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## IMAGINATION BETWEEN PHYSICK AND PHILOSOPHY

### On the central role of the imagination in the work of Henry More<sup>1</sup>

Koen Vermeir

'Thus far, Madam, I have presum'd to be a physician'  
*Henry More to Anne Conway, April 4 1653*

#### Abstract

I argue that the imagination plays a central role in the thought of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More. First, physiological descriptions of melancholy and imagination were at the heart of his attack against enthusiasm and atheism. Second, in order to defend his metaphysical dualism, he had to respond to traditional accounts of the imagination as a mediating faculty between body and soul. Third, More also opposed the traditional view that the imagination was a material faculty, because in the context of 17th century philosophy and medicine, such ideas could lead to materialism. More's metaphysics led him to propose a novel view in which the imagination was part of the immaterial soul and at the same level as reason. In his physiological descriptions, however, he retained a gradualist view on the imagination that suggested intermediate stages between material and immaterial substances. Although his metaphysical and physiological descriptions seem to conflict, I suggest that the conflict can be mitigated by his interpretation of the body as the instrument of the soul.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Yasmin Haskell for ironing out my English. Thanks are due also to the anonymous referees for their useful suggestions, and to all the editors for their patience.

## **Prologue: a shoemaker's suicide**

On a Friday morning, the 20th of September 1591, a shoemaker from the city of Breslau in Silesia (part of current-day Poland), cut his own throat with a shoemaker's knife. The family, in order to avoid shame and disgrace, covered up the suicide and presented his death as caused by a stroke. They declined early visits from neighbours and friends, washed and clothed him quickly, and did this so well that the priest and later visitors did not discover the deceit. As a result, the shoemaker had an honest burial in the churchyard and received due respects in accordance with his social rank and reputation.

A few weeks later, a rumour went around that the shoemaker had in fact died a violent death. The magistrates were persuaded to begin an investigation, but the shoemaker's widow opposed this and accused the gossipmongers of wanting to bring discredit upon her. Amid all this agitation, to the astonishment of all, the ghost of the shoemaker appeared. He terrified the sleeping with horrible visions and was a nuisance to those who were awake. The spectre came not only at night but also in broad daylight. He would pinch and hit the citizens, he would cast himself on their beds and lie close to them, or he would try to suffocate them, so that blue marks and the impression of his fingers would be visible on their bodies. Even when people took precautions to sit together with the candles lighted, the shoemaker would still appear and attack them.

In the end, the shoemaker's widow could not prevent the magistrates from ordering the disinterment of the body, and the body was exhumed on 18 April 1592. They found the corpse intact, the wound in his throat gaping, and they noticed a magical mark on the great toe of his right foot. The body still looked good, and even seemed to have put on more weight. They buried the corpse again, this time under the gallows. All was in vain, however, as the apparition kept harassing the citizens and now he did not even spare his own family. After a while, the widow herself stepped to the magistrates and demanded stricter action. As a result, the corpse was exhumed again and burned on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, and the spectre disappeared.

Curiously, the shoemaker's maid, who died some time after him, also reappeared as a ghost. She almost suffocated a fellow servant and mishandled a child in the cradle. One time, she appeared in the shape of a hen, which one of the servants in the house took to be so indeed. The servant started running after the hen, but the chicken grew to huge size, turned around, caught the servant by the throat, and handled her so violently that she could neither eat nor drink for a good while after. The maid kept appearing in different shapes and harassed people

for more than a month, until her corpse was also dug up and burned, after which she was never seen again.

This account was recorded by Martin Weinrich (1548-1609), a physician and philosopher who lived in Breslau at the time of these curious events. The story became widely publicised when Weinrich's brother Charles included it in the preface to the 1612 edition of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's (1470-1533) *Strix* or *De ludificatione Daemonum* (1523), a famous work of demonology. The story of the shoemaker is also one of the many peculiar stories retold by the English Neo-Platonist philosopher Henry More (1614-1687), who had culled it from Weinrich's preface (AA 111-113; IS 131).<sup>2</sup>

