What was the comparative history of religions in 17th-century Europe (and beyond)? Pagan monotheism/pagan animism, from *T'ien* to Tylor

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The title of our volume – which echoes François Hartog's *Régimes d'historicité*, and behind it Michel Foucault's linking of the notion of truth to the explicitly political notion of regime – immediately poses the question of the relationship between historical instantiations of the comparative enterprise and their polemical or political function, a question restated with brilliant clarity by Geoffrey Lloyd in the Epilogue. Now, I should say at the outset that I am sceptical about such a mode of doing intellectual history, at least in its strongest form; its weaknesses have been most vividly exposed by the debunking of Edward Said's famous, reductionist, political reading of European oriental scholarship. That is not, of course, to say that I believe we should discount power structures and polemical intentions (or unconscious presuppositions) at play in the history of intellectual endeavour, including the history of Western comparatism. But, like Anthony Grafton,[1] I should rather like to delve in greater detail into the texts themselves, and reveal the numerous, sometimes conflicting contexts – some polemical-political, some less so – that informed the comparative study of world religions in the early modern period.

As for my case study, some readers may be surprised to find the question of my title being asked at all, for they might think that enough answers to it have been offered, and that no further investigation is required. A set of well-known studies, stretching from F.E. Manuel's *The eighteenth century confronts the gods* (1959) through to a rather bombastically-titled recent account of Bernard Picart's and Jean-Frédéric Bernard's *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723–43),[2] have recapitulated in ever increasing detail a familiar story. According to this story, the writing of the history of religion in early modern Europe can be mapped onto the gradual shift towards deism that reached its peak in the early eighteenth century, for as thinkers moved ever more to venerating

[*] dmitri.levitin@all-souls.ox.ac.uk. Further elucidation of some of the material presented here will appear in my *The kingdom of darkness: Pierre Bayle, Isaac Newton, and the corruptions of philosophy* (Cambridge, forthcoming). I am very grateful to all the participants in the Seminar on the History of Comparatism held in the Centre for Research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities in Cambridge in 2014–16. Since my central theme will be the importance of the comparison between Greek and eastern system of thought, it seems appropriate that I single out for thanks Sir Geoffrey Lloyd, who has been relentlessly generous in his support of my work. The immediate genesis of this essay was as a commentary on Richard Serjeantson's paper presented to the second session of that seminar (see **n. 000** below); I am deeply grateful to him for many discussions of the subjects covered here. Many thanks also to Chris Morton at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own. References to standard ancient, patristic, and medieval texts are given in the usual abbreviations – those texts do not re-appear in the Bibliography.

[1] See ch. 2 in this volume, and also Grafton 2016. That is not to suggest there are no differences between us, for I probably place more emphasis on the influence of theological doctrine than he does. Whether that renders our interpretations compatible or incompatible I leave to others to decide.

[2] Manuel 1959; Hunt, Jacob, Mijnhardt 2010.

natural religion, they conceived of all world religions as equal, and equally subject to comparative study. This triumphalist – I would say classically whiggish – story could also be retold in denunciatory mode, chastising the comparative enterprise because its foundational moment was rooted in liberal Protestant polemic.[3]

This story, while still prevalent, is now under severe pressure, for the simple reason that it does not fit the evidence. Transformative approaches to the comparative-historical study of religion were being developed well before the rise of deism; the heroes of the putatively 'enlightened' approach were more often than not plagiarising from their orthodox, humanist predecessors.[4] A set of pioneering studies has explored the writing of the history of religion in the seventeenth century, highlighting the innovations to be found in the difficult, primarily Latin works of the late humanists.[5] But, perhaps because of the synchronic and cultural-historical nature of much of this scholarship, it has not really offered much of a counter-narrative to the previous, deist-centred story, at least on the level of ideas, instead tending towards a slightly undigested, accumulative approach. Take, for example, a prominent and important recent article entitled 'Taking paganism seriously: anthropology and antiquarianism in early seventeenth-century histories of religion'. The article seeks to explore how 'we get from the popular but methodologically unreconstructed encyclopedias' of the mid-sixteenth century to the 'mature histories of religion that begin appearing in abundance about a century later'.[6] To answer, the author discusses a large range of texts: Bartolomé de las Casas's reports from America; Matteo Ricci's descriptions of Confucianism; John Selden's study of ancient near eastern deities, among others. But for all the talk of 'the history of the gods finally [becoming] a history of culture', we are not really told *what* was novel, on the basic scholarly and empirical level, about the content of the seventeenth-century material. At one point, the author announces that travel reports '*had* to have affected [the] evaluation of the earlier mythographies' – but as all graduate supervisors know, when historians start talking about something *having* to have happened, they are usually asserting rather than proving.[7] Nonetheless, such accumulative syntheses have posited that it was in the seventeenth, rather than the nineteenth century that Western history of religions became 'modern'.[8]

Now, as will become evident, I am very much convinced that nineteenth-century comparative history of religion – and even later scholarly developments – owe a lot to seventeenth-century predecessors, and that the seventeenth-century moment was indeed a broadly transformative one. But I am less interested in asserting the 'modernity' of the seventeenth-century enterprise (an assertion that inevitably involves stripping it of its historical specificity) than in exploring the various contextual factors that explain its

[3] See the high-profile account in Smith 1990, well critiqued in Grafton 2016.

[4] See now the historiographical overview in Levitin 2012.

[5] As well as the works discussed in Levitin 2012, see now Stolzenberg 2013, 129–79; Cavarzere 2015; Touber, 2015; Gommans and Loots 2015; Mandelbrote 2017.

[6] Miller 2001, 183.

[7] Ibid., 192–3, 190 (my emphasis).

[8] See also Stroumsa 2010.

emergence. And so what I will modestly offer here is what I believe to be the first *narrative* account of how ideas about ancient religion were transformed in the seventeenth century, and what contexts (some very surprising) played into that transformation.

To even attempt such a thing, we will have to travel very far: from the presocratic philosophers to the church fathers; from the medieval schoolmen to the great humanist scholars and Christian apologists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; from the pioneering reformers of European natural philosophy (above all Pierre Gassendi) to the leading lights of the late-seventeenth century republic of letters (above all Pierre Bayle); and finally all the way through to the person considered the founder of cultural anthropology, E.B. Tylor. In each case, we will have to resist the temptations of reductive ideological mapping – as we shall see, ideas about religious comparison could easily cross confessional, national, and disciplinary boundaries. Rather, we will have to engage in some precision with the details of texts themselves, and of their complex receptions. But I believe the results to be worth the effort: as I have delved deeper and deeper into these materials, I have come to believe that the inter-connections between them form one of the richest, most complex, and most fascinating episodes in Western intellectual history, and the history of the European encounter with the non-European.

As my title suggests, I consider a key moment in the story to have occurred in the 'long' seventeenth century. It was at that point that – for reasons that I will come to explain – paganism came more and more to be equated with animism or pantheism widely conceived (it could manifest itself as monism, vitalism, or in other forms).[9] As I shall argue, this reading emerged in part from new interpretations of Greek philosophy, which were generalised to explain all of pagan religious thought, in turn leading to a fierce debate about whether what looked like a pagan monotheism that was at least partially similar to that of Judaism and Christianity was in fact a radically alien animism. (Indeed, so important did the comparison between Greek philosophy and eastern religion become that we can say with only a little frivolity that seventeenth-century Europe was replete with proto-Geoffrey Lloyds.) The emergent comparatist 'regime' was so powerful that it came to delineate a 'logic of paganism' that was believed to encompass religious beliefs across the world, from ancient Egypt to Japan, and beyond. And as we shall see, its central assumptions remained current for the orientalists of the eighteenth century (their incorporation of much new empirical evidence notwithstanding), and even for the anthropologists of the nineteenth and classicists of the twenty-first. But to continue with the political metaphor, if there was a comparativist 'regime' in early modern Europe, it left so much scope for civil war within itself that its results would be completely unpredictable to its practitioners, and outgrew any polemical aims that they themselves may have had.

I POST-PATRISTIC APOLOGETICS AND THE HISTORY OF RELIGION IN 17TH-CENTURY EUROPE

[9] While I will continue to use such terms, it is important to note at the outset that they are anachronistic, and that early moderns struggled to come up with an adequate vocabulary for religio-philosophical doctrines that made a first principle immanent in the world.

(*Ia*) *The patristic paradigm*

Let us begin with a simple question: who wrote histories of religion in the seventeenth century, and why might they have written them? Before we answer this question by attributing any complex ideological motives to our subjects, we should not forget that most obvious of explanations: curiosity. The humanist movement from the start emphasised the importance of the rediscovery and rewriting of what we might anachronistically term 'cultural' history, including the history of religion.[10] In the seventeenth century, as interest shifted from matters solely 'classical' to matters late antique and oriental,[11] the history of religion increasingly became the subject of what can with some justification – but again with a degree of anachronism – be called 'research'. Indeed, it bred a whole new literary sub-genre: that concerning the diversity of religions.[12] Perhaps the best example of such research appeared in 1700, in the form of Thomas Hyde's spectacular *Historia religionis veterum Persarum*, the first European history of Zoroastrianism to be based primarily on near eastern sources, supplied to Hyde by returning English merchants.[13]

But as we shall see, even Hyde's astonishing book was anchored in a set of assumptions that were derived from another genre than pure *historia*. That genre was religious apologetics. This is a subject that is not entirely unstudied.[14] But it is one that seems to me to have remained somewhat misunderstood, and so we must begin by asking ourselves another question: why did seventeenth-century humanists and theologians feel any need to write new works of historical apologetics at all? After all, almost all the great works of patristic historical apologetics – Justin Martyr's two *Apologies*, *Dialogue with Trypho*, and *Exhortation to the Greeks*; Tatian's *Address to the Greeks*; Athenagoras's *Supplication for the Christians*; Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus* and *Stromata*; Origen's *Contra Celsum*; Marcus Minucius Felix's *Octavius*; Tertullian's *Ad nationes* and *Apologeticus*; Arnobius's *Adversus nationes*; Lactantius's *Institutiones divinae*; Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* and *Demonstratio evangelica*; Theodoret of Cyr's *Cure of pagan maladies*, among others – had been republished, often with extensive commentary and critical apparatus.[15] The importance of these texts as sources for the history of religion cannot be overstated. Of course, older pagan texts – Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, etc. – offered a wealth of

[10] But contrary to the famous argument in Momigliano 1950, and the subsequent essays in Miller 2012, I believe that the role of 'antiquarianism' in this development has been exaggerated: see further Levitin 2015a.

[11] These distinctions are of course 19th-century ones, and the point that 'classics' in the modern sense was non-existent in the early modern period is an important one for this study; see further Haugen 2011, *passim*.

[12] See e.g. Botero 1595, part III; Varenius, 'Brevis informatio de diversis gentium religionibus' in Varenius 1649; Ross 1653. Piacart 1723 is only another entry in this genre – its significance has been greatly overplayed. The best study of this genre is now Mills 2016. I believe its main impact was in popularising new data.

[13] On Hyde, see n. **000** below.

[14] E.g. Laplanche, 1983; Pitassi 1991; Sheppard 2015. It should be said that the history of Renaissance apologetics could do with significantly more scholarship. The relevant section in Dulles 1971, 145–55 is so superficial and confused in its use of various key categories that it is best avoided.

[15] For a start on a bibliography of early modern patristic publishing, see Quantin 1993.

information. But, because of the demands of apologetics, the Christians texts (and the Jewish works that inspired them) supplied far more arguments about the historical inter-relationship between various religions: which sage came first, who stole from whom, and so on.[16] In the face of this wealth of material, why did anyone feel that a new kind of historical apologetics was required at all?

To answer this question, we must consider the structure of patristic historical apologetics.[17] Of course, early Christian writers relentlessly emphasised the errors of paganism: its idolatry, superstition (δεισιδαιμονία), polytheism, etc. But at the same time, educated Christians, seeking elite converts, sought to posit similarities between the pagan wisdom admired by prospective converts (or opponents such as Celsus and Porphyry). In the second century, Justin Martyr, adopting an apologetic strategy already prevalent in Hellenistic Judaism, and playing on the Greeks' own belief in the antiquity of 'alien wisdom', argued that the pagans had derived their religious and philosophical ideas from the Jews, specifically from Moses, and that that wisdom also contained some of the truths of Christianity: hence Plato's adumbration of the trinity, and so on.[18] This argument could be taken in two directions. One, which we may for convenience label the 'negative/plagiarism' thesis – and which Justin's own works emphasise much more strongly[19] – suggests that 'correct' pagan theology (which meant that practised by a few elites, and distinct from the crude polytheism of the masses) was dependent on access to the Old Testament, or to Jewish teachings (perhaps mediated by travel to other eastern locales, especially Egypt, where they were already known). At its most radical, this apologetic strand denied any independent value to pagan philosophy or theology beyond what was derived from Judaeo-Christian revelation. In contrast, the second strand, which we might label 'positive-syncretistic', tended to have a higher opinion of the pagans' (or at least the pagan philosophers') capacity to grasp truth independently, usually on the basis of some kind of broadly neo-Platonic conception of the human soul's ability to participate in the divine, or to communicate with the eternal λόγος. Here we may cite the examples of Clemens Alexandrinus and Origen, although again we should emphasise that this was always combined with the plagiarism thesis.[20] Moreover, the claims of this second strand should also be divided into two further strands. What we might label a 'hard' similarity thesis would insist that knowledge of even revealed mysteries like the trinity was available to the pagans. 'Soft' similarity, by contrast, would only emphasise their acquiescence to truths that could be known naturally, such as monotheism and the immortality of the soul (I ignore for the

[16] For this kind of 'cultural-intellectual' history in antiquity more broadly, see esp. Cancik 2008, 3–27.

[17] The subsequent summary necessarily considers only those subjects – broadly 'theological' – of direct relevance to us, and says nothing of such important matters as Christian attitudes to the history of the pagan oracles, use of images, demonology, and so on. For all of these and more, probably the most valuable single overview remains Hanson 1985, 144–229, notwithstanding its entertainingly judgmental comments about 'puritanical' philistinism among some early Christians (Prof. Hanson was for some time Bishop of Clogher in the Church of Ireland). See also Edwards et al., 1999.

[18] There is a huge literature; among the most important overall treatments, see Droge 1989; Pilhofer 1990.

[19] E.g. *Dial.*, VII.1–2; see further Droge 1989, 49–81.

[20] As convincingly shown in Droge 1989, 124–67.

time being the question of what was considered 'natural' as opposed to 'supernatural' knowledge in the first centuries AD).

Crucially, both arguments depended on emphasis on elements of *similarity* between Christianity and paganism. We could call this approach a 'regime', but we could only do so with the proviso that it could not be a totalitarian one: for contemporary pagans to be persuaded by these arguments about the similarity between pagan and Jewish and Christian 'theology', they had to be persuasive. This persuasiveness was varied. When many of the church fathers argued that pagan polytheism had, at least among the elite, in fact been considered a form of monarchical monotheism, they were to some extent pushing at an open door: since the fifth century BC, some educated Greeks had espoused variants of the view that the pantheon of Gods was in fact symbolic of, or subservient to, one cosmic intellect. But on other subjects, their claims for similarity would have been less convincing. When Clement of Alexandria alleged that creation *ex nihilo* was held not only by Plato (dubious enough) but also by the Stoics (entirely improbable), he cannot have convinced many.[21] Judaeo-Christian forgeries like the Sibylline Oracles or the prophecies of Hystaspes may have had more immediate success in convincing some of the direct compatibility of paganism and Christianity, but soon led to the emabarassing accusation that Christianity relied on 'pious frauds',[22] and so to cautious repudiation by Augustine and others.[23] Positing that pagan philosophers – especially Plato – knew the trinity may have buttressed Origen against Celsus, but again became an embarrassment in intra-Christian debates, as when Origen's subordinationist trinitarianism was condemned as Platonic fallacy by Jerome.[24]

Nonetheless, this search for similarity – which, it should be emphasised, in the minds of its practitioners never impinged on the divine, revealed status of Christianity (why should it?) – was for the most part gleefully adopted by the fifteenth and sixteenth century scholars and apologists who benefited from the systematic re-discovery and publication of the works of the church fathers. I am not talking here about the neoplatonic fringe – Ficino, Pico della Mirandola with his pseudo-Cabbala, Reuchlin, Postel – whose importance has probably been overplayed, but about the apologetic mainstream. Above all, the 'positive' emphasis on similarity was adopted by Agostino Steuco, whose *De perenni philosophia* (1540), despite its name, was less a work proposing a new philosophy and more an attempt at a historical apologetics that was prepared to discover almost all of Christian theology – creation *ex nihilo*, a fully consubstantial trinity, etc. – in much of pagan philosophy.[25] Steuco's enthusiasm for the insights of the pagans was controversial and not widely shared, but he collected so much data that even in the seventeenth century, when everyone knew that the philological foundations on which his edifice was built were decidedly shaky, his book

[21] *Strom*. v.14.

[22] E.g. Porphyry, *Plot*., 16.

[23] See generally Grafton 1991, 162–77, esp. 165–8.

[24] Jerome, *Cont. Ruf*., I.14.

