher also went hand in hand with a genuine concern for his family, expressed both in the lively reports about myself and my two sisters that he shared with our grandmother and his friends, in the constant concern for his widowed mother's problems, and in the worries about money that surface in so many of the letters to his mother and that remind us that he was, among other things, part of the generation that had grown up during the Great Depression.

The series of letters I have drawn on most extensively here were written to my father's mother, Zelda Popkin, between 1947 and 1970. These letters cover approximately the first half of his career, as he went from being a brash young assistant professor at the University of Iowa to being a world-famous scholar and embattled chair of his department at UCSD.² Zelda Popkin (1898–1983), the letters' recipient, was a novelist and public-relations professional who lived in New York.³ She had been widowed in 1943, at the age of 45, and never remarried. During most of the period covered by these letters, her novel-writing career, which had peaked in 1945 with the publication of *The Journey Home*, a story about a returning GI and a young woman brought together by the circumstances of a horrific train wreck, was headed downhill; between 1956 and 1968, as her son's career was taking off, Zelda – she insisted that the whole family address her by her first name – was unable to publish anything at all. A few attempts to return to her earlier specialty of public relations were also unsuccessful. Only in the last two years of the period covered by these letters did her fortunes take a turn for the better, with the success of her autobiographical novel *Herman Had Two Daughters*, and thereby relieve my father of a major worry.

My father's relationship with his mother was strained and combative, and my own mother often had to mediate between them. (She also supplemented his letters with some of her own, which Zelda conserved along with my father's.) Nevertheless, these letters, which Zelda Popkin carefully saved, show that my father invested considerable energy in maintaining her morale

²At the moment, this family correspondence is still in the hands of the Popkin family. Some of it relates to relatives and other people who are still living. In due course, copies of these letters will be added to the Popkin papers in the Clark Library. Our family papers also include numerous letters from Zelda Popkin to my parents, spanning the years from 1943 to 1983. Copies of these have been deposited with Zelda Popkin's literary papers in the Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Collection at Boston University.

³I have written about some aspects of my grandmother's life in an article, "A Forgotten Forerunner: Zelda Popkin's Novels of the Holocaust and the 1948 War," *Shofar* 20 (2001), 36–60. She also published an autobiography, *Open Every Door* (New York: Dutton, 1956).

by keeping her informed about his own adventures and the doings of her grandchildren. As his peripatetic life took him to Iowa, Europe, California, and Israel, my father's correspondence with his mother kept him in touch with the New York Jewish world in which he had grown up. In Zelda, he knew he had an audience who would appreciate his idiosyncratic view of things, and these letters show how much of her story-telling skill he had inherited. For her part, Zelda kept him up to date about life in New York, about other relatives, and about her discouraging struggles to revive her literary career.

My father's letters to other friends often illuminate aspects of his life and work that he did not discuss with his mother. His correspondence with his boyhood friend John Lowenthal (1925–2003), who also served as my father's personal lawyer, documents his concerns about the political atmosphere of the McCarthy period in the United States and his involvement with the case of Alger Hiss, a State Department official convicted in 1952 of lying about his affiliation with the Communist Party. My father's passion about the Hiss case prefigured his later and better known obsession with the Kennedy assassination.⁴ The letters my father wrote to the great Renaissance scholar Paul Oskar Kristeller (1905–1999), one of his teachers at Columbia and a steadfast supporter of my father's career, are less personal, but reveal a great deal about the development of his ideas.⁵ Judah Goldin (1914–1998), a major figure in Judaic studies, became a friend of my father's in the early 1950s, when they were both on the faculty at the University of Iowa. After Goldin left Iowa, the two began a correspondence that lasted until Goldin's death in the late 1990s. From these letters, one can see that my father turned to Goldin, not only to discuss his growing interest in Jewish matters, but also for personal advice in moments of crisis.⁶ A common interest in the philosopher Pierre Bayle brought my father together with the French scholar Elisabeth Labrousse (1914–2000) in the mid-1950s. Their friendship and their correspondence continued until her death. In addition to scholarly matters, these letters contain

⁴I would like to thank John Lowenthal's widow, Ann Lowenthal, for providing me with the letters my father wrote to her husband in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁵I would like to thank the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University for providing me with photocopies of this correspondence, extending from 1951 to 1988, which forms part of the Paul Oskar Kristeller papers, box A40. Among other things, this correspondence file includes copies of a number of my father's fellowship applications, as well as revealing letters about the writing of his main book, *The History of Scepticism*.

⁶I am grateful to Arthur Kiron of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies Library at the University of Pennsylvania for copies of many of my father's letters to Judah Goldin, spanning the years from 1953 to 1997.

some of my father's most extensive comments on politics.⁷ Richard A. "Red" Watson, an undergraduate student of my father's at the University of Iowa in the early 1950s, went on to do a graduate degree with him. The two men became close friends, and eventually colleagues at Washington University.⁸ While the correspondences with Zelda Popkin, John Lowenthal, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Judah Goldin, Elisabeth Labrousse and Red Watson are the most extensive collections of letters I have drawn on in this essay, my father kept large folders of letters addressed to him, which often offer valuable insights into the development of his work, even when his replies are missing.⁹

In the halcyon days of university expansion immediately after World War II, my father, aged 23, was able to land an assistant professorship at the University of Iowa on the strength of his master's degree from Columbia and one year of teaching experience at the University of Connecticut. He and my mother had hardly ever been away from the East Coast until they got off the DC-4 from Chicago, and my father immediately began to report back to his mother in New York. "So far we like Iowa City very much," he told her after their first few days. "The University has oodles of interesting activities, and looks as alive as the best of eastern colleges... Prof. [Everett] Hall is a top man in philosophy from whom I will learn a great deal. Prof. [Gustav] Bergmann also appears to be a wonderful fellow, so I am very happy on this score" (10 Sept. 1947). Fitting into university social life required some adjustment on my parents' part, however. "Saturday we went to a drinking party of some English instructors," my father wrote in November 1947. "We have been drinkers already, whoopee. (Yesterday we crossed the Rubicon. We got a liquor license and purchased a bottle of whisky for home consumption. I fail to see why we were so stubborn about the matter until now.)" (18 Nov. 1947).

Within two months, my father began to learn about academic politics as he found himself in the middle of "an open war" between Hall, the Iowa philosophy department chair, and Bergmann, a former member of the Vienna Circle. At first, he sided with Bergmann: "Even though he is well on his way

⁷I thank Elisabeth Labrousse's son, Jean-Philippe Labrousse, for providing me with a number of the letters my father wrote to his mother. This correspondence runs from 1958 to 1999.

⁸Professor Watson returned my father's letters to him, along with copies of his own replies, in 2002. The Popkin-Watson correspondence, the most voluminous of the files I have used, runs from 1958 to 1995 and includes many details about my father's research and other activities.

⁹Together with copies of the Lowenthal, Kristeller, Goldin, Labrousse and Watson correspondences, most of these documents are now in the Clark Library. Starting in the early 1960s, my father often kept carbon copies of his outgoing letters, which are also in the Clark collection.

to becoming a psychopathic case, he is brilliant in philosophy, in understanding everyone in the world except Bergmann. We have too much in common in all sorts of ways, and so Julie and I have become attached to the weird man” (13 Nov. 1947). This alliance did not last long. By the following February, my father was writing about Bergmann’s hostility to the courses he wanted to offer on the history of philosophy. “So, I offered to end Gustav’s pains by departing from Iowa and taking with me my unBergmannlike interests. This really hurt Gustav. He has completely given in to avoid my departure” (11 Feb. 1948). My father’s relations with Bergmann would continue to deteriorate during his remaining years at Iowa, where he taught until 1960. In March 1953, he drafted a letter to the university president, complaining that “those of us who have been unconvinced of Prof. Bergmann’s view of himself as one of the leading philosophers of today, and [who] have refused his right to dominating control over the departmental program, especially on the graduate level, have earned his hostility.”¹⁰ Over the years, too, his feelings about the University of Iowa would change drastically. “It is just too stultifying... to spend much time in a really isolated community like this,” he wrote to Zelda in January 1959, a year and a half before he finally received the job offer that took him to Harvey Mudd College in California, where he taught from 1960 to 1963 (20 Jan. 1959). Nevertheless, his letters to her hardly revealed the extent of his efforts to find another position, a constant theme in his correspondence with friends and colleagues.

Long before he was able to leave Iowa City for good, my father found various opportunities to travel for shorter periods. A turning point in his career came in 1952–1953, when a Fulbright Fellowship allowed him to take the family to France for a year. It was the first of many trips abroad for all of us, and his first opportunity to meet foreign scholars and work in European libraries. The Fulbright grant made millionnaires out of the Popkin family: it totalled 1,680,000 francs, amounting to about \$4,800 at the time (29 May 1952). On arrival in Paris, my father, who had never before been out of the United States, was as overwhelmed by the city’s monuments and its cultural life as any other American tourist, and also as confounded by the challenges living in a foreign culture. “There is nothing as baffling as a phone call in French,” he told his mother, recounting the experience of being invited to visit a French family but being unable to understand their name, the name of their street, or even the name of their Métro station (12 Sept. 1952).

¹⁰RHP to Virgil Hancher, 5 March 1953, in Popkin family correspondence. My mother, Juliet Popkin, told me that she often persuaded my father not to mail some of the highly emotional letters to University of Iowa administrators that he drafted during his year in Europe in 1952–1953, so it is not clear whether this letter was actually sent.

Like generations of American scholars, my father was bemused by working conditions in the historic reading room of the Bibliothèque nationale on the rue Richelieu. He was shocked by the limited number of seats, and, as he was never fond of getting out of bed, he was unhappy to realize that “the only solution is to arrive early in the morning, and hold on to a chair all day long” (22 Sept. 1952). Once he resigned himself to this routine, he discovered other problems. “The lighting in the place is fantastic. Only when it is pitch dark do they turn on the lights, and only for a few minutes. It is easy to see why European scholars wear thick glasses. Also, they have given me several volumes well eaten by bookworms,” he wrote in one letter, before going on to describe his first effort at contacting a French philosopher: “In my last letter I reported that I had posted my first French letter. The next day, its recipient, Prof. [André-Louis] Leroy, telephoned and after a brief duel in French he lapsed into English, and asked me to come and see him the following afternoon. So, first I rushed off to the Bibliothèque nationale to read Leroy’s book on Hume, and then I went to see him in his swanky apartment by Porte d’Orléans. He is a wonderful old man, one of the grand old men of French philosophy. First we talked briefly in French, and then we argued for an hour about Hume in English. He was delighted to find someone interested in Hume, since his French colleagues are not... He is interested but dubious of my research” (2 Oct. 1952).