### **Henry More's defence of Christianity against atheists and enthusiasts**

For Henry More, the story of the shoemaker was part of his collection of historical and experimental evidence of the existence of spirits. This was crucial for his project of defending Christianity and basic Christian truths. He even ventured to appropriate the results of Robert Boyle's (1627-1691) hydrostatical experiments. What Boyle interpreted as proof of the 'spring of the air', More reinterpreted as evidence that mechanical explanations were not enough, and he claimed the experiment as an argument for the existence of a Spirit of Nature.<sup>3</sup> For Henry More, the defence of Christianity expressed itself in two more (but related) preoccupations. This can clearly be seen in his most important writings from the 1650s, *An Antidote against Atheisme* (1653), *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656) and *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659). More considered these works as a complete expression of his philosophical system when he collected them in a new edition in 1662. Furthermore, he reprinted, updated and translated them for the later editions of his *Opera*, in which they still played a central role.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I will refer to More's main philosophical works as follows: **AA**: *An Antidote against Atheism*; **ET**: *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*; **IS**: *The Immortality of the Soul*. For the purpose of this paper, I am using the 1662 edition which binds these works together. H. More, *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* (London, 1662). **GMG**: H. More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (London, 1660). **EM**: H. More, *Enchiridion Metaphysicum* in *Henrici Mori Cantabrigiensis Opera Philosophica* (London, 1679).

<sup>3</sup> On Henry More and Robert Boyle, see S. Shapin and S. Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 207-224. A. Gabbey, 'Henry More and the limits of mechanism', in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, 19-36. A. Coudert, 'Henry More and Witchcraft', in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, 115-136 (122-125). J. Henry, 'Henry More versus Robert Boyle: the spirit of nature and the nature of providence' in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, 55-76. For Boyle's experiments on 'spirits', see S. Schaffer, 'Godly Men and Mechanical Philosophers: Souls and Spirits in Restoration Natural Philosophy', *Science in Context*, 1:1 (1987), 55-85. In this paper, due to constraints of space, I will not elaborate on More's notion of a Spirit of Nature.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper I focus on the philosophical works from the first period, published collectively in 1662. Gabbey distinguishes a first philosophical and a second theological period in the work of Henry More, starting around 1662 ('*Philosophica Cartesiana Triumphata: Henry More (1646-1671)*', in *Problems of Cartesianism*, edited by T. M. Lennon, J. M. Nicholas, and J. W. Davis (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), 171-250). He

A first preoccupation was an attack on atheism. More writes that he was roused to compose the *Antidote* after he had heard people seriously indulging in atheistic talk during a visit to London.<sup>5</sup> The main challenge was philosophical, however. The danger of atheism was perceived as acute in the seventeenth century, partly because of some new or revived philosophical currents. More describes the ‘abhorred monster, *Atheisme*, proudly strutting with a lofty gate and impudent forehead, boasting himself the onely genuine offspring of true Wisdome and Philosophy’ (GMG vii).<sup>6</sup> In his *Antidote*, he directs his arrows against epicureans in general. One of the few atheists he mentions by name is Lucilio Vanini (1585-1619), who followed Pomponazzi in naturalising miracles and apparitions (AA 138).

The preoccupation with atheism was to be pervasive in More’s oeuvre, and the targets of his criticism would change depending on the circumstances. In the *Immortality of the Soul*, he directed his attention to a new and powerful exponent, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who argued for materialism in *Leviathan* (1651) and *De Corpore* (1655). In *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660), More identified two kinds of atheism: Aristotelian and Epicurean.<sup>7</sup> He accuses radical Aristotelians of atheism because they argue that all miracles and apparitions are the effect of the stars or of the imagination. He singles out Pomponazzi, Cardano and Gaffarel, but he engages in particular again with Vanini.<sup>8</sup>

The second strand of atheism was Epicureanism, recently revived by Gassendi, and More accuses them of denying any incorporeal principle. Interestingly, More became suspicious also of the ‘new Principles of the *French Philosophy* misinterpreted and perverted’ (GMG vii). Although he was the first to defend and disseminate Descartes’ ideas in England, he came to fear the impious implications of a universal mechanism. Still later, his fear of Cartesianism

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argues that More’s philosophical system did not alter much after that. There were some significant changes, however, as Reid has shown recently (J. Reid, ‘The Evolution of Henry More’s Theory of Divine Absolute Space’, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 45:1 (2007), 79-102). Indeed, subtle modifications of his position and additional thoughts may be traced through the scholia to AA, IS and ET in the later editions of his *Opera*. More’s views on the imagination did not change radically, however, and to detail the subtle transitions would require another study.