[25] Steuco [1540] 1542, 337–475 for creation *ex nihilo*, a subject that will be of particular importance for us later. See further Schmitt 1966, at 515–24; Muccillo 1988.

continued to be recommended as an introduction to historical apologetics in reading guides for prospective divines across Europe.[26]

More common were variants of the negative/plagiarism thesis. These could be relatively mild, as is in the exceedingly popular (partly because exceedingly uninventive) *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne* (1581) by the French Reformed leader Philippe de Mornay.[27] Or they could insist strongly on the total incapacity of pagans to achieve almost any truth – whether theological or even philosophical – outside of a Judaic (i.e. post Mosaic) inheritance: this strategy was usually adopted by strongly Reformed or Lutheran writers, who incorporated it into anti-Pelagian polemics about the limits of fallen reason. Here we might instance such late and philologically-impressive examples as the Lutheran Johann Heinrich Ursinus's 1661 investigation of Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, and Sanchuniathon the Phoenician, which insisted on the chronological priority of Moses to all of them;[28] or the huge *Court of the Gentiles* (1669–78) by the English nonconformist theologian Theophilus Gale, which consists mostly of a regurgitation of patristic commonplaces about Mosaic intellectual primacy, incorporated into a scheme of Reformed covenant theology.[29]

Contrary to the assumptions of several modern historians, there was nothing 'liberal' or 'progressive' about such emphasis on similarity: whatever the utopian ecumenical dreams of men like Mornay, their works were eagerly recommended as pedagogical reading by the most orthodox, bigoted divines across Europe, for they were intended as preparative to courses of full polemical divinity. Moreover, it was through the lens of the 'patristic paradigm' that the discoveries of the religions of the new world and of east Asia were initially interpreted. This should not be unexpected, given the prevalence of patristic texts (and commentaries upon them) within educational curricula. It comes as no surprise to find that the prominent Jesuits José de Acosta and Antonio Possevino recommended that their missionary colleagues reread the relevant early Christian classics before setting off.[30]

(*Ib*) *Questioning patristic comparatism*

Our question now becomes: how and when did European scholars come to modify this patristic paradigm? The key shift occurred in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a period whose importance not just for the issues at hand, but for the pre-history of the Western humanities more generally, remains under-appreciated. It was then that humanism gradually shifted to a more contextualised, historicist approach, one which, more and more, emphasised the *difference* between past and present. As is almost always the case, principle followed practice, and we are dealing here not with methodological theory, but with a set of empirical discoveries, in the making of which the figure of Joseph

[26] E.g. Boverio 1617, 132a; and for some English examples, see e.g. Fotherby 1622, sig. [A5]^{v}; Baxter 1673, 928.
[27] de Mornay [1581] 1585, 67–93, *passim*. See Ménager 2006; Woolford 2011, 180–6.
[28] Ursinus 1661. See Hafner 2010, at 9–10.
[29] Gale 1669–77; Levitin 2015b, 146–53; Pigney 2010.
[30] Ryan 1981, 528. For evidence of the missionaries' use of patristic precedent, see below.

Scaliger loomed large, even if accompanied by a larger cast of accomplices than some history of scholarship has allowed him.

The first, and now most well-known,[31] of these discoveries was chronological. Scaliger's intense research offered a vision of history in which the antiquity of Egypt in particular was pushed very far back (dangerously far for some of Scaliger's readers). One long-term impact of this was the negation of the idea of Mosaic intellectual primacy: the biblical Jews started to be portrayed not as the fount of wisdom, but either as an independent, largely primitive people, or, gradually, as *inheritors* of Egyptian customs and ideas. There was nothing heterodox about these arguments, which, alongside the realisation of the great antiquity of Chinese civilisation, culminated in the works of John Marsham and John Spencer in the 1670s and 1680, both of which were designed not to usher in a new secular comparatism, but to defend aspects of orthodox religious belief using the techniques of the new scholarship.[32] But one side-effect was the gradual death of the negative/plagiarism thesis, and Scaliger and his successors were deeply critical of the Hellenistic Jews and the church fathers for inventing the myth of Jewish intellectual primacy.

This brings us to our second transformation: a new, critical attitude to a set of texts that we may broadly label Hellenistic – that is to say, stretching from the *Letter of Aristeas* (2nd century BC), through to the works of the Hellenistic Jews, and then the early Christian writers (up to Eusebius) who were inspired by them. Scaliger and others not only discovered the phenomenon of Hellenistic Judaism,[33] but, just as importantly, recognised that many of the claims about ancient pagan history made by the Hellenistic Jews and their Christian successors were dangerously unreliable, to be read more as pious propaganda than as trustworthy history.[34] Casaubon's famous denunciation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was only one part of this historical-philological project; probably no less important was the repudiation of the *Chaldean Oracles* as a serious source for the putative similarity between Christian and ancient near eastern theology.[35] These sources' claims for Mosaic primacy, or for more general similarity between pagan and Judaeo-Christian ideas – claims which as we have seen lay at the heart of the traditional apologetic project – likewise came under scrutiny. To give only one example, John Selden would soon respond with scandalised incredulity to the idea that Aristotle had been taught by a wandering Jew, an idea he dismissed as a fable concocted by self-aggrandising Hellenistic Jews like Aristobulus.[36]

The third and final component of this transformative moment was a new, more contextual and distant attitude to Greek philosophy. In this case, this was not the result of Scaligerian philology. Rather, developments within philosophy itself led to a new vision of

[31] See in brilliant detail Grafton 1993.

[32] In Marsham's case, the veracity of the Masoretic chronology; in Spencer's, the liturgy of the English church. See now Levitin 2015b, 156–64; Levitin 2013; Stolzenberg 2012. For the question of Chinese chronology, stimulated above all by Martino Martini, see von Collani 2000; Poole 2012.

[33] Grafton 2014 and the works cited there.

[34] See e.g. Scaliger 1606, 4–5.

[35] Grafton and Weinberg 2011, 30–42; Grafton 1983; Mulsow, ed. 2002; Levitin 2015b, 54–70.

[36] Selden 1640, 14–15.

ancient thought as alien and not directly compatible with 'modern' (i.e. post-Christ) ideas. The Platonic revival had met with stern opposition that used the history of philosophy to emphasise the difference between pagan Platonism and correct natural philosophy or Christian theology. [37] Within Aristotelianism, the rediscovery and publication of commentators like Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias, combined with the long controversy over Pietro Pomponazzi's claims that the immortality of the soul could not be proved from Aristotle's philosophy, similarly led to the realisation – at least in some quarters – that Aristotle may have been even further from the Christian worldview than had previously been assumed.[38] The publication of, and growing familiarity with, the fragments of the philosophers we now call the pre-Socratics also slowly began to convince early modern Europeans that Greek philosophy had been far more alien, and above all, far more 'pagan', than they had ever thought. For example, the famous Jesuit commentary on Aristotle produced at Coimbra devoted great space to eludiating the opinions of the monists chastised by Aristotle in the first book of the *Physics*, I.2, making it clear that those like Steuco were wrong to read them as prefiguring a Judaeo-Christian conception of a monotheistic transcendent deity, but that they (as well as theogonic poets like Hesiod) should be read as materialists who made the world into an animal, and that their enigmatic manner of philosophising about the first principle was similar to that of the Egyptians and Chaldeans.[39] Indeed, it is imperative for everything that follows that the reader remembers that we are dealing with – and attempting to recover – a lost world that existed before nineteenth-century Philhellenism, a world where Greek philosophy was not considered a unique phenomenon insulated from the rest of pagan thought, but rather one that came more and more to be viewed as a manifestation of a global 'religious' worldview.

The confluence of these developments challenged the central presuppositions of patristic apologetics, and the regime of religious comparatism it sustained. As we shall see, some of those presuppositions survived – further evidence that unlike political regimes, intellectual ones are not unified entities that at moments of revolution must fall entirely to be replaced by a different 'regime'. But all this leads us to ask: if it was not going to rely on the church fathers' historical claims, what should a new, distinctly seventeenth-century apologetics look like?

The most important answer to this question was provided in the huge *De theologia gentili, et physiologia Christiana sive de origine ac progressu idololatriae*, first published in 1641 (with an expanded edition in 1668) by the Dutch polymath G. J. Vossius, a leading inheritor of Scaliger's Dutch legacy.[40] This remarkable book, published in combination with

[37] See above all Crispo 1594, on which see Glawe 1912, 24–6; Kraye 2002, 394–7.

[38] The fullest overview is now Martin 2014. For the rejection of a 'metaphysical' version of Aristotelian natural philosophy in favour of a 'naturalistic' one that tended towards animism or vitalism, see Keßler 1995.

[39] Fonseca et al., 1616, cols. 173–77. For an overview of the printing of various pre-Socratic fragments, see Hankins and Palmer 2008.

[40] Vossius, as he himself admitted, was inspired to write his book by John Selden's *De Diis Syris* (1617), but constraints of space prevent me from discussing that work here (albeit see n. **000, 000** below). For a summary, see Toomer 2009, I, 211–56. For more on Selden's influence in this regard, see now Mulsow 2016.

Vossius's son's translation of Maimonides's tractate on idolatry from the *Mishneh Torah*, seems to have been the most widely-read work of Latin historical apologetics in Europe throughout the seventeenth century and beyond.[41] Its impact, I should like to suggest, was immense, but also immensely complex.

I have argued that at the heart of the change in apologetics and the history of religion in the early seventeenth century lay a modification of the rejection of the patristic paradigm of arguing for (i) Mosaic primacy, and (ii) strong similarities between paganism and Christianity. And so it is no surprise to find Vossius announcing, in a letter to his friend Abraham van der Meer, that from a scholarly perspective, this was exactly his aim. The apologetics of Steuco and the church fathers, he contended, had been rendered obsolete, and something new was required.[42] But this being so, what should such a post-patristic, non-syncretist apologetics look like?

Vossius's answer to this question was ingenious. The pagans *did* have some knowledge of the true god. This was the Unknown God (Ἄγνωστος Θεός) mentioned by Paul in his disputation against the Athenian philosophers at the Areopagus (Acts 17:22–31), where Paul himself was happy to quote the pagan poets Epimenides and Aratus to convince his opponents.[43] This knowledge was not innate, but derived either from tradition – not Mosaic tradition, which was limited to the Jews, but the universal tradition that went back to Noah and his sons[44] – or, more importantly, from nature. Now, what Vossius meant by the latter is hugely important, and opens the door to a component of the early modern discussion of religious thought that has been almost entirely ignored by commentators: the continuing influence of neo-scholastic natural theology.

Aquinas, drawing on a long tradition of apophatic theology, had asserted that humans were incapable of truly grasping the divine essence. However, through analogical reasoning

[41] See the examples in Rademaker 1981, 306–7, 309. For the numerous editions, see **n. 000** below. I am not the first to posit Vossius's importance on this score, but it seems to me that previous commentators have missed the precise nature of the significance of his work.

[42] Vossius to Abraham van der Meer, 13 Dec 1627, in Vossius 1690, 112b–113a.

[43] Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 5b–6a. Not least because of the centrality of this passage to theological disputes, the identity of the Unknown God became a sub-topic of considerable debate in early modern scholarship. See e.g. Selden 1617, lxi–lxii, 112, 114, arguing that the altar Paul referred to was typical of altars to all the gods in common, on the basis of a commentary of Theophylactus on the passage, which itself was based on a forged inscription from Euthalius (Toomer 2009, I, 219 for the full details), allowing him to claim that pagan polytheism in fact concealed a monotheism derived from observation of nature (lxvii: 'Satis ex his constat *Graecorum, Latinorum,* & *Aegyptiorum*, qui nempè omnes longè ante alias gentes Arcanorum naturae studiis incumbebant, abditiorem &, quam in vulgus edere non immeritò abhorrebant, Theologiam non tam Plures quam UNUM supremum DEUM agnovisse; ut & sanctiorem Philosophiam', also lix) – an obvious anticipation of Vossius's case. By the late 17th-century the issue had become a set-piece dispute: see e.g. Bose 1659; Köber, 1683; Meursius 1687, 41–7; Segers, Grube 1712; Fabricius 1713; Bergested 1744. For a modern discussion of Acts as a book of apologetics, see Alexander 1999.

[44] This Noahide religion was not directly equivalent to 'natural religion', for it also contained revealed truths like post-mortem life, spiritual beings subordinate to God, and the origin of evil (Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 15–42, 11b).

on the creation, they could come to a predication of the divine attributes.[45] This could be done through three *viae* (ways), which he derived from the writings of pseudo-Dionysius (whom he believed to be the real Dionysius Areopagite of Acts 17:34), especially the latter's *De divinis nominibus*. These were the *via causalitatis*, which worked from created things back to a necessary cause with powers of efficiency, exemplarity and finality and thus with intelligence and will; the *via remotionis* (or *negationis*), which worked by eliminating from creation all its defects to produce attributes such as incorporeity, immutability, and infinity; and the *via eminentiae*, which attributed to God the perfections found in created things, but in a super-eminent way.[46] As far as Aquinas was concerned, here was a way of discussing God's being and relationship to the world while continuing to respect his transcendence and unfathomable infinity on the one hand, and without slipping into univocity, Averroist equivocity, or Maimonidean defeatism about positing any worthy divines names on the other.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to recognise that this conceptual apparatus survived well into the early modern period. It was taught in both Reformed and post-Tridentine theology, and Reformed theologians in particular tended to reject Scotist univocity and insist on the analogical methods by which the divine attributes could be predicated, allowing them to formulate an account of the attributes that both maintained God's transcendence and to assert his relationship to the created world.[47] It is one of the most striking, and most surprising, findings of my research that the writing of the history of religion in the seventeenth century – performed by scholars who often declared that they had little time for scholastic niceties, and who knew that the three *viae* were derived from a Dionysius whose authenticity they had long rejected – was still so deeply anchored in scholastic natural theology.

Vossius is fine proof of this. He referred directly to the pseudo-Dionysian/Thomist three *viae* so as to argue that humans could, from nature, come to an analogical knowledge of God's various attributes.[48] But the fall had rendered human reasoning imperfect: like the blind man of John 9, fallen man had evidence of God in front of him (in nature) but could not acknowledge it.[49] The result was that humans gradually failed to recognise the

[45] The central discussions are those in *Summa contra gentiles*, I.30.3; IV.1; *Summa theologiae*, I.QQ.12–13. For analysis, see e.g. Lyttkens 1952; McInerney 1996; Hall 2007, esp. 9–16, 51–2.

[46] Key *loci*, among many others, are *ST*, I.Q3.a.3; Q.13.a.12; *SCG*, I.14. Among several important studies, see Boland 1996, 94–146.

[47] For a summary of the Reformed context, see Muller 2012, 127–50, esp. 139.

[48] Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 4b–5a, discussing the three *viae* at length. One assumes that his acceptance of this model stemmed from his education by orthodox Reformed theologians in Leiden; Vossius's teacher Franciscus Junius, to whom he always declared his intellectual debts, had particularly emphasised this Thomistic argument. For Vossius's teaching by, and respect for, Junius (whose daughter he married), see Rademaker 1981, 44–6, 69, 72, 85–6, 156, 210–11, 437–8. For the three *viae*, see Junius's 'Summa aliquot locorum communium SS. Theologiae, tribus libris comprehensa', in his posthumous *Opera theologica*: Junius 1613, col. 1840 (and subsequent pages for their use in predicating the divine attributes). My emphasis on these theological elements renders my reading of Vossius very different to that in Somos 2011, 170, 180–1, 198, 290, 372–3.

[49] Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 9a–10b.

difference between god and nature, and came to revere the creation rather than the creator.[50] The apologists' task became to confute this error, to show that contrary to pagan opinion, 'God was neither nature, nor a part of it, but its originator', and to clarify where they had gone wrong.[51]

This combination of historical and natural theological thinking explains the curious, generically novel title of Vossius's book: 'On pagan theology and Christian physiology, or the origin and progress of idolatry'. To accuse the pagans of nature-worship was of course not revolutionary.[52] But as a basis on which to found a large-scale apologetics, it was deeply novel. Put in the crudest terms, it allowed Vossius to reject much of the patristic paradigm, which insisted on *similarity* between paganism and Christianity, and to build an apologetic argument that recognised the *difference* between the two that had been increasingly discovered in the previous century. Pagans from Asia to Greece had misread the book of nature, and so had come to erroneous conceptions of the divine.[53]

Yet at the same time, Vossius could combine this emphasis on difference with another apologetic secret weapon. According to him, the popular religions of the people and the poets was formed from the monarchist presupposition that God would have subordinate ministers; this was probably a true polytheism.[54] But, across the world, the philosophical elite knew better, recognising that the multiplication of divine names was only a vulgar misrepresentation of the ubiquity of a single divine force throughout the world. What characterised their theology, in other words, was what we would anachronistically call animism, pantheism, vitalism, or monism. This was a function of Vossius's belief that true knowledge of God was to be gained from nature, to the limited extent that it revealed his attributes through the scholastic *viae*. Accordingly, incorrect opinions about him almost always consisted of conflations of him *with* nature. But those opinions were never *fully*

[50] Vossius suggested several ways in which this may have happened, which he never entirely reconciled with each other: at one point he simply spoke of the pagans' wilful ignorance of the transcendent divinity manifested by the creation; subsequently, the forces of nature were ascribed both corporeality and divinity (sig. $**3^{r}$); he elsewhere he suggested that the poets and priests, who knew the truth (at least initially), accommodated to the desires of the masses by representing the gods as physical (not as humans, but as very subtle substances), ultimately leading to the deification of natural substances (114a–b).

[51] Ibid., sig. $[*4]^{v}$–$**^{r}$ ('Cumque gentiles virtutem illam divinam, quae est ab Deo, minime distinxerint ab altera, quae est in Deo; eoque ex naturae mirandis collegerint, Natuam esse Deum: nobis contra propositum fuit, ostendere Deum non esse Naturam, vel partem illius; sed Naturae auctorem.')

[52] See e.g. Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, VII.5–6, 23, 27, 29–30.

[53] That starworship was the first cause of idolatry was an old idea: among patristic apologists, see e.g. Clement, *Protr.*, II.26.1; Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.*, I.6–II.1, II.5.3–5. Influential pagan souces that place starworship at the origin of religion include Plato, *Crat.*, 397cd; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.*, I.11.1; Cicero, *Nat. deor.*, 49–65. It is usually contrasted with Euhemerism (worship of dead men), but even Euhemerus seems to have held starworship as an alternative (and possibly prior) origin of religious belief: Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.*, VI.1.8. It thus became a standard opinion among both patristic and early modern writers that Euhemerism came after starworship. For early moderns, this idea was strongly reinforced by the authority of Maimonides: *Guide*, III.29 (=Maimonides 1963, 514–22 – published in a popular Latin translation by Johann Buxtorf jr in 1629) and the commentary on Mishnah *Avodah Zarah* translated by Dionysius Vossius to which the *Theologia gentilis* was nominally a commentary: Maimonides 1641, 3.

[54] Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 735a–b. For the distinction between popular and elite religion Vossius relied on Varro's famous scheme, as in n. **000** below.

imperfect, for they always concealed at heart the true monotheist notion of the transcendent deity with all the attributes belonging to him.