These early contacts paid off and by December, my mother told Zelda, “Dick’s work delights and baffles him but he is most thrilled at finding very important people here who are genuinely interested and excited by the points he is raising... He has so much material that he cannot hope to encompass it all this year” (19 Dec. 1952). Zelda was apparently somewhat disappointed to discover that the seventeenth-century *libertins érudits* who figured in my father’s research were not in the same line of work as the famous courtesan Ninon de Lenclos, of whom she had heard. “Unfortunately, my *libertins* were the librarian of the Bibliothèque Mazarin, a philosophy professor at Aix-en-Provence, and the tutor of the Dauphin, a rather dull crew,” her son explained (1 July 1953).

This research would broaden my father’s vision: a project which had initially been framed as an inquiry into the origins of David Hume’s ideas broadened into *The History of Scepticism*. He was already beginning to see the connections between scepticism and seventeenth-century theological disputes, as this next letter shows; it also records one of his first meetings with Father Paul Henry, the Jesuit priest and Plotinus scholar who would become one of his best friends:

Last Wednesday was Catholic Wednesday here. I spent the day reading 17th century Catholic tracts against the Huguenots, (like Pierre Nicole’s *The Pretended Reformers convicted of Schism, a cute title, n’est-ce pas?*).

Then at 6 p.m. Le Reverend Pere Robert Lenoble arrived for aperitifs. He is the leading authority here on the history of science in the 17th century, and was in New York last year. We had a long debate about my research, which was very enjoyable and profitable. He left about 7:30, and at 8 Le Reverend Pere Paul Henry arrived for dinner. As Julie said, our first priest for dinner... He is a most delightful person, and he speaks a perfect English. After American Catholics, he is quite a shock, being very liberal, worldly, a gourmet, and a wonderful human being... We had a real French meal, lasting over three hours, and much fascinating conversation. Jerry was much interested in the idea of men in skirts, and has apparently mastered the concept. (27 Jan. 1953)¹¹

As he wound up his exciting year of research in Paris, my father summarized the plans he was now making in a letter addressed to his department chair at Iowa: "I have an article completed on English Pyrrhonism in Hume's day, one almost completed on Father Mersenne, and 40 volumes on Pyrrhonism outlined. I have found the proper link between Bayle and Hume, and can now prove that Hume's main originality is not philosophical, but only psychological. On all else he had been long anticipated, or else he misunderstood the point at issue. My Descartes material is more sensational, as is my material on English Pyrrhonism prior to Locke. (I have to review Leroy's book on Hume for the *Review of Metaphysics* which begins with a footnote saying that there is no evidence Hume read Sextus. What fun will ensue!)" In other words, the central arguments of *The History of Scepticism* were rapidly taking shape.¹²

The year 1953 also brought another important milestone in the Popkin career: his first paper at an international conference, an affair in Dublin marking the bicentenary of Bishop Berkeley's death. In a letter to one of his Iowa colleagues, he reported, "It was a most elegant philosophical affair, attended by the greats of Europe, plus Eamon De Valera. For better or for worse Berkeley is on the philosophical map, duly consecrated by many ceremonies, and

¹¹ My father had met Paul Henry in the United States in 1952, at a meeting of the American Philosophical Association. R. H. Popkin, "Warts and All," 113. Their friendship endured throughout the rest of Henry's career. A letter of recommendation my father wrote for Henry in 1962 gives a sense of the qualities that drew him to his friend. The letter described him as "a man of extreme tolerance and understanding. He is not at all interested in measuring people by whether they agree with him, or share his religious convictions. He is a genuine European intellectual, concerned with exploring ideas. Everywhere he has gone, his friends are those people who share some common intellectual interests, regardless of race, religion or creed." RHP to Julian N. Hartt, 6 Nov. 1962.

¹² Draft letter to [Robert Turnbull], undated but apparently July 1953, in Popkin family papers.

he has been saved temporarily from positivistic misinterpretation.”¹³ Zelda got a slightly different version of the affair, together with an anecdote about Karl Popper: “I met almost all the great men of European philosophy and got drunk several times on lovely Irish whiskey... The Rector of Trinity College, Dublin, interrupted his address to mention my work on Pyrrhonism, so I’m a famous man. I even met some English philosophers who have read my articles. I had a room next to Prof. Karl Popper of the London School of Economics who wanted to know what was wrong with Bergmann. I told him that Bergmann thought he was the world’s greatest philosopher. Popper, a humorless Austrian, said, ‘Why should he think that? He’s never done anything.’ I explained that Bergmann thought he had done great things in his articles. So Popper meditated a moment on that, and said, ‘How can he think that? His papers are just trivial.’ Such is fame.” The conference went well, despite a brush with American anti-communist hysteria, in the person of the American cultural attaché, “a good Rotarian who does the book burning for the USIS library in Dublin. He was very touchy about the matter and kept informing us that in Ireland, books are banned by the Irish government, so why shouldn’t he ban books too” (July 1953).¹⁴

My father could afford to make fun of the American government’s anti-communism in Ireland, but he knew that the period’s political atmosphere threatened him personally. In high school, he had briefly been a member of a Communist youth group. This complicated his pursuit of a permanent job at the University of California in Berkeley, where he held a visiting professorship in 1953–1954 after returning from France, as a detailed letter from a faculty member there in response to my father’s question about the controversial loyalty oath Berkeley professors had to sign indicates.¹⁵ In 1956, carefully framing his question in the third person, he asked his good friend and lawyer John Lowenthal, “What advice would you give to somebody who desires to go abroad, but who would have to answer yes to the query about whether he was ever a member of the C. P. on the passport application? Will

¹³Draft letter to [Robert Turnbull], undated but apparently July 1953, Popkin family papers.

¹⁴The conference was in honor of the 200th anniversary of Berkeley’s death. See “Introduction: Warts and All, Part 2,” xv.

¹⁵Benson Mates to RHP, 6 Feb. 1953. Family folklore claims that my father was denied a permanent appointment at Berkeley because of the opposition of one department member there. Mates’s letter and a response from my father (28 Feb. 1953) indicate that he was told that there was very little chance of his being kept on permanently before he arrived in California. At the end of his year on the Berkeley faculty, my father told Paul Kristeller that several senior professors had “led [him] to believe that within a year or two they would try to have U. of Cal. make me a permanent offer.... I am undecided as to whether I would be interested in being at Berkeley permanently because of the state of the department there, the political atmosphere due to the oath controversy, and the location” (19 June 1954).

said individual be turned down? Will he get himself into difficulties, if he is now peacefully enjoying life as a college professor?" (12 Nov. 1956). The issue came up again in March 1958, when my father was in the Netherlands and needed to apply for an extension of his passport. "Are they likely to start investigating me ad nauseum to find out what the state of my opinions and memberships is, etc?" he asked Lowenthal. "Also, since I was a member of the YCL [Young Communists' League], which as I remember, maintained the position that it was a different organization than the CP, which one had to join separately at a later age, could I, in good faith, sign the statement, or would I be liable for prosecution for perjury if the government so desired?" (4 Mar. 1958). Lowenthal advised him just to mark "No" on the form, leading my father to tell him, "occasionally I have to be practical... You and I won't make our fame for US vs. Popkin, in the Supreme Court" (26 Mar. 1958).

Comments on the news remained common in my father's letters, particularly those to his mother. He kept her abreast of local scandals and crime stories in Iowa City and later in Claremont – as a one-time detective story writer, Zelda always appreciated a good murder – and they traded opinions about major world events. Here is his account of Charles de Gaulle's sudden return to power in France in May 1958, as he tracked it from the Netherlands, where he was spending a year as a Fulbright scholar:

This week I have been glued to the radio, trying to solve the French crisis. On the European radio, you can get all sorts of things, from the English language broadcasts out of Moscow, to various French stations, Flemish ones, etc. So I listen to the news in everybody's version that I can understand, which means mainly English, French, Dutch and Flemish, and German if I am desperate. Most of the time Radio France has a horse-race or a soccer game on, or a quiz programme, but I heard a furtive report from their man in Algiers, who had managed to get them on the phone, while the Algerian army was looking for him. At the moment the situation looks very grim, since there seems to be no way out except for a military putsch or a civil war. But like a good French cheese, it is ripening slowly... My theory is that the mounting tourist season will prevent any real ruckus, since there will [be] too many Americans in the way to hold any respectable-sized riots. At any rate it's safer up here in cold damp Holland, where there hasn't been a revolt in over three centuries 17 May 1958.

Two weeks later, he wrote humorously to his friend John Lowenthal, "Regarding the French crisis, I continue to do my part by smoking a pack of Gauloises a day, and by keeping in constant touch with De Gaulle" (9 June 1958).

These comments on politics never crowded out reports about his work, however. The quirks of the Bibliothèque nationale and other European collections continued to amuse my father for many years. He reported to Zelda about the BN's "Enfer," the special section for blasphemous and pornographic

books, the graffiti on the walls of the toilets, the stiffly bureaucratic signs posted to discourage users from writing them, the filthy communal towel over the sink, and the details of an elaborate scheme he and a friend had to concoct in order to be able to trade their assigned seats (22 Apr. 1953). By the time of his second research trip to Europe, in the summer of 1956, he had become thoroughly at home in the BN. “The library is getting to treat me as a special character, and one of the librarians even talks to me in English voluntarily,” he boasted. “And they violate rules to make my tedious chores easier. Life has changed too much. Only the old dirty towel remains to remind me of yesteryear” (3 July 1956).

