

Enfield's Brucker and Christian Anti-scepticism in Enlightenment Historiography of Philosophy

John Christian Laursen

William Enfield, LL.D., published *The History of Philosophy, From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Present Century: Drawn up from Brucker's Historia Critica Philosophiae* in two volumes in 1791.¹ Joseph Priestley drew heavily on it, and John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were still writing about it more than two decades later. They probably did not know it was an unreliable translation and abbreviation, distorted to suit Enfield's polemical purposes. In this paper, I will survey those purposes, together with the purposes of Priestley, Adams, and Jefferson in discussing him. They can be broadly divided into three: (1) confessionalism: Enfield wrote the work on behalf of Dissenting Unitarianism, (2) anti-scepticism: he wrote it as Christian apologetics, and (3) revolutionary politics: this was part of Priestley's and Jefferson's appreciation of it, and why it was influential on early feminist Mary Hays. Enfield's work provides us with a case study of the more general point that the history of philosophy is always written with *parti pris*; that every new history of philosophy carries with it the baggage of political and religious polemic, implicit or overt. There is no "view from nowhere".

¹The book was reprinted in 1792 (in Dublin, probably a piracy), 1819, 1837, 1839, and 1840. See Francesco Bottin, "La storiografia filosofica nell'area britannica" in Italo Baldo et al., *Il secondo illuminismo e l'età kantiana*, vol. 3.2 of Giovanni Santinello (ed.), *Storie delle storie generali della filosofia*, Padua, Antenore, 1988, p. 573; Helmut Zäh, "Verzeichnis der Schriften Jacob Bruckers" in W. Schmidt-Biggemann and Theo Stammen (eds.), *Jacob Brucker (1696-1770): Philosoph und Historiker der europäischen Aufklärung*, Berlin, Akademie, 1998, pp. 348–51 (does not include an 1840 edition). Martin Fitzpatrick reports that "It was reprinted twice" in "William Enfield 1741–1797", Thoemmes Press, *Encyclopedia of the History of Ideas*, p. 2. In his text, Fitzpatrick observes, correctly, that Enfield's version was abridged, but in his bibliography he describes it as "6 vols". A reprint of the 1837 edition contains an introduction by Knud Haakonssen: William Enfield, *The History of Philosophy From the Earliest Periods: Drawn Up From Brucker's Historia Critica Philosophiae*, Bristol, Thoemmes Press, 2001, pp. v–xii.

J.C. Laursen (✉)

Department of Political Science, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA
e-mail: john.laursen@ucr.edu

Let us start with a bit of biography. Enfield was a tutor at the Dissenting Warrington Academy in Liverpool from 1770 to 1783, where he was a colleague of Joseph Priestley. He was also minister at Cairo Street Chapel, Liverpool, and then at Octagon Chapel in Norwich. He wrote an *Essay towards the History of Liverpool* (1773) and nine volumes of *The English Preacher, or Sermons on the Principal Subjects of Religion and Morality* (1773–1779). The popularity of his work on elocution, *The Speaker* (1774), “continued well into the nineteenth century”,² and his *Exercises in Elocution* (1780) was reprinted several times. In natural science, he brought out an *Institutes of Natural Philosophy* in 1785, and 10 years before the Brucker translation he published a translation of J.J. Rossignol’s *Elements of Geometry* (1781). He contributed to the *Monthly Review* from 1774 until his death in 1797.³ Thomas Percival obtained a Doctorate of Law, *honoris causa*, from Edinburgh for Enfield.⁴

1 Confessionalism: Dissenting Unitarianism

As a conscientious Dissenter, Enfield sought to undermine the established orthodoxies of the Anglican Church whenever he could. As R. K. Webb put it, in an ordination sermon published in 1777 Enfield told “the ordinands that if their study ends in conviction about ‘the system of our forefathers’, i.e., Calvinism, they can expect indulgence, respect and candour, although adopting liberal views will bring approbation, countenance and support”.⁵ Now, what does liberal mean here? In John Seed’s words, “the most advanced and Rational Dissenters, Enfield argued in 1778, based their Dissent from the state Church on the grounds of absolute individualism: ‘the natural right every man possesses of framing his system of religious faith, and choosing his form of religious worship for himself’”.⁶

Enfield was a Unitarian, understood by the Church of England as a heresy associated with Arianism and Socinianism, and technically subject to legal penalty in England until the 1820s. In a letter of 1789, he declared “that he could not conform to the Established Church until it became ‘perfectly Unitarian’”.⁷ One of the benefits of the history of philosophy, Enfield wrote in the preface to his abridgment of

² Martin Fitzpatrick, “The Enlightenment, politics and providence: some Scottish and English comparisons” in Knud Haakonssen, (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-century Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 85.