This was again not in itself a brand new argument – several of the church fathers had insisted that the imperfect monotheism supposedly implied by the doctrines of the Greek philosophers could be used as a proof of the truth of the Christian conception of God. Minucius Felix in particular associated the first principles of all the philosophers from Thales onwards with the Christian God.[55] Above all, Augustine in his discussion of the 'natural' theology of the pagans, had claimed that the philosophers had erroneously conflated god with the soul of the world or their first principles.[56] But Vossius, more than any other apologist before him, adapted this old argument to the realities of modern scholarship. It allowed him to argue that he was no naïve searcher for similarities between paganism and Christianity – for he recognised the difference between pagan animism and Christian transcendentalism[57] – while nonetheless discovering at least a trace of such similarity. And it was because of this emphasis on the natural philosophical origins of religious truth that he discussed exhaustively the doctrines of the Greek philosophers, so as to find in them evidence of an animism that he claimed was common throughout the pagan world, but which nonetheless concealed a corrupt monotheism. (Other early modern historical apologists would come to argue that he had overly focussed on the philosophers.)[58]

With far more thoroughness and sophistication than any predecessor, he offered developmental narratives that connected primitive idolatry with the doctrines of the Greek sages. So for example, sun worship began because the pagans – *tam barbari, quam Graeci* – associated their gods with the heavens,[59] and the sun was the most prominent object to be found there.[60] Its antiquity was traceable to at least the time of Job (as per his oath at 31:26–8), who was contemporaneous or prior to Moses.[61] From there, Vossius could go on to chart in laborious etymological detail its manifestation in the various sun-deities of the Egyptians,

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[55] *Oct.*, XIX.3–15, concluding (XX.1) 'Exposui opiniones omnium ferme philosophorum, quibus inlustrior gloria est, deum unum multis licet designasse nominibus, ut quivis arbitretur, aut nunc Christianos philosophos esse aut philosophos fuisse iam tunc Christianos'. The whole discussion is clearly a manipulation of Cicero, *Nat. deor.*, I.10–15.

[56] Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, VII.5–17, 23, 27–30; VIII.1–11. In speaking of 'natural' theology Augustine was referring to the threefold division of theology into poetic, civil, and natural/philosophical from Varro's *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum*, a division that continued to be central to early modern apologetics and history of religion. For its broader cultural significance, see Rüpke 2014. Varro had made great effort to show that 'popular' polytheism was in fact compatible with the doctrine of the *anima mundi* (VII.9)

[57] He consistently critiqued what he saw as modern repetitions of the patristic error of searching for too much similarity between Christian and pagan theology: see e.g. his characterisation of Justus Lipsius's attempt to render Stoic fate compatible with Christian providence as no better than the misreadings of Aristotle offered by the scholastics (213b–214a).

[58] Jurieu 1704, sig. **3^{r}.

[59] Vossius could cite for this such canonical statements as Aristotle, *De cael.* I, 270^{b}6–10: it is from here that the *tam barbari, quam Graeci* formulation comes (Aristotle has 'καὶ βάρβαροι καὶ Ἕλληνες'). See also Aristotle, *Met.*, XII.8 (1074^{a}).

[60] Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 116a–b.

[61] Ibid., 118b

Assyrians, Phoenicians, Moabites, etc., and its mutation into star-worship more broadly. Due to the celestial bodies' perpetual motion, they were assigned sense and reason, and subsequently souls. Here Vossius could point out that philosophers ranging from Xenocrates and Alcmaeon to the Stoics had all attributed divinity to the heavenly bodies.[62] Most importantly, Aristotle had also deified the firmaments, as could be confirmed by the readings of him offered by his best commentators: Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius, Philoponus. In reaching this conclusion, Vossius was contributing to a long debate in the Aristotelian commentary tradition.[63] He explicitly argued that scholastic Aristotelians who denied this fact and tried to accommodate Aristotle's ideas to Christianity were misrepresenting the Stagirite.[64] But he was not making a contribution to philosophy, but rather to a sophisticated attempt to understand historical opinions about the divine.

Again and again, Vossius found such continuities between pagan theology and Greek philosophy, with the latter helping to explain the former. In further chapters, he traced the deification of individual elements: when the Milesian philosophers Anaximenes and Diogenes of Apollonia made air the principle from which all things were made, they were in fact espousing a kind of pantheistic monism, which was in turn derived from the air-worship of the Assyrians, early Arabs, and Egyptians.[65] Others, such as the Stoics, conflated God and the world in a different way, saying that he consisted of a divine mind and a corporeal body, and that his various parts were called by various names; individual souls were only part of this universal soul.[66] But because, unlike the Platonists, the Stoics thought this universal principle to be corporeal, their doctrine approached the atheistic vitalism of Strato of Lampsacus, the third scholarch of the Peripatetic Lyceum, who had not only conflated God with nature, but also rendered him mindless.[67]

In all cases, what defined pagan thought was a kind of animism that fused god with nature. At the same time, that animism, with its tendency towards monism, almost always concealed a (corrupt) monotheistic core. Vossius's genius was thus to turn the late humanist insistence on the difference between paganism and Judaeo-Christianity to an apologetic end: paganism, because of its animism, was fundamentally different to the Judaeo-Christian conception of god, but, when considered historically, that animism could still reveal the truth that correct natural theology should lead to. Vossius had identified a contingent,

[62] Ibid., 168b, drawing on Cicero, *Nat. Deor*. I.13.34 (Xenocrates), I.11.27 (Alcmaeon); and the usual sources (Posidonius, Cicero, Augustine) for the Stoics.

[63] Wolfson 1962.

[64] Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 169b–170a.

[65] ibid., 267b–268b. That Anaximenes's air was his god is affirmed in Cicero, *Nat. Deor*. I.26 ('Anaximenes aera deum statuit…'); for the Assyrians and Arabs, Vossius's source is Herodotus's repeated references to 'οὐρανίης Ἀφροδίτης' (heavenly Aphrodite, see e.g. I.105, I.131), combined with Firmicus Maternus, *De errore*, 4, a clever conjunction still used by modern scholars (e.g. Shanzer 1986, 73). For the Egyptians: Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* III.2.

[66] Vossius [1641, 1668] 1700, 724a.

[67] Ibid., 724b–725a. The account of Strato's god is from Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, VI.10, which Vossius quotes, alongside the fuller Cicero, *Nat. deor*., I.13. Minucius Felix had attempted to appropriate even him for pagan monotheism: *Oct*., XIX.8.

historically situated 'logic of paganism', that led both the people and the elite philosophers into animism.

II AFTER VOSSIUS: IS PAGANISM CORRUPT MONOTHEISM, OR MATERIALIST ANIMISM?

IIa Pagan animism as corrupt monotheism

Here, then, was an attempt to build a new historical apologetics on the ruins of the patristic predecessor: to recognise the radical difference between the pagan and Christian mental worlds, but to use that difference to one's advantage. Vossius could do this by contrasting the pagan world-view with that produced by 'correct' natural philosophy, filtered through the three *viae* of Thomistic natural theology.

For all these reasons, Vossius's apologetics proved hugely influential. But it could be taken in two directions, partly because of some ambiguities in Vossius's own narrative. Above all, he was ambiguous about the precise philosophico-theological features of the animism that he ascribed to all the elite pagans across the world. Was their deity diffused immaterially, or immanent in nature in a manner more redolent of vitalism or even monism?[68] But, not least because the immediate reception of Vossius's book conincided with a period of momentous transformation in European natural philosophy, precisely that issue became central to debates across Europe, and beyond.

One direction in which this narrative could be taken was to assert, unambiguously, that the elite pagans, for all their animist idolatry and subordinate beings, had been monotheists, and that this proved the 'naturalness' of monotheism. This was done across Europe by several writers, some well-known, some less so. Important examples include Herbert of Cherbury and Ralph Cudworth in England, the Lutheran Tobias Pfanner in Germany, and the Jesuit Pierre Lescalopier in France.[69] They operated at different levels of scholarly sophistication, and their aims were not always precisely the same: Herbert and Pfanner, for example, had sympathy for the idea that monotheistic pagans might be saved,[70] while Lescalopier and Cudworth produced more traditional works of apologetics.

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[68] The latter is suggested by the claim in the important passage from VIII.1 cited in **n. 000** above that the pagan natural theologians thought God 'naturam rerum'; see also e.g. II.84, 268, for the equation of God with the aether, especially by the Milesians.

[69] Lescalopier 1660; Herbert 1663; Cudworth 1678, 192–632; Pfanner 1679. On Lescalopier, see D'Angers 1955; Kors 1990, 180, 210. On Herbert and his debt to Vossius, see Rossi 1947, III, 100–9. For Pfanner, the only discussion I am familiar with is that in Mulsow 2015, 258–9: my reading is rather different from the modernising one offered there.

[70] On Herbert, this has been shown in R. Serjeantson, 'Comparativism against Christianity? Edward Herbert and pagan religion' (paper presented at CRASSH Comparatism seminar, December 2014), identifying Herbert's key Catholic source. For Pfanner, see *Systema*, 518 (in the appendix 'De salute gentilium'). For the discussion over this in early modern Europe, see Harent, 'Infidèles (Salut des)', in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (15 vols, 1899–1950), VII, 1726–1930; Krumenacker 2013. Interestingly, Selden changed his mind on the issue: for the initial rejection, see Selden 1617, lxvii–lxix, and then the excision of this passage in the 2nd edition, Selden 1629, 72–3. Toomer 2009, I, 220–1, notes this, and attributes it to Selden being influenced by the 'Jewish doctrine that the "pious (חסידי) among the Gentiles" would have a share in the world to come', as in Maimonides,

Nonetheless, on the scholarly level, they all shared certain similarities. They all followed Vossius in claiming that God, and certain of his attributes, could be predicated from nature, and in referencing Paul on the Unknown God to substantiate this.[71] They all acknowledged that the church fathers and their modern emulators had gone too far in their search for similarity.[72] Nonetheless, they believed that – due to the knowability of the truth from nature, as per the dictates of Thomistic natural theology – pagan animistic idolatry did conceal a monotheistic core. (Pfanner even organised his book around the divine attributes as they could be derived from the three *viae*.)[73] Consequently, they all claimed that for almost all the pagans, the plurality of Gods in fact represented one supreme deity: talk of plural θεοί may have referred to his powers, or simply to subordinate deities who were his representatives and were not to be worshipped properly, but only symbolically.[74]

These were powerful arguments, which allowed these scholars and theologians to reassert the gentlest form of the patristic argument: Christians and pagans worshipped the same god, however imperfectly the latter did so. But all of them had to deal, at least a little, with the central problem thrown up by the new scholarship: that pagan theology seemed far more different to Judaeo-Christian theology than the church fathers and those like Steuco and Mornay had supposed. In particular, they had to acknowledge that a large number of those they claimed were imperfect monotheists were in fact more akin to animists or pantheists. This they discussed especially in regards to the Milesian and Eleatic schools of philosophy, whose monist pantheism they struggled to equate with monotheism.[75] Just as problematically, they had to face up to a problem that the new research on the history of philosophy had revealed (and which Steuco had been able to ignore so blithely): namely, that the pagans did not seem to acknowledge divine creation in the proper sense, but rather believed in a pre-existent matter that God had only organised or actuated.[76] Surely this implied not monotheism but dualism? Similarly, they all succumbed to the revisionist view of Aristotelianism that had been developing since the early sixteenth century, admitting that the Stagirite had equated God with the world, and that this had led to the heinous atheism-pantheism of Strato.[77] One might argue that if this was the universal 'monotheism' they were identifying, the battle was hardly worth fighting.

Mishneh Torah, Teshubah 3.5, which is quoted in Selden 1640, 32 (see also 832–4). But Selden there also cites Collio 1622, which Serjeantson has shown to have been Herbert's key source. Might Selden's primary main inspiration have been Catholic rather than Jewish?

[71] Herbert 1663, 166–7; Pfanner 1679, 76–7, 308–10 (citing Vossius, among others); Lescalopier 1660, 89b; Cudworth 1678, 474–7.

[72] E.g. Pfanner 1679, 130–1 and 144–5 criticising the Greek fathers and those who followed them, like Mornay, for overplaying the extent to which pagans could know revealed truths like the trinity.

[73] Pfanner 1679, 76–7 and *passim*.

[74] The latter was Herbert's argument: Herbert 1663, 183–4. See also Pfanner 1679, 58–65, 101–3; Cudworth, 1678, 211.

[75] E.g. Lescalopier 1660, 44a–45b, arguing that Xenophanes' pantheism concealed a monotheistic conception of God; Pfanner 1669, 123; Cudworth 1678, 151–5, 463–4, and *passim*.

[76] Herbert 1660, 158–9; Pfanner 1679, 156–61; Cudworth 1678, 34–44, 114–15, 215–16, 739–40.

[77] Pfanner 1679, 153; Lescalopier 1660, 58a–b; Cudworth 1678, 107–9, *passim*.

These tensions are above all evident in Cudworth's magisterial book, certainly the most scholarly of them all. Building on Vossius, Cudworth's argument was precisely that the pagans were animists, but that this animism concealed a monotheistic foundation:

> for the fuller clearing of the whole *Pagan Theology*, and especially this one point thereof, that the Πολυθεΐα was in great part nothing else but Πολυωνυμία, *their Polytheism* or *Multiplicity of Gods*, nothing but the *Polyonymy of One God*… Two Things are requisite to be further taken notice of; First, that according to the *Pagan Theology*, *God was conceived to be Diffused throughout the whole World*… Secondly the Pagan Theology went sometimes yet a strain higher, they not only thus supposing, God to Pervade the whole World, and to be Diffus'd through All Things (which as yet keeps up some Difference and Distinction betwixt God and the World) but also Himself to be in a manner All Things.[78]

This argument – which had nothing to do with the non-existent 'Cambridge Platonism' to which Cudworth is usually ascribed, but which was a product of a pan-European shift in scholarly apologetics – was spectacular, greeted with interest and respect across the continent, despite being written in a parochial language few Europeans bothered to learn.[79] But Cudworth was also forced to admit (at great length) that this 'monotheistic animism' could frequently degenerate into pantheistic or vitalist atheism. This could be either the 'Cosmoplastic', which he attributed to the later Stoics, and which saw the world not as an animal but as a vegetable, 'without understanding or sense'; or the 'Hylozoic', which 'makes all Body, as such, and therefore every smallest atom of it, to have Life essentially belonging to it… though without any Animal Sense or Reflexive Knowledge',[80] and which he associated – by now predictably – with the Peripatetic Strato.

Cudworth's version of Vossius's narrative was the fullest available. But it also exposed the problems with that narrative. Claiming that pagan theology was pantheistic, but that that pantheism concealed a (corrupt) monotheism, begged the question: why might it not have been *just* pantheism? Could such a first principle really be the God Paul spoke of at the Areopagus? At points, Cudworth admitted as much. When he discussed those philosophers who equated God with the *anima mundi* or with an omnipresent first principle, he conceded that they often held it to be not immaterial, but a very subtle substance, as Heraclitus did with his fire, or Diogenes with air.[81] Such pagans, 'who acknowledged no *higher Numen* than the *Soul of the World*, made God to be *All Things* in a gros[s] sense, they supposing the whole

[78] Cudworth 1678, 503–6. See also the clear summative statements to this effect at 516 and 539.

[79] For some examples of Cudworth's European reception, see below. A Latin translation was immediately commissioned, but never materialised: Henri Justel to Thomas Smith, 22 December 1677, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Smith 46, p. 264.

[80] Cudworth 1678, 105. The key evidence for Strato was in Cicero: *Nat. Deor.*, I.13.35, castigated him for holding that 'all divine force is resident in nature, which contains, he says, the principles of birth, increase, and decay, but which lacks, as we could remind him, all sensation and form'; *Acad.*, II.121 and *De fin.*, V.5 explicitly classify him as an atheist. Cudworth also added (108–9) the evidence of the ambiguous passage at Plutarch, *Adv. Col.*, 14 1115F–1115B; the ambiguities of the Greek allowed him to argue that Strato held a world of vital but not animated (i.e. rationally directed) parts.

[81] Cudworth 1678, 505, 533.

Corporeal World Animated to be also the *Supreme Deity*', and that he thus consisted of parts; it was these parts that were treated as subordinate deities.[82] But how could a real theist – let alone a monotheist – think of God as corporeal, or as composed of parts? Even Cudworth realised that this brought such a theism close to yet another type of atheism, the hylopathian, which he associated with the Ionic sect of philosophers, and especially with Anaximander, Anaximenes and Hippon, whose error it was to reify qualities, thus believing that matter itself could generate animation and life.[83] Cudworth's confusion is encapsulated in the fact that he sometimes classified Diogenes as an atheist, and sometimes exculpated him.[84] It was precisely such tensions that Pierre Bayle would soon exploit.

IIb Pagan animism is fundamentally different from Judaeo-Christian monotheism

Well before before Bayle, some Europeans took the Vossian narrative in a different direction: for them, the discovery that all pagans were animists was not a means for building an apologetics that found this animism to be a (corrupt) monotheism; rather, it was a means of insisting even more on the *difference* between the pagan and Judaeo-Christian worldviews.

Once again, a large role was played in this process by philosophers, and so again attitudes to the history of religion were often determined by attitudes to the history of Greek philosophy. Particularly crucial here were the works of Pierre Gassendi, culminating in his *Syntagma philosophicum*, published in the posthumous *Opera omnia* (1658).[85] Gassendi is of course relatively well known, but misconceptions about his project abound, mostly because the primary sources remain untranslated. It is less the case that Gassendi's aim was exclusively to 'sanitise' or 'baptise' Epicureanism;[86] rather, it was inherently contextualist-comparative, based on the idea that whatever the flaws in Epicurus's system, it was generally preferable to its Greek (and other pagan) competitors.[87]

For Gassendi, much of Epicurus's philosophy had to be explained contextually as a reaction against a particular pagan worldview – shared by almost all ancient near-eastern sages and Greek philosophers – that can only be described as 'animist'. When put like this, one immediately wonders whether Gassendi might have been influenced by the new, post-

[82] Ibid., 533–5.

[83] See the definition at ibid., 115–6, and the comparison of Heraclitus and Diogenes to the hylopathians at 533.

[84] Cf. Cudworth 1678, 124 (where Diogenes is classed alongside Anaximenes and Hippon as an hylopathian atheist) and 533 (where it is claimed that Simplicius 'vindicates [him] from that Imputation of Atheism, which *Hippo* and *Anaximander* lye under' – Cudworth gives no reference, but I suspect this is a somewhat strained reading of *Phys.*, 151.20–30).

[85] The discussion here will draw primarily on the *Syntagma*, but readers should be aware that all the key themes were already adumbrated in Gassendi's huge *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenes Laertii* (Gassendi 1649) and so were available to European readers in the 1650s.

[86] Which is the central argument of the much-cited account of Osler 1985.