<sup>5</sup> Gabbey, ‘Philosophica Cartesiana Triumphata’, 199.

<sup>6</sup> On atheism in the seventeenth century, see e.g. R. Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du xvii siècle* (Paris: Boivin, 1943). G. E. Aylmer, ‘Unbelief in seventeenth-century England’, in *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, edited by D. Pennington and K. Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 22-46. M. Hunter, ‘The Problem of Atheism in Early Modern England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, 35 (1985), 135-157. See R. Cudworth, *The true intellectual system of the universe* (London: Richard Royston, 1678) for a contemporary description of atheist currents.

<sup>7</sup> GMG 335. More sometimes conflated Aristotelianism and Epicureanism in his accusations of atheism. In GMG 335, Vanini is classified with the Aristotelians, in GMG 282 and EM 303 with the Epicureans. The relevant element here, however, is a theory of material vapours and effluvia (coming from the stars or from the human imagination) which was used for naturalising wonders and miracles. For background on this theory, see K. Vermeir, ‘The ‘Physical Prophet’ and the Powers of the Imagination. Part I. A case-study on prophecy, vapours and the imagination (1685-1710)’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 35C:4 (2004), 561-591.

<sup>8</sup> See GMG 282, 334-360, reprinted separately as a book, *Tetractys Anti-Astrologica* (London, 1681), and in EM 302-307.

would be confirmed by Dutch radical Cartesians, such as Lodewijk Meyer, Adriaan Koerbagh, Lambert van Velthuysen, and finally by Spinoza in the *Tractatus*. These evolutions prompted More to stage a challenge to Cartesianism in his *Enchiridion Metaphysicum* (1671).<sup>9</sup>

A second concern of More was the even more dangerous phenomenon of false religion, especially of those people who falsely think they are inspired.<sup>10</sup> Idolatry is particularly dangerous because it might deceive honest Christians and lull them into sectarian heterodoxies. Furthermore, the religious chaos and instability it created was easily transferred to the social and political realm, as was clear from the turbulent years of the Interregnum. Of course, his preoccupation with enthusiasm was also the result of his earlier controversy with Thomas Vaughan (1622-1660), in which he tried to distance himself from the latter's mystical philosophy. In the *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, More explicitly deals with a number of 'political enthusiasts', some of whom he had seen in person. He also criticised famous historical figures such as the false messiahs David George (Anabaptist and spiritualist David Joris, ca. 1501-1556) and H.N. (Hendrik Niclaes, 1502?-1580, founder of the Family of Love) and he wondered whether Mahomet was an enthusiast. In his reaction to sectarianism, More directed his attack particularly against the Quakers.<sup>11</sup>

In his *Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, published in 1660, More wrote that the recent Restoration allowed him to write more freely, and he discussed the same and other false prophets in considerable detail (GMG xv). He stated that he did not want to quibble with every sect, as long as they held to the fundamentals of Christianity. But he remained critical of the Quakers and accused in particular the Familists of apostasy from Christianity. There were also 'philosophical enthusiasts' who had a speculative complexion and believed that their fancies were inspired by God himself. Here, More singled out chymists and theosophists, and he wrote about their speculations: 'What can it be but the heaving of *Hypochondria* that lifts up the Mind to such high comparisons from a supposition so false and foolish?' (ET 30).

In the opening sentences of the 1655 edition of *An Antidote against Atheism*, as well as in the 1662 edition of *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, More makes clear that a strong imagination or fancy was the main cause of both atheism and enthusiasm: '*Atheism and Enthusiasm*, though

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<sup>9</sup> For the complex evolution of More's thought and attitude in relation to Descartes, see Gabbey, 'Philosophica Cartesiana Triumphata'.

<sup>10</sup> On enthusiasm, see especially M. Heyd, "*Be Sober and Reasonable*". *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). D. Fouke, *The Enthusiastical Concerns of Dr. Henry More. Religious Meaning and the Psychology of Delusion* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). J. Goldstein, 'Enthusiasm or Imagination? Eighteenth-Century Smear Words in Comparative National Context', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 60:1/2 (1998), 29-49. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 60:1/2 (1998), 7-28.