This second visit cemented my father’s relations with leading French scholars. “I’m never going to leave Paris, since my audience is all here, panting for discussions about French scepticism,” he wrote in one letter to Zelda (22 June 1956); another said that “my reception among the local yokels keeps bouleversing me.” To John Lowenthal, he wrote, “My wife, who has, perhaps, known her husband a bit too well, has been astonished, flabbergasted, and finally dismayed by the endless affairs philosophiques which have been going on in our life here. Since no one ever took me seriously before, she can’t comprehend why it should happen now, and especially here, of all unlikely places” (27 Aug. 1956). The noted scholar Julien Eymard d’Angers wrote a note about his work in the French journal *Dix-Septième Siècle*: as my father told Zelda, “it is the first time the journal has taken any notice of any American scholar.” This same letter recorded a meeting with the controversial scholar Lucien Goldmann, “a very jolly slob, who takes himself very seriously... When I told the R. P. Julien Eymard d’Angers that I was going to meet Goldmann, he was astonished. He had never met Goldmann, and he was even a bit afraid, because after all he is a Marxist, you know” (28 July 1956). As he prepared to sail back to the United States, my father confessed, “If I wasn’t sure of coming right back, I’d be sobbing like mad now, getting even more wrinkles in this paper.” His confidence about returning to Europe quickly stemmed, among other things, from another significant new friendship, that with Paul Dibon, then the French cultural attaché in the Netherlands, who “insisted that he would work untiringly to make sure that we spend next year in Holland”¹⁶ (late Aug. 1956). Dibon and my father would subsequently collaborate in establishing the International Archives of the History of Ideas monograph series.

Over the years, my father would entertain his mother and friends with tales of life in many more European libraries. When the Bibliothèque nationale closed for its annual vacation, he decided to tackle the Bibliothèque de

¹⁶A formal letter from Dibon proposing a meeting in Paris, dated 21 Aug. 1956, probably marks the start of this connection.

l'Histoire de Protestantisme Française, “because it claims to be open about three hours a day, but never the same three hours each day, so that this looks like a really special problem in libraryship” (21 Mar. 1953). He visited the British Library for the first time in May 1953, where he found conditions very different from France: “I am ensconced... with a permanent card, lots of light, and space...” In July 1958, he was in Florence: “The conditions prevailing here have forced a revolution in my working habits, since the damn library I am working in, that of Lorenzo di Medici, (designed by Michelangelo no less), opens at 9, and closes at a quarter to two each day, and I have to look through 30 boxes of letters and manuscripts, covered with dust” (2 July 1958). In 1961 came his momentous first visit to the library of the Great Synagogue of Amsterdam, which he visited on a tip from the library staff at the better-known Rosenthal Library:

I started perusing some Spanish manuscripts, and the curator told me there were much better ones at the Synagogue, that there were 300 uncatalogued manuscripts there in Spanish, French and Portuguese. The Synagogue is hardly ever open, but the curator, a Litvak named Fuks, took Dibon and myself over there and let us loose. The collection is really startling, containing all sorts of writings by Spinoza's teachers, with the most unexpected and startling contents. Dibon, who has been writing a monumental history of Dutch philosophy, just cannot believe his eyes. No one in Holland seems to know about this treasure trove. As a result, I have been working like a dog, sifting through it all whenever Fuks can let me in... Dibon keeps muttering that whenever I come to Holland for five days, he has to write another volume of his history of Dutch philosophy. (27 June 1961)

By this time, the Popkin research style was well established. On a summer research trip in 1962, he reported gleefully to Zelda from Brussels that “I feel like a traveling salesman zooming from place to place, startling people with what I am looking for, since it never occurred to them that such materials might exist. The notes are piling up like mad, with no end in sight... Amsterdam is turning out to be even more of a gold mine than I expected, and Paris was pretty rich too... At the Synagogue in Amsterdam they are treating me royally... I have been trying to decide if I am sitting where Spinoza was condemned and excommunicated” (26 July 1962). At home, my father's working style was equally intense. As he finished his translation of Bayle's *Dictionary* in 1963, he described the scene to John Lowenthal: “I have written my manuscript in the living room, with piles of the folio volumes of Bayle's *Dictionary* all over the place... and I had not only the library's copy of that set, plus my own of the French original, plus the other works of Bayle, five folio volumes, piled up all around me, with the manuscript spewing out of the typewriter all over the house” (3 Feb. 1963).

My father's visits to the Amsterdam synagogue library were the result of a major shift in his research interests. The *History of Scepticism* was finally on its way into print, after many years of searching for a publisher. The first version of the manuscript had been submitted to Princeton University Press in 1956. The Press was encouraging at first, asking my father to make revisions in his work, a process he finished in June 1957, when he complained to Zelda about the work involved in proofreading and checking the footnotes: "It has long since passed the boring stage, but this will pass, no doubt" (29 June 1957). To his disappointment, however, Princeton promptly rejected the project altogether. Paul Kristeller then recommended the manuscript to the Johns Hopkins University Press, but in March 1958, my mother told Zelda that it had been rejected again, "and may have to face further revision before he offers it for publication again. This is a bitter pill and he finds it difficult to swallow"¹⁷ (20 Mar. 1958). My father told Kristeller, "I guess the best thing to do next is to follow their advice and yours, and to try to rewrite the whole work, before showing [it] to anyone else" (27 Mar. 1958). He finally obtained a contract with the Dutch firm of Van Gorcum, and it was not until October 1960 that he could finally report to his mother that "my opus on scepticism has just come off the press. The Dutch publisher sent us an impressive copy by airmail, and said that more are on their way, probably wending their way through either the Suez or Panama canals... Now we sit back and await learned reviews pointing out that I misread or didn't read at all, some esoteric document of the late 16th century" (26 Oct. 1960).

Although *The History of Scepticism* made my father's scholarly reputation, it was not his first book. Always strapped for income in these years, my father and his good friend Avrum Stroll had contracted in 1955 to produce an introduction to philosophy for general readers. My father was unhappy about the project, and embarrassed about the title imposed by the publisher: *Philosophy Made Simple*. "I am afraid that the whole matter oppresses me, so the less said the better," he told his mother, claiming that "I have not, and probably never will, open the parcel containing my free copies... the results of my whoring" (12 Nov. 1956). Zelda, accustomed to living from her book royalties, had no sympathy for his complaints. "Now, really, Richard—take this from an old-time author—a first book has to be a thrilling experience. It's immutable law. And no matter how you wave it away, I'm sure Richard Popkin didn't write an inconsequential book and by all the rules, his mother deserves an autographed copy to display with pride," she told him.¹⁸ My father did even-

¹⁷These rejections rankled for years afterward, as the comments in "Warts and All," published in 1988, make clear. (p. 116)

¹⁸Zelda Popkin to Richard Popkin, 7 Nov. 1956 (Popkin family papers).

tually reconcile himself to the book; when he had to reread it for a second printing, he “was pleasantly surprised that it’s no stinker. No ordinary reader could tell what the hell it’s about, but I’m no longer ashamed of anything except its cover” (16 Jan. 1957).

Even before *The History of Scepticism* finally appeared, however, my father had become fascinated by Jewish topics, and particularly by the saga of the Marranos. The question of when this development in his intellectual life occurred has caused a certain amount of controversy. My father sometimes attributed his new interest to a mystical experience, but he was unable to recall precisely when it occurred; in his autobiographical essay, he writes of an “overpowering religious experience” that he dates after our family’s return from the Netherlands to Iowa City in the fall of 1958.¹⁹ This was certainly a moment of crisis in his life, as several painful letters to his long-time friend Judah Goldin show. “As you know, I am always brooding about something, and for the past several months I have been brooding about what to do with the rest of my life,” he wrote to Goldin on 7 January 1959. Even though he finally had a contract for the publication of the *History of Scepticism*, he was so unhappy with his situation at Iowa and in the philosophical profession that he was considering taking a graduate degree in another discipline or leaving academia altogether. In March 1959 he told John Lowenthal, “Rather than sit out here and suffer through another year to see what would happen next, if anything, I have decided to see if I can change my field and get into something in which there are a lot more opportunities. My own interest lies on the borderline between philosophy, history, history of science, French studies, and several other things” (30 Mar. 1959).

My father’s letters to Zelda and to Judah Goldin make it clear, however, that the deep crisis of the fall and winter of 1958–1959 was not the first step in his turn to an interest in Jewish topics. In one sense, these letters even suggest that the notion of a sudden turn to Judaism is misleading: he had grown up in a secularized but nonetheless intensely Jewish atmosphere, and he was always sensitive to Jewish matters. What may be his earliest published political statement was a letter, signed with three colleagues from the University of Connecticut faculty, denouncing anti-Jewish incidents in England in 1947.²⁰ One of his earliest letters to Zelda from Iowa City mentions that “we went over to the Hillel group to hear a discussion on Palestine,” a burning issue just prior to the United Nations vote to partition the territory; it is true that

¹⁹“Warts and All,” 117.

²⁰“End Persecution,” *Hartford Courant*, 6 Aug. 1947. These outbreaks were a reaction to the killing of two British soldiers in Palestine by Zionist groups trying to force the British to leave the region.

the experience had convinced him that he wanted nothing further to do with the local rabbi (18 Nov. 1947). A few months later, he told Zelda that he and my mother “discovered some wonderful reading which you no doubt know by heart, namely Sholom Aleichem’s ‘The Old Country’” (2 Feb. 1948). During their early years in Iowa, my parents did occasionally attend the local Unitarian Church, but it is doubtful that they saw this as a major break with their Jewish roots. My father told a friend that he felt at home with the group because “they do not believe in God, Christianity, or anything except social welfare.”²¹ Writing to the Iowa university president about an explosive tenure case at Iowa in 1952–1953, my father claimed that the candidate was being treated unfairly “solely because of the fact that with his appointment more than half the department would consist of people of Jewish extraction.”²²

Something clearly changed in my father’s relationship to Judaism in the spring of 1957, however, just at the time when he thought that the *History of Scepticism* was finished and when he was looking forward eagerly to leaving for the Netherlands. Like January 1959, this was a moment of acute unhappiness in his relationship with the University of Iowa, and, for that matter, with the discipline of philosophy. In response to a friend who had sent him an article denouncing the unhealthy intimacy of academic scientists and business interests, my father wrote, “I think the central and crucial degeneration in the learned world has come from the philosophers, in their ever-increasing refusal to deal with anything serious, and their ever-increasing attempt to prove to themselves and everyone else that philosophy is nonsense, or is a disease that has to be cured. Just compare a dialogue of Plato’s with the subject matter of almost any current American or British philosophical journal. Perhaps your efforts will inspire me to stop piddling and to sit down and write a diatribe against the philosophers.”²³

In 1957, as he would do again in the crisis he experienced in late 1958, my father had turned to Judah Goldin for advice. “Now that you have held my hand, and set me on the right path, life is no longer so black,” my father wrote to Goldin on 6 March 1957. The particulars of the crisis had to do with the

²¹R. C. “Chet” Baldwin to RHP, 1 Dec. 1947, quoting an earlier Popkin letter. Baldwin had been one of my father’s colleagues during his one year of teaching at the University of Connecticut.