[87] See e.g. the summary of his argument Gassendi 1658, I, 5. The importance of this contextualist-comparative approach is recognised in the classic study Joy 1987, esp. 83–105, as well as in LoLordo 2006, 20–4; no studies have recognised the crucial role Gassendi's re-writing of the history of animism plays in his system.

Scaligeran literature on the history of religion. As it happens, Gassendi had conceived of his 'Epicurean' project during a late-1620s visit to Holland during which he met Vossius and talked to him about the subject; whether he was directly inspired by the *Theologia gentilis* (or a proleptic relation of its argument) is unclear.[89]

In any case, Gassendi's argument had a strong familial relation to Vossius's. He agreed with him that all pagan thinkers were theological animists, and that this differentiated the pagan worldview from the Judaeo-Christian; he deployed much of the same evidence to make the case. But his one crucial twist to the story was to suggest that this animism should not be treated as an imperfect monotheism, but that its immanent deity was in fact so radically different from the Christian God that a modified Epicurean natural philosophy, and the natural theology that it produced, were – for all their faults – better suited to underpin a correct understanding of the relationship between the divine and the world.

Like Vossius, Gassendi insisted that there was continuity between near eastern and Egyptian beliefs about the divine, and the philosophy of the Greeks.[91] The ancient oriental theosophers – Indian, Ethiopian, Chaldean, and Egyptian – had posited material first principles, from which emerged the four elements and an animated world, in which the celestial bodies were considered gods.[92] This emanationist materialism migrated from ancient theology and poetry into Greek philosophy.[93] Of the pre-Socratics, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Melissus, and Zeno of Elea all held that the corporeal universe was One, equivalent with god; hence they also posited the immovability of the universe.[94] It was Gassendi's discussion that brought the figure of Xenophanes – previously of little importance in European scholarship, but to be so important for Bayle and many subsequent thinkers – to the fore.[95] In the chapter 'Sit-ne Mundus Anima praeditus', Gassendi went on to explain that this animism was inherited by almost all Greek philosophers: the Ionics with their omnipresent material first principles; the Pythagoreans, Platonists, and Stoics with their variants on a divine *anima mundi*; those like Hippocrates who posited a vital principle; and even Aristotle, whom Gassendi creatively re-interpreted at length so as to be able to conclude that 'Aristotle can easily be seen to be drawn to the opinion of the *anima mundi*'.[96]

[89] Rademaker 1981, 220–1, 282; Sassen 1960, 22, 24, 28, 43–4. Vossius's book was immediately warmly received in the philosophical circles in which Gassendi operated: Mersenne, for example, was 'dying to see it': Constantijn Huygens to André Rivet, 8 October 1641, in Huygens 1911–17, III, 243 ('Je luy [Mersenne] envoye l'*Idolatria Vossii* par Flissinghe et Calais; il meurt d'envie de la veoir…').

[91] See e.g. Gassendi 1658, I, 6b (in the chapter 'De origine Philosophiae').

[92] See e.g. ibid., I, 12a–b.

[93] A clear statement is offered at ibid., I, 288a. Gassendi then quotes the Orphic hymn to Kronos, 'ὃς ναίεις κατὰ πάντα μέρη κόσμοιο, γενάρχα', which he very loosely translates in pantheistic terms as 'Mundi Progenitor, qui parteis incolis omneis'.

[94] Ibid., I, 138b.

[95] The fragements of Xenophanes had been published in the important collection Estienne 1573, at 35–9. Israel 2006, 438 therefore seems wrong to imply that his ideas were not debated before Bayle.

[96] Gassendi 1658, II, 243a: 'Ex quo obiter intelligitur videri possefacile Aristotelem pertrahi ad opinionem de Anima Mundi'. See also the inclusion of Aristotle in the list of animists at I, 333a–b.

It was thus no surprise that the worst animist of all (*pessime omnium*) was the Aristotelian Strato, who placed all divine power in nature, without even attributing to it sense or form.[97]

Why were the pagan philosophers so beholden to animism? First of all, because, lacking revelation, they could not figure out the origin of individual souls, and so assigned that origin to one, universal soul.[98] Second, it was because the resulting animism fitted so well with pagan theology, allowing them to explain the many teleological phenomena observed in the world, and how the world itself was god, and natural objects subordinate deities.[99] But Gassendi's most important argument – one that woud tild shape scholarship until the present day – was that the animist, or even pantheist, theology of all pagan thinkers stemmed from their inability to believe that substances could be created *ex nihilo*, an inability that was understandable given that such a belief was indeed irrational, and knowledge of it depended on access to revelation. Some were full-out eternalists: most famously Aristotle, whose position could be traced back to the near east, to the Chaldeans.[100] But much more common was the belief that the world was created from pre-existent matter, held by a huge number of Greek philosophers (all the Milesians, Stoics, and atomists), and traceable back to the Egyptians and Indian Brachmans, as well as 'innumerable others'.[101] Revelation taught that the world is created from nothing, but the pagans, not having such knowledge, 'all agree that that matter from which the world was created was pre-existent, because nothing can be made out of nothing'.[102] This had two momentous consequences: paganism gravitated either towards dualism, or to pantheistic monism. The first was reflected in the pagans' tendency to posit two principles: God and pre-existent matter (the latter often represented by chaos), which was the view both of the theogonic poets (Orpheus, Hesiod) and philosophers like Plato and Anaxagoras.[103] The second was evident from the fact that they so often conflated God and the world, usually by making him equivalent to some kind of immanent principle like the *anima mundi*; as we have seen, Gassendi thought this had been the view of everyone from the near eastern sages through to Aristotle, and had only been rejected by Epicurus.[104]

It was here that lay the philosophical pay-off. Epicurus – for all his faults – could now appear as a counterpoint to the dangerously animist physics of all the others pagans: indeed,

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[97] ibid., I, 296b–297a.

[98] Ibid., I, 159b.

[99] Ibid., I, 160a–b.

[100] Ibid., I, 162a–b; Gassendi does not give a precise source for the Chaldeans, saying only 'de quibus testatur Diodorus': the reference must be to *Bib. hist.*, II.30.

[101] Gassendi 1658, I, 162b–163b. Gassendi again does not give sources, apart from Laërtius for the Egyptians and Strabo for the Brachmans: he must have been thinking of *Vit. phil.*, Proem., 1; *Geog.*, XV.1.70.

[102] Gassendi 1658, I, 163a: 'Ut discrimen autem praemittam, quod inter hoc Fidei dogma, & illud de Mundi exortu Philosophorum placitum intercedit; ecce Sacra Fides decernit Mundum Deo Authore coepisse; Philosophorum autem plerique coepisse cum volunt aut serie causarum fatali, aut casu. Omnes deinde in id consentiunt, ut materia praefurit, ex qua procreatus sit, quod nihil ex nihilo fiat; cum Fides tamen Sacra declaret fuisse Mundum ex nihilo, nullave materia creatum'. See also 480b.

[103] Ibid., I, 481a.

[104] Ibid., I, 288a–289a.

Gassendi even explicitly spoke of Epicurus as an opponent of 'idolatry'.[105] Where all the pagans animated the heavens, Epicurus refused to anthropomorphise natural bodies.[106] On the subject of efficient causation, all the Greek philosophers attributed it to a divine principle immanent in the world; only Epicurus, with his atoms themselves being efficient principles, left space for the correct view, when a transcendent God upon whom material activity is dependent was added. As Gassendi put it, God need not be an *anima mundi*, for it was 'enough that he is incorporeal, and penetrates and maintains the whole machine of the world'.[107] Or on the subject of the soul, while it could not be denied that Epicurus held the heinous view of it as material and mortal, all the other Greeks – following other pagan predecessors – believed the soul to be a thin material substance that dissipated into the *anima mundi* upon death; hence they held such equally heinous opinions as the soul's eternity, and its transmigration.[108]

In Gassendi's hands, the Vossian narrative of universal pagan animism was transformed. That animism came to look so distant from the transcendent God of Judaeo-Christian theology that Epicurean physics was more likely to function as a preparative for the latter. Indeed, Gassendi even spoke of the way in which Epicurean physics could permit an analogical predication of the divine attributes: Epicurus was effectively turned into Aquinas, inferior in theology but superior in natural philosophy.[109] The one thing that Epicurus had failed to recognise – and which it was possible to recognise from nature – was that unity was one of the divine perfections. That unity *was* recognised by those who equated him with a first principle or an *anima mundi*, but only at the price of surrendering transcendence: it was precisely because he did not see God as the form or soul of the world that Epicurus did not achieve this quasi-monotheism.[110] But the immanent God of these pagan 'monotheists' was hardly a simple unity in the Judaeo-Christian sense, for by definition, he had to consist of parts.[111] Such a conception of the divine led to further errors, such as the idea that the soul as a very thin, fiery substance, which Gassendi asserted was prevalent among the pagans; indeed, this was the inevitable notion of the soul for those without revelation.[112] This 'monotheism' was thus a chimera, and was in fact completely

[105] Ibid., I, 161a; also 312a–b.

[106] Ibid., I, 520a (in the chapter 'Sint-ne Caelum, Sideraque animata?').

[107] Ibid., 333–7 for the whole discussion, and 334a–b for the quotation ('Sufficiat Deum quidem esse incorporeum, ac pervadere, fovereque universam Mundi Machinam'). From a philosophical perspective, an excellent discussion is LoLordo 2005; the only aspect I can disagree with is the claim that Gassendi's attacks on the *anima mundi* were covert attacks on Ficino, Fludd, or some other modern exponent of the doctrine (89–92): the brilliance of Gassendi's argument was to imply that virtually everyone – crucially including Aristotle – was an animist akin to Plato or the Stoics.

[108] See the huge discussion in Gassendi 1658, II, 238b–56; it is here that Gassendi develops most fully his animistic reading of Aristotle. See further II, 621a–625a.

[109] Ibid., I, 293b–294b, and the explanation why Epicurus's analogism was better than the hubristic one of the other pagans at 296b.

[110] Ibid., I, 303b–305a.

[111] Ibid., I, 307a–b; also 333a–b, 334a.

[112] Ibid., II, 250–6. See also LoLordo 2006, 229–47.

incompatible with Christianity. Unsurprisingly, Gassendi had no time for Herbert's monotheisic reading of pagan theology.[113]

Even more than Vossius, Gassendi had identified a 'logic' to paganism: from the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, they had all (Epicurus excepted) arrived either at pantheistic monism or dualism (both, in any case, were animistic). He therefore did not need to offer precise historical or diffusionist explanations for similarities between near eastern religion and Greek philosophy; it was enough to prove that they had stemmed from similar operations of the human mind. This 'conjectural' mode of comparatism would become ever more popular in the second half of the seventeenth century, not least because chronological scholarship was rendering the old search for precise genealogical links between pagan and biblical figures ever more unstable.

Gassendi's conceptualisation of paganism would prove hugely influential, as we shall shortly see. This means that if we were to conceptualise seventeenth-century comparative religion as a 'regime', we would also have to recognise divisions within that regime. On the one hand, it was united by the broad consensus that pagan religions were animistic. On the other, it was divided as to whether that animism concealed an imperfect monotheism (Vossius, Herbert, Pfanner, Lescalopier, Cudworth, etc.), or whether it was a pantheism or monism that was entirely incompatible with the true conception of God (the Gassendist argument). In other words, we are not dealing with a monolithic 'orthodoxy', but rather a complex debate about the interpretation of a large set of proof texts. So for example, precisely because they both agreed that pagan theology was grounded in animism, Cudworth could use much of Gassendi's data, while reaching the opposite conclusion: pagan animism *was* grounded on an (imperfect) monotheism.[114]

But others did adopt Gassendi's conclusions, and use them to re-construct more fully the history of ancient religion. Increasingly, they also incorporated more of the evidence that was flooding in from the extra-European world. The natural person to do this was the physician François Bernier (1620–1688), who studied with, and became secretary to, Gassendi, before embarking on a twelve-year journey to the east, including Palestine, Egypt, Arabia and then India, where he served as a physician at the court of the last of the great Mughal emperors, Aurangzeb.[115] The religious beliefs that Bernier encountered there he approached in a Gassendist framework, as we can see from his very first description (dating from 1667) of what he called the 'grande Cabale' (i.e. the inner doctrine, as opposed to the 'eternal' idolatry) of the Indian Brahmins:

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[113] See Gassendi's attack on Herbert's *De veritate*, the 'Ad librum D. Edoardi Herberti Angli, De veritate, epistola', composed 1634, in Gassendi 1658, III, 411–19. Also Gassendi to Elie Diodati, 29 August 1634, in Mersenne 1945–88, IV, 335–41, at 336–8.

[114] For Cudworth's huge (often unacknowledged) debts to Gassendi, which he attempted to use against the Frenchman's conclusions, see Levitin 2015b, 362–3, 424–5.

[115] On Bernier's travels and reports, the most useful recent accounts are those in Tinguely, 'Introduction', in Bernier 2008, 7–36 and Dew 2009, 131–67. On this and many subsequent subjects I should like to signal my very large debt to App 2012, here 161–74. Burke 1999, 124–37 recognises that Bernier's opinions about the east were informed by his philosophical position, but fails to identify that position correctly.

You are not unfamiliar with the doctrine of many of the ancient philosophers, concerning that great Soul of the World, of which they want our souls, and those animals, to be portions; if we were to look carefully in Plato and Aristotle, we would perhaps find that they were of this opinion. It is this that is the universal doctrine of the gentile Indian Pendets, and this same doctrine currently makes up the Cabbala of the Sufis, and of the most part of the learned men of Persia, and which one finds explained in those heightened and emphatic Persian verses, the *Goul-tchen-raz*, or Garden of Mysteries; it is also the same as that of [Robert] Fludd, which our great Gassendi has refuted so learnedly, and in which the great part of our chymists lost themselves.[116]

The pneumatological pantheism attributed to Plato and Aristotle, and the subsequent reference to Gassendi's attack on Fludd, leave us with no doubt what philosophical ideas Bernier had in mind when he encountered texts like the Sufi *Gulshan-i rāz* (*Secret Rose Garden*) by Mahmoūd Shabestarī (1288–1340), to which he here makes reference (and which was indeed deeply influenced by the neoplatonism of the great Sufi scholar Ibn Arabi (1165–1240)). Bernier combined his reading of this text with that of another – the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, a part of the Hindu Vedic scripture – and with oral reports, to arrive at a distinctly 'Gassendist' vision of elite South Asian religion.[117] On Bernier's reading, it posited a pantheist first principle, Achar, from whom both souls and all material objects emanated and to whom they returned: this was represented by the allegory of a spider secreting and then retracting its webs. The world is thus an illusion, and the only reality is the omnipresent, material deity. Of course, Bernier insisted that he had challenged the Sufis to explain how a corporeal principle could come to constitute the world as humans experienced it, but according to him they could only reply with allegories that failed to clarify how a god 'who is not corporeal but *Biapek*, as they say, and incorruptible, should nonetheless be divisible into so many bodies and souls' – the age-old objection to all immanationist theories of the divine.[118]

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[116] 'Lettre a monsieur Chapelain, envoyee de Chiras en Perse, le 4. Octobre 1667. Touchant les Superstitions, étranges façons de faire, & Doctrine des Indous ou Gentils de l'Hindoustan', in Bernier 1671, 127–8 [separate pagination]: 'Il n'est pas que vous ne sçachiez la doctrine de beaucoup d'anciens Philosophes, touchant cette grande ame du Monde, dont ils veulent que nos ames, & celles des animaux, soient des portions: Si nous penetrions bien dans Platon & dans Aristote, peut-estre que nous trouverions qu'ils ont donné dans cette pensée; C'est là la Doctrine comme universelle des Pendets Gentils des Indes, & c'est cette mesme Doctrine qui fait encore à present la Cabale des Soufys, & de la pluspart des gens de lettres de Perse, & qui se trouve expliquée en Vers Persiens si relevez & si enfatiques dans leur Goul-tchen-raz ou parterre des Mysteries; Comme ç'a esté celle-là mesme de Flud que nostre grand Gassendy a refute si doctement, & celle où se perdent la pluspart de nos Chymiques'.

[117] My understanding of Bernier's Indian sources is entirely informed by App 2012, 164–71, but Prof. App does not recognise the Gassendist origins of Bernier's whole framework. For a modern pantheist-monist reading of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, see e.g. Puligandla 1996.

[118] 'Lettre', in Bernier 1671, 131: '…comme il se peu faire que Dieu n'estant pas corporel, mais Biapek, comme ils auoüent & incorruptible, il soit neanmoins divisé en tant de portions de corps & d'ames'. By 'Biapek' Bernier almost certainly meant 'vyāpaka' (व्यापक), meaning 'all pervading', which he had already discussed, on the basis of the oral testimony of religious figures in Varanasi, in 'Lettre', 123–4. (This identification is already made in Bernier 2008, 526.) The concept derives from logical thought; see e.g. Bochenski 2001, 141–2. I am deeply grateful to my colleage Péter-Dániel Szántó for confirming my thoughts on the matter.

The amalgamation of Gassendi's vision of the history of paganism with such an account of pan-Asian 'theology' was definitively crystallised in Bernier's *Abrégé de la philosophie de Gassendi* (1674), especially in the modified second edition of 1684.[119] Here we see two important developments. First of all, the account of Asian pantheism, in the chapter 'Si le Monde est Animé' (an exact counterpart to the section in Gassendi's *Syntagma* with the same title in Latin), has been incorporated into the full Gassendian 'conjectural' history of belief about the divine. All pagans ascribed to the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit*; accordingly, they were either full-out eternalists, or believed that the world was made from pre-existent matter.[120] From here, they logically posited animist, pantheist, or monist systems in which the world either emanated from, or was informed by, an omnipresent divinity, and individual souls were part of the material *anima mundi*.[121]

The second development was that the geography of the 'Asiatic theology' was now much expanded, to incorporate also the far east, including China and Japan.[122] (We shall soon encounter the sources that allowed Bernier ot make this claim.) The Gassendist vision of the history of paganism, largely focussed on Greek philosophy, had been expanded to incorporate almost all of Asia, and used to construct a comparatist project of truly epic proportions.

