

THE RECEPTION OF GERMAN MYSTICISM IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND



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Henry More



Anne Conway

International Conference sponsored by the
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Time Zones

14h00 EDT Eastern Daylight Time (Montreal)
= 19h00 British Summer Time (Cambridge)
= 20h00 Central European Summer Time (Munich)

11h00 EDT Eastern Daylight Time (Montreal)
= 16h00 British Summer Time (Cambridge)
= 17h00 Central European Summer Time (Munich)

10h00 EDT Eastern Daylight Time (Montreal)
= 15h00 British Summer Time (Cambridge)
= 16h00 Central European Summer Time (Munich)



Hinc lucem et pocula sacra

PROGRAMME

SATURDAY, 19 JUNE

- 14h00 (EDT) First Session—Platonism and the German Theology**
Chair: Garth Green
McConnell Professor of the Philosophy of Religion,
McGill University
- 14h00—14h25 **James Bryson**, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich
Receiving the Reception: Franz von Baader's Anglophilia
- 14h25—14h50 **Douglas Hedley** (Clare College, Cambridge University)
The Cambridge Platonists and the German Theology
- 14h50—15h15 **Torrance Kirby** (McGill University)
*Preaching Platonism? John Everard and the domestication of
medieval German mysticism in Early Modern London*
- 15h15—15h45 **Discussion**
- 16h00—17h00 **Vin d'Honneur** (Zoom Chat Rooms)

SUNDAY, 20 JUNE

- 11h00 (EDT) Second Session—Mysticism and Metaphysics**
Chair: Torrance Kirby
Professor of Ecclesiastical History, McGill University
- 11h00—11h25 **Matthew Nini** (McGill University)
*Seeing a Single Eye: On the English Reception of Cusa's De
Visione Dei*
- 11h25—11h50 **Adrian Mihai** (Clare Hall, Cambridge University)
*'Got gebirt mich sich': Eriugena's and Eckhart's teachings on the birth
of God in creation*
- 11h50—12h15 **Marie-Élise Zovko** (Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb)
*Anne Conway, Herrera, and Spinoza on God and God's
Relation to Individual Beings*
- 12h15—12h45 **Discussion**
- 14h00 (EDT) Third Session— Jacob Boehme and Mysticism in England**
Chair: Douglas Hedley
Professor of the Philosophy of Religion, Clare College,
Cambridge University
- 14h00—14h25 **Scott Brown** (St. Louis, Missouri)
*Virtual Exhibit:
First Editions of Boehme's Works in German & English*
- 14h25—14h50 **Kevin Killeen** (University of York)
The Theopoetics of Jacob Boehme
- 14h50—15h15 **Chance Woods** (Belmont University)
*Metaphor and Metaphysics: Situating Henry More's
Platonism between Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Böhme*
- 15h15—15h40 **Jan Rohls** (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)
Jacob Boehme's Theosophy and English Romanticism
- 15h40—16h10 **Discussion**

MONDAY, 21 JUNE

- 10h00 (EDT) **Fourth Session—German Mysticism in Cambridge
Platonism and American Puritanism**
Chair: James Bryson
Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellow, Ludwig Maximilian University
of Munich
- 10h00—10h25 **Simon Burton** (New College, University of Edinburgh)
*Cusan Astronomical Mysticism in the Samuel Hartlib Circle and
its Periphery*
- 10h25—10h50 **Joshua Hollmann** (Concordia College, New York)
*Image and invisibility: God, Christ and Creature in Nicholas
of Cusa's De visione Dei and Anne Conway's Principia
philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae de Deo, Christo et
creatura id est de materia et spiritu in genere*
- 10h50—11h15 **Eric Parker** (St John's Anglican Church, Lexington, Virginia)
"High flown" Mystics: Peter Sterry and Jacob Boehme
- 11h15—11h45 **Discussion**

Acknowledgements

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**The Reception of German Mysticism in Early Modern England
funded by a SSHRC Insight Grant**