³ Fitzpatrick, “William Enfield 1741–1797”, *op. cit.* p. 2.

⁴ Anthony Lincoln, *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763–1800*, New York, Octagon, 1971, p. 73.

⁵ R. K. Webb, “The emergence of Rational Dissent” in Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁶ John Seed, “Rational Dissent and political opposition, 1770–1790” in Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁷ Fitzpatrick, “The Enlightenment, politics and providence”, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Brucker, and in the spirit of Gibbon, would be the discovery that “many of the doctrines commonly received as of divine authority, originated in the Pagan schools, and were thence transplanted *at a very early period*, into the Christian church”.⁸ This could be used for Unitarian polemical purposes: “when it is generally known... that the fundamental doctrine of the *unity of the Divine Nature* has undergone corruptions... it cannot fail... to produce such a reform in religion, as shall free its public institutions from the encumbrance of scholastic subtleties” (vii–viii).

If Enfield's theology would have been considered radical in some quarters, that was not the way he understood himself. As one scholar has put it, Enfield's teaching “emphasised moral virtues and gentlemanly conduct in a way thoroughly consonant with the ideals of Scottish Moderatism”.⁹ As he wrote to a friend, “I set out in life with the plan of *moderation*, and neither my temper nor my principles will suffer me to desert it”.¹⁰ One of his colleagues summed him up as follows:

Religion was to him rather a principle than a sentiment; and he was more solicitous to deduce from it a *rule of life*... than to elevate it into a source of sublime feeling. Despising superstition, and fearing enthusiasm, he held as of inferior value everything in religion which could not ally itself with morality, and condescending to human uses. His theological system was purged of every mysterious or unintelligible proposition; it included nothing which appeared to him irreconcilable with sound philosophy, and the most rational opinions concerning the divine nature and perfections.¹¹

It should not be forgotten that any history of philosophy is also a publishing venture seeking market share in the midst of confessional rivalry. Thus, Brucker's *Critical History of Philosophy* was designed in part to “capture” the scholarly market for his Lutheran Protestant viewpoint. Philosophy had become part of the education of future clergymen and jurists, and its interpretation could not be left to the Catholics.¹² The history of philosophy also became a matter of disciplinary rivalry: by the end of the century Carl Friedrich Stüdtlin was writing massive histories of moral philosophy in general and of specific philosophical issues such as suicide, the morality of the stage, and the relations between science and ethics, in order to capture philosophy for the theology faculties in Germany.¹³ Enfield wrote his book to capture

⁸ William Enfield (ed.), *The History of Philosophy, From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Present Century: Drawn up from Brucker's Historia Critica Philosophiae*, London, Dove, 1819, p. vii; see also I.30. (Hereafter cited from this edition in parentheses in the text.)

⁹ Quoted in Fitzpatrick, “The Enlightenment, politics and providence”, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See Schmidt-Biggemann and Stammen (eds.), *Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), op. cit.*; Mario Longo, “Le storie generali della filosofia in Germania” in F. Botin, M. Longo, and G. Paia, *Dall'età cartesiana a Brucker*, vol. 2 of Giovanni Santinello (ed.), *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1979, pp. 527–635, esp. 605 ff.; Lucien Braun, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie*, Paris, Ophrys, 1973, pp. 100–119; cf. Martial Gueroult, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie*, 3 vols., Paris, Aubier, 1984–8.

¹³ See J. C. Laursen, “Skepticism and the History of Moral Philosophy: The Case of Carl Friedrich Stüdtlin” in J. van der Zande and R. Popkin (eds.), *The Sceptical Tradition around 1800: Scepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1998, pp. 371–2.

the history of philosophy for the Dissenting academies, coffeehouses, and drawing rooms. This was, of course, one reason for “dumbing it down” into two relatively short volumes. Sales to students could be almost guaranteed, and at the same time the text would massage them into accepting the Dissenting view on many philosophical questions. It would be interesting to know how many orthodox readers put the book down when they came to Enfield’s Unitarian sentiments in the preface.

The very idea of *translating* Brucker meant taking a position in yet another scholarly turf war. This was the source of a difference of opinion between Priestley and Enfield. Priestley taught ancient languages and defended the central role of the teaching of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin in elitist, specialist, professional scholarship. Enfield acted for the gentlemen amateurs and the ‘moderns’ by emphasizing the vernacular, including making Brucker available in English.¹⁴

More about Enfield’s purposes can be gleaned from his criticism of the only previous general history of philosophy in English, Thomas Stanley’s *History of Philosophy* (1655). “To say nothing of the uncouth and obscure style in which this work was written... the author’s plan extended little further than to the history of the Grecian sects of philosophy... [and] he has rather performed the office of an industrious compiler, than that of a judicious critic” (iii). Enfield was writing the history of philosophy in part to polish it up for his gentleman students, and in part to introduce readers to the practice of independent thinking and judicious criticism.