Bernier had been driven above all by his curiosity about the culture he encountered. But this comparatist project also presupposed a similar view of natural theology to that of his teacher. Most of the ancients (with some notable exceptions) had correctly recognised the need for a divinity from the order of nature; this was also true of the Asians.[123] But they had mistakenly ascribed that order not to a transcendent god, but to an informing soul. In reality, one couldn't know the nature of God. All that was possible was a version of the scholastic *via negationis*: removing the imperfections from the creation to arrive at an analogical account of the divine attributes. An incomplete model of this method has been adopted by Epicurus, as Gassendi had argued.[124]

But one did not need to have travelled to the east to expand Gassendi's 'logic of paganism' to include most, if not all, of the history of world religions. Before Bernier had put pen to paper, this had already been done with an apologetic purpose in mind by the Leipzig-based Lutheran pedagogue Jakob Thomasius (1622–84), above all in his *Schediasma*

[119] The differences in the editions have already been noted in App 2012, 166–8.

[120] Bernier 1684, II, 39–42, 96–101.

[121] Ibid., II, 81–4.

[122] Ibid., II, 90.

[123] Ibid., II, 225–6 for the ancient philosophers, and 255–6 for the Asians: 'N'ajouteray-je point icy qu'entre les preuves qui regardent la Providence il n'y en a point qui plûssent davantage à Daneche-mend-kan un des plus celebres sçavans de l'Asie, & des plus puissans Omerahs de la Cour du Grand Mogol, que celles qui si tirent de l'Usage des Parties'. Bernier is here referring to Danishmand Khan (Mullah Shafi'a'i), an official at the court of Aurangzeb to whom he taught Gassendist and Cartesian philosophy and Harvey's ideas about circulation; for their interactions, see further Dew 2009, 151–5.

[124] Bernier 1684, II, 261–2.

historicum,[125] and by the young English divine Samuel Parker, in his *Tentamina de Deo*.[126] Both books were published in 1665, which should perhaps be recognised as an *annus mirabilis* not only for mathematics but also for new conceptions of the history of religion. They both sought to show the stark difference between – and therefore incompatibility of – pagan and Judaeo-Christian philosophy and theology. Accordingly, they criticized both the church fathers and those moderns – Steuco, Mornay, and in Parker's case even Scaliger, Selden, and Vossius – who they thought had not gone far enough in recognizing that incompatibility. (Thomasius even accused them of 'syncretisim', popularising the phrase.)[127]

Instead, they both drew, with rather less acknowledgement than they might have, on Gassendi's vision of the 'logic' of paganism, so to explain why pagan and Judaeo-Christian religion were necessarily so different. According to Thomasius, the metaphysical basis, or 'first falsehood' (Πρῶτον Ψεῦδος) of all pagan religion – from Zoroaster and the Chaldeans in the near east through to the Egyptians and then the Greek philosophical sects – was that nothing could be made from nothing. This assumption led either to an emanationist monism in which the divine essence was the only real substance in the world, or to a dualism in which two uncreated principles – one divine and one material – allowed the pagans to absolve god of the charge of having created evil. What connected all pagan thought was animism, for they simply could not conceive of a transcendent deity, a conception that required revealed knowledge of the irrational doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

Parker likewise emphasised in Gassendist fashion the animism that characterized all of pagan religion, discussing a huge range of historical evidence (much of it the same as had been examined by Vossius, whose book he clearly had open when composing his own). The title of his central chapter is 'The ancient philosophers held the world soul to be the

[125] This work has recently received some attention: the best treatment is Lehmann-Brauns 2004, 21–111. No account has recognised the debt to Gassendi. While the *Schediasma* was the best known of Thomasius's works, and the first in which his ideas about the history of religion were published, he stated those ideas in pedagogy and subsequent publications both before and after 1665; in what follows, I will offer corroborative citations to the most important of these.

[126] For a full account of this previously unappreciated book, see Levitin 2014a.

[127] For Thomasius's criticisms of the church fathers, see, among other *loci*, Thomasius 1665, 38–9, 'De secta nominalium' [lecture delivered 28 Jan 1658], in Thomasius 1683, 254; 'De ideis Platonicis exemplaribus' [lecture delivered 9 April 1659], in Thomasius 1683., 283–4, 291; 'De syncretismo Peripatetico' [lecture delivered 28 Jan 1664], in Thomasius 1683, 337; 'Opposita illorum errori, qui asserunt praeexistentiam animarum humanarum' [lecture delivered 29 Jan 1674], in Thomasius 1683 474; 'An gentiles in anima mundi agnoverint spiritum sanctum?' [lecture delivered 6 June 1663], in Thomasius 1693, 353–4, 355–6 (a particularly apt summary), 359–60. Criticism of Steuco and Mornay came as early as the lecture delivered on 20 June 1644, 'Mysterius SS Trinitatis ex ratione… demonstrari nequaquam posse', in Thomasius 1683, 5, n. h; also 'An gentiles in anima mundi agnoverint spiritum sanctum', Thomasius 1683, 354–5, listing Steuco and Mornay among those 'Qui omnes accuratis voluminibus laboraverunt, ut Religionem nostrum e Paganica, veritatem scilicet e mendaciis, aurum e cloaca elicerent'; 362; also Thomasius 1676, 20. For Parker *contra* Scaliger, Selden, and Vossius, see Parker 1665, 269. As for 'syncretism', Thomasius knew that the term had first been deployed in this way by Georg Horn, in Horn 1655, 323–4: see 'De syncretismo peripatetico', in Thomasius 1683, 326, n. b; but he seems to have been more influenced by an academic dissertation by Michael Siricius, a now obscure theology professor at Giessen (on whom, see K. Krause, in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig, 1875–1912), XXXIV, 417), which argued that Simon Magus was the first of the syncretists: see Siricius 1664, 58, cited at Thomasius 1665, 28, n. q.

supreme divinity'; within it he charted the growth of such idolatrous animism from the rise of starworship in the east, through to more specific forms of nature-worship, such as sun-worship and the 'sacred obscenities' associated with various fertility gods (such as the permanently erect Priapus and Baal Peor), the belief in which he claimed could be explained by the pagans extrapolating from the generational power of the sun. Philosophical error stemmed from this religious worldview. As the pagans sought to explain the providential operation of the celestial bodies, they attributed to them intelligence, and then omniscience, omnipotence and the power of predetermination. From here it was only a short step to asserting the deity's omnipresence and to equating God with nature. This move was first made by the devious, fraudulent astrologers so that they could claim to read the divine operations in the world, but it then became prevalent among the philosophers too. According to Parker, all of Greek physics had its origins in the belief in a divine but corporeal *anima mundi*. For all the philosophers God was nature, and even those who seemed to be monotheists in fact conceived of God as a world soul composed of parts. All the pagans – whether near eastern priests or Greek philosophers – thought of 'spirit' not as something immaterial but as a 'very thin substance' (*substantium pertenuem*); in turn, when they spoke of 'mind' (νοῦς) they spoke of a faculty rather than a substance. Creation, providence, and omnipotence were ascribed to it and souls were said to arise from and return to it – hence the widespread belief in transmigration, not just among eastern religions, but also Greek philosophers like Pythagoras. Again and again, Parker reiterated that animism explained the similarity between pagan religion and pagan philosophy: the same reason that led Aristotle to ascribe intelligence to the stars explained Egyptian animal-worship. Only in this way could one rightly understand the supposed 'pagan monotheism' discussed by Selden, Vossius, and Herbert.[128]

The post-Gassendist comparativism of Thomasius and Parker had significant influence. Thomasius inaugurated a whole school of thought about pagan religion and philosophy in Germany;[129] as we shall see, both influenced Pierre Bayle. Both had drawn extensively on Gassendi, but both had also built substantially on his ideas about the Greek philosophers, expanding them to encompass pagan religion *tout court*. This led them to a blunt assertion of the incompatibility of pagan and Judaeo-Christian theologies – as Parker entitled the

[128] Parker 1665, 233–68, esp. 242: 'Hinc quidem Opinantur viri docti Ethnicos, salte ex iis sapientiores... unicum verym & supremum Numen agnovisse, quod inter alios fusius comprebare satagunt *Cl. Seldenus* de Dîs Syris proleg.c.3. *Doctiss. Vossius* de ortu & progressu Idololatriae l. 1. c. 2... Et denique Nobiliss. *Herbertus*, qui integrum librum super hac re adornavit, cui scilicet titulum fecit *de religione Gentiulium*. Verum hercle quaecunque afferunt argumenta, nihil majus adstruunt quam credidisse Ethnicos Unicum esse supremum omnium Numen, in quod reliqua omnia contrahere oporteret ; minime vero evincunt Numen istud, qualecunque fuerit, quicquam esse rebus naturalibus & creatis superius ; Ipsi autem non modo libere confitemur, sed & contendimus unicum eos supremum Numen agnovisse ; dicimus tamen in rebus creatis substitisse, neque ad ipsum Deum *Opt. Max.* assurrexisse, sed *animam mundanam* numinis unici & supreme praerogativa ornavisse, & in eam omnes Deunculos minores refudisse'. At 243–7, Parker fiercely attacks Stueco's monotheistic reading of the presocratic philosophers and their first principles.

[129] As well as the disputations and lectures cited above, see Thomasius (*praes.*) 1668. Leibniz, who was very close to Thomasius in the 1660s, was always interested in these ideas: see e.g his short MS note 'Deum non esse mundi animam', *c.* 1683–86, in Leibniz 1999, 1492.

chapter in which he took on Vossius, 'Pagan notions about God are wrongly applied to the supreme God whom we honour; rather, they should be understood as referring either to the sun or to the world soul, which the pagans supposed to be the supreme divinity."[130] Both of them, it should be noted, still considered such a position to be compatible with a version of neo-Thomist natural theology in which the divine attributes could be predicated from nature by using the three *viae*. For Thomasius this was to be done on the basis of a reformed, empirical, and non-animist Aristotelianism; for Parker, by using the new experimental philosophy of the Royal Society. But both of these entirely orthodox Christian theologians were also declaring – as Gassendi had declared – that Christianity was in fact *less* rational than paganism, requiring the revealed doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* to attain its own logic.[131] Animism was the religio-philosophical opinion that came most naturally to man. The atheist-vitalist Peripatetic Strato was both its logical and most dangerous culmination.[132]

(*IIc*) *The global debate over pagan animism*

The scholarly holes not just in the patristic focus on similarity, but also in the Vossius-Pfanner-Lescalopier-Cudworth position – that pagan animism concealed an esoteric monotheism – were being exposed. This development was intensified by the remarkable congruity of the debate within apologetics and natural philosophy with the debate among missionaries about the nature of eastern religion, a debate that erupted on to the domestic European stage in the final quarter of the seventeenth century.

Its contours among the missionaries had been established almost a hundred years previously.[133] In the 1580s, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), a Jesuit missionary to Japan, developed a hugely influential vision of Buddhism, one that came to be available to Europeans in a Latin catechism published in 1586. Informed by an impressive familiarity with Zen Buddhist texts (the Zen school was particularly prominent in those areas of Japan where the Jesuits were active),[134] Valignano argued that Buddhism, which had migrated east from India in the first century AD, contained two doctrines. One was the public 'outer' doctrine, that consisted of idolatrous worship encouraged by the promise of immorality. The secret 'inner' doctrine was a materialist monism in which 'Buddha nature' (*busshō*, 佛性) or 'One mind' (*isshin*, 一心) was the eternal first principle from which the world

[130] Parker 1665, 181: 'Gentilium de Deo placita perperam ad Supremum, quem colimus, Deum traduci: Sed aut de Sole aut de Animâ Mundi, quae Suprema Omnium Numina esse censuerunt, intelligi oportere' (this is the title of Bk. II, ch. 1).

[131] See e.g. Parker's summary in his later *Disputationes de Deo* (Parker 1678), 377–86, discussing eastern sages, Greek theogonic poetry, and Greek philosophy.

[132] E.g. Thomasius 1665, 30–1; Parker 1678, 373.

[133] And have now received excellent analysis in Rule 1986; Mungello 1989; App 2012 – subsequent citations will prioritise primary sources, but I am indebted to these works for offering me guidance through this complicated and fascinating subject, which has also inspired much commentary that is either derivative or plain wrong. In particular (and as already noted by Rule 1986, 44–6) it is imperative not to confuse the debate I will subsequently describe with the rather more famous dispute over Chinese rites.

[134] Valignano's Japanese sources are brilliantly reconstructed in App 2012, 51–88.

emanated. The first principle lacked intelligence and the power to create *ex nihilo*, and was therefore far from the providential creator God of Judaeo-Christianity. Their reverence consisted of a meditative exercise called *sokushin sokubutsu* (即心是佛) intended to align the individual mind with Buddha nature; personal immortality and postmortem rewards and punishments were rejected in favour of transmigration, akin to Pythagoreanism. All this Valignano compared to the teachings of the Greek philosophers: the monist first principle was akin to that of Melissus and Parmenides; the quest for union with that first principle redolent of animism.[135]

Valignano's conclusions were quickly popularised in Europe when reprinted in Antonio Possevino's *Bibliotheca selecta* (1593, 1603).[136] We have already seen how, half a century later, Bernier's account of the 'inner' doctrine of Indian religion would only have confirmed them. But before that, they also had a continuing impact on the missions to the far east, especially to China. The first leaders of the Jesuit China mission, Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) gradually devised a strategy to convert the Chinese elites by positing that 'original' Confucianism consisted of the precepts of natural law, including the worship of a transcendent, monotheist deity, represented in the Confucian classics as *T'ien* ('Heaven', 天) or *Shangdi* ('Supreme Ruler', 上帝). Crucially, according to Ricci – well trained in Thomist theology at the Collegio Romano – these divine names could be predicated by the Thomist analogical natural theology I have previously described. As Ricci put it in his *True meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shiyi*, 天主實義), published in Beijing in 1603 with the support of the renowned Confucian official Feng Yingjing:

> The Lord of Heaven, however, transcends all categories, and does not belong to any common category. To what category, then can He be compared? Since the Lord of Heaven has no form or sound, by what traces can He be apprehended? His substance is inexhaustible and the material universe cannot contain Him within its boundaries. How then can one discover a clue as to how great He is? If one wishes to give some indication as to His nature, one can find no better way to do so than by employing words like 'not' and 'lack', because, if one uses words like 'is' and 'has' one will err by too great a margin… If we now wish to say what the Lord of Heaven is we can only say He is not heaven and not earth; His loftiness and intelligence are much more extensive and much more ample than that of heaven and earth. He is not a ghost or a spirit; His spiritual essence transcends all ghosts and spirits. He is not man; He totally surpasses all sages and men of wisdom. He is not morality; He is the source of morality… If I wish to infer the nature of His essence, I find that no place can contain Him and yet there is no place where He is not present; that He is unmoving and yet that He is the active cause of all movement; that He has no hands or mouth, and yet that He creates all things and instructs all people.[137]

[135] Valignano 1586, fols. 3^{v}–44^{r}. The comparison with the Greek monists is at 18^{r}.

[136] Possevino 1593, 459–529.

[137] Ricci [1603] (1985), 93–5. See also 119, and Ricci's Latin summary of his argument (461): '…non posse hominem penitus Deum intelligere. Et de eius natura multa melius intelligi per negationem quam per affirmationem. Et hac occasione multa docet de perfectionibus et attributis divinis, usque ad finem capitis'. There is now a full study of Ricci's application of neo-Thomism to Chinese terms, and its often surprisingly positive reception by the Chinese themselves, in Kim 2004, esp. chs 3 and 4.

Here was Dionysian-Thomist apophatic natural theology translated into the language of the *literati*. We may find the idea ridiculous, but the job of the historian is not to chastise the past but to explain it, and it is a hard fact that Ricci's argument engaged some *literati* (not only converts, but also Confucian scholars), not least because he was partaking in an enterprise familiar to Ming elites – criticism of Sung-era exegesis – and because he used recent native exegesis, above all that by the former Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng (1525–82), to do so.[138]

The missionary strategy therefore became to convince the *literati* that the 'god' of Confucianism was the same as the God being preached by the missionaries – just as Paul had preached the Christian God to the pagans by quoting their own books at them. Unfortunately, Ricci continued, the original religion of China, which Confucius had only transmitted, had been corrupted by the three 'religious' movements now dominant: Neoconfucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. All of these Ricci studied intensely and interpreted in a manner akin to Valignano's reading of Buddhism; that is to say, as outward idolatry mixed with an esoteric materialist monism for the elite. The atheist-monist Neoconfucianism of the *literati* needed to be reformed and returned to its Confucian purity, in part by application of neo-scholastic natural theology.[139]

From the perspective of the history of comparatism, the result of this vision of Chinese religious history, which soon became the 'official' Jesuit view, was that the monist-pantheist interpretation of the three 'modern' religions of the east was now dominant. And since Buddhism – whose monist first principle was, through the influence of Chinese sources, increasingly recognised as 'emptiness' or 'nothingness' – was considered the most widespread religion in the east, it became common by the second half of the seventeenth century to suggest that the biggest 'religion' in the world was in its exoteric form a nature-worshipping polytheist idolatry, and in its esoteric-elite form a materialist monism.[140] This was, as we have already seen, the thrust of Bernier's hugely popular works. We might also note that the Italian missionary Giovanni Filippo De Marini (1608–82), who had travelled across south east Asia and had particular knowledge of Vietnam, claimed in his much republished and translated *Historia et relatione del Tunchino e del Giappone* (1665) that this

[138] See the examples in the brilliant critique of Gernet [1982] 1986 in Goodman and Grafton 1990; also Kim 2004, 212–65. Kim is I think right to suggest (45) that Goodman and Grafton overplay the similarity of Ricci with later figurists and underplay the crucial scholastic dimension of Ricci's argument, but then one of the very things that I hope this piece shows is that the distinction between 'humanists' and 'scholastics' was almost never total. For Jesuit use of Zhang Juzheng, see Mungello 1981; Mungello 1989, 279–82, now developed in Meynard 2015, 22–40.,

[139] Ricci [1603] (1985), 99ff. See esp. 221: 'We know that the natures of every kind of thing are good and that their principles are fine. One may speak of them, therefore, as traces of the Lord of Heaven; but to say that they are the Lord of Heaven is wrong. For example, when one sees the imprint of the foot of a great man on the road, one can regard this as proof that the foot fo the great man has passed this way, but one would not equate the foot-print with the body itself of the great man'.