Research Précis

The project consists in establishing the fundamental influence of German or Rhenish mysticism on English religious thought, chiefly in the 17th-century. The English reception of such German mystical authors as Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1328), the anonymous author of *Theologia Germanica*, Johannes Tauler (c. 1300-1361), Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), Sebastian Franck (c. 1499-1542), Hans Denck (1500-1527), Valentin Weigel (1533-1588), and Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), to mention just the most significant representatives of this tradition, has been hitherto little studied, or not studied at all. There are some notable exceptions, particularly the research of Douglas Hedley on the exceptional role of the Cambridge Platonists, especially of Henry More, in the dissemination of German mysticism in England in the seventeenth century, and Nigel Smith's monograph *Perfection Proclaimed* (Oxford, 1989). This project will not only reconstruct for the first time the wide-ranging reception of these German thinkers in Early Modern England, but also show that it was through this reception that the influential tradition of 'German mysticism' was first created. For instance, while in 17th-century Germany the writings of the main figure of this tradition, Jakob Böhme, went underground because of accusations of heresy, in England they were keenly translated, commented upon, and considered in relation to other German writers who had also been translated at the same time, specifically Sebastian Franck and Valentin Weigel. Through their work, the English readers thus established a lineage that connected these thinkers, and that at the same time created a philosophical bridge between England and Germany. The project will highlight the international legacy of these authors by adopting the perspective of historico-philosophical engagement with the sources, placing them also in the theological milieu of their time.

Research and Conference Steering Committee

Garth Green
Douglas Hedley
Torrance Kirby

The Reception of German Mysticism in Early Modern England



Paracelsus

Robert Fludd

Johannes Kepler

John Sparrow

ABSTRACTS

James Bryson, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich
Receiving the Reception: Franz von Baader's Anglophilia

Living through the emergence and flowering of German Idealism, Franz von Baader (1765-1841) was one of the great scholars and interpreters of the late medieval tradition of German mysticism. Baader is credited with introducing Meister Eckhart to Hegel, turning Schelling to theism, and is perhaps best known as the greatest interpreter of Jacob Boehme in the 19th century. Less appreciated, however, is the influence of Renaissance and early modern English sources on Baader's thought. This paper will provide a brief overview of Baader's enthusiasm for English philosophy and literature seen through the lens of German mysticism that represents the beating heart of his thought, including his admiration of Shakespeare, Milton, and Henry More.

Simon J. G. Burton, University of Edinburgh
"Cusan Astronomical Mysticism in the Hartlib Circle and its Periphery"

Since the publication of Alexander Koyré's *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* the role of Nicholas of Cusa in paving the way for the Copernican Revolution of early modernity has fascinated scholarship. While debate continues on Copernicus' own connection to Cusa his influence on the infinite cosmology of Giordano Bruno is beyond doubt. Yet discussion of Cusa's astronomical legacy rarely extends to consideration of wider aspects of his theocentric and mystical cosmology, despite evidence for the impressive reception of his *De docta*

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ignorantia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this paper I will examine aspects of this reception relating to both Puritans and Platonists in England and New England.

While the circle of intellectuals and reformers gathered around the Anglo-German intelligencer Samuel Hartlib is well known for its Neo-Platonic and hermetic interests, it is only relatively recently that the influence of Cusa on their thought has begun to be explored. By drawing attention to an astronomical MS written by the Silesian mystic Abraham von Franckenberg and conveyed to Hartlib this paper will highlight an important possible conduit for the reception of Cusan ideas. It will also demonstrate how von Franckenberg's recourse to Cusa connects not only to his critical engagement with Copernicanism but also his mystical reconceptualising of the cosmos. Notably this not only invokes Cusa and his coincidence of opposites, but also Tauler, Bruno and Boehme. The paper will then examine further evidence for interest in Cusa's astronomical mysticism among English and American Puritans on the periphery of both the Hartlib circle and Cambridge Platonism. Building on the recent work of Howard Hotson, Ariel Hessayon and others, it will thus aim to show the role of the Hartlib circle and wider Puritan networks in mediating German mysticism and Neo-Platonism to seventeenth-century England.