<sup>11</sup> On 'David', see ET 22, on Nicolas and David George, see ET16, ET23-27, on Mahomet ET15, on the Quakers ET 18.

they seem so extremely opposite to one another, yet in many things they do very nearly agree. For, to say nothing of their joynt conspiracy against the true knowledge of God and Religion, they are commonly entertain'd, though successively, in the same complexion. For that Temper that disposes a man to listen to the Magisterial Dictates of an over-bearing *Phansy*, more than to the calm and cautious insinuations of free *Reason*, is a subject that by turns does very easily lodge and give harbour to these mischievous Guests' (ET 1). In Paracelsus, Pomponazzi, and Vanini, atheism and enthusiasm were even present simultaneously (ET 33-35). For More, their fantastical theories of the imaginative power of the stars, or of the power of the imagination to create phantoms in the air, were enthusiastical in their extravagance and heterodoxy, but also harboured irreligion (AA 137-142; EM 302-307). He accused them of having an overheated imagination. According to More, both atheism and enthusiasm in general are the result of too strong an imagination, and he set out to provide an antidote to this disorder.

All this implies that there are (at least) two crucial theoretical problems at the basis of More's work.<sup>12</sup> One: If extraordinary phenomena, apparitions and experiments prove that spirits exist, what is the nature of 'spirit' or what is the relation between the material and the immaterial? Two: What is the role of the imagination, and how does it lie at the root of both atheism and enthusiasm? These two problems are closely connected since in classical psychological theories the imagination is the intermediary between the material and the immaterial. This indicates the centrality of the imagination in More's philosophical system.

In this paper, I will show that More developed an innovative view of the imagination, based on metaphysical principles as well as on physiological descriptions. In his work, classical medicine and Neo-Platonist humanist tradition converged and were integrated in a system together with new medical and natural-philosophical currents. This integration also posed certain difficulties, however, and created a tension at the core of his thought. More appealed to different theories of the imagination in order to solve problems that were central to his philosophy. This diversity posed problems of coherence, but it also indicates that a study of the imagination is crucial for understanding the scope of More's system, which tried to synthesise a variety of traditions. In the following section I will provide some background on the history of the imagination before returning to More.

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<sup>12</sup> Although I will primarily discuss More's work up till 1662, these concerns remain central to his thought. Further elaborations of his views can be found in later editions of AA, IS and ET in his *Opera*, as well as in EM.

## Spirits and imagination

Early modern theories of the imagination were based on a mixture of philosophical and medical traditions. In *De Anima*, Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC) had characterised the imagination as a cognitive faculty, a bridge between perception and understanding, which separates and combines sense impressions. Vortices in the blood or the *pneuma*, a vaporous substance, transported these impressions from the senses to the heart.<sup>13</sup> Instead of focussing on these anatomical operations, Aristotle set more store by the epistemic characteristics of the imagination. On the one hand, he held that the soul cannot think without images; the imagination was indispensable for thought. On the other hand, the imagination is a faculty that easily leads us into error, and in this way it posed a distinct epistemological challenge.

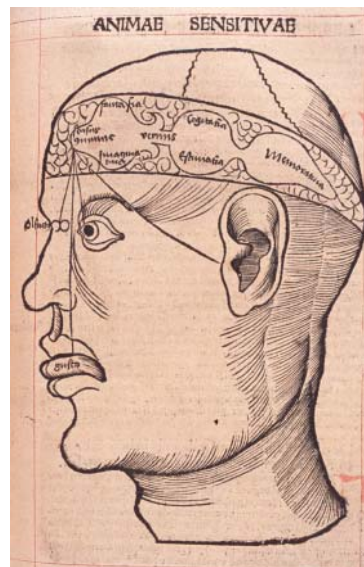


Fig.1: The basic scheme of the ventricles of the brain, locating different faculties of the soul, such as *sensus communis*, imagination, and memory, was elaborated in different ways but remained essentially constant for many centuries. In G. Reisch's compendium *Margarita Philosophica* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1503), sig. H1<sup>r</sup>, for instance, the imagination was classified as one of the internal senses and was located at the back of the first ventricle.