[140] This perception was only enhanced by the writings of the leader of the mission to South India, Roberto de Nobili, who also believed Buddhists to be monist atheists, while claiming that another sect – the Gnanis – had a monotheistic conception of God and that the term *Sarvēśuran* could be used for 'God' for the same Thomist reasons deployed by Ricci: see Kim 2004, 109–13, and the texts cited there.

religion – with its 'exterior' idolatry and promise of immortality and rewards and punishments, and its 'interior' emanationist monism – was a 'hydra that has spread its venom in as many different kingdoms as there are that make up most of Asia'.[141]

But if everyone agreed on the 'inner' materialist monism (and exterior idolatry) of Buddhism and of *literati* Neoconfucianism, there was vicious disagreement over 'original' Confucianism itself. Ricci and his followers claimed that the Neoconfucians of the Sung dynasty had corrupted Confucianism, making it a hubristic, speculative monism, when the original doctrine was in fact an expression of analogical natural theology that cautiously predicated the divine attributes. But in the early seventeenth century, Valignano's interpreter in Japan, João Rodrigues, inspired partly by the mockery of Ricci's interpretation of the classical Confucian texts by some hostile Chinese, suggested that the Neoconfucian *literati* were right: the inner doctrine of Confucianism was and always had been similar to that of Buddhism and Daoism, and directly comparable to that of the presocratics. As he put it, 'all these three sects of China are totally atheistic in their speculative teaching, denying the providence of the world. They teach everlasting matter, or chaos, and like the doctrine of Melissus, they believe the universe to contain nothing but one substance'.[142] According to Rodrigues and Ricci's successor as head of the Jesuit mission, Nicolò Longobardo, Ricci's *t'ien* was in fact equivalent to the Neoconfucian first principle *li* (理) or *taiji* (太極), which, they claimed, was an eternal, material monist first principle from which the world emanated, and to which it returned. Moreover, Rodrigues and Longobardo thought that the blatant similarity between the three eastern religions, Persian beliefs, and Greek philosophical monism could be explained historically. All these doctrines had a common origin: Noah's son Ham, who was also Zoroaster, and whose atheist monism spread throughout the world, across China, India, and the near east, and then finally to Greece.[143] Whatever the Chinese revered, it was not Paul's Unknown God.[144]

The victory of the Ricci-supporting faction in China in the late 1620s ensured that Rodrigues and Longobardo's ideas remained largely unknown in Europe. But they exploded into the *respublica litteraria* when published by the Dominican missionary and arch anti-Jesuit Domingo Navarrete in his *Tratados historicos, politicos, ethicos, y religiosos de la monarchia de China* (1676). Here one could find all the components of the anti-Ricci reading: it was absurd to think that European missionaries could know Confucianism better than native commentators; the outer doctrine of Confucianism was pure idolatry, whereas its inner doctrine was a materialist emanationist monism akin to that of Buddhists, Daoists,

[141] de Marini 1665, 107 ('Sparse quest'Idra il suo veleno in tanti Regni, in quanti la maggior parte di quest' Asia si divide'), and 110–13 for the doctrine; for further details on his vision of Buddhism, see App 2012, 134–7, 149–51.

[142] Cooper 1981, 311–12, to which I was led by App 2012, 98–109.

[143] Longobardo 1701, 11–12. Longobardo's treatise survived in only one MS, used by Navarrete, who published it in his *Tratados* (see note below); this French translation was the first stand-alone publication. See likewise Antonio Caballero a Santa Maria 1701, 73–4. Santa Maria was a Franciscan missionary; his treatise was published with Logobardo's report, of which he had possessed a copy, sending it to the Propaganda Fide in 1662: see Brockey 2007, 444. n. 18. See further Rule 1986, 102–11.

[144] Longobardo 1701, 15–16; Santa-Maria 1701, 94–5.

and the presocratic philosophers; all this probably derived from Ham, thus explaining the 'great resemblance' of elite belief from Japan to Greece.[145] In fact, Navarrete was particularly keen to point out similarities between this vast religious system and the monism of the Greek philosophers, so as to counter Ricci's 'scholastic' reading of Confucianism. He printed Longobardo's treatise with a commentary in which he regularly drew comparisons with the Greek monists – not least by using the Coimbra Aristotle commentary – so as to prove that 'the *Chineses*, according to the Principles of their natural Philosopy, and Physicks, had not the knowledge of a spiritual Substance distinct from the Material, as we assign; and consequently knew not what God, or Angels, or the rational Soul were'.[146]

This characterisation of the biggest system of religious belief in the world was read by a host of European men of letters. For example, Navarrete's book was a favourite of John Locke's, who repeated the ideas about Confucian atheism in the fourth edition of the *Essay concerning human understanding* to show that even the idea of God was not innate.[147] Antoine Arnauld learnt Spanish just to read Navarrete, and subsequently incorporated into his much-read anti-Jesuit polemics lengthy descriptions of eastern religions as pantheist-monist.[148] Before the century was out, Noël Alexandre, the leading French Dominican theologian and a major player on the European scholarly scene, had published books not only propagating the Rodrigues-Longobardo reading, but also systematically comparing Chinese and Graeco-Roman idolatry. Both, according to him, only recognised the heavens as their supreme divinity, with the only difference being that the Chinese (somewhat counter-intuitively) worshipped them without thinking them divine. The closest thing the Chinese had to a deity was the Neoconfucian monist first principle, *li* – original Confucianism was no different. This was reflected in a broader theology of comparativism, justified by a reinterpretation of Acts. Paul had never meant that the Athenians' Unknown God was the *true* God, only that he had come to preach to them the God they had been looking for. Otherwise he would surely have encouraged pagan conversion by instructing the Areopagite to place an inscription to the Unknown God in the church at Athens of which he had become the first bishop, and St Mark would have likewise have put an inscription to Kneph – the ageless Egyptian deity who was considered to be the 'sovereign reason' of the world – in the church at Alexandria. That they had not was an obvious rebuke to the Jesuits' tactics.[149]

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[145] Navarrete 1676; I have used the contemporary translation in Churchill 1704, see esp. 81a–101a (esp. 89b–90a, 100b–101a, for comparisons with the presocratics), 125b–126b; 152b, 154a–b, 183a–224b (187b–188a for the point about 'great resemblance'). The fullest study of Navarrete is Cummins 1993.

[146] Churchill 1704, 183a–224b (184b–185a for the quotation); see e.g. 193a for the comparison with the Greek monists – he was only developing Longobardo's own point (see e.g. 200a–b).

[147] Locke 1706, 38 [I.4] (=Locke 1979, 88); Talbot 2010, 187 usefully collects evidence but mistakes the edition of the *Essay* to which the reference to Navarrete was first added.

[148] See e.g. Arnauld 1689, 427–57; Arnauld 1690, 35–6; Arnauld 1692, e.g. 40–1.

[149] Alexandre 1699, 7–16, esp. 12–15 (relying on Longobardo and Navarrete); [Alexandre] 1700, 49–52 (comparison of Chinese and Graeco-Roman heaven worship), 55–8 (Unknown God, Kneph), 62–5 (*T'ien/Shangti* = *li*). It should be noted that by this stage the debate had become dominated by the question of whether Chinese rites (ancestor and Confucius veneration) were civil or idolatrous – for the interplay of the

In the meantime, the official Jesuit view had received its definitive statement in the long-gestating *Confucius Sinarum philosophus*, finally brought out in Paris by Philippe Couplet in 1687, and containing translations of three of the Confucian *Four Books* (Daxue, Zhong Yong, and Lunyu).[150] Both this spectacular book and other defences of the Jesuits continued to insist that original Confucianism was a true monotheism, and that Ricci had been right to tell the *literati* that a correct examination of nature, combined with analogical predication of the divine attributes, would lead them back to the 'original' Chinese conception of the divine that Confucius had preserved – just as Paul had used pagan notions at the Areopagus.[151] That concept had been established too close to the time of Noah himself to be corrupted by idolatry or atheism; only later did the the corruptions introduced by Buddhism and the hubristic speculation of the Song Neoconfucians turn it into an esoteric atheist monism for the elite and exoteric idolatry for the masses.[152]

But the Jesuit missionaries were understandably out-of-date when it came to their use of philosophical categories. Ricci and the editors of the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* had not only cited long discredited precedents like Hermes and the Sibyls as for the possibility of pagan monotheism,[153] but, more importantly, they had also used a modified scholastic Aristotelianism to 'save' Confucianism. But as we have seen, that Aristotelianism was now being lumped together with the pre-Socratic monism that Aristotle himself had so famously condemned. In other words, it was becoming ever harder to claim that there could be *any* natural theology that could correctly predicate the divine attributes, and hence that any pagans could have had anything that could be labelled a 'monotheist' conception of the divine. Some reviewers of the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* made exactly this point. In response to the Jesuits' argument that preaching *Shang ti* in China was no different to the early Christians preaching θεός or *Deus* to the Greeks and Romans, because in both cases they were appellatives predicating the attributes of 'divinity' rather than personal names

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two issues, see Lundbaek 1994. Kneph, was known to early moderns from references in Plutarch, *Is. Os.*, 359D and Porphyry quoted in Eusebius, *Pr. Ev.*, III.11, and through them became a favourite example for Egyptian monotheism or esoteric monism: see e.g. Nicolai 1681, 23; Montfaucon 1719, II, 269–70. For Alexandre's scholarly career more broadly, see above all Quantin 2007.

[150] For the composition and circumstances of publication, see Golvers 1998; Dew 2009, 205–33; for the structure of the argument, the Chinese sources used, and the translation principles, see Mungello 1981; Lundbaek 1983; Meynard 2015, 2–70.

[151] Couplet et al. 1687, lxv, lxvii, xciii (=Meynard 2011, 171, 173–4, 208 : 'Shangdi is not a personal name, like Saturn, or other names, but rather an appellative such as 'divinity' or 'God'. Etymologically, also, it has no imperfection, but on the contrary expresses power and supreme majesty. So, according to the opinion of Doctor Thomas [Aquinas] and other Theologians, the one true God could be called by names expressing perfection without imperfection. It is fair to and just for us to glorify the Ancient Chinese, for they knew, expressed and worhsipped the true God under such a name'). For the original Latin, I have been able to consult the copy presented to Louis XIV (to whom the work was dedicated), now All Souls College, Oxford, shelfmark LR.4.c.2. There are, alas, no annotations.

[152] Couplet et al. 1687, lxxiv–lxxv, lxxiv–lxxvii (=Meynard 2011, 177–8; 183–8), including the important statement of Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, II.13, 'errant igitur qui deorum cultus ab exordio rerum fuisse contendunt et priorem esse gentilitatem quam dei religionem, quam putant posterius inventam, quia fontem atque originem veritatis ignorant'.

[153] E.g. Couplet et al. 1687, xcix–c (=Meynard 2011, 216).

like 'Saturn', Henri Basnage noted that this was to ignore the fact that pagans often used personal names to refer to the 'different qualities' of one God – Neptune for the sea, Mars for war, etc.[154] For this idea, Basnage drew on an extraordinarily learned recent book by the Durch antiquarian Gisbert Cuper, analysing an Egyptian medal depicting Harpocrates. According to Cuper, the medal was typical of both Egyptian and wider pagan culture, in that it was an allegorical depiction of their one 'real' deity: the sun.[155] In other words, pagans (at least elite ones) *were* monotheists, but only in the sense that they worshipped one deity; that deity was a natural object rather than the transcendent, omnipotent immaterial being predicated by correct natural theology. Even this, Cuper at one point admitted, may have been a later *ex post facto* justification of primitive polytheism by the wisest among the pagan philosophers. This point was in turn emphasised by Jean Le Clerc, who insisted that monotheistic readings of the pantheon of pagan gods were defensive back-projections by later pagan philosophers writing against the Christians.[156] On the basis of this exegetical point, he offered a whole developmental theory of myth and religion: all primitive religions were polytheistic, and only later did pagan elites re-interpret them in monotheistc terms. To read pagan polytheism via later philosophy, as Selden and Vossius had done, was a grave anachronism.[157] This anti-philosophical interpretation of myth would culminate in the early eighteenth century in the works of the Abbé Banier.[158] Le Clerc, meanwhile, when he reviewed the *Confucium Sinarum philosophus*, was tactfully silent about the veracity of the Jesuits' interpretation, but he later made it clear that he supported the Rodrigues-Longobardo line: Chinese religion was either full-out polytheism, or, among the elite, an atheistic monism.[159]

Indeed, in the final quarter of the century, more and more Europeans were becoming convinced, in Gassendist fashion, that pagan conceptions of the divine were so animistic that they could not be in any way compatible with the Judaeo-Christian transcendent god. This point was being made ever more prominently by natural philosophers. Robert Boyle's hugely influential *Free enquiry into the vulgarly received notion of nature* (1686) argued in Gassendist fashion that the Western teleogical conception of 'nature', made famous in Aristotle definition of it as an internal principle of motion (*Physics* II.1), was in fact an

[154] Basnage de Beauval 1687, 65–79, at 70–1.

[155] Cuper 1687, 2: 'Scilicet HARPOCRATES ante oculos ponitur, non silentium tantum digito suatens, verum SOLIS imaginem referens; ad quem ut plerique dii, ita & ille a vesanae religionis cultoribus relatus est', and esp. 111–17, engaging much with Vossius.

[156] See his review of Cuper's Harpocrates in Le Clerc 1687a, 136–7.

[157] See his important piece on Selden's *De Diis Syris* in the Le Clerc 1705, 80–146, esp. 122–3: 'Qu'on lise la fin du III. Chapitre de ses [i.e. Selden's] Prolegomenes, & l'on verra, qu'il confond des conjectures philosophiques avec la Religion'. The reference is to Selden, *De Diis Syris* (London, 1617), lxvii, where Selden claimed that the pagans had known of God's unity from the study of nature, as per n. **000** above. Le Clerc was well aware that Vossius was following Selden's lead: 137, 142–3.

[158] Banier 1711, esp. I, 1–49; Banier 1738, I, 19–70; Levitin, 2015a, 719.

[159] Le Clerc 1687b, even here hinting that the Neoconfucian interpretation of the Four Books was preferable (432), and then Le Clerc 1694, 95–8.

inheritance from the animist idolatry of the near east, and needed to be replaced.[160] In Germany, this claim was combined with Thomasius's version of the Gassendi narrative, and proved particularly influential in stimulating debate about what form of nature-worship defined ancient philosophies and religions – Leibniz was only one of many to obsess about the issue.[161] In France, the leading philosopher of the late seventeenth century, Nicolas Malebranche, in his *De la recherché de la vérité* (1678) introduced his famous doctrine of occasionalism (the theory of causation that states that all events are caused directly by God) by presenting it as a response to the animism that necessarily characterised all other philosophies and theologies (he cited Vossius), and which according to him had derived from eastern religion before impregnating Greek philosophy and, via Aristotle, Christian theology.[162]

Of course, some continued to use new sources so as to develop Ricci-esque arguments about other religions.[163] For example in Oxford, Edward Pococke, in his groundbreaking *Specimen historiae Arabum* (1650), used a barrage of Arabic sources (including that pioneer of Islamic religious comparativism, Muhammad al-Shahrastānī), to suggest that the most famous dualist of them all, Zoroaster, had in fact been a monotheist.[164] Pococke's student and successor in the Laudian Arabic chair, Thomas Hyde, in his aforementioned *Historia religionis veterum Persarum* (1700), perhaps the most interesting work of the history of religions published in our period, combined a pioneering use of Persian and other near eastern sources (many brought to him by East India Company merchants) with the Arabic monotheist interpretation of Zoroastrianism and a broader framework clearly adopted from the Jesuits, in particular the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus*. According to Hyde, who had in Oxford hosted Shen Fuzong, a Chinese convert brought back to Europe by Couplet, Zoroastrian dualism was not really a proper dualism, but a corrupt monotheism in which fire worship was *pyrodulia* rather than *pyrolatria* (fire being a symbol of the one true divinity), and Mithra represented not only the sun but also God. The evil principle, Ahâriman, was created, unlike the good principle.[165]

But such optimistic readings of pagan theology were becoming ever harder to sustain. The culmination of the atheist-monist intepretation of pagan religion that had grown in

[160] Boyle 1686; Levitin 2014b. The book was quickly made available to continental audiences in a Latin translation published in London in 1687, with an edition appearing in Geneva the year after.

[161] The main participants were the Altdorf professor Johann Christoph Sturm, Kiel professor of medicine Günther Christopher Schelhammer, and then Leibniz. Among several discussions, see Baku 1891; Mulsow 2006; Vassányi 2011, 13–18.

[162] See Malebranche [1678] 1958–84, II, 309–20, chapter entitled 'De l'erreur la plus dangereuse de la Philosophie des Anciens', and the fifteenth 'Éclaircissement' (III, 203–52, esp. 248–5). As far as I am aware, none of the vast literature on Malebranche's occasionalism has discussed the significance of the fact that its first introduction came in this historical-comparative mode.

[163] Leibniz's writings on China, composed with one eye on Bayle, are only one example: they are usefully collected and translated in Leibniz 1994.

[164] Pococke 1650, 147–9. The key *locus* is Shahrastānī 1986–93, I, 638–54; for the broader context, see Bürgel 1999, 202–12.

[165] For full details, including Hyde's combination of this with a plagiarism thesis, see Levitin 2015b, 95–108; Stausberg 1998, II, 680–717; for his meeting with Shen Fuzong, Poole 2015.

popularity during the seventeenth century can be found in the late works of the famous Huguenot Pierre Bayle, especially his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697, with important additions in the second edition of 1702) and *Continuation des pensées diverses* (1705).[166] Bayle's enemies described him as a *philosophe*, and the dominant trend of modern scholarship has been to explain his thought by using philosophical labels, above all 'scepticism'. But the *Dictionnaire* in particular was as much a product of obsessive reading in historical and ethnographic materials as of philosophical speculation. Bayle's initial aim had been to compose a dictionary of scholarly errors, an aim that continued to manifest itself in the final version.[167] By reading all of Bayle's *oeuvres*, I have become convinced that he consciously sought to demonstrate that the 'imperfect monotheism' version of the history of religion – whether developed in the hands of ancient or modern commentators – was just such an error, and that it had to be replaced in favour of what I have called the Gassendist version, which emphasised the pantheism or monism of all non-Judaeo-Chrisitan system. This was not, as is commonly assumed, a critique of a basic *consensus gentium* argument. Rather, it was a much more sophisticated, scholarly vision of how cultures bereft of Judaeo-Christian revelation – specifically the revealed doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* – conceived of a first principle and its relationship to the world.