Fourth Session: German Mysticism in Cambridge Platonism and Anglo-American Puritanism

While Ernst Cassirer famously speculated on a connection between Cambridge Platonism and the thought of Nicholas of Cusa, the fifteenth-century German mystic and polymath, it is only recently that scholarship has begun to bear this out. Significantly, this movement in scholarship also coincides with renewed attention to both Protestant and especially Puritan mysticism. This panel is situated very much at the convergence of these two scholarly trends and offers further evidence for a deep connection between Cambridge Platonism, Anglo-American Puritanism and Cusan mysticism. At the same time, it also seeks to place this reception of Cusan thought in the light of a much wider appropriation of German mysticism, including especially engagement with the thought of Tauler and Boehme. In doing so, it draws particular attention to the role of the Hartlib circle as mediating this connection between English and German mysticism, and focusses particular attention on Peter Sterry and Anne Conway as two prominent members of the Cambridge Platonist school who came under Cusa's influence.

Douglas Hedley, Clare College, Cambridge University

The Cambridge Platonists and the German Theology

The influence of the anonymous late-medieval *Theologia Germanica* or *German Theology* upon the Cambridge Platonists is undeniable. Henry More refers explicitly to the formative influence of the *German Theology* upon his own development. Ralph Cudworth and John Smith refer to the central doctrine of the ‘infant’ or ‘baby’ Christ in the soul, a key doctrine of the Eckhart school. Yet the nature of the influence of the *German Theology* upon the Cambridge Platonists remains opaque and puzzling. In this paper I attempt a sketch an account of the reception of the *German Theology* by the Cambridge Platonists.

Joshua Hollmann, Concordia College, New York

Image and invisibility: God, Christ and Creature in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De visione Dei* and Anne Conway’s *Principia philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae de Deo, Christo et creatura id est de materia et spiritu in genere*

In *Anne Conway: A Women Philosopher*, Sarah Hutton contends that Conway’s *Principia* (1690) may have been influenced by the Christology of Nicholas of Cusa. Furthermore, Hutton notes that Conway had access to the writings of Nicholas of Cusa, notably his mystical masterpiece *De visione Dei* (1453). Following Conway’s prompting, this paper examines the theological influence of Nicholas of Cusa’s Christology in *De visione Dei* on Anne Conway’s *Principia* through the nexus of image and invisibility as unfolded and enfolded in God, Christ and creature. This paper argues that Nicholas of Cusa’s interplay of image and invisibility through the person and work of Christ in *De visione Dei* is discernable both in the structure of God, Christ and creature in the *Principia* and in the substance of the *Principia* on Christ as middle being between God and creatures. Both *De visione Dei* and the *Principia* feature Nicholas of Cusa’s themes of *complicatio-explicatio* and the *coincidentia oppositorum* in relation to Christ as middle being and communion of image and invisibility, matter and spirit. In addition, Conway’s refutation of the confounding of God and creatures and her focus on Christ as medium and image in the *Principia* match Nicholas of Cusa’s discussion of image and invisibility in Christ at the conclusion of *De visione Dei* (chapters 19-25), and the conception of Christ as the absolute and contracted maximum in his most famous work, *De docta ignorantia* (1440). Through comparing the perspectives of image and invisibility in the Christology of *De*

visione Dei and the *Principia* this paper aims to expand the reception of Nicholas of Cusa's mysticism in early modern England.