One last point should be adumbrated here. That is that confessional scholarship often shaded into nationalist scholarship. When Brucker captured the history of philosophy for the Lutherans, he also captured it for the German-speaking world, self-consciously introducing many German philosophers who would not have been included in a francophone or anglophone history of philosophy. Enfield’s translation/adaptation retains many of these figures, no doubt new and strange to many English readers, who in addition would not have had access to any further materials by these authors. One twentieth century commentator has also observed that English readers might have been put out by the sparse attention paid to their national philosopher, John Locke.¹⁵

2 Scepticism, Anti-scepticism, and Christian Apologetics

Now, it might be suspected that Enfield’s politeness and moderation could amount to religious scepticism. Michael Watts reports that

At the ordination of Robert Gore in Cross Street, Manchester, in 1779 William Enfield declared that their business as Christian ministers was ‘to stop the progress of ignorance and error; to discourage superstition; to promote useful knowledge; to reprove the vices of the age in which we live’, but not a word did he say about the saving of souls.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Lincoln, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

¹⁵ Bottin, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

¹⁶ Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: Vol. 2: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 96.

Priestley came to decry the decay of “just zeal” in the “young gentlemen of the type produced by William Enfield’s Academy, whose guiding star was ‘politeness’”.¹⁷ But Enfield never abandoned his Christianity. We are going to see that scepticism was a tool for him against both the orthodox and the radically atheistic, but that he was also committed to debunking scepticism where it might threaten his own brand of Christianity.

Enfield was a Cartesian or Lockean in the sense of using philosophical scepticism to undermine dogmatism by limiting excessive claims to knowledge, but claiming to supersede scepticism as well. In the preface to his translation of Brucker, he writes that from the history of philosophy

It may be possible to determine, with sufficient precision, *how far* it is possible for the human faculties to proceed in the investigation of truth, and *why* it can proceed no further. Perhaps the time may not be far distant, when an end will be put to fruitless controversy, by distinctly ascertaining the limits of the human understanding (vii).¹⁸

Enfield’s version of Brucker’s “Preliminary Observations” reiterates the point: the study of the history of philosophy “may serve to prevent the farther waste of precious time in speculations, which experience has shown to lie beyond the reach of the human faculties” (I.30).

In view of later uses of Enfield to criticize Priestley, it is worth observing that Enfield’s “attitude towards truth was both more sceptical and ecumenical than that of Priestley”, according to Martin Fitzpatrick. He believed that “many aspects of religion were open to doubt and always would be. He quoted Charron’s view that ‘nous sommes nés à quêter la vérité; la posséder appartient à une plus haute et grande puissance’”. He “believed that errors and prejudice were best left to die away”, and that controversy was not the best road to truth but “might have the opposite effect of ‘rousing the sleeping lion’ of prejudice”.¹⁹ But, as we shall see, he was never a religious sceptic, and devoted substantial space to refutation of the sceptics – or at least to *ad hominem* attacks on them.

The use of histories of philosophy to attack scepticism is especially paradoxical considering that one of the most important sources of scepticism throughout history has been precisely the history of philosophy. If there are so many warring schools and opposing ideas, how can we decide which one is right? Shouldn’t we just suspend judgment about that? If we take this tack, we have become sceptics. But this was not Enfield’s route: rather, he used his history of scepticism in philosophy to undermine the sceptical schools and defend religion. He was evidently incapable of the theoretical sophistication of a Carl Friedrich Stäudlin, whose *History and Spirit*

¹⁷ Lincoln, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁸ Fitzpatrick, “The Enlightenment, politics and providence”, *op. cit.*, p. 86, quotes the same wording from William Enfield, *Remarks on Several Late Publications*, London, 1770, p. v: “Possibly, the time may not be far distant when an end will be put to fruitless controversy, by distinctly ascertaining the limits of the human understanding”.

¹⁹ Quoted in Fitzpatrick, “The Enlightenment, politics and providence”, *op. cit.*, p. 86; see also Martin Fitzpatrick, “Varieties of Candour: English and Scottish Style”, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, vol. 7, 1988, pp. 35–56.

of *Scepticism* of 1794 distinguished the popular, unphilosophical scepticism that led to atheism from the philosophical scepticism of the ancients, Hume, and Kant, which could be used on behalf of Christian apologetics.²⁰ So, as we shall see, Enfield had to dismiss philosophical scepticism as much as unphilosophical scepticism.