The physiology of imagination was developed by Galen (129-199), the court physician of the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius who laid the foundations of the medical system that would

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<sup>13</sup> Although the Stoics, the Sicilian medical school, and Aristotle had thought that the heart was the main seat of the spirits and the origin of sensation and intelligence, Plato and Galen located them in the brain. When hit on the head, as Galen noted, man may display a variety of sensory, locomotive, and intellectual disorders, which proved that the brain was responsible for these functions.



be dominant until the late seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup> Galen combined elements of Aristotelianism, Platonism, and particularly Stoicism when he identified the *pneuma* or animal spirit as the instrument of the soul. Galen inherited the spirit theory of the medical school of Alexandria, in which the vital spirit (*pneuma zoötikon*) is made from air and the vapours of the humours in the heart. Transported by the blood, the vital spirit passes through the ventricles and fine blood vessels of the brain where it is rarefied and combined with air to yield the animal spirit (*pneuma psychicon*) which consists of the most subtle matter (FIG 1). This animal spirit is then transported through the nerves to the senses and muscles, performing the functions of what we now call the ‘nervous system’. The essence of this scheme was unchallenged for centuries and still dominated medical and philosophical thought in the seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup>

A third important strand of thought is Neoplatonic philosophy. The most important exponent was Plotinus (205-270), who elaborated on Plato’s, Aristotle’s, and Galen’s psychology. For him, the imagination is the connection between the higher and the lower soul, but it should be brought under the control of reason in order to purify it from the errors and illusions arising from the material world. It was in particular the later Neo-Platonists such as Proclus, Iamblichus, and Synesius who developed Plotinus’ thought into a mystical philosophy in which the imagination played a central role. The imagination was akin to the astral body which enveloped the soul and constituted a connection to the divine. Visions, prophecy and dreams were the effects of God’s action on the human imagination.

In the Renaissance, the imagination became a theme in its own right with Gianfrancesco Pico, who wrote the first monograph on the subject. Pico’s sceptical attitude is evident in the central message of his book, which is that the imagination as a source of error. This idea was present in earlier work on the imagination, but with less emphasis. Pico explains, for instance, that the temperament of the body can distort the imagination and that demons can create false phantasms. The remedies for these errors are to be sought in bodily cures, with the help of a

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<sup>14</sup> On Galen, see R. Siegel, *Galen on Psychology, Psychopathology and the Function and Diseases of the Nervous System* (Basel: Karger, 1973). T. Tieleman, *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul*, *Philosophia Antiqua*, 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> For the history of psychology and the anatomy of the brain, see K. Park, *The Imagination in Renaissance Psychology* (MPhil. Dissertation, Univ. London, 1974). E. R. Harvey, *The Inwards Wits. Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1975). On the organic soul, see K. Park, ‘The Organic Soul’, in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. B. Schmitt, Q. Skinner, and E. Kessler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988b), 464-484. For more on *pneuma* and spirit, see G. Verbeke, *L’évolution de la doctrine du pneuma, du stoïcisme à Saint Augustin* (Louvain: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945). M. Putscher, *Pneuma, Spiritus, Geist. Vorstellungen vom Lebensantrieb in ihren geschichtlichen Wandlungen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974). D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (Ndeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1969). For an overview on the imagination, see M. W. Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1927). See also L. Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis. From Perception to Knowledge*, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History, 48 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), especially for the history of the intellective soul.

physician, but also in reason. Fear, pain, and pleasure only affect the imagination and can be dispelled by a Stoic application of reason. The best aid in controlling the imagination, however, is the intellect strengthened by prayer and by the light of faith.<sup>16</sup>

In the foregoing I have highlighted some essential tenets that were the foundation of later theories of imagination. In a modified form, Aristotelian, Galenist, and Neoplatonic views on imagination were still prevalent in Henry More's time and were important for his own thought. These theories indicate the confluence of medical, epistemic, moral, and religious concerns that were related to the imagination, a connection that is central in More's work as well. More also responded to a number of specific developments in his own time. Most importantly, he was inspired by the new philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650), who had argued for a strong dualism of body and soul.