²²RHP to [Virgil] Hancher, president of the State University of Iowa, 5 Mar. 1953 (incomplete letter in Popkin family papers). The case, which involved a junior faculty member named Joseph Cobitz, created a bitter division among the Iowa philosophy faculty. Cobitz left Iowa, but my father and his friends continued to refer to the matter for years afterward.

²³“Extracts from letter of RHP to Ed Speyer, 18 April 1957,” in Popkin papers. I have not found the original letter. Ed Speyer was a long-time friend of my father’s.

internal politics of the Iowa philosophy department, but the same letter goes on to say, "In the mean time, my colleague Ted Waldman and I are working on a revision of Cecil Roth's theory of the Jewish contribution to civilizing the world. We realized Roth had failed to observe several crucial facts—(a) the Irish count on our side, (b) since Montaigne was a Jew, anything worthwhile in France due to the spirit of Montaigne (namely everything) counts on our side, (c) there are queer mutations so that there are people who are goys by accident, but Jews by essence."²⁴ Although this passage was written in a humorous spirit, the line about Montaigne could be said to contain the germ of later Popkin theories about the influence of the descendants of the Marranos.

My father's letters to Zelda and to Judah Goldin from the spring of 1957 give additional indications that this was a key period in his relationship to Judaism. "You may be happy to hear that we have had our first seder, and although it was the blind leading the blind, it went off very well," he told Zelda on 16 April 1957.²⁵ Even as he prepared for his year as a Fulbright scholar in the Netherlands, he was thinking further ahead. Realizing that Israel had just been included in the Fulbright program, he wrote, "in my present mood, I think I would rather make my expedition after Utrecht one to Israel rather than to Oxford" (12 June 1957). Judah Goldin realized the significance of my father's shift of interests, and urged him to explore Judaism seriously. "Judah is trying to convince me to learn Hebrew, and has sent me a grammar. The problem, so far, is flabbergasting, but some day I hope to have mastered all of lessons one and two, which are the alphabet and the vowel marks. It's incredible to me that all the little boys in the Bronx can figure it out, and an old scholar like me is bewildered," my father wrote to Zelda (29 June 1957). Meanwhile, he continued to correspond with Goldin, who wrote to him on 10 July 1957, "I hope that at least writing and getting some of the thoughts out of your system, helped also getting some of the anguish out of your system." From this letter it is also clear that Goldin had specifically urged my father to take up biblical, not modern, Hebrew, "to be able to do several chapters of Scripture when the time comes." Did my father momentarily consider preparing for an adult *bar mitzvah* ceremony?

²⁴Ted (Theodore) Waldman had received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Iowa and became a lifelong friend of my father's. He replaced my father at Harvey Mudd College when my father moved on to UCSD in 1963.

²⁵Zelda responded, "I'm glad you had the Seder... at this season Jews feel a sort of loneliness and want to be together. Whatever—limping and halt as it may have been at your house—it was a festival that belongs to your kids, part of their inheritance, and good for them to have it." She herself had joined Judah Goldin's family for the celebration. (20 Apr. [1957])

It took a few years before my father's scholarly interests began to reflect his deepening interest in Judaism, but by January 1960, when his spirits were lifted by his having not just one but two job offers, and thus the assurance of escaping from Iowa, he wrote to Goldin that "I am slowly evolving a theory that the infusion of scepticism into Renaissance thought was a Marrano conspiracy."²⁶ In March 1960, during his last semester at the University of Iowa, he gave his first talk "on the subject that I am now working on, (while I should be writing a book instead), the contribution of the Marranos, the secret Jews, in Spain in the 16th century to the Renaissance and the Reformation. I spend my time figuring out which famous Spaniards of the period were actually Jews, and hunting through the Inquisition records for clues. The results so far are fabulous... I now have several of the local Spaniards looking furiously through the histories of their country to see if there was anybody of any fame during the period who wasn't Jewish" (letter to Zelda Popkin, 21 Mar. 1960). Later that year, he explained to Paul Kristeller how his new interests were changing his views about the development of skepticism: "It seems to me now that the interest in and concern with scepticism in the 16th century is probably in large measure a product of the intellectual crisis caused in Spain by the establishment of the Inquisition, and by the expulsion of the Spanish Jews in 1492."²⁷

My father's concern with Jewish issues was not limited to the Marranos. In December 1960, he thanked Zelda for the present of a copy of André Schwartz-Bart's Holocaust novel, *The Last of the Just*: "As soon as the book arrived, I started reading it, and was enormously impressed. Julie, as usual, read it all through in two sittings, and has been completely shaken ever since. She reports it is the most moving book she has ever read. Her account of what happens after where I have gotten to, has me a bit leery of proceeding at the moment. But from what I have read so far, I am impressed by the rich quality of it, and the importance of what he has to say" (30 Dec. 1960). A letter written the next day to Judah Goldin also mentioned Schwartz-Bart's book and added that "I was giving serious consideration to looking into the possibilities of moving to Israel... it seems to my untutored mind that the very existence of the political state of Israel changes the meaning and purpose of those who live their lives in terms of the stream of Jewish history. So what does one do???"

The enthusiasm for Jewish studies that grew out of my father's discovery of the Marranos would lead to many visits to Israel, but not to any serious attempt to settle there. On the other hand, it would generate innumerable books and articles over the next forty years. Even so, it was hardly my father's only preoccupation in the early 1960s. Intellectually, he was also very much

²⁶ RHP to Judah Goldin, 19 Jan. 1960.

²⁷ RHP to Kristeller, 4 Dec. 1960.

involved in work on his translation of selections from Pierre Bayle's *Dictionary*. His research on Bayle was a logical extension of the *History of Scepticism*, whose first edition had ended with a discussion of Descartes. Bayle had already moved to the center of his concerns by the time he went to the Netherlands in 1957, as long letter to Paul Kristeller shows.²⁸ His interest in Bayle had brought him into contact with the French scholar Elisabeth Labrousse in the mid-1950s, and his letters to her are one of the richest sources of information about the development of his ideas. In November 1958, he explained to her his then-controversial argument that Bayle needed to be counted as a fideist, and not as a rationalist forerunner of the Enlightenment. "I admit that I am genuinely troubled by the side of Bayle that you stressed..., his rationalism with regard to morality. Although I am not yet prepared to offer an explanation of how I think the fideistic, sceptical Bayle can be reconciled with the moral rationalism of Bayle, I am encouraged to hope that an explanation can be found... the same problem seems to be present in almost all of the sceptics from Sextus and Montaigne, through Hume, Mill and Bertrand Russell, and is perhaps explained by Kierkegaard's contention that the moral life at its highest is the rational life, but that the religious man must give up rationality and accept faith, even where the duties required by faith would be considered immoral by the rational man."²⁹

One can see that the work on Bayle was closely related to the concern with religious issues that drove my father's interest in the Jews. As he put the finishing touches on the translation, he told Paul Kristeller that reading the *Dictionary* "from A to Z... is really an amazing education," and he wrote to his friend John Lowenthal, "I seriously think it is my most important work, and the most useful for my own understanding of the universe, that I have ever undertaken."³⁰ As the translation project neared completion, he outlined for Red Watson the view of Bayle's thought that he had arrived at, suggesting that the *Dictionary* needed to be read as an equivalent of Maimonides's *Guide to the Perplexed*. "Bayle attacks all rational claims in the manner of the subtle Arriaga, transforms the reader into an égaré, and then starts offering him a guide for the perplexed. The ultimate end of such a guide is to remove him from perplexity by removing him from the rational world to the world of 'true Christianity,' namely that of Bunel, or maybe of Eppendorf, etc." (9 Feb. 1963). The work on Bayle also fed into his developing Jewish interests. "Every now and then I get a clue from Bayle about the Marranos, and then I break off

²⁸ RHP to Kristeller, 15 Nov. 1957.

²⁹ RHP to Elisabeth Labrousse, 24 Nov. 1958.

³⁰ RHP to Kristeller, 19 Dec. 1962; RHP to John Lowenthal, 3 Feb. 1963.

Dictionary reading, and go pursuing the lead,” he told Elisabeth Labrousse on 6 May 1962. But the work involved in getting the complicated translation project into print frustrated him. At the end of 1964, he was finally able to check the proofs for his book. “It has been a stupifying experience, especially those damned notes to *Rorarius* and *Spinoza* and *Zeno of Elea*. I have ceased to care if souls have beasts,” he wrote to her (26 Dec. 1964).

In addition to his scholarly work, my father had many other preoccupations in the early 1960s. There were new jobs, first at Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, California, where he taught from 1960 to 1963, and then as the founding chair of the philosophy department at the new University of California, San Diego, campus in La Jolla. Moving to southern California was a major adjustment for the whole family. “In spite of our expectations that the area would be full of phoniness, hoopla, etc., what we’ve seen of it, and especially what is immediately around Claremont, is very nice, and there seem to be lots and lots of civilized people, all busy sprinkling their lawns and flora,” my father wrote to John Lowenthal after a first month in Claremont (8 Aug. 1960). September 1961 brought a new addition to the Popkin family with the birth of my sister Susan. “The report is that I am being the worst kind of doting father, but *c’est la vie*,” he told Lowenthal (23 Sept. 1961).