3 Enfield's Brucker

Now we shall show how these purposes in writing the history of philosophy played out in Enfield's text.²¹ Enfield's translation transmits fairly enough some aspects of Brucker's treatment of the history of philosophy.²² His version of Brucker's "Preliminary Observations" begins with some anti-clericalism: "superstition very early bestowed [the title of Wise Men] upon those who were entrusted with the direction of religious concerns; although it cannot be doubted, that they had often no other right to such pre-eminence, than that which was founded upon ingenious imposture" (I.23). After the rise of the Sophists, who claimed wisdom, a wiser sort "adopt[ed] an appellation more suitable to the character of men, who modestly professed themselves to be in the pursuit, rather than in the possession of truth and wisdom, namely, that of Philosophers" (I.24). And Enfield's Brucker relies on a distinction between philosophy and theology to insulate theology from any threats from philosophy: theology deals with the truths which God has revealed and philosophy covers truths connected with happiness and discoverable by reason. The "two provinces are perfectly distinct, and ought to be kept separate, except where the one may occasionally serve to cast light upon the other" (I.25).

In its only constructive use of the history of scepticism, Enfield's Brucker used general sceptical tropes to tear down dogmatic arrogance. The history of the errors

²⁰ See J. C. Laursen, "Kant in the History of Skepticism" in Martyn P. Thompson (ed.), *John Locke und Immanuel Kant: Historische Rezeption und gegenwärtiges Relevanz*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1991, pp. 254–268; J. C. Laursen, "Stäudlin, Carl Friedrich (1761–1826)" in H. Klemme and M. Kuehn (eds.), *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*, London, Continuum, 2010, pp. 1122–1125.

²¹ Although many commentators have claimed that Enfield's work was a mere summary of Brucker's, Francesco Bottin notes that it was "ben lungi dall'essere una semplice traduzione dell'opera del Brucker" [a long way from being a simple translation of Brucker's work], Bottin, "La storiografia", *op. cit.*, p. 574; see also p. 581 for G. H. Lewes's contempt for Enfield.

²² In "The Enlightenment, politics, and providence", Martin Fitzpatrick says that "Brucker's eclectic attitude toward truth is indicated by his method of writing the history of modern philosophy without acknowledging divisions into different schools" (p. 86). Perhaps he borrowed this from Enfield, II.470: "Instead therefore of attempting, as some writers have done, to divide modern philosophy into distinct schools, we shall content ourselves with a more simple arrangement...". But it is rather obviously wrong to anyone who has read Brucker, who has long chapters on the modern stoics, epicureans, sceptics, and so forth. It is true that Enfield's Brucker favors what he calls the eclectics in Book X, where he rejects the division into schools, but Enfield has chapters on the modern stoics, epicureans, sceptics, theosophists, scriptural philosophers, and so forth (Books VIII and IX).

of philosophers “suggests a useful lesson of modesty and diffidence in our own inquiries, and of candour towards the mistakes of others”, and encourages “a manly freedom of thinking” (I.29). For Pyrrho, “controversy became the parent of Scepticism”; “the sceptic sect owed its existence to the disputatious spirit of the Dogmatists” (I.484, 495). It “was not without some appearance of reason, that they looked upon the whole mass of Dogmatic philosophy as an ill constructed edifice, raised upon sand” (I.496). Added to a “natural feebleness of judgment and instability of temper”, it was not hard to see how one could become a sceptic (I.496).

But Enfield goes on to distort Brucker's history of scepticism in at least three ways. Together, these distortions shore up the apologetic value of the book, making it even more of a defense of Christianity than Brucker's original. The first sort of distortion comes from selective abridgment.²³ Enfield eliminates much of the detail of Brucker's exposition, and yet retains much of the *ad hominem* slander. That is, if Brucker had several pages of philosophical analysis followed by a sentence or two of *ad hominem* slander, eliminating much of the analysis and retaining the slander puts much more emphasis on the slander. Over and over, we are told things like:

True causes of the continuance of this sect, through every age, have been that indolence which is inimical to every mental exertion; that kind of intellectual imbecility which, in various degrees, incapacitates men for discerning the true... or lastly, that propensity towards subtle refinement, which hinders the most vigorous mind in... accurately distinguishing truth from error (I.496).

Timon's love of indolence and wine “tempted him to embrace the indolent doctrine of Scepticism” (I.485). Arcesilaus “was fond of splendid entertainments, and a luxurious manner of living; and there is little doubt, that he frequently indulged his natural propensities, in a manner not very consistent with the character of a philosopher” (I.250). He died “in a delirium occasioned by excessive drinking” (I.250).

Enfield makes sure that religion is excepted from any praise for the sceptics.