Kevin Killeen, University of York
The Theopoetics of Jacob Boehme

Jacob Boehme's *Mysterium Magnum* encountered in England a culture attuned to hexameral elaboration and a kaleidoscopic Genesis, understood to encode spiritual, scientific and exegetical truths. This paper will propose a theopoetics of *Mysterium Magnum*, understanding its theology to inhere very much within its gush and tumultuous prose. It will make the case that Boehme's vast and most creative engagement with scripture produces a chemico-physics of the Johannine Word, in which the world percolated into being and remained suffused with a quiveringly active 'eternal speaking Word'. Everything—stone, metal, or biblical tale—pulsed and crackled with the Eternal, whose pre-logical energy of the divine (its 'grammar of derangement') needed to be met by an enthused and enflamed engagement, a carnivalesque hermeneutics that read the inward figure, not the outward husk of the word. For all that the text is a monument to the unknowable and the nescient—Boehme insists that many of its meanings are true only in the Eternal and not in the Existent world—it is nevertheless the most highly wrought account of the energy of the divine at work in the world and on the Word. A close reading of Boehme's most startling, poetic and apophatic text, whose terminology is Protean, musical and cacophonous, does not produce a rounded philosophical system, so much as a fugue of ideas, twisting and turning continually, and it is this, the paper will suggest, that endeared him a culture of radical enthusiasts in the England of the 1640s and beyond.

Torrance Kirby, McGill University
Preaching Platonism? John Everard and the domestication of medieval German mysticism in Early Modern London

John Everard (?1584-1641) was a popular London preacher and sometime lecturer at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields in the 1620s. Many of his sermons were preached at 'public meeting places' in Kensington where he was chaplain to Henry Rich, Earl of Holland. In 1628 Everard translated the anonymous *Theologia Germanica*. Along with writings of other Rhenish mystics, e.g. Johannes Tauler and Hans Denck, he also published translations of such Neoplatonic sources as the *Mystical Divinity* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and the writings of Hermes

Trismegistus. With John Sparrow, Durant Hotham, and Giles Randall, Everard exemplifies the noteworthy influence of Rhenish mysticism on English religious thought in the Early Modern period, as well as an extension of the continuity of Platonic tradition as described by Raymond Klibansky. Through his dissemination of late-medieval mystical theology in his sermons Everard contributed to a popularizing of Platonism in Early Modern England.

Adrian Mihai, Clare Hall, Cambridge

'Got gebirt mich sich': Eriugena's and Eckhart's teachings on the birth of God in creation

The paper focuses, for the first time, on the similarities and differences between John Scotus Eriugena and Meister Eckhart on the doctrine of the birth of God in creation. First, I will examine the difficult question on the direct and/or indirect influence of Eriugena on Eckhart. Secondly, I will compare and contrast the teaching of both thinkers on the generation of God in creation. One of Eriugena's most daring and fundamental philosophical statements is that in creating the universe, God "*creates*" (*creatur*) himself. In other words, God realizes himself in and through creation. "God, says Eriugena in the third book of his *Periphyseon* (c. 866), by manifesting Himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in creation [*deus in creatura creatur*]" (III 678c1–d1, ed. É. Jeaneau). Similarly, the central idea of Eckhart's monumental doctrine is that of the generation or birth of God in the human soul: "Er [*scil. Got*] *gebirt mich sich*", i.e. *God begets me as himself* (*Sermon 6*, ed. J. Quint = *Sermon 6*, ed. N. Largier, p. 82). In this paper I shall endeavour to set forth a synthesis of these fundamental Eriugenian and Eckhartian doctrines, from which their metaphysical, theological and ethical systems directly derive.

Matthew Nini, McGill University

Seeing a Single Eye: On the English Reception of Cusa's *De Visione Dei*

In 1646, Giles Randall published *The Single Eye, or the Vision of God*, a translation of a 1453 Latin treatise by "the learned Doctor Cusanus." The text was already known in Protestant England: John Everard had also worked on it. While the relationship between Everard's and Randall's translations remains disputed, the approach is similar: both men had previously (and independently) translated the *Theologia Germanica*, and both were associated with a spiritual movement called familism and held antinomian views. Why would two radical reformers be interested in the Catholic and cosmopolitan views of a Rhineland Cardinal of the

Roman Church, in particular a treatise that takes as its starting point an icon? This paper suggests that the answer lies precisely in the use of the icon, focusing on Cusa's preface. Cusa's *De Visione* was a missive to the monks of Tegernsee, and he included with it an icon meant for a spiritual exercise that would serve as introduction to the treatise. An omnivoyant image that seems to look back at the viewer no matter where one stands in relation to it, the icon inaugurates a radical equality and relation of experience and testimony among viewers. Each monk has the same singular relationship with the icon no matter where he stands, and can ask the others if they, too, see what he does. In this way, Cusa uses innovations in perspective to establish a theology of unity and equality in difference that is highly attractive to an antinomian reformer.