The early 1960s were also the height of my father’s involvement in attempts to “solve” the case of Alger Hiss, a Roosevelt-era State Department official convicted of perjury in a controversial trial in 1950. John Lowenthal had been a volunteer assistant on the Hiss legal team at the time, and he and my father corresponded regularly about it after Hiss was released from prison in the mid-1950s. In October 1958, my father outlined for Lowenthal an elaborate theory as to how Hiss’s accuser, Whitaker Chambers, could have forged the documents that had played a crucial role in the case (11 Oct. 1958). Lowenthal showed this letter to Hiss, and reported that he was “impressed by what he termed your brilliant statement... he would like to meet you and discuss a few things.”³¹ Public interest in the case revived in the early 1960s, and several letters refer to renewed plans for a meeting of the three men. “Please give Alger my greetings, and tell him I’m still looking forward to our getting together for a ‘complete discussion’ of the case,” my father wrote to Lowenthal on 25 October 1963. His obsession with the Hiss case clearly prefigured his subsequent obsession with disproving the official explanation of the Kennedy assassination; the last mention of Hiss in his letters to Lowenthal explains that “I have to warn you and Alger that I’ve temporarily suspended meditating on his case to work on the Oswald one...” (23 Jan. 1965).

³¹ John Lowenthal to RHP, 1 Nov. 1958.

Along with these non-academic occupations, my father was also involved in new professional projects. Together with Paul Dibon, he was heavily engaged in launching the *International Archives of the History of Ideas*. The long and complicated negotiations with the Dutch publisher Nijhoff are detailed in a series of letters in my father's files. There was also the project of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, first broached to my father at the end of 1957 by his former teacher Paul Oskar Kristeller, which involved many difficulties.³² Eventually entrusted with the new journal's editorship, my father was determined to keep it independent of any particular academic institution, and fought a long battle against proposed editorial arrangements that he feared would prevent "the printing of the sort of articles that I would consider contributions to the history of philosophy."³³ "As you can well imagine, I have not been willing to compromise any views about what the field of 'the history of philosophy' is, nor any scholarly standards," he wrote to Kristeller during one of these crises.³⁴ He had no prior experience in editorial work to fall back on, however, and when the page proofs of the first number reached him, "In a panic I had to go up to San Francisco to see the publisher, the University of California Press, to find out what I am supposed to do about it all. Then I had to read all of the proofs, on the theory that the editor had at least the responsibility of finding out what was in his journal before it came out, and send them out to contributors hither and yon... we now have more than twenty paid up subscribers, and need between 1,000 and 1,500 to break even," he told Zelda (11 Aug. 1963).

This letter was written just after my father arrived in La Jolla as the first chair of the philosophy department at the new University of California campus there. The job had been offered to him in the winter of 1963. "The plum of Pacific coast philosophy jobs has been tossed my way," my father told John Lowenthal. "La Jolla is intended to be as big as Berkeley and UCLA within ten years, and has really dynamic leadership, plus none of the built-in problems of UCLA and Berkeley, since it has no undergraduate students, no faculty except a few scientists at the moment" (3 Feb. 1963). He wrote to Red Watson that "it is the first time in my life that I have seen a situation where I really felt I would fit perfectly, where we might be happy for a lifetime, and where I could do what I want to" (9 Feb. 1963). It was an extraordinary opportunity for a man who was not yet forty years old. Although he arrived full of optimism, my father quickly learned that the University of California system had its less inviting features. "Each morning when I arrive, my secretary has

³² Kristeller to RHP, 23 Dec. 1957.

³³ RHP to John Mothershead [?], 7 Sept. 1961.

³⁴ RHP to Kristeller, 14 Mar. 1963.

received an enormous wad of paper of various parts of the bureaucracy which I am supposed to understand about what the department has been charged for, what we have ordered, what we are supposed to do about X, Y, and Z. Everything comes in all sorts of colored copies, which we are supposed to sign and send to other offices, which send us more forms announcing the happy news that they have received our forms, and will we send them more forms acknowledging this and that," he told his mother (11 Aug. 1963).

When he wrote this first humorous comment about the travails of a department chair in 1963, my father could hardly have imagined how complicated his life at UCSD was going to become. Building up a new department and a new campus from scratch would have been challenging under any circumstances, but the increasingly contentious atmosphere of the 1960s magnified these difficulties. "For a week my department has been boiling over with controversy over sharp disagreements regarding appointments... It has taken a fair amount of diplomacy, of which I have damned little, to quiet matters down," he wrote to his mother in January 1964 (11 Jan. 1964). The radicalism of the period began to affect his life when he decided to highlight the new department's existence by sponsoring a conference on "the philosophy of Karl Marx" in February 1964. As he wrote to Paul Dibon, the "subject, I am sure, has long since become a bore on the European scene. Here it is still considered much too touchy" (17 Feb. 1964). To Zelda, he wrote, "Some of the powers in the university are really quaking about what might happen if our local Birchers, who are many in number, see fit to raise a word of protest. The university is doing its best to hide the whole episode, while I am helpfully inviting people from all over to come and attend"³⁵ (17 Feb. 1964). Describing the conference to Zelda afterward, my father reported that it was something of an ordeal, since on "the night of the first session one by one the entire Popkin family collapsed with stomach flu," but somehow he pulled himself together and even managed to host a closing party, which "ended with around 60 people getting drunk in our living room to the wee hours of the evening." He continued, "then one of the participants, from Brandeis, didn't want to go home, in the hopes that we would hire him, so we had him around all of the next day, introducing him to deans, officials, etc." (8 Mar. 1964).

The guest who wouldn't leave was the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who joined the UCSD philosophy department a year later, just as he

³⁵The "Birchers" were members of the John Birch Society, an influential right-wing political group of the period noted for its hostility to anything smacking of Marxism or communism. My father's papers include a note from UCSD chancellor Herbert York assuring him that "the participants in this symposium, speakers and others, are free to express their own true opinions including during the sessions of the symposium, and nothing I have said has been intended to suggest otherwise." (20 Dec. 1963)

became a global celebrity. He and my father became good friends, but Marcuse's purported role as the guru of radical student protesters made the department a lightning rod for political attacks in California. My father doubted that Marcuse really relished this role. "Herbert is a fairly tired radical who came to La Jolla for a peaceful old age. So he is a bit overwhelmed by having his revolution occur at a time like this," he wrote, soon after the most memorable moment of our family's involvement in the Marcuse controversies (2 June 1968). This was the "night of the long guns," an occasion in May 1968 during which a group of Marcuse's graduate students, fearing that he was in physical danger from right-wing extremists, posted armed guards around his house and set up a base camp for their operation in our living room. My father didn't have to describe this scene to Zelda, because she had actually been staying with us at the time, although her deafness kept her from understanding why boxes of shotgun shells had appeared on the living room coffee table, but her son kept her informed of subsequent developments. "The latest round in the affair is that I drafted a stirring statement for the department in honor of his birthday, ending with the news that we are establishing a Herbert Marcuse Prize in philosophy to be given annually. The university refused to let the public relations office distribute the statement to the press... the terrified university still keeps silent, and they are now accusing the Philosophy Dept. of all sorts of crimes, and rumor is floating around to the effect that if we don't stop agitating... the dept. will be dismantled and put out of business," he wrote to Zelda in July 1968 (20 July 1968).

The Marcuse affair was not the only guise in which the 1960s movements affected my father's life. In 1964, the Free Speech Movement rocked the university's Berkeley campus, and he was appointed to a system-wide committee to look into the official response to the protests. "Last week my first meeting on the Berkeley crisis took place, and I can see that I am hooked for the rest of my academic career here," he told his mother in January 1965. "The committee I am on met in Berkeley from noon one day till 1:30 am, and then from 9 till 2 the next day... listening to various versions of the events. The end result was to realize that we were lied to by experts, and that we have to meet next week far from the madding throng in Santa Barbara to try to figure out what is going on. By now I am convinced beyond recall that the students must be right, since the faculty and the administration are such finks, trying to prove the most preposterous things about the case" (12 Jan. 1965). (As if my father was not under enough stress, this letter mentions that he was giving me my first driving lessons.)

My father's principled commitment to freedom of speech led him to sympathize with the Filthy Speech Movement, an offshoot of the original protest whose members provoked outrage by putting the word "Fuck" on protest signs. "The whole university is going mad over the terror of

the famous word," he wrote to Zelda. "When I met the genius who carried the banner with a strange device, he had another sign, this time saying, 'Are you worried about double parking? Join planned parenthood.' When I mentioned that this latest sign might be at variance with his previous one, he glowered at me and said that he was not interested in logic" (26 Apr. 1965). While these events took place on the Berkeley campus, my father was by this time also completely at odds with the academic administration at UCSD. "A revolt is brewing against our administration, and, as you can imagine, I am in the thick of it, both writing tons of nasty memoranda, and conferring in corners with all of the other plotters," he told his mother in August 1965, and at the end of that year, he wrote to her proudly, "the people who run this institution must regret greatly that they ever hired a philosophy department" (21 Aug. 1965; 23 Dec. 1965). In addition to his involvement with the campus protests at Berkeley, my father also helped organize demonstrations against the Vietnam war at UCSD. On 18 November 1965, he boasted to his French friend Elisabeth Labrousse that "we managed to get the largest turnout per student capita in the country." As the war dragged on and student protests intensified, my father became ever more estranged from the University of California administration. Like many department chairs, he came to feel that he could no longer devote himself to the things he loved best. "I dream of being a professor somewhere where I just teach, talk to students and colleagues and do research," he told Watson (11 Mar. 1966). "The officialdom seems to think they are forced to support the worst elements of public policy, and that the real enemies of the university are the students, because they care about what is happening to the world," he wrote to his colleague Avrum Stroll (6 Dec. 1967). Despite all his conflicts with the UCSD administration, however, my father was proud of what he had accomplished as department chair. "In my opinion, it has developed so rapidly and so well that it is now generally considered one of the leading departments in the country," he reported to the university chancellor in February 1968.³⁶

In my father's own life, however, the event of the 1960s that eventually loomed the largest was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963. In this regard, his first mention of the subject, in a letter to Zelda written just eight days later, is both prophetic and misleading, laying out his immediate conviction that there was some mystery behind the event but giving no hint of how involved he would become with it:

On the cosmic side of events, we are not taking them in quite the way you seem to be on your side of the continent. During the week I have come