Bayle never discussed the origin of paganism systematically, but his thoughts on the subject can be gathered from several places. Like almost everyone in the seventeenth century, he suggested that the origin of idolatry lay in starworship.[168] But he did not dwell particularly on this original moment; instead, he discussed at length in various articles of the *Dictionnaire* how the first full system of pagan religion was developed by the poets. This was a system of pure, polytheist idolatry: there was no deeper allegory behind the myths, and the people believed these myths literally.[169] Just like Le Clerc and later the Abbé Banier, Bayle was fiercely critical of an earlier generation of mythographers – above all Natale Conti – who had sought allegorical or philosophical explanations; Conti's approach had been yet another victim of the scholarly turn against the search for similarity from the late sixteenth century onwards.[170] Nonetheless, Bayle did see one connection between this primitive

[166] Full details of how and why Bayle arrived at his conclusions, drawing on all his works and correspondence, will appear in my *Kingdom of darkness*, ch. 3. To avoid unnecessary confusion for the reader, subsequent references will refer to the name of the text cited, and then to the citation in the *Oeuvres diverses* (=Bayle 1964–82 in the Bibliography). As for the *Dictionnaire* (henceforth *DHC*) I will give the article title with the remark letter in subscript, followed by page references to the fifth edition of 1740 (=Bayle 1740 in the Bibliography).

[167] van Lieshout 2001; Vermeir 2012. For Bayle and travel literature, see Charnley 1998. For his biography, the best account remains Labrousse 1963–64.

[168] E.g. *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* [1703–7] (henceforth *RQP*), in *OD*, III, 726a–b.

[169] E.g. *DHC*, Laïs$_B$ (III.33a): '…les Paiens ne pouvoient pas dire, que les abominations qu'ils publioient de leurs Dieux n'étoient que des Contes Poëtiques…'.

[170] For explicit criticisms of Conti, see e.g. *DHC*, Jupiter$_A$ (II.901a); Thamyris$_D$ (IV.342b). Bayle also seems to have been influenced by Theodorus Janssonius van Almeloveen's *Opuscula, sive antiquitatum e sacris profanarum specimen* (Amsterdam, 1685), which he reviewed in the *NRL*, January 1686, *OD*, I, 465b, commenting especially on this aspect. This late-seventeenth century turn to developmental theories of myth – in which Cuper and Janssonius were central – deserves more study; for now, see some of the comments in Mandelbrote 2017. For Janssonius more generally, see Stegeman 2005. But it should be noted that Bayle seems

poetic mythology and ideas about nature: the former had stemmed from anthropomorphism, or what Bayle called 'the ma[king] of natural idols'.[171] So for example the anthropomorphisation of trees led to the invention of the wood nymphs.[172] Or, refusing to believe that rational humans could simultaneously be responsible for their own passions, the pagans attributed the appearance of such passions to the gods, and in turn anthropomorphised each passion into a god.[173]

Such a naturalistic origin notwithstanding, this mythological religion was inconsistent and unphilosophical. And so despite surface similarities, the creation narratives of the pagan philosophers could not be mapped onto those of the earlier poets.[174] However, there was one similarity between the poetic and the philosophical theologies: both were animistic. But this manifested itself in different levels of consistency. The poets were full polytheists, and so for them, Fortune, for example, was just one of many Gods. The philosophers, meanwhile, believed in one, ubiquitous principle, which they sometimes labelled 'Fortune'.[175] As this suggests, for Bayle, the essence of the philosophical theology of the pagans was a cosmotheist deification of the whole of nature. There was an inherent logic to pagan theology: all of it tended to what Bayle called 'naturalism'.[176] Without revelation, human reason had a natural tendency to conceive of the world as penetrated by an active power.[177] This was because the revealed knowledge of creation *ex nihilo* by a transcendent god was inconceivable to pagans, whose systems – from a non-revealed point of view, more 'rational' than those of Christianity – were inevitably pantheist or dualist, so as to explain creation and activity in the world.[178] For all their specific differences, the theologies produced by pagans stretching from Greece to China were 'naturalist', a similarity that Bayle drew attention to with all the eagerness of a fully-fledged nineteenth-century comparatist: 'One cannot sufficiently wonder at the fact that an idea which is so extravagant, and so full of absurd contradictions, should insinuate itself into the mind of so many people so far apart from one another, and so different in their humour, education, customs, and genius'.[179]

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also to have been indebted to the work of Claude Saumaise for this point. See *DHC*, Abdere$_D$ (I.13b): 'Mr. de Saumaise dit là-dessus, qu'il ne faut point chercher l'uniformité dans les Fables: il a raison…' (the reference is to the discussion in Saumaise 1629, 160); also *DHC*, Esope$_L$ (II.404).

[171] *DHC*, Hamadryades$_D$ (II.691b): 'On en fit une idole naturelle'.

[172] *DHC*, Hamadryades$_D$ (II.691a–b).

[173] See the long remark Y in *DHC*, Helene (II.708b–709b).

[174] *DHC*, Thalès$_D$ (IV.340b–341b).

[175] *DHC*, Timoleon$_K$ (IV.373b).

[176] Perhaps the most concise summary Bayle offered was that at *Mémoire communiqué par Mr. Bayle* [1704], in *OD*, IV, 182a, describing 'La doctrine générale & dominante, soit parmi les anciens Païens, soit parmi les Chretiens & les Musulmans'.

[177] *DHC*, Caïnities$_D$ (II.7a). See also *Continuation des Pensées diverses* (henceforth *CPD*), in *OD*, III, 294a–295a.

[178] It is imperative to recognise that Bayle did not think that this made naturalism *in toto* more rational than Christianity, since it tended to a monism that could not explain movement at all. This was therefore an apologetic argument, albeit one of a very different stripe to that made by Vossius et al.

[179] *DHC*, Japon$_D$ (II.832a): 'On ne peut assez admirer qu'une idée si extravagante, & si remplie de contradictions absurdes, ait pu se fourrer dans l'ame de tant de gens si éloignez les uns des autres, & si différens entre eux en humeur, en education, en coutumes, & en génie'.

Bayle did not arrive at this view in a vacuum, or because he was secretly promoting Spinozism.[180] Rather, he did so because he drew extensively on what I have identified as the second, 'Gassendist' strand of seventeenth-century comparative history of religion. When he considered the religion and emanationist cosmogony of Buddhism and the Indian Brahmins, summarised in the allegory of a spider excreting and then retracting its webs (from which stemmed a belief in the union between the human and divine souls), Bayle simply reproduced Bernier's Gassendi-inspired account; he also drew on the whole, long post-Valignano tradition of reading Chinese and Japanese Buddhism as at heart a monist atheism.[181] When he came to Confucianism, Bayle adopted the anti-Ricci interpretation (ultimately derived from Rodrigues and Longobardo) of it as monist atheism. According to Bayle, defenders of Ricci's position had falled into the same error as the chuch fathers, mistaking evocation of a supreme first principle for true monotheism.[182] The Sorbonne had been right to condemn this argument in 1700, and it was surprising to see that Oxford had not censured Hyde, who had made the same argument concerning the ancient Persians.[183] In the long article on Zoroaster added to the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*, Bayle acknowledged the brilliance of Hyde's scholarship, but maintained that the Englishman was fundamentally wrong to look for a monotheistic reading of the Persian sage. He had relied too much on later Arabic and Persian writers: the Greek accounts of near eastern religion – which insisted that it *was* truly dualistic – might sometimes be unreliable, but they were surely preferable to those of Arabs who had lived a millennium later; travellers reporting the monotheism of contemporary Zoroastrians were hardly useful evidence, since these Zoroastrians were surely just accommodating to the Islam that now surrounded them.[184]

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[180] Which is the thesis of many publications by Jonathan Israel, who rather naively assumes that any European who characterised pagan religion as monist was an esoteric Spinozist: e.g. Israel 2013.

[181] *DHC*, Spinoza$_{A}$ (IV.254a), quoting Bernier, *Suite des mémoires*, 202, as in **n. 000** above. The account in *DHC*, Brachmanes$_{K–L}$ (I.653b–654b) is derived from Bernier. Bayle's use of Bernier is already discussed in App 2012, 228–9, 231. For Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, see esp. Spinoza$_{B}$ (IV.254b–255b); Japon$_{C, D}$ (II.831b–832a). Bayle's sources are simply the reviews of the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* in the *Bibliothèque universelle* (as n. **000** above) and the *Acta eruditorum* (May 1688), 254–65, and Valignano's catechism as it appeared in Possevino's *Bibliotheca* (n. **000** above) – he was effectively repeating the line on Buddhism that had become standard since Valignano. More interestingly, he noted in Gassendist fashion that while the Chinese Buddhists called their first principle 'cum hiu' (i.e. *kong xu* [空虛], emptiness), it could not really be a true nothingness, for the Chinese, like all pagans, undoubtedly assumed that nothing comes from nothing; rather, it probably referred to something akin to 'space distinct… from matter' ('l'espace… distinct des corps'), imbued with real extension and activity (IV.255b).

[182] *DHC*, Maldonat$_{L}$ (III.296a–b), drawing on Arnauld 1690, 35 (as n. **000** above); *DHC*, Sommona-Codom$_{A}$ (IV.238a–239b); *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 210b, 226b–231b (a long 'Digression' on the Sorbonne's censure of the monotheist reading of Confucianism, focussing in particular on the development of Ricci's argument made in La Comte 1696), 397b. When he did use the recent French popularisers of Ricci's argument, he did so only to point out the monist atheism of contemporary Neoconfucianism: *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 343a–345b, drawing on Le Gobien 1698.

[183] *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 229b.

[184] *DHC*, Zoroastre$_{F}$ (IV.559a). Bayle's friend Cuper had likewise been critical of Hyde's 'Jesuit' reading of Zoroastrianism: Cuper to Johann Georg Graevius, 23 November 1699, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS d'Orville 478, 169–70.

If those who had searched for monotheism among the eastern religions were wrong, the accusation was equally just when applied to those who sought it among the Greek philosophers, whose ideas were directly comparable to those of the Asians. Here Bayle – unnoticed by all his modern commentators – simply reproduced the conclusions of Gassendi and his most prominent followers, especially Thomasius and Parker.[185] Because none of the philosophers could believe in creation *ex nihilo*, they all posited either a dualism or a pantheistic monism in which all substances were god. Indeed, in the case of the Eleatics, this led to a scepticism founded on the denial of all movement and change – Xenophanes' monism was thus even more consistent than Spinoza's, for the latter still foolishly believed in mutability, which was logically impossible in a monist system.[186] Attempts to sanitise the philosophers' opinions were wildly misguided. Lescalopier's claim that Thales's first principle, water, was not itself divine but had been actuated by a separate deity was absurd; those who 'tried to justify' Parmenides and Melissus 'by giving to their opinion a favourable sense, and a great air of conformity with the orthodox opinion about God's nature' had completely misunderstood their monism. The attempt to rescue Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle for the cause of monotheism was no more doomed to fail, for they were all animists who posited an *anima mundi* of one type or another and for whom divine extension could not in reality be separate from the universe, but only a logical abstraction.[187] Whether Aristotle intended it or not, he 'blazed a trail' for vitalistic atheism.[188] His disciple, Dicaearchus, and our old friend Strato, took Aristotle's quasi-vitalism to its logical conclusion.[189]

Like Gassendi, Bayle argued that the only Greeks to reject animism were Democritus and Epicurus, although the former had to sneak animism in through the back door by

[185] Full evidence will be provided in my *Kingdom of darkness*. Here I only note that Bayle had read Gassendi's reconstruction of ancient philosophy early in his life, and referred to it as a 'materpiece': *DHC*, Epicure$_{M}$ (II.370a): 'Ce qu'il [Gassendi] a fait là-dessus [i.e. on Epicurus] est un chef-d'oeuvre, le plus beau & le plus judicieux Recueil qui se puisse voir'. Bayle's first explicit mention of Gassendi is in the letter to Vincent Minutoli, 31 Jan 1673, in Bayle 1999–2017, I, 187. On 29 June 1675 he reported to his brother on Bernier's *Abregé* (Bayle 1999–2017, II, 213). The most important testimony is for his plans for his studies for the next year in a letter to his brother of 25 November 1675: 'Vous pouvez asseurer Mr Martel que je suis grand ami des nouveaux philosophes, et que je soupire ardemment apres l'année de physique, où je me jetterai dans le cartesianisme et dans les atomes d'Epicure que le grand Mr Gassendi a si bien retablis' (Bayle 1999–2017, II, 299). He was certainly well familiar with it by March 1677 (Bayle 1999–2017, II, 135).

[186] *DHC*, Xenophanes$_{L}$ (IV.524a–b). For the Eleatics, see further *DHC*, Zenon d'Elée$_{K}$ (IV.546b).

[187] *DHC*, Thalès$_{D}$ (IV.340b–341a); Anaxagoras$_{D}$ (I.209a–211); Zenon d'Elée$_{K}$ (IV.546b): 'Il y a long-tems qu'on tâche de les justifier, en donnant à leur opinion un sens favourable, & un grand air de conformité avec le dogme des Orthodoxes sur la Nature de Dieu'; Jupiter$_{G}$ (II.903b); Ovide Nason$_{G}$ (III.558b–559b); Pericles$_{A}$ (III.664a). On generation, see Archelaus$_{B}$ (I.290a–b); Cesalpin, André$_{B}$ (II.118a); Ovide Nason$_{G}$ (III.556a–559b). For Pythagoras, see: Pythagoras$_{O}$ (III.747b); *RQP*, in *OD*, III, 724b; *CPD*,; *DHC*, Pauliciens (III.635–6). For Plato: *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 283a–291a; *RQP*, in *OD*, III, 519, 918a–919a; *DHC*, Pauliciens$_{L}$ (III.634a–b). For Aristotle: *RQP*, in *OD*, III, 918b–919a; *DHC*, Diogene$_{B}$ (II.296b); Spinoza$_{A, CC}$ (IV.254a, 267b); Pereira$_{E}$ (III.652b); Pomponace$_{F}$ (III.780a–781b); Rorarius$_{E}$ (IV.79a–80a).

[188] *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 335a: 'La doctrine d'Aristote… fraia le chemin à l'Athéïsme de Straton'; again citing Parker 1678 , 372.

[189] *DHC*, Dicearque$_{C}$ (II.285); *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 333a–336a; *RQP*, in *OD*, III, 882a.

attributing to atoms an animating virtue or soul.[190] Epicurus was the only pagan to maintain a distance between a transcendent divinity and the creation. Here is Gassendi's exact framework: the pagan world could be divided into a group consisting solely of Epicurus, who insisted on the divinity's distance from the world, and everyone else, who forged animist systems grounded on a conflation of God and the world.[191] But unlike Gassendi, Bayle did not believe that this meant that Epicureanism was the best basis for natural theology. Like all pagans, Epicurus adhered to the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, which led him into other, insurmountable difficulties, especially about how atoms could account for life and sensation. The only way 'to solve this problem' was 'the hypothesis of the soul of the world', which, as we have just seen, faced its own unsolvable problems.[192] All versions of paganism were simply incompatible with Judaeo-Christian doctrine, which rested on the revealed knowledge of creation *ex nihilo*.

Most astonishing is the extent to which Bayle drew on Gassendi's premier English follower, Parker – astonishing because Bayle was Europe's foremost advocate of religious toleration, and Parker one of the most intolerant clerics in Restoration England. But Parker had expanded Gassendi's vision from the Greek philosophers so as to apply it to all of world religions, so we should not be so surprised that Bayle found ideas so useful, even referring to his Latin works as the only books he needed to cite to prove his point.[193] For Bayle, Parker had proved conclusively – against the church fathers, Mornay, Lescalopier, Pfanner, Cudworth, Hyde, and those Jesuits who had followed Ricci – that the 'monotheism' that one seemed to be able to find in the pagans was in fact a mirage, based on a misreading of a monism that presupposed an extended, substantially omnipresent first principle.[194] Meanwhile, anyone who read Paul's preaching to the Athenians about their Unknown God as an endorsement of pagan monotheism – as had Vossius and the Jesuits – was mistaken. The apostle never 'wanted to say that they [the pagans] understood the Divinity as an immaterial being which created all other beings out of nothing'. All he was attributing to them was a 'general knowledge of the divine existence', a general knowledge of which he was in fact sharply critical, for he also said that 'when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened'

[190] *DHC*, Democrite$_{P}$ (II.274a–b); Epicure$_{G}$ (II.367b–368a).

[191] Hence the hypothetical debate between Epicurus and a Platonist in Epicure$_{S}$ (II.372a–b) is really a debate between Epicurus and the rest of the pagans, of whom Plato was typical.

[192] *DHC*, Epicure$_{S, T, E}$ (II.374a–b, 367b), drawing on Galen *De elem. ex. Hipp.* 2 (K I, 415–17) which Bayle is only taking from Gassendi's discussion of the issue (*Syntagma philosophicum*, in *Opera*, II, 343a–b), before going on: 'Qu'on se tourne de tous les côtez imaginables, comme ont fait Lucrece & Gassendi, pour soudre cette difficulté, on ne pourra pas même l'effleurer, & ce qu'on dira de meilleur est que tous les Philosophes qui reconnoissent que les principles des corps mixtes sont prives de sentiment, s'exposent autant qu'Epicure à la même difficulté. Il faut dire les choses comme elles sont, l'Hypothese de l'ame du Monde, ou celle des automates, est la seule voie de se tirer de cet embarrass…'. See also Lucrece$_{F}$ (III.211a).

[193] *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 225b: 'Je ne vous citerai point les autoritez qui prouvent cela, il me doit sufire de vous indiquer un ouvrage [Parker's *Tentamina*] où vous les pourrez trouver toutes rassemblées'.

[194] *CPD*, in *OD*, III, 214b–215a; 224b–226b, 240b–241b, 330b–331a, 335a–b. For further attacks on the church fathers, Mornay, Lescalopier, Pfanner, and Cudworth, see e.g. 199b–200a, 216a–217b, 286a–b.

(Romans 1.21), that they 'knew not God' (Galatians 4:8; also 1 Thess. 4.5) and even called them atheists (Eph. 2:12).[195]

Bayle's views were the culmination of a century of reflection on the nature of global religion by scholars, missionaries, travellers, philosophers, and theologians. Of course, he did not arrive at them without his own philosophical agenda. His aims were (i) in philosophy, to defend a modified Cartesian (or more precisely, Malebranchian) occasionalism, which he claimed was the only philosophy it was rational to adopt once one had accepted the revealed doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*; (ii) in theology, to defend the Reformed doctrine of predestination.[196] But Bayle's position, like that of everyone I have described, cannot be reduced to his polemical aims. It was the product of a complex set of empirical and theoretical developments that occurred throughout the seventeenth century, and which no writer could ignore if they wanted their views on the nature of world religions to be taken seriously.