The Sceptics have advanced nothing upon the important questions respecting the Existence and Providence of a Supreme Being, which may not, with the greatest confidence, be referred to mere verbal quibbling, or to the acknowledged imperfection of the human intellect, which, whilst it embraces, on the clear and certain ground of final causes in nature, the doctrine of the existence of a Deity, must always confess itself unequal to the full comprehension of his nature and operations (I.494).

But, “they not only joined in the popular worship of the gods, but confessed that there appeared to be, in the human mind, a natural instinctive principle of religion. A concession, which sufficiently invalidates all their futile reasonings on the side of Infidelity” (I.494). The Romans did not adopt Pyrrhonism partly because they could adopt the more prudent Academic scepticism, and partly because the “extravagances” of the Pyrrhonists “had brought such a general opprobrium upon the sect” (II.29).

²³Bottin, “La storiografia filosofica”, makes the same point with regard to Enfield's abridgement of Brucker on Aristotle: eliminating much of the erudition and adapting Brucker's vocabulary to English philosophy changes the picture of Aristotle (p. 578). Translating Brucker's history of the early Church with the language of “fancy” and “wonder” puts it in the vocabulary of Hume, Smith, and the Scottish Enlightenment (p. 579).

Enfield also introduces a number of outright mistakes in his translation. He characterizes Sextus Empiricus baldly as an Empirical physician, noting that a number of physicians were attracted to the school “as if the medical profession peculiarly disposed the mind to scepticism” (II.135–6).²⁴ But Brucker had surveyed the debate over Sextus’s affiliation with either the Empirical school or the Methodical school.²⁵ Among the moderns, Enfield got La Mothe le Vayer’s name wrong, when Brucker had it right (Enfield, II.435; Brucker IV.1.547). Getting these details wrong contributes to misinformation about the sceptics which discredits them.

A second sort of distortion of Brucker comes when Enfield’s version has no sense of development within Pyrrhonism from Pyrrho’s dogmatism to the later Sextus’s true scepticism. Brucker’s detail brings out developments in scepticism from Pyrrho and the Pyrrhonists to Arcesilaus and then Carneades, and it has been argued that he played an important role in renewed philosophical attention to ancient scepticism in the eighteenth century.²⁶ Enfield flattens all of this out, turning the sceptics into caricatures. It is not too much to say that he was part of the movement to vilify, condemn, and ignore ancient scepticism that dominated the history of ancient philosophy until perhaps 25 years ago, and which has only been convincingly refuted in the last 10 or 15 years.²⁷

Enfield’s version eliminates the sense of development. For example, he writes that the founder of the Middle Academy, Arcesilaus, “professed to derive his doctrine concerning the uncertainty of knowledge from Socrates, Plato, and other philosophers” (I.252). His doctrine was “that although there is a real certainty in the nature of things, every thing is uncertain to the human understanding” (I.252). And, according to Enfield’s Brucker, he maintained that “in all questions, opposite opinions may be supported by arguments of equal weight”, but acknowledged that reason and

²⁴ It is worth noting that Jefferson described himself as a medical sceptic in a letter to Benjamin Rush of August 17, 1811: “I acknowledge facts in medicine as far as they go, distrusting only their extension by theory” (Albert Ellery Bergh (ed.), *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Washington, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907, vol. 13, p. 75).

²⁵ Iacobi Bruckeri, *Historia critica Philosophiae*, Lipsiae, 1742–4, vol. II, pp. 631–6. Hereafter cited in parentheses in the text.

²⁶ See C. W. T. Blackwell, “Jacob Brucker’s theory of knowledge and the history of natural philosophy” in Schmidt-Biggemann and Stammen (eds.), *Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), op. cit.*, pp. 207–8; C. W. T. Blackwell, “Skepticism as a sect, skepticism as a philosophical stance: Johann Jakob Brucker versus Carl Friedrich Stäudlin” in van der Zande and Popkin (eds.), *The Sceptical Tradition around 1800: Scepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society, op. cit.*, pp. 343–363.

²⁷ See, e.g., R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics*, New York, Routledge, 1995; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists*, Richard Bett (ed.), Oxford, Clarendon, 1997; Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents and his Legacy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; Charles Brittain, *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001; J. C. Laursen, “Yes, Sceptics Can Live Their Scepticism and Cope with Tyranny as Well as Anyone” in J. Maia Neto and R. Popkin (eds.), *Scepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought*, Amherst, Humanity Books, 2004, pp. 201–223; J. C. Laursen, “Skepticism, Unconvincing Anti-scepticism, and Politics” in Marc André Bernier and Sébastien Charles (eds.), *Scepticisme et Modernité*, Saint-Étienne, Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005, pp. 167–188.

the senses “are capable of furnishing probable opinions sufficient for the conduct of life” (I.253). Crediting Arcesilaus with probabilism carries out Enfield's policy of denying any development in the history of scepticism. Brucker did not: he reserved the words *probabile*, *probabilem*, and *probabilitas* for Carneades (I.745–67).