³⁶RHP to UCSD Chancellor John Galbraith, 14 Feb. 1968.

around to being grateful to the Dallas police for providing comic relief during a national tragedy. They have also provided work for historians for many generations to come, writing books on who or what really was behind the plot. The juxtaposition of the event with the personalities of Oswald and Rubinstein is enough to make one ponder for many years about what really makes events happen. And considering which of the participants Rubinstein bumped off, I can't see the Arabs or anyone else working up much of a case for anti-semitism. So, take it easy. The world still goes on, and the American government remains pretty much the same, except that Johnson may be able to get a couple of bills passed. It was amazing how everyone was gripped by and glued to their TV sets day and night up to Monday. We went to a service on Monday at Temple Beth Israel in San Diego, and it was a moving transformation to change from being a viewer to a participant in some aspect of the situation. Without the service, it would have been much harder to return to [the] world of memoranda on Tuesday, and the endless battle of bureaucratic problems. (30 Nov. 1963)

Exactly how my father's interest in the Kennedy assassination turned into the obsession that led him to write a celebrated critique of the Warren Commission report in the *New York Review of Books* and then an expanded book version, *The Second Oswald*,³⁷ in 1966 is not clear from these letters, but the process was largely completed by November 1964, when he wrote the longest of all his letters to his mother, five single-spaced pages recording his reactions to reading the report. "Now that I have a copy of the Warren Commission Report, I find my hypothesis supported all over the place, and that on almost any subject or aspect of the case, the Report indicates that there is something screwy, that the evidence doesn't fit, and that it can only either be ignored, or the witnesses impeached, or dismissed with the news that it must be mistaken... to get down to my own hypothesis, let us suppose at the outset that Oswald didn't do it," he began, concluding five pages later, "My theories on the 'more' are far too speculative and libelous to suggest at this stage," although he went on to name two possible suspects (10 Nov. 1964). In this case, it was my grandmother, rather than my father, who played the role of skeptic. "I haven't given too much thought to Lee Harvey's alleged assassination but have been inclined to accept the solitary-crackpot thesis, chiefly on historical grounds. Every previous presidential assassination has been a lone screwball deal... Don't dismiss the screwball theory so lightly—nuts have altered history before; and don't take the testimony of witnesses too seriously. They're notoriously unreliable," Zelda wrote in reply to my father's long screed.³⁸ My

³⁷ Richard H. Popkin, *The Second Oswald* (New York: Avon Books, 1966).

³⁸ Zelda Popkin to Richard Popkin, n.d. but Nov. 1964.

father ignored her advice, and subsequent letters kept Zelda abreast of the negotiations that led to his article and the book that established his reputation as one of the harshest critics of the Warren Commission.

In the midst of all these obligations and distractions, to which were added various ups and downs in the lives of his three children, the building of a house in La Jolla, an active role in the creation of the first Jewish congregation in that part of San Diego, and concerns in the lives of both Zelda and my mother's parents, it is not surprising that the history of philosophy took a back seat in my father's letters. His role in establishing the Jewish Community of La Jolla surprised his secular-minded mother. "The news that you're starting a shul in La Jolla amuses and intrigues me and in my spare moments I speculate on whether you are beginning to run true to Harry Feinberg's genes," she wrote. "Your grandfather, remember, was a kind of Jewish Johnny Appleseed, scattering new synagogues and Jewish centers wherever he set foot."³⁹ In his work, my father continued to explore the influence of Jews and Marranos on the development of seventeenth-century philosophy, the topic of his official inaugural lecture at UCSD in April 1964, and to work on several other projects, including his anthology of readings in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosophy and a volume of selections from David Hume that he co-edited with David Norton.⁴⁰ To Zelda, a professional author who measured the success of books by their royalties, he stressed his hopes that these projects would bring in some supplementary income, badly needed, he wrote,

³⁹Zelda Popkin to Richard Popkin, 16 Mar. [1964]. Zelda's own attitude toward her father and her Jewish upbringing in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, was softening somewhat at this time. Another letter from spring 1964 mentions that she had revisited the town. "I stayed over night, went to see the magnificent Jewish Home... just being completed and was greatly touched to find out how many people still remembered my father affectionately." (n.d. but spring 1964) Soon afterward, she would begin to weave her memories into a highly autobiographical novel, *Herman Had Two Daughters* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1968), her first published book since 1956 and one that was especially successful with Jewish readers nostalgic for the intense communal life of the early twentieth century. My father's files contain a few letters from his grandfather, who died in 1959, but the relationship was not a close one, and Harry Feinberg's example was probably not in his mind when he helped found the La Jolla congregation. On the other hand, my father's thinking about Jewish history was certainly affected by his discovery of numerous "Marranos" in La Jolla—Jews who had been living in that neighborhood of San Diego but who had concealed their origins because of the restrictive housing covenants still in force there until the early 1960s, and who unexpectedly turned out for the first community seder organized by the new La Jolla congregation in spring 1964.

⁴⁰Richard H. Popkin, ed., *The Philosophy of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (New York: Free Press, 1966); David F. Norton and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

“if we are going to pay for Jerry’s college” (2 Jan. 1966). With all his other obligations, he complained, “there is little time for coherent or consecutive thought” (9 Feb. 1966).

In 1966–1967, he did have a leave to travel to Europe and Israel, followed by a semester as a visiting faculty member at Duke University. From Paris, he wrote to Judah Goldin about a new direction in his work: “Since early last month, I’ve been trying to work on the 17th century, especially on Isaac Pereira [La Peyrère], the father of theory that there were men before Adam (naturally he is a Marrano). I’ve found lots of exciting material, but the Oswald case keeps getting in the way” (20 Aug. 1966).⁴¹ His book on the Kennedy case was translated into French, and he was frequently interviewed on the subject. A visit to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary “was a shock, but most exciting,” he told Watson. Although my father had disassociated himself from Marxist ideology in his teenage years, he had not been prepared for the reality of life in the Communist world. “We were... amazed by the outspoken anti-Communism of everyone we met” in the three countries’ intellectual communities, he wrote, “and depressed by realizing what they had to live with” (3 Jan. 1967). Israel had an entirely different effect on him. “I am ready to defect every instant and have found my real home,” the same letter to Watson reported. “Julie has to drag me kicking and screaming off each kibbutz we visit... The philosophers are first class, but the people in Jewish history are both incredible characters, and really exciting guys. And here I can argue about the merits of Isaac La Peyrère, and such like to my heart’s content.”

The 1966–1967 trip was my father’s last long stay in Paris – his research and connections came to focus increasingly on London and the Netherlands – and the beginning of a long flirtation with Israel. The Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab states in June 1967 had a profound effect on him, as two lengthy letters to Elisabeth Labrousse reveal. “I really believe that the week of June 5–9 will play a major role in the history of Judaism down to the end of time,” he wrote on 26 July 1967. “The Hitler persecutions affected all of us in a morbid way, and have made every Jew, no matter how little he was interested in Judaism[,] feel that for better or worse he belonged to a tragic history. The Israeli victory is another event in which all Jews have participated, and for the first time in centuries, or even millenia, it is a heroic one rather than a group disaster. As you can gather, I am in a state of euphoria about what happened

⁴¹My father had become interested in La Peyrère, on whom he eventually published a book, several years before this. A letter to my mother (22 Aug. 1964) reports that he “found enough for another volume on La Peyrere the pre-Adamite man and his influence... Among other things, I found that La Peyrere, in his last days was working on a *Rappel aux juifs*, in which he was claiming that there were two Messiahs coming, one for the Xtians and one for the Jews.”

and see it as as great an event as the Maccabean resistance to the Syrians.” He was, however, relieved that the fighting had ended well before his seventeen-year-old daughter Maggi had managed to arrive in Israel, after leaving her boarding school in the Netherlands. “She is now on a kibbutz on the Lebanese border helping rebuild Zion by doing dishes,” he told Labrousse.⁴²

Elisabeth Labrousse replied by raising the issue of the Palestinians, evoking a long answer from my father. “I fail to see why the Jews are the only group that is not entitled to their own chance of independent development within their historical framework and roots,” he told her. “Your friends can argue from now to doomsday that the Jews are not a race, etc., but they can never get rid of the fact that we have had a different and a unique history which has made us a cohesive group with its own culture, its own ideals and aspirations which cannot be fully realized as members of a quasi-tolerated minority group within other cultures....” He conceded that “the problem... of the Arab refugees is certainly a most serious one,” but this did not mean that he could refuse to support Israel: “I am quite disturbed by the callous attitude I have found among many Israelis about the matter, and their views since the June war have definitely not gotten any better. But whenever I get saddened by this, I realize that I haven’t had the courage up to now to move to Israel, so that I don’t have to live in the situation they do.” He did, however, “share with the Israelis an overwhelming concern to see that state of Israel continue and develop, and I really think that this is crucial not only for the Jews, but for the world” (25 Dec. 1967).

By the late 1960s, my father had become thoroughly disenchanted with UCSD and was actively seeking another job. He was offered a position in the history of ideas program at Brandeis University in the fall of 1968, but turned it down because, as he explained to Paul Kristeller, “I am reluctant to move away from philosophy, at least in the institutional sense, since, like you, I feel philosophy departments desperately need real contact with the history of philosophy.”⁴³ By the fall of 1969, a Guggenheim fellowship allowed him to anticipate a full year of renewed research. He told Watson that he was

⁴² Elisabeth Labrousse had experienced the Six-Day War during a visit to Algeria, where, as she told my father, “we had some bad moments because the reports given by the Algerian radio had not the slightest connection with reality!” She said that “for several days I trembled for Israel,” but “now I hope that it will show wisdom and ‘restraint,’ although it will be difficult, if only to assure its future. But how many clouds are still on the horizon, what misery for those poor refugees and ‘wandering Arabs.’” In her opinion, “It is the western character of Israel that is, in the last analysis, what they are least willing to overlook. Anti-semitism, in this case, seems to me to be in reality just a superstructural ideology.” Labrousse to RHP, 28 June 1967.