Descartes' dualism was most pronounced in his cerebral physiology.<sup>17</sup> He developed a mechanical or hydrodynamic model of how the animal spirits are transported to the muscles by means of tubes, valves, and pumps, and how little threads, coming from the senses, open little tubes, so that as a result the freed animal spirits are projected onto the surface of a gland in the middle of the brain. Here, in this pineal gland, the *sensus communis* and the imagination are located. From there, the images can be transported to and retained in another part of the brain that constitutes memory. The figures that are formed on the surface of the pineal gland constitute ideas that are taken up by the rational soul, which transcends the material substrate of the brain. It is this pineal gland that forms the connection, in Cartesian anthropology, between human physiology - which includes the material processes of perception, imagination, and memory - and the immaterial soul (FIG 2).

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<sup>16</sup> See G. Pico della Mirandola, *On the Imagination*, trans. H. Kaplan (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971). On the context of the book, see K. Park, 'Pico De Imaginatione in der Geschichte der Philosophie', in G. Pico della Mirandola, *Über die Vorstellung*, edited by E. Keßler (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1986), 16-43.

<sup>17</sup> Notably in *L'Homme* written around 1632, first published in Latin translation in 1662. The French original was published later in 1664 (*Traité de l'Homme* in R. Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery, 12 vols (Paris: Cerf, 1897-1913), vol. 11).

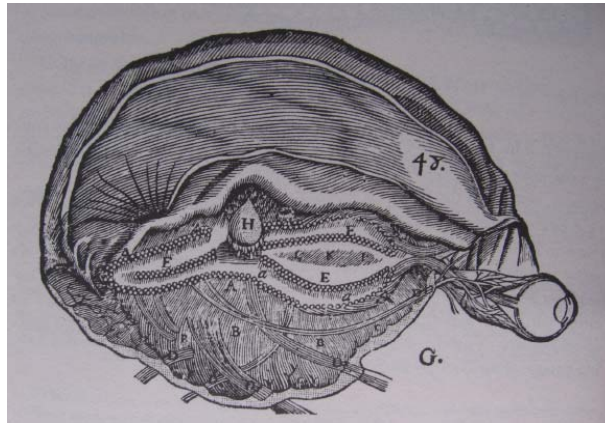


Fig. 2: Descartes' vision of the brain, with threads, tubes, and valves. In the middle is the pineal gland (H), the site of the *sensus communis* and the imagination and the connection with the rational soul. R. Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery, 12 vols (Paris: Cerf, 1897-1913), vol. 11, 170.

It is clear that there was a complex interaction between philosophy and medicine in the study of the imagination. Descartes too was inspired by the new anatomical research and he did his own dissections in order to discover the structure of the body, the senses, and the brain. Nevertheless, philosophers traditionally had different interests, oriented more towards epistemology as compared with the physicians' physiological or anatomical research. Avicenna already explicitly noted the difference between medical and philosophical theories of the imagination.<sup>18</sup> While the lower faculties of the soul could be identified with particular locations and physical structures in the brain, many philosophers stressed that this was impossible for the higher faculties. Reason worked by the universal notions of the mind and could not be reduced to physiology. Even if many savants were both philosopher and physician, both disciplines had different methods, styles of reasoning, and interests.

Many physicians acquired a reputation of materialism because of their focus on the material part of man. The vitalist Francis Glisson (1597-1677) admitted that man's immaterial soul fell outside the purview of his natural philosophy,<sup>19</sup> and contemporaries noted materialist tendencies in many of the most prominent physicians, such as William Harvey (1578-1657) and Thomas Willis (1621-1675). These often gave the impression that their physiological studies yielded all there was to say about the soul. The physician Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) recounts: 'I remember a doctor in physick, of Italy, who could not perfectly believe the immortality of the soul, because Galen seemed to make a doubt thereof.'<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of

<sup>18</sup> Harvey, *The Inwards Wits*, 23-24.

<sup>19</sup> J. Henry, 'Medicine and pneumatology: Henry More, Richard Baxter, and Francis Glisson's *Treatise on the Energetic Nature of Substance*', *Medical History*, 31 (1987), 15-40 (21).