A third distortion is to emphasize that many alleged sceptics were actually dogmatists, where Brucker just reports that this was one claim about them. So, for Enfield, when Socrates confessed that he knew nothing: “by this confession, however, he did not mean to assert the universal uncertainty of human knowledge, but merely to convince his followers of the futility of those speculations which do not rest upon the firm foundation of experience, and to teach them modesty” (I.251). Enfield also gives credit to the far-fetched idea that Arcesilaus was really a dogmatic Platonist: His secret design was to “establish the doctrine of Plato... that the only true science is that which is employed upon the immutable objects of intelligence, or Ideas” (I.253).

In Enfield's sketched version, Arcesilaus alarmed “the governors of the state... [who began] to apprehend that his tenets would produce the dissolution of all the bonds of social virtue and of religion” (I.253). So one of his successors, Carneades, modified the stance of the school, which became known as the New Academy. He divided probabilities into three classes, Simple, Uncontradicted, and Confirmed, and argued that we could not have science, only opinions (I.256). But Carneades was equally suspect. On an embassy to Rome, Carneades argued one day in praise of justice and the next day against it. Cato the Censor, “apprehensive lest the Roman youth should lose their military character in the pursuit of Grecian learning, persuaded the senate to send back these philosophers, without further delay” (I.255). Nevertheless, Enfield cannot condemn him without more, because Brucker had reported that he did not undermine “the whole foundation of morals”, as Arcesilaus did, and “at the same time that he taught the necessity of suspence in speculative researches, prescribed rules for the direction of life and manners” (I.257). But his morality was dangerously hedonistic: as “the foundation of morals, he taught, that the ultimate end of life is the enjoyment of those things towards which we are directed by the principles of nature” (I.257).

The Middle Academy “became a favorite sect among the Romans” who “observed the contradictory opinions which were advanced by different sects... [and] were inclined to look at truth as a treasure, which lies too deep to be fathomed... and contented themselves, with such probable conclusions, as were sufficient for the practical purposes of life” (II.12). “It was particularly suited to the character of a public pleader, as it... would inure him to the practice of collecting arguments from all quarters, on opposite sides of every doubtful question” (II.12). The chief Roman partisan of the Middle Academy was Cicero, who is also dismissed by Enfield's Brucker for wanting “strength of mind”; and for relating the opinions of others rather than having his own philosophy (II.17, 19). “We seldom find him diligently examining the exact weight of evidence in the scale of reason”; “he was better qualified to dispute on either side with the Academics, than to decide upon the question with the Dogmatists” (I.20).

Priestley followed Enfield's cues in his *Doctrines of Heathen Philosophy*, saying only of the ancient sceptics that "they advanced nothing new, and only doubted, and disputed, in different ways about the positions of others" (p. viii). Many later historians of philosophy followed in this path. An example is the long-common practice of describing Sextus Empiricus as no more than a compiler, now put to rest by recent studies.²⁸

Enfield's Brucker goes on to look at the modern sceptics, again employing the *ad hominem* arguments. Some modern philosophers "forsook the straight path of rational inquiry, and lost themselves in the mazes of scepticism or enthusiasm. Vanity has inclined some to contradict every decision of philosophy..." (II.432). A "timid, indolent, or volatile temper has often disposed men to prefer the easy task of raising difficulties and cavils, to the more laborious undertaking of investigating truth" (II.433). Scepticism has sometimes been used to overturn Revelation, and sometimes to support superstition or fanaticism "by declaiming on the imbecility of human reason" (II.433). Some, he admits, have used it constructively to turn "the study of nature out of the channel of conjecture into that of experiment" (II.433).

Moderns discussed are Francis Sanchez, Jerom Hernhaym, Francis Vayer de la Mothe [sic], Sorbiere, Fouchier, Daniel Huet, and Bayle, and the *ad hominem* is stressed. Huet "found his mind too feeble to master the difficulties of metaphysical and theological studies, and concluded that his want of success in the search after truth was owing, not to any peculiar infelicity in his own case, but to the general imbecility of the human mind" (II.436). Peter Bayle was "justly reckoned one of the most powerful advocates for Pyrrhonism" (II.439), and was "justly censured for indulging a degree of latitude, inconsistent with good morals and decency" (II.442).

It may be worth asking ourselves whether the omissions, distortions, and *ad hominem* attacks in Enfield's Brucker are the product of deliberate bad faith or dishonesty in historiography. We can perhaps never know for sure, but one does not have to go that far: polemicists for any cause may be careless, inattentive to and unable to see the strengths of the targets of their polemics. They may skate close to bad faith, and may appear to their targets as acting in bad faith, without being convicted of out-and-out bad faith. If they exaggerate and if they diminish unfairly, it may be more a product of passion and commitment to a cause than of deliberate dishonesty.