III THE BIRTH OF THE 'MODERN' HISTORY OF RELIGION?

We have seen how in the seventeenth century, 'paganism' came to be equated with animism, pantheism, or monism. Gradually,that system of belief was portrayed more and more not as imperfect monotheism, but as a quasi-atheistic monism, fundamentally different from the Judaeo-Christian conception of God. So successful was this narrative, that many, like Bayle, came to believe that it offered a heuristic for understanding the religious-theological beliefs of almost the whole of the (non-Judaeo-Christian) world throughout history: from ancient Egypt to Japan; from Zoroastrianism to Greek philosophy and Chinese and Indian emanationist monism. Let us now ask the broader question: did this seventeenth-century reinterpration herald the birth of the 'modern' comparative history of religions?

Not least through the dissemination of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, this vision achieved huge influence in the eighteenth century. The idea that Buddhism and 'Brahmanism' were essentially the same, that they were part of a pan-Asian pantheistic theology whose practical manifestation was a belief in deiformity and transmigration, and that this religious system had direct historical or conceptual connections with the near east, Egypt, and beyond, continued to be popularised by texts as important and widely-read as Diderot's relevant articles in the *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772).[244] Hume's *Natural history of religion* (1757) repeated, with far less scholarly detail, Bayle's narrative: there was 'an universal tendency among mankind' to conceive of objects as animated or anthropomorphic; first, this manifested itself in the river gods or hamadryads of the vulgar; later, philosophers could not

[195] *RQP*, in *OD*, III, p. 935a. Earlier, see Bayle, *Pensées diverses* [1683], in *OD*, III, 76b, 141a.

[196] The philosophical and theological arguments this involved are far too complex to address here; I will explore them in *Kingdom of darkness*.

[244] See esp. the articles 'ASIATIQUES. Philosophie des Asiatiques en général'; 'BRACHMANES' and 'BRAMINES' in Diderot et al. 1751–78, I (1751), 752–5; II (1752), 391, 393–4, discussed in App 2010, 133–87.

'entirely exempt themselves from this natural frailty': hence the animist-pantheist dotrines of Greek sages, none of whom could conceive of a world created *ex nihilo*.[245]

More importantly, such assumptions informed far more serious research programmes, including those that involved the incorporation of new sources, translated from previously unknown languages. Urs App has now given us brilliant case studies of how they shaped a set of pioneering eighteenth-century works of oriental scholarship: the work on the *Forty-two chapter Sutra* by Joseph de Guignes, Voltaire's influential interpretation of the pseudo-Vedic forgery the *Ezour-vedam*, Anquetil-Duperron on the *Zend-Avesta*, and Charles Wilkins on the *Bhagavad Gita* (Sankskrit Hindu scripture, part of the *Mahabharata*). De Guignes, for example, mis-translated the *Forty-two chapter Sutra* not only because his Chinese was not up to the task, but also because he expected to find in its preface something not contained there: an emanationist gnosticism, with similar Pythagorean influences (for a while, he even speculated that Indian religion had been established by wandering gnostics).[246]

De Guignes, like many even in the nineteenth century, was still broadly operating in a biblical-diffusionist framework. But even when that framework was finally destabilised, the scholarly assumption that all non-Judaeo-Christian religions were connected by a tendency to animism in theology (culminating in monistic pantheism among the learned), and a consequent search for deiformity in practice, remained an extremely powerful one. Nowhere is this more evident than in the writings, published and unpublished, of the founding figure of social anthropology, E. B. Tylor, whose Oxford chair was the first recognised position in the subject in the world. Tylor is of course famous for his deployment of the concept of 'animism', but what concerns us is less linguistic similarity, and more the astonishing similarity of narrative and conceptual outlook between him and those of our early moderns.

According to Tylor, every society possessed religion in the sense of a belief in spiritual beings. The first cause of 'religion' was animism: 'First and foremost among the causes which transfigure into myth the facts of daily experience, is the belief in the animation of all nature, rising at its highest pitch to personification'.[248] Like all our early moderns, Tylor conceived this animist religion in intellectualist terms, repeatedly characterising it as a 'philosophy of nature', or 'the natural philosophy of primaeval man'.[249] It originally developed from the attribution of souls to seemingly animate bodies, such as the sun and the moon. But – exactly as Gassendi, and then Thomasius, Parker, and Bayle had insisted – that conception of 'soul' was not an immaterial one, but that of a 'thin' substance, 'vapour',

[245] Hume [1757] 2007, 40–1, 46–8. Hume's examples are clearly taken from Bayle (for Bayle on the hamydryades, see n. **ooo** above). For absolute confirmation, see the entry in Hume's memoranda (late 1730s–early 1740s): 'Tho the Antients speak often of God in the singular Number, that proves not they believed in his Unity, since Christians speak in the same manner of ~~his Unity~~ the Devil. Baile' (printed in Mossner 1948, at 500; see also 501, entries 11, 13 (on Thales), 14 and 15 ('A Stratonician cou'd retor the Arguments of all the Sects of Philosophy…); also 503, entry 40, from Cudworth). For the dating, see Stewart 2000, 276–88; also Pittion 1977.

[246] App 2010, 213–23, 231–3, 240–7.

[248] Tylor 1871, I, 258. For similar summative statements, see e.g. ibid., 385; Tylor 1881, 391–2.

[249] These quotations are from Tylor 1871, I, 258, and II, 187; see also e.g. I, 276, 339, 386, among many other *loci*.

or 'subtle matter'.[250] Even more like Bayle, Tylor insisted that this conception of the soul was in some senses more 'rational' than the Christian concept of an immaterial soul, which posed huge problems on the question of mind-body interaction.[251]

Among 'primitive' peoples, this animism had various consequences. Sometimes it led to a monarchical polytheism (of the type much discussed by Vossius, claimed as monotheism by Cudworth, and denied to be such by Bayle).[252] As Bayle had argued, animism also produced dualism.[253] However, as societies developed, such polytheism, 'in its assignment of the sovereignty of the world to a supreme being who combines in himself the attributes of several… minor deities, tends toward the doctrine of fundamental unity'.[254] But, as Gassendi had long before noted, and as Bayle had relentlessly argued against Cudworth, this 'unity' never represented a true monotheism.[255]

The various manifestations of this animism could be traced across the whole world:

> Starting with the bold rough nature-myths into which the savage moulds the lessons he has learnt from his childlike contemplation of the universe, the ethnographer can follow these rude fictions up into times when they were shaped and incorporated into complex mythologic systems, gracefully artistic in Greece, stiff and monstrous in Mexico, swelled into bombastic exaggeration in Buddhist Asia.[256]

Of course, most of Tylor's examples came from ethnographic data collected in the nineteenth century. But what is remarkable from our perspective is the extent to which he was convinced, just like all our early moderns, that his universal animism also manifested itself in the religious philosophies of more advanced societies. 'Much that the primitive animistic view… explains, has been indeed given over by more advanced education to the "metaphysical" and "positive" stages of thought. Yet animism is still plainly to be traced onward from the intellectual state of the lower races, along the course of the higher culture… into the accepted philosophy of religion'.[257] When Plato spoke of the earth bringing forth men and God shaping them, he was indulging in exactly the same animism as one could find in the Indian Vedas or in the Ying and Yang of 'Chinese philosophy'.[258] When Pythagoras spoke of disease being caused by spirits in the air, and when Socrates spoke of such spirits as the cause of insanity, they were only systematising earlier 'primitive' beliefs.[259] When the ancient Egyptians, Plato, Pythagoras, the Jewish Kabbalists, the

[250] Ibid., I, 387–90; 411.

[251] Ibid., I, 412.

[252] Ibid., II, 225. See also Tylor 1881, 362–4.

[253] Tylor 1871, II, 287–300.

[254] Ibid., II, 321–2. Tylor's examples at this point do not come from modern ethnography, but could all have been deployed by an early modern scholar: Zeus in Greece; Ahura Mazda in Persia; 'the assertion that the esoteric religion of ancient Egypt centred in a doctrine of divine unity'; Baal; Bel; and Moloch.

[255] Ibid., II, 301.

[256] Ibid., I, 248–9.

[257] Ibid., II, 99.

[258] Ibid., I, 295–6.

[259] Ibid., II, 125–6.

Buddhists and the Brahmans insisted on transmigration, theirs was only a more formalised pantheistic version of a long-extant doctrine.[260] Animism gave birth to 'one of the most influential doctrines of civilized philosophy', that is to say, when Democritus became the first to offer 'a theory of thought' by proposing that perception involved the reception of images (εἴδωλα) thrown off by objects, which was nothing more than 'the savage doctrine of object-souls, turned to a new purpose as a method of explaining the phenomena of thought'. This was no coincidence, 'for at this point of junction between classic religion and classic philosophy the traces of historical continuity may be still discerned… Democritus seeking a solution of his great problem… found it by simply decanting into his metaphysics a surviving doctrine of the primitive savage animism'. (Bayle had argued something very similar about Democritus).[261] Through Greek philosophy, such ideas even survived into early Christianity, whether when Tertullian and Origen spoke of the 'thin yet not immaterial substance of angels and demons', or when Origen and even the medieval scholastics believed in the animation of the stars (a typical early modern example, as we have seen).[262]

Even some of Tylor's scholarly polemics were the same as those of the early moderns. Bayle, Le Clerc, Banier, and other contemporaries had critiqued previous mythographers like Conti for allegorising myths, and for claiming that they concealed advanced moral allegories or philosophies rather than primitive religious doctrine; Tylor, astonishingly, was still berating Conti's great English follower, Sir Francis Bacon, for the same fault.[263] Even more astonishingly, Tylor planned – in his ultimately unpublished Gifford Lectures of 1889–91 – to attack the view of Vossius and Herbert that primitive animism in fact concealed an esoteric monotheism.[264] Charting the history of the study of 'natural religion', he pointed to the crucial initial role of the church fathers, and then its development by Vossius and Herbert.[265] But although such figures were owed 'a tribute of respect', it was imperative to recognise that they had all shared a common misunderstanding: 'they thought that by comparing Christianity and Judaism, and the philosophy and religion of ancient Greece and Rome, with some glimpses of Egyptian, Babylonian, and other systems then less understood than now, they could extract the common elements lying at the very source of the faiths of the world'.[266] What Tylor did not say was that his own counter-narrative had *also* been developed in the seventeenth century, by Gassendi, Bayle, and many others. Primitive religion was not compatible with Judaism and Christianity in the way suggested by Vossius,

[260] Ibid., II, 10–13.

[261] Ibid., I, 448–50. For Bayle, see *DHC*, Democrite$_P$ (II.274a).

[262] Tylor 1871, I, 181, 263–4.

[263] Ibid., I, 251, criticizing Bacon's *De sapientia veterum* for trying, 'after the manner of not a few philosophers before and after him, to interpret the classic myths of Greece as moral allegories'. For Bacon's mythography and use of Conti, the best recent account is Lewis 2010, esp. 371–2, 376. Tylor was certainly familiar with the most important work of early 18th-century anti-Conti mythography, Banier 1738; for the general context, see n. **000** above.

[264] Freire-Marreco 1907, 397; Stocking 1992.

[265] Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, MS Tylor, Box 15, galley proofs for 'Natural Religion', Gifford Lectures, 1889–91, Ch. I ('History of the doctrine of natural religion'), 3–8.

[266] Ibid., 15, 13.

for it consisted of an animism that Tylor charted from primitive to advanced societies (the latter including both Graeco-Roman and Christian religion), using a mixture of modern anthropological and ancient textual evidence. As for anything that looked like true monotheism among contemporary primitive societies, Tylor systematically insisted that it could be dismissed as a later intrusion brought by Christian missionaries.[267]

Of course, Tylor was not a diffusionist in the early modern sense. But 'Aryanism' could for him do much of the work that post-Noah diffusion, or conjectural history, could do in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[268] The very last sentence of the first volume of *Primitive culture* shows beautifully the similarity between the scheme of Tylor and that first development by Gassendi: 'The divisions which have separated the great religions of the world into intolerant and hostile sects are for the most part superficial, in comparison with the deepest of all religious schisms, that which divides Animism from Materialism'.[269] Could anything be more redolent of Gassendi's 'Epicurus vs the other pagans' narrative?

Nor is anthropology the only 'modern' discipline that seems to have directly inherited some of the basic assumptions of early modern scholarship.[270] Recently, a fierce debate has broken out among classicists about the existence and nature of 'pagan monotheism'. I can assure the reader that perusing the essays of the late Michael Frede, anyone familiar with the early modern literature might think they were reading Cudworth; reading Martin West's essay on the progress 'Towards monotheism', they may believe themselves transported to the world of eighteenth-century conjecturalism (albeit with better philology).[271] Early modern scholarship has had a very long afterlife indeed.

IV Conclusion

At this point, the reader may be expecting me to declare triumphantly that I have discovered the 'religious origins of modern anthropology', or more generally to announce that seventeenth-century comparatism was 'modern'. But I should like to resist the

[267] Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, MS Tylor, Box 15; also the rough notes, all concerning animism, in Box 9. See further Stocking 1992, esp. 5–10.

[268] See e.g. the discussion of the soul as a 'thin substance' in Tylor 1871, I, 390: 'The conception of the soul as breath may be followed up through Semitic and Aryan etymology, and thus into the main streams of the philosophy of the world'. Or on Chinese animistic heaven-worship (II, 320): 'These stray scraps from old Chinese literature are intelligible to European ears, for our Aryan race has indeed worked out religious ideas from the like source and almost in the like directions'.

[269] Tylor 1871, I, 453.

[270] In saying this, I do not seek to imply that modern anthropology operates in the same way as did Tylor: for the reaction against Tylor's animism among the next generation of anthropologists, see Stocking 1995, esp. 42–4, 55–6, 61–3, 165–6. It is interesting to note, however, that the discipline has seen influential recent calls for a revival of Tylor's 'animism' concept: Bird-David 1999. I am well out of my comfort zone here, but as far as I can tell, this article has stimulated much debate among practising anthropologists. See also the defence of Tylor offered in Stringer 1999.

[271] The debate was ignited by Frede and Athanassiadi 1999, in which see esp. the editors' 'Introduction' (1–20) and West's 'Towards monotheism' (21–40). For a summary, see Mitchell van Nuffelen 2010. It is amusing to note that some participants in the debate recognise that Cudworth already 'reproduces all the relevant sources' (Fürst 2010, 83, n. 3).

temptation to do so (however attention-grabbing it would be). In fact – and here I speak directly to the central theme of this volume, especially as it has been delineated by Geoffrey Lloyd in the Epilogue – my very point throughout has been that comparatist enterprises cannot be reduced to the ideology that produces them. Just because Tylor shared the broad conclusion of my early moderns – i.e., that non-Judaeo-Christian religions were defined by adherence to 'animism' in one form or another – does not mean that he shared their ideological aims. In fact, while the early moderns made clear their 'metaphysical' assumptions – those of neo-scholastic natural theology (Selden, Vossius, Ricci, etc.), neo-Epicureanism (Gassendi), or Malebranchian occasionalism (Bayle) – Tylor, although he sometimes hinted that he was opposing paganism to a 'modern' or 'scientific' worldview,[272] made it clear that 'though the doctrines [he] examined bear not only on the development but the actual truth of religious systems' he felt 'neither able nor willing to enter into this great argument fully and satisfactorily'.[273] The empirical assumptions with which he began may have been very similar to those of our early moderns – and in this we are discovering only one more discipline in which nineteenth-century scholarship was far more indebted to that of the seventeenth century than we previously thought[274] – but the chief presupposition with which he started was one of *disciplinarity*: that is to say, that he was contributing to an intellectual discipline with its own rules and purposes, and one that did not need to be justified by reference to other disciplines, not least theology.

In saying that disciplinarity matters, and that it serves to stifle presuppositions (however much they are still present), I am not saying something fashionable. Some of the contributors to our sessions would, I think, dismiss our intellectual disciplines as yet another 'power structure', working to impose a totalitarian categorisation on the 'other'. From a different perspective, Lloyd writes in the Epilogue that 'comparatism has often been a weapon of polemic, in effect denying any other comparatisms any legitimacy', and attributes only to modern anthropologists the ability to return from their comparative endeavours with a self-reflexive attitude (p. **ooo** below). In the interest of stimulating in readers of our volume a comparative approach of their own, I should like to say, very modestly, that I am less interested in this kind of judgemental approach to the history of comparitism, whether written in a condemnatory mode or a defensive one (as some histories of the Jesuit missions in particular still attempt to defend the extent to which Jesuit accommodation was 'successful'). Rather, I am interested in getting beyond the bland and uninteresting truism that everyone conducts comparatism on the basis of certain (explicit or unstated) presuppositions, and investigating how, historically, comparatism has actually happened, and how the complex interplay of presuppositions, polemic, and new findings has changed the enterprise. What my research has shown me – and what I hope the story I have told here will convince at least some readers of our volume – is that if we go beyond ideological mapping and instead follow the details of the debates themselves, we find that

[272] See e.g. Tylor 1871, II, 167; also Tylor 1881, 356–7.

[273] Tylor 1871, II, 324–5.

[274] See e.g. Marchand 2010; Marchand 2016; Ledger-Lomas and Mandelbrote, forthcoming.

no comparative enterprise can be reduced to the 'polemical' aims that may have inspired it. Early modern comparison may have had as its aim a 'triumphant reaffirmation of the One True God' (Lloyd, p. **000** below), but its results were very different: a complete re-conceptualisation of the way humans (at least those bereft of revelation) could conceive of the divine, of 'nature', and of the 'human' *qua* a being composed of body and soul.

As I said in one of our sessions, at some point the fetishisation of self-reflexion turns into narcissism: the pleasant, self-satisfied certainty that no one has ever been as self-reflective as we are today, and that until very recently everyone (or at least every Westerner) was an unthinking bigot incapable of understanding any society but their own, and unwilling to make the attempt. I have absolutely no interest in defending 'Western comparativism' (as if such a thing has ever existed): such moral judgements are not the historian's job. But what I hope to have shown is that early modern European comparative religion, while undoubtedly connected to various 'polemical' aims, and certainly grounded in a set of assumptions that were far from 'modern', nonetheless generated genuine – and even spectacular – change that had lasting significance.

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