⁴³ RHP to Kristeller, 5 Jan. 1969.

convinced that he had found a way “to unite all my subjects—I discovered (a) that there was Jewish Pyrrhonism, (b) that around 1700 someone constructed a Pyrrhonism against the Jews, and (c) that this same type then used the Jews to construct a Pyrrhonism against the Catholics. So, now finally everything will fit together” (10 Apr. 1969). By early 1970, he was indeed once again describing to his mother the joys of a new library, as he went through the files of the East India Company in London, looking for material on the eighteenth-century Jewish economist Isaac de Pinto (31 Jan. 1970). In June 1970, he wrote excitedly from Jerusalem, which he found “marvelous. The Old City is the most unbelievable place I’ve ever seen.” He was even considering staying in Israel, a prospect he had first mentioned during his initial visit there in 1966, when he had written that he was “wondering whether to stay immediately or in a few years” (18 Dec. 1966). “There is a gradual build-up of a plan to get me to become the chairman of the new dept. of philosophy at Haifa... some life decisions will have to be made,” he wrote four years later (20 June 1970).

Nothing came of the Haifa prospect; instead, my father left UCSD for a titled chair position at Baruch College of the City University of New York in 1971, bringing him back to his native city and close to his mother for the first time since 1946, only to regret his decision almost immediately. Even before leaving San Diego, he told Judah Goldin that “New York really terrifies me... I look forward to seeing all the people I miss from here, and using the libraries, but we are really attached to the ease of life out here” (10 June 1971). He returned to UCSD after one year, but in 1973, he left San Diego for good, moving to Washington University in Saint Louis. “It seems to be a really lively enterprise with lots of interest in La Peyrère studies,” he told Goldin after a visit in October 1972. He held a joint appointment in philosophy and Judaic studies there until his retirement and relocation to Los Angeles in 1986. Like his initial enthusiasm for his other jobs, his optimism about the situation at Washington University soon faded and he actively pursued a number of other possibilities. In 1980, he did accept a part-time appointment at Tel Aviv University, but by then he had concluded that he could not really uproot himself and his wife. “We probably could not stand a steady diet of it (in the literal sense, Kosher food is pretty hard to take),” he told Watson. “Economically I don’t think we could readjust” (14 Apr. 1980).

Throughout the 1970s, my father continued to develop his ideas about the connections between the Marranos and the development of European thought. He became ever more convinced of the central importance of Isaac La Peyrère and his pre-Adamite theory. Messianism or millenarism had by now joined scepticism and the Marranos as one of the characteristic themes of his research. On 5 May 1969, he wrote to Goldin, “I’ve got some very juicy material about the 17th century Bible critic, Isaac La Peyrère, which should make a good tale. I’ve found out that his theory that there were men before

Adam comes from his Messianism. He wanted to prove that only Jewish history was of any importance, and that the goyim didn't come from the Biblical world or belong to it... His Messianism seems to have been independent of the Sabbatai Zevi movement, but had a great impact on European political figures like Queen Christina, the Prince of Condé and Cromwell." "It now appears that I will spend my life on La Peyrère and the pre-Adamites," he told Labrousse on 11 February 1971. "I may be mad, but I think the theory is one of the real turning points in intellectual history."

His interest in the implications of La Peyrère's polygeneticist theory of human origins led not only to my father's explorations of millenarianism but also to his pioneering article on the Enlightenment origins of modern race theories. "Right now I am engrossed in how the theory gets misused in the Enlightenment and the early 19th century to justify racism," he wrote to Goldin on 18 July 1971. A letter to Watson listed the "18th century villains" responsible for the development of modern racism: "Hume, Buffon, Blumenbach, Kant and Voltaire." In contrast to these secular philosophers, my father had found a religious hero: "The great abbé Grégoire, who was fighting racism at the end of the 18th century, claims that modern racism is due to three ingredients—giving up Biblical humanism, adopting a naturalistic interpretation of man, and needing a justification for slavery and the rape of America. From my researches, the good abbé is basically right" (16 Oct. 1971). Before long, he had also discovered evidence of La Peyrère's influence on Grégoire. Labrousse obtained photocopies of some key documents for him, and he found them "fantastic" (15 Oct. 1972). "La Peyrère wanted to create a Jewish-Christian church in France to precede the Messianic Age. Grégoire was trying to create a Jewish-Christian state in France by secularizing the Church and giving the Jews citizenship," he concluded a week later⁴⁴ (21 Oct. 1972).

While my father was excitedly pursuing new ideas in his research, he was also becoming ever more absorbed by his detective work on the Kennedy assassination and other American political controversies, particularly the Watergate scandal that dominated the news in 1973 and 1974. "As you probably remember when you last saw me I was a Watergate fanatic," he wrote to Elisabeth Labrousse on 25 June 1973. "I don't do much besides Watergating at present." After plying her with details about the Napoleonic Sanhedrin in a letter dated 5 July 1974, he told her, "Besides the Napoleon industry going on, I've been super busy as a spy, and got elected spy of the week back in late June when I did a job that not even E. Howard Hunt [one of the chief Watergate

⁴⁴ After many delays, my father's research on La Peyrère was finally published in book form in *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676). His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987).

conspirators] could have done.” By mid-1975, his obsession with these matters had escalated into a full-fledged manic crisis, painfully evident in a letter to Judah Goldin: “What has lately driven us all to the brink of insanity is that I have actually solved the JFK killing, with name of murderer... the whole planning apparatus, out of the CIA, the refusal of the FBI to block the assassination, and the fact that they had all of the evidence I have (roughly 5,000 pages) by 1967, and did nothing but harass the critics... I am in a wild state, sometimes not sleeping for days” (4 July 1975).

There followed several difficult years, during which my father was under intensive treatment for manic-depression. He had given up drinking in 1972, and eventually swore off smoking as well; equally importantly for his psychological equilibrium, he distanced himself from the conspiracy investigations that had preoccupied him so intensely, although he never lost his interest in them.⁴⁵ His struggle against cigarettes landed him on the front page of the *New York Times* in 1977, when Columbia University awarded him the Nicholas Murray Butler medal and the paper's reporter singled him out for chewing gum during the ceremony. In a letter to the university's president, my father felt obliged to write, “I hope you have forgiven me for my gum chewing which I do to give up smoking.”⁴⁶ Remarkably, he managed to keep his career going through all this. In 1979, he wrote to Judah Goldin, “During my grim past period I found that I pretty well cut myself off from all of my friends. At the same time I kept teaching, and only missed one class last year because of my condition. I also continued writing, and actually got more done than usual... I managed to put together the fourth edition of *History of Scepticism*, which now goes from Erasmus to Spinoza, with a chapter on La Peyrère.”⁴⁷ By this point, he had lost his interest in campus affairs; he mentioned to Goldin that “I have *never* been on a university committee in the six years we have been in St. Louis.” But he was still editing the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* and co-directing the International Archives of the History of Ideas (15 Feb. 1979).

As he slowly regained a certain psychological equilibrium, my father developed new scholarly interests. The same conviction that had underlain much of his speculation about the Kennedy assassination and Watergate – that

⁴⁵ In November 1996, he exchanged several lengthy letters about details of the Watergate affair with a British journalist, Anthony Summers.

⁴⁶ RHP to William J. McGill, 27 May 1977. Before going to Columbia, McGill had been chancellor at UCSD and in fact had lived a few houses down the street from the Popkins, so he knew my father personally. Most of my father's letter was devoted to issues facing Columbia's philosophy department rather than chewing gum.

⁴⁷ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979).

seemingly unrelated things in fact were tied together – may have helped him recognize the connections between seventeenth-century European theologians and late twentieth-century American fundamentalists, a theme that would eventually produce *Messianic Revolution*, the book he co-authored with David S. Katz.⁴⁸ The idea was already in his mind when he wrote to Judah Goldin, on 21 November 1981, about an encounter with a “Christian Zionist” in Los Angeles: “This man’s conception of Judaism, even though he wears a yarmulke, and studies Talmud and Maimonides all day long, is the simple caricature of 17th century millenarians. He expects that he will help bring about the conversion of the Jews by his conversion.” He also became increasingly convinced of the importance of millenarism in seventeenth-century intellectual life. “Since I last wrote my head has been swimming because I realized that some of the material I had unearthed shows that there was a movement of Christian followers of Sabbatai Sevi, and that his group included Serrarius, Comenius, Robert Boyle, Henry Oldenbourg, and maybe Spinoza,” he wrote to Watson. “The possibilities seem staggering. The wild Millenarism of the English Revolutionaries, of Comenius, etc. apparently merged with the Messianism of first Spinoza’s teacher, Menasseh ben Israel, and then with that of the Sabbatians. Out of this came the ideology of the Royal Society and maybe also Spinoza’s naturalism” (22 May 1980). These ideas would eventually coalesce into his identification of the millenarians as a “third force” between the seventeenth-century skeptics and their rationalist opponents.

In 1981–1982, my father was appointed as a visiting professor at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles. He had first become acquainted with the library, which he described to Watson as “a Huntington Library in a minor key,” (16 May 1962) twenty years earlier, when he was teaching at the nearby Claremont colleges. Although he and my mother would not relocate permanently to Los Angeles until 1986, my father realized that the Clark would be an especially supportive environment for him. “The Clark library is an unbelievable island of tranquility in the noisiness and crapiness of LA. It sits in a little square on the edge of a ghetto neighborhood, in ornate splendor, with elegant gardens,” he told Goldin. “Inside is probably the best collection of 17th and 18th century English materials in the country, with practically no readers. All I have to do is preside over the enclosed [list of] lectures, give a party after each one, and look learned if anyone drops in.” Dad continued to visit other libraries all over the world until physical problems finally forced him to give up traveling in the late 1990s. In 1981, he combined a visit to my wife and me at the University of Kentucky with a stop at a forgotten collection of French Catholic theological works in Vincennes,

⁴⁸David S. Katz and Richard H. Popkin, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millenium* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1999).