4 Revolutionary Politics and Feminism

At the time that Enfield was writing, the history of philosophy could also be written to encourage radical politics and revolution. Joseph Priestley, as is well known, wrote one of the first answers to Burke in defense of the French revolution in the

²⁸ Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents and his Legacy*, *op. cit.*; Emidio Spinelli, *Questioni scettiche*, Rome, Lithos, 2005.

same year in which Enfield brought out his *History of Philosophy*.²⁹ His many volumes of theological and philosophical writings always managed to justify radical causes on the bases of human perfectibility, necessitarianism, utilitarianism, anti-clericalism, millenarianism, and other doctrines. But as revolutionary as these volumes were in terms of political implications, they were all written as Christian apologetics as well.

Priestley emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1794. John Adams was wary of his political radicalness. His Secretary of State, Timothy Pickering, sought to deport Priestley under the Alien and Sedition Acts for his francophile beliefs at a time of impending war with France, although that came to nothing. The election of Thomas Jefferson brought into power a President who sympathized with many of Priestley's radical ideas.³⁰ In response to Priestley's pamphlet on *Socrates and Jesus Compared*, Jefferson wrote in 1803 that he should expand the work by adding comparisons to other philosophers and systems. Priestley did, publishing *The Doctrines of Heathen Philosophy* in 1804, mentioning in his preface that readers could consult Enfield's "excellent *History of Philosophy*" if they wanted more details.³¹

Later, in 1812 Adams and Jefferson, who had not communicated with each other since 1804, got back in touch by correspondence. Then, when Adams wrote about a book that he believed Priestley had left in manuscript, Jefferson was able to tell him that *The Doctrines of Heathen Philosophy* had indeed come out. He wrote to Adams on August 22, 1813:

It is with great pleasure I can inform you that Priestly finished the comparative view of the doctrines of the Philosophers of antiquity, and of Jesus, before his death; and that it was printed soon after... The Abbé Batteux had in fact laid the foundation of this part, in his *Causes premieres*; with which he has given us the originals of Ocellus, and Timaeus, who first committed the doctrines of Pythagoras to writing; and Enfield, to whom the Doctor refers, had done it more copiously.³²

Jefferson arranged to send Adams a copy of Priestley's book, and may have hoped that it would contribute to radicalizing Adams.

Adams had mellowed a great deal since the paranoid days of his Presidency, but he was no doubt still wary of the political implications of Priestley's history of

²⁹ Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolutions in France*, Birmingham, Thomas Pearson, 1791.

³⁰ See Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952, pp. 280 ff.

³¹ See Joseph Priestley, *The Doctrines of Heathen Philosophy compared with those of Revelation* Northumberland, Pa., Binns, 1804, reprinted New York, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1987, p. viii. Enfield's *History of Philosophy* was not in the catalogue of Priestley's books auctioned after his death, although he did have many volumes of Enfield's *Sermons, Prayers, Hymns, Biographical Sermons*, and other works (*Catalogue of the Library of the late Dr. Joseph Priestley*, Philadelphia, Dobson, 1816, p. 13). Priestley did not have Brucker's *Historia critica*, but he did have the short Latin version: *Bruckeri institutiones historiae philosophicae* (1756) (p. 62).

³² Lester J. Cappon (ed.), *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1959, p. 368.

theology and philosophy.³³ One way to diminish the threat of a history of philosophy is to attack its scholarship. And that is what Adams did, taking Jefferson's cue. In the flyleaf to his copy of *The Doctrines of Heathen Philosophy*, he wrote: "This is the work of a dying man of extraordinary application and research. But Enfield's *History of Philosophy* will show its glaring imperfections".³⁴ In a letter to Jefferson, he similarly undercut Priestley's scholarship for several pages, reminding Jefferson that "despotic, monarchical, aristocratic and democratical fury" had all taken part in distorting the history of philosophy for their own purposes.³⁵ Enfield is made to undermine any revolutionary implications of Priestley's history of philosophy.

Jefferson returned to the role of the history of philosophy in understanding ethics in a later letter. On October 13, 1813 he wrote to Adams: "To compare the morals of the old, with those of the new testament... the philosophy of the Hebrews must be enquired into, their Mishna, their Gemara, Cabbala, Jezirah, Sohar, Cosri, and their Talmud must be examined and understood, in order to do them full justice. Brucker, it would seem, has gone deeply into these Repositories of their ethics, and Enfield, his epitomiser, concludes in these words. 'ethics were so little studied among the Jews, that, in their whole compilation called the Talmud, there is only one treatise on moral subjects... It is impossible to collect from these writings a consistent series of moral Doctrine.' Enfield, B4, Chap. 3."