Eric Parker, St Paul's Anglican Church, Lexington, Virginia
"High flown" Mystics: Peter Sterry and Jacob Boehme

In the remaining notebooks of Peter Sterry is a list of books that he kept in Chelsea during the year 1663 for the purpose of teaching a number of students there. Often numbered among the Cambridge Platonists, one modern author speculates that Sterry may have seen his educational work in Chelsea as a realization of a pansophic "School of Light" envisioned by Jan Amos Comenius and proposed to Oliver Cromwell by Samuel Hartlib and John Dury to be established at Chelsea College. In the early 1640s Sterry was employed as chaplain to Lord Brooke, who was an early sponsor of Hartlib and Comenius in their visits to England. Among the books that Sterry kept in Chelsea were books that had also inspired Comenius: Bacon's *Instauration* as well as works by Plotinus, Proclus, Nicholas of Cusa, and Marsilio Ficino. Sterry, whom Bishop Burnet called "a high flown mystical divine" also had a copy of a work by Johannes Tauler, and three volumes by Jacob Boehme (more than any single author in the list besides the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas). His list contains Boehme's *Aurora*, *Mysterium Magnum* and others. In a letter from 1651 to the Welsh Puritan minister and Boehme translator, Morgan Llywd, Sterry outlines his reception of Boehme in detail. As one of Cromwell's triers and a member of the Council of State, Sterry is very cautious. He has "much perused" Boehme's works, but he worries that Boehme's visions might stem more from evil sources than good. He places too much confidence in freewill, speaks confusedly about the Trinity, and mixes theology with "Heathenish Philosophy." Though critical, Sterry's reception turns positive in the end, as he claims "as much Heavenly Pleasure, & Profite" in reading Boehme "as

of any Discourses, besides those of ye Holy Scriptures.” Sterry’s positive remarks likely reinforced Llywd’s decision to translate and publish a selection of Boehme’s writings into Welsh in 1657. Sterry prefers the Trinitarian thought of Nicholas of Cusa, but his high praise of Boehme warrants further examination into his possible influence on Sterry’s thought.

Jan Rohls, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

Jacob Boehme’s Theosophy and English Romanticism

The paper investigates the influence of Boehme’s mystical theosophy on English Romanticism in its beginnings. There is an interdependence between early German and early English Romanticism the mediator between both being Henry Crabb Robinson. He introduced William Blake as a Romantic follower of Boehme to the German audience. But it was not only Blake who refers to Boehme, but it was Coleridge as well. Thus early Romanticism opened a new period of Boehme’s influence in England after the 17th and early 18th century.

Chance Woods, Belmont University

Metaphor and Metaphysics: Situating Henry More’s Platonism between Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Böhme

The intellectual career of Henry More (1614-1687) can, in many respects, be described as a dual quest for origins: the journey to discover the foundations of Platonism in western philosophy and the grueling odyssey to understand the divine source of the material world. Indeed, these two ventures were intricately related for this poet-philosopher. More was particularly obsessed with an idea that he first discovered in Plotinus: namely, the seeming impossibility of describing matter in definitive monistic terms. This idea proved important for More because, as a student of the “Neoplatonic” tradition, he was convinced that one’s epistemic orientation toward the material world had profound consequences for the scope of one’s metaphysics and one’s ascent toward the ineffable One. This paper will contend that More wrote his complex poem *Psychozoia* (aka the Platonic Song of the Soul) as a consequence of Plotinus’ arguments regarding the kind of language used to describe matter. Second, I will suggest that More wrote his poetry as a kind of rational (albeit mythographic) mysticism that is at least metaphysically consistent both with a kind of monism and with Christian apophatic theology. More commendably recuperated a frustratingly complex premise from the Platonic tradition: the symbolic correspondence between mental and physical