Indiana, about which he reported to Elisabeth Labrousse that “there is no librarian, just two very helpful elderly ladies who unfortunately are unable to find any particular book. When I asked if the building was used for anything besides housing the books, I was told that the Alcoholics Anonymous group meets there on Wednesdays” (28 Jan. 1981). In 1981 he also made his first visit to the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. Memories of the Nazi era had dissuaded him from spending time in Germany, but, as he wrote to Watson, “when I found out that Wolfenbüttel was the place where Lessing wrote *Nathan the Wise*, and that Moses Mendelssohn visited him several times there, I knew it was an extension of the Holy Land” (11 Oct. 1981). The Clark Library, however, became his intellectual home for the last decades of his life. After his retirement from Washington University in 1986, my parents bought a condominium apartment in Pacific Palisades. “We live a block from the center of the village,” he told Judah Goldin, “and can take care of most of our needs without a car. There is a bus from our corner to UCLA. And by car I can get to the Clark Library in 18 minutes” (1 Jan. 1987). The nineteen years my father spent in Pacific Palisades before his death in April 2005 were the longest period of steady residence at one address in his whole life.

Retirement certainly did not diminish my father's intellectual energy, although he was slowed down by periodic bouts of depression and physical health problems. “I still work when depressed, but it ain't fun,” he told Watson (5 June 1989). His book on La Peyrère finally appeared in 1987, and he continued to produce a steady stream of articles. He was, however, increasingly concerned about what he saw as the diminished status of the historical approach to the study of philosophy. In 1988, he was a guest speaker at an institute devoted to the teaching of the history of philosophy. Writing to Paul Kristeller, who had introduced him to this field of study nearly a half-century earlier, he reported that the experience was “both heartening and disheartening.” He was encouraged to meet young scholars interested in the history of the discipline, but concerned that they often lacked the necessary training to study it properly. “So, the good side is that there are people in the wings to carry on. The bad side is that they suffer from various lacunae in their work because they have had no training in how to do research, how to find material, and usually how to use the great research libraries.” He hoped that a program might be established to allow promising young scholars to work with mentors who could help them develop the necessary skills for work in the field.⁴⁹ The month-long seminar on the seventeenth-century anti-religious tract “The Three Impostors” that my father organized in Leiden in 1990 was an example of what he had in mind.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ RHP to Kristeller, 5 Aug. 1988.

⁵⁰ Richard H. Popkin, “Introduction: Warts and All, Part 2,” in James E. Force and David S. Katz, eds., *Everything Connects* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), xxxi–xxxv.

Letters written to Elisabeth Labrousse in the mid-1990s, forty years after they first met, continued to update her on projects such as the *Columbia History of Western Philosophy*⁵¹ (“It is, as you may expect, a revisionist version of what happened, stressing the role of scepticism through the last two thousand years” (10 Oct. 1996)), the final revised edition of *The History of Scepticism*,⁵² and his work on millenarianism. Inevitably, exchanges of scholarly tidbits and comments on political affairs now had to be combined with reports on medical problems and the loss of old friends. A letter of 19 June 1995 discussed the death of Popkin and Labrousse’s long-time colleague Paul Dibon; in another letter, dated 16 January 1997, my father urged Labrousse to be patient in the wake of a cataract operation. “The first couple of days are difficult, but then the improvement should be obvious. Quite a while back, I had cataracts removed from both eyes within a month. The difference has been amazing. I rarely use eyeglasses except to read Bayle’s footnotes.” Even when near-blindness during his final years made it impossible for my father to write or type his own correspondence, he continued to stay in touch with friends and fellow scholars by dictating letters and exchanging e-mail. He was also increasingly handicapped by emphysema. A letter to a fellow sufferer from lung ailments explained that “going upstairs, hills, is exhausting. My situation will gradually get worse over time, but I can function quite well if I stick to level ground... I am gradually accepting that I can no longer be a jet set wandering Jew, but will have to operate mainly from here.”⁵³

Lively as my father’s letters are, and as valuable as they are for tracing his career, they are rarely introspective. Only on a few occasions did he emulate Montaigne, the French philosopher who looms so large in his *History of Scepticism*. One of the rare trips he took that had nothing to do with research, a family visit to friends in New Orleans during the Christmas holidays of 1958–1959 that coincided with the deep depression mentioned in the letters to Judah Goldin quoted earlier in this essay, inspired some serious reflections. As he traveled south, my father was very struck by the spectacle of the region, then still marked by segregation. To his mother, he wrote, “I found that I felt as grim about going into Mississippi as I do about entering Germany, and I expected the place to look like one vast concentration camp. And lo and behold, when we entered the noble state, it looked more prosperous than its neighbors, it had lovely scenery, good roads... and no sign of people being

⁵¹Richard H. Popkin, ed., *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁵²Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵³RHP to Danièle Letocha, 26 Oct. 1995.

lynched." Later, he did see poorer parts of the state, "definitely America at its worst." The whole experience made him unusually reflective. "I always find it stimulating to look at another cultural world, since it makes me brood about what is right and wrong, and I found the problem of Mississippi almost as interesting as that of Spain or the Azores," he wrote (5 Jan. 1959).⁵⁴

In a rare break from his letter-writing practice, he came back to the same subject in his next letter to Zelda. "I find that whenever I go out into a new culture, I find that I suddenly wake up mentally, but when I get back here, I fall asleep all over again. But I doubt that I, or we, really see much of what goes on when we are there, since most of the looking is always inward and not outward. I find that what happens is that I notice that other people eat something different for breakfast, and immediately I start wondering who is right. And soon this goes from noticing the trivia to noticing that there are totally different ways of life, and that people seem to get along in all sorts of radically different ways. And, maybe because I am too unsure of myself, I find I end up all in dither wondering what's right and what's wrong. And, as a result of all our traveling, I am now in doubt about almost everything most of the time. So, perhaps travel isn't broadening, but just shattering, and the people who can travel without having their own values questioned are better off? Who knows?" (20 Jan. 1959).

Another uncharacteristically personal letter of 23 August 1974 to Judah Goldin shows my father still struggling to find the balance between doubt and belief, this time on a more philosophical plane. "I know that something went screwy in the course of the 17th century that led to the modern intellectual morass. And I'm sure that one didn't have to, and doesn't have to run off into the direction of scientism and naturalism. Like you I think one has had to hold on to a commitment that life is not meaningless. But I'd go further, that our best clue to what meaning it has is still, at least for Westerners, in the Scriptures. But, so far, I couldn't and wouldn't defend this intellectually, but only on the basis of my own religious experience."

In the last decades of his life, my father had several serious exchanges with his friend Red Watson, who challenged him to define his position on religion and to assess the meaning of his career.⁵⁵ In 1987, he admitted that he

⁵⁴Our family had made an unexpected visit to the Azores Islands in the summer of 1956, when the ocean liner taking us back from a summer in France developed engine trouble and had to put into the port of Horta in the island of Fayal to make repairs. We were told that this was the first time a passenger vessel had stopped there since before World War II.

⁵⁵Watson also deserves credit for encouraging my father to write the autobiographical essay "Warts and All" that appeared in the first *Festschrift* volume dedicated to him. My father found the task difficult at first, but finally reported to Watson that he had done most of it "in a couple of long sessions lasting until 2 a.m. each time" (29 Dec. 1986).

had been “drifting out of Judaism,” but added that “Christianity is not, in William James’s term, a live option for me. I don’t know if it is early Jewish brain-washing or sanity, but I cannot find anything plausible in Christianity... The Druse or the Shi’ites seem easier to take, for me. And I get no comfort from churches, I just enjoy them as art objects... What I am looking for in the late 17th century is a Judeo-Christianity that has given up its historical mythology. And I think it is a combination of the views of the Quakers of the time, Spinoza, and Jean Labadie” (22 Aug. 1987). When Watson pushed him to justify his position further, my father replied, “You wonder how I can be religious, given my ‘intelligence and knowledge of scepticism, and more... with your knowledge of psychology and physiology, etc.’ I wonder in reverse—how you can be a scientific materialist in this day and age given your intelligence and knowledge of scepticism and modern science.” As a postscript to this letter, he quoted a bit of doggerel: “‘The wise in every age conclude, What Pyrrho taught and Hume renewed, That dogmatists are fools’”⁵⁶ (20 Mar. 1988).

Watson had asked my father to sum up not only his religious and philosophical convictions, but also the trajectory of his career. Did he regret not having taught at more prominent universities, or not having achieved a leading position in the American Philosophical Association? My father replied that, for him, the meaning of an academic career “lies in what one publishes, and who one influences, not in what job one has... So, I don’t feel I would have done better or worse at other institutions. My contribution, such as it is, I think is my writings, plus the JHP [*Journal of the History of Philosophy*] and the International Archives, plus influencing quite a number of people in various branches of intellectual history.” He had never seen much point in trying to counter the influence of analytic philosophers in the APA, but he hoped that there would be a place for the historical approach in the profession: “I don’t worry about what the analytic historians will do, but I just want to guarantee some ways young people can get the training to do historical history of philosophy” (22 Aug. 1987).

When my father died in April 2005, he was still working on several projects. The one he talked about with the greatest enthusiasm was an essay on the influence of the *Chizzuk Emunah*, the Karaite rabbi Isaac of Troki’s critique of Christianity, written at the end of the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ The project gave

⁵⁶The lines are by one of Hume’s friends, the poet Thomas Blacklock.

⁵⁷Richard H. Popkin, “Four Centuries of Influence: Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki’s *Chizzuk Emunah*,” edited by Jeremy D. Popkin, with the assistance of Peter K. J. Park and Knox Peden, in Richard H. Popkin, *Disputing Christianity: The 400-Year-Old Debate Over Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki’s Classic Arguments* (New York: Humanity Books, 2007), 11–40.

my father an opportunity to touch on all his favorite historical themes: the interaction of religious arguments and skepticism, the contribution of Jews to the development of western thought, the continuing relevance of obscure religious arguments in the contemporary world, and the role of eccentrics such as George Bethune English (1787–1828), the first American writer to embrace Isaac of Troki's ideas. My father imagined Isaac of Troki as a Jew who was nevertheless an outsider in his own community, because of his heretical Karaite beliefs, and as someone who would have exchanged ideas with the Christians and Socinians who were active in Poland during his lifetime. Perhaps my father hoped that his ideas, like those of Isaac of Troki, would continue to be reinterpreted and argued over long after his death. About Isaac of Troki's life and personality we know almost nothing. Thanks to his letters, however, the memory of Richard Popkin's zest for scholarship, his gift for friendship, and his wide-ranging interests will remain alive.

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