"For a comparison of the Graecian philosophy with that of Jesus, materials might be largely drawn from the same source. Enfield gives a history, and detailed account of the opinions and principles of the different sects," Jefferson told Adams.³⁶ It is worth observing that Enfield's purpose in putting down the Jews was surely Christian apologetics. Jefferson's purposes were to enlist the history of philosophy against "Platonic Christianity" and in favor of "the primitive simplicity of its founder", but he would leave the hard research to "others, younger and more learned than we are".³⁷

Treating the history of philosophy as an antiquarian enterprise, remote from any practical implications, has the depoliticizing effect that, as we saw, Adams may have wished for. Adams added a bit of reception history of the historiography of philosophy in his note on Enfield:

Enfield is but an abridgment of Brucker's *Historia Critica Philosophiae*, in five volumes folio or large octavo. Of this work there is probably but one copy in America. That was

³³ Annabel Patterson's essay on "John Adams: reader extraordinary" in *Early Modern [English] Liberalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 279–305, emphasizes his pre-revolutionary reading, and observes that there is some justice in the charge that he became more conservative in his later days (p. 281). Nevertheless, his interest in Priestley probably indicates something about his renewed openness to radical ideas by 1813. As Patterson notes, as late as 1823 he was also recommending republication of Algernon Sydney, which was hardly a conservative suggestion (p. 305).

³⁴ Haraszti, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

³⁵ Letter of December 25, 1813 in Bergh (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 14, pp. 33–40.

³⁶ Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, *op. cit.*, pp. 383–4.

³⁷ Letter of October 13, 1813 in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, *op. cit.*, vol. 13, pp. 388–391.

brought from Europe by Mr. Buckminster, and sold at a great price at his auction, when Mr. Shaw in behalf of the Athenaeum was outbidden by the deeper purse of Harvard College. It would be more useful in the Athenaeum than in the Cambridge library.³⁸

In this antiquarian vein, Jefferson agreed with Adams on January 24, 1814:

I think with you that Priestley, in his comparison of the doctrines of Philosophy and of revelation, did not do justice to the undertaking, but felt himself pressed by the hand of death. Enfield had given us a more distinct account of the ethics of the antient philosophers; but the great work, of which Enfield is an abridgement, Brucker's history of Philosophy, is the treasure which I would wish to possess, as a book of reference or of special research only, for who could read 6. Vol. 4to. of 1000 pages each, closely printed, of modern Latin?³⁹

Jefferson and Adams were gentleman scholars, not antiquarian specialists.

I can only raise one last politically radical use of Enfield's history of philosophy, without pursuing it in detail. That is that the Dissenting autodidact, friend of Mary Wollstonecraft, and feminist writer Mary Hays wrote of reading Enfield's book as part of her program of self-education in 1793, and cited his book in articles promoting the education of women in the *The Monthly Magazine* in the late 1790s.⁴⁰ I have no evidence that such a result was part of Enfield's purpose, but at a time when women were not taught to read Latin, Enfield's English version of Brucker could educate them whether it was intended to or not.

Jonathan Israel has given us a portrait of the widespread fear of and opposition to Spinoza in the first half of the eighteenth century, based on his perceived atheism and democratic politics.⁴¹ Enfield's version of Brucker's history from that period carries the message deep into the late eighteenth century. "The impieties contained in [Spinoza's] treatises excited general indignation... [and] the empty sophisms, the equivocal definitions, the false reasonings, and all the absurdities of the writings of Spinoza, are fully exposed" (II.532). Spinoza calls the "one universal substance" God, in order "to conceal his atheism" (II.533). Many authors sincerely opposed him, but "others, under the pretence of refuting Spinoza, secretly favored his system" (II.533). That the history of philosophy held such ambiguities was undoubtedly appreciated by Priestley, Adams, and Jefferson, each of whom used it for their own purposes.

To sum it all up, Enfield adapted Brucker's history of philosophy to the author-translator's confessional Dissenting Unitarian purposes, flattened the German author's subtle scholarship on the history of scepticism for Christian apologetic purposes, and provided ammunition for the political-theological speculations of Priestley, Adams, and Jefferson in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

³⁸ Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

³⁹ Cappon (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 424.

⁴⁰ See Mary Hays, *The Idea of Being Free: A Mary Hays Reader*, Peterborough, Broadview Press, 2005; Gina Walker, *Mary Hays (1759–1843): The Growth of a Woman's Mind*, Williston, Ashgate, 2006.

⁴¹ Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001; *id.*, *Enlightenment Contested*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

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