realities. To fully demonstrate how More addressed the latter point, this paper will also situate More's Platonism in relation to two German mystical thinkers: Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) and Jakob Böhme (1575-1624). Cusa shares with More a profound impetus to revitalize Platonic metaphysics for scientific endeavors, and Böhme's idiosyncratic mystical theology influenced More in powerful ways. More learned from both Plotinus and Böhme in particular that embedded tropes in metaphysical thinking profoundly affect our conceptions of materiality. Cusa had faced this problem by pioneering a novel theory of Infinity to encapsulate the relationship between the transcendence of God and the immanence of the material world. Facing the new challenges of Baconian science and Spinozistic materialism, More achieved something quite remarkable by hybridizing Plotinian and Böhmenian insights to completely reframe the question of matter's ultimate relationship to God.

Marie-Élise Zovko, Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb

Anne Conway, Herrera, and Spinoza on God and God's Relation to Individual Beings

Anne Conway's understanding of God and God's relationship to created beings bears important similarities to the philosophy of Platonism embodied in Plotinus and the Neoplatonic tradition of philosophical mysticism. Conway's Anti-Cartesian stance is generally also applied to Spinoza or Spinozism; but this generalization belies fundamental similarities between Spinoza and Conway, similarities rooted in their shared philosophical background. Conway's Platonist tendencies emerged under the influence of Kabbalist doctrine contained in the work of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*, as mediated to her through her friend and physician, Francis Mercury van Helmont. What is less known is that von Rosenroth's work contained an abridged Latin translation of Abraham Cohen Herrera's widely influential Platonic interpretation of the Kabbalah, *Puerto del Cielo (Gate of Heaven)*.*

Herrera's interpretation of the Lurianic Kabbala, which he studied under Luria's disciple Israel Sarug during his sojourn in Ragusa (present-day Dubrovnik) at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, was guided by his understanding

* *Porta coelorum*. Abridged Latin translation of *Sefer Ša'ar ha-Šamayin*, by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, in *Kabbala denudata* (Sulzbach 1678)cf. Krabbenhoft, *Gate of Heaven*, xxi. Two manuscripts of *Puerto del Cielo* and one of *Casa de la divinidad* – from the hand of Samuel David Curiel, in 1675, and Samuel Abaz George – 1740 and 1731, respectively – are preserved in the Jewish-Portuguese Seminary, Ets Haim, the successor to the Hebrew school Spinoza also attended, in Amsterdam

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of Renaissance Platonism, above all Marsilio Ficino, with its legacy of Plotinian, Proclean and Iamblichean thought. Herrera's syncretistic blending of the tradition of Jewish mysticism and Platonist philosophy, his attempt to explain the "sovereign contemplations of kabbalistic and theological mysticism" using the "humble arguments of human philosophical thought,"[†] made him exceedingly attractive to Conway, in particular as regards the Lurianic theory of *tzimtzum*. Along with Judah Abrabanel, Herrera's work also served as a repository of major themes from Neoplatonic philosophy for Spinoza. Herrera left Dubrovnik for Amsterdam,[‡] where he spent the final years of his life as a member of the synagogue where Spinoza would receive his early schooling. Anne Conway's view that spirit or mind and matter form two ends of a continuum and that matter is destined to be spiritualized has parallels in the work of Spinoza which point to their common Neoplatonic background. The spiritual monism offered by Anne Conway as a solution to questions of theodicy related to Christian orthodoxy proves to be closely related to Spinoza's view of reality, drawing into question interpretations which view Conway's philosophy as opposed to Spinoza's "materialism". Conway's criticism may properly refer only to Hobbes, as Spinoza's monistic Platonism is, in fact, both historically and philosophically, intimately related to her own philosophical perspective.

[†] *Casa de la divinidad* Bk. V, Ch. 9;

[‡] In *Gate of Heaven*, Herrera refers to two locations where he was resident: Amsterdam (Bk. V, Ch.6), and Ragusa or present-day Dubrovnik, where he studied with the disciple of Isaac Luria Israel Sarug, whom he names as his teacher (Bk. VIII, Ch. 6)

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NOTES