<sup>20</sup> T. Browne, *Religio Medici* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1643), section 21.

his *Religio Medici* (1643), Browne nicely sums up the reputation of his colleagues and feels compelled to assert his own faith: ‘For my religion, though there be several circumstances that might persuade the world I have none at all,--as the general scandal of my profession,--the natural course of my studies,--the indifferency of my behaviour and discourse in matters of religion (neither violently defending one, nor with that common ardour and contention opposing another),-- yet, in despite hereof, I dare without usurpation assume the honourable style of a Christian.’<sup>21</sup>

In the seventeenth century, as I have already pointed out, the perceived danger of materialism and atheism increased notably. Inspired by new anatomical, physiological, and natural philosophical insights, philosophers such as Hobbes and Descartes gave a mechanical account of the human body. The body and the material parts of the soul, such as perception and imagination, seemed sufficient to explain the basic capacities of animals and humans. Cartesian dualism made it particularly easy for materialists to dispense with the immaterial part of the soul. In the course of the century their radical views would be developed into a materialism that alarmed Henry More and many of his contemporaries. Orthodox philosophers were concerned with the soul in its full complexity, taking into account philosophical tradition and Christian dogma, and rejected a reduction to the material.

In his own oeuvre, More took on the challenge of combining these contemporary strands of thought: he integrated a Cartesian-style dualism and a particular attention to the functioning of the body with Neoplatonic tradition and with Christian doctrine on the soul. In this way, he wanted to safeguard the immaterial from radical and materialist philosophers. In order to do this, he had to develop a new view on the imagination. I will show that the imagination and spirits, traditionally seen as intermediate substances, played a central but sometimes ambiguous role in his system.

As with the many viewpoints on the imagination, ‘spirit’ also carried a multiplicity of meanings. These ranged from the material ‘spirits’ in wine and other liquors, the physician’s vital and animal spirits, the apparitions of ghosts and spectres, the human soul, other spiritual beings such as demons and angels, the spirit of nature, the illusory ‘Spirit’ of enthusiasts, to the Holy Spirit and God. Henry More expresses this strikingly when he sums up his argument against materialists and atheists: ‘that which impresses *Spontaneous Motion* upon the *Body*, or more immediately upon the *Animal Spirits*, that which *imagines, remembers* and *reasons*, is an *Immaterial Substance distinct from the Body*, which uses the *Animal Spirits* and the *Brains* for instruments in such and such Operations.’ (AA 36) More here expresses his opposition to

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, section 1.

materialist physicians and philosophers who suggest that the theory of animal spirits is sufficient to explain the physiological and intellectual functions of man. He continues: ‘And thus we have found a *Spirit in the proper Notion and signification* that has apparently these Faculties in it, it can both understand, and move Corporeal Matter.’ (*loc.cit.*, my emphasis) According to More, to understand the parts of the soul, such as imagination, memory, and reason, one needs to posit an immaterial spirit that can guide the material spirits in their performance of different functions.

### **Separating body and soul**

In the early modern period it was widely accepted that the lower functions of the soul (perception, memory, and imagination) were material faculties constituted of animal spirits and located in different parts of the brain. Very controversial, however, was the suggestion that some parts of the brain were responsible for reasoning as well. Both mechanistic and vitalist explanations of intellectual processes were threatening for More. If complex mechanical organisation or sentient matter could explain all physiological and psychological processes, an immaterial soul could be dispensed with. For traditional Christian philosophers, the imagination mediates between the material body and the immaterial soul, sharing characteristics of both. But the imagination, as a material faculty, might come to usurp the functions of higher faculties, or alternatively, these higher faculties might be seen as material in the same way the imagination is. The result could be the denial of an immaterial soul, the materialist and atheist conclusion More tried to prevent.<sup>22</sup>

More tries to steer away from this line of reasoning by creating a sharp metaphysical distinction between matter and soul. He strongly opposed all contemporary suggestions of sentient or animated matter as well as ‘emergence’ theories based on biological organisation and complexity.<sup>23</sup> More developed an original metaphysics in which matter is purely passive, and immaterial spirit is the only active principle in the world. In the *Axioms* at the beginning of *The Immortality of the Soul*, body is defined as a divisible and impenetrable substance. Spirit or immaterial substance is defined as its opposite: indivisible and penetrable. (IS 19-21) Particularly striking is More’s statement that both substances are extended; they occupy a certain amount of space. More sometimes illustrates the properties of Spirit with a sphere of

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<sup>22</sup> For More’s reaction to Hobbes, Cartesians, and the Spinozists, see e.g. A. Jacob, *Henry More’s Refutation of Spinoza* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1991). Gabbey, ‘Philosophica Cartesiana Triumphata’.

<sup>23</sup> For More’s attack on the vitalist physician Glisson, see Henry, ‘Medicine and pneumatology’. For a discussion of Glisson, see G. Giglioli, *The Genesis of Francis Glisson’s Philosophy of Life* (PhD dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2002).

light. A sphere of light is extended and penetrable but one cannot cut a piece from it and separate it from the whole. Furthermore, a change in the centre of the orb, such as a change in colour or luminosity, will alter the whole sphere at once, which is a nice demonstration of the unity of Spirit. (AA 173)

Such a strong metaphysical dualism is the first step in safeguarding the independent existence of immaterial spirit. It nips in the bud the possibility of sentient matter as well as of a real mediating faculty between body and soul. Furthermore, More's stress on the passivity of matter is a response to the suggestion that physicians and radical philosophers might not need a soul to explain psychological functions; that the mechanical workings of body, imagination, and animal spirits are enough to explain perception, thought, and action. In contrast, as a Neo-Platonist, More accepts Plato's view that the brain, the corona, or the animal spirits serve only as *instruments* for an immaterial soul. He argues in detail that they cannot be identical with the common percipient or *sensus communis*. Without a soul, they cannot count as a sufficient principle of spontaneous motion. They are merely matter and cannot move by themselves.

In the preface to *The Immortality of the Soul*, More argues that Descartes should be taught in all universities. He has a specific reason for this: 'That the Students of Philosophy may be thoroughly exercised in the just extent of the *Mechanical powers of Matter*, how farre they will reach, *and where they fall short.*' (IS 13, my emphasis) In the body of the text, he challenges Descartes' and Regius' purely mechanical model of the body in order to show that it is necessary to introduce a spiritual principle. He elucidates the limits of the Cartesian model by explaining how the animal spirits flow through the nerves and move a muscle (FIG 3). In figure 3, K is a part of the body to be moved. B and C are muscles, and DE and FG the nerves that transport the animal spirits to the muscles. The valves in the nerves trap the spirits if necessary. If the pineal gland sends animal spirits to these muscles, and the valves keep them there, the muscles will swell, shorten, and move K upward.

More's point is the following: Imagine that we want to open someone's closed fist. We will have to apply much effort if this person opposes us. If he does not oppose us, however, it will be easy to open his hand. Mechanically, the two situations are identical; it is only an act of will – opposing or not - that makes the difference. For More, mechanics alone cannot explain the difference between the two situations and one has to introduce an immaterial principle to understand what is happening. More concludes, in contrast to Descartes, that 'it is the mere *Imperium* of our *Soul* that does *determine* the *Spirits* to this *Muscle* rather than the other, and holds them there in despite of external force. Frome whence it is manifest that brute beasts must have *Souls* also.' (IS 82)

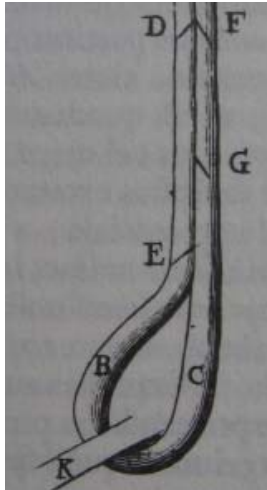


Fig 3: More's discussion of the mechanics of a muscle (IS 82). BC is the muscle, moving the body K upward, if so directed by the animal spirits in the nerves ED and FG.

More's description of the physiology of the brain is a combination of newer medical theories and of the older tradition of the ventricles of the brain. More reviews and rejects a number of suggestions that locate the seat of the soul in the heart, in Regius' 'small solid particle', in the membranes in the head, in the *Septum Lucidum*, in Descartes' pineal gland, or in a part of spinal marrow. According to More's own opinion: '*The chief seat of the Soul, where she perceives all Objects, where she imagines, reasons, and invents, and from whence she commands all the parts of the Body, is those purer Animal Spirits in the fourth Ventricle of the Brain.*' (IS 94) For More, the four ventricles do not correspond anymore with the different lower faculties of the soul. The brain rarefies the blood into the subtle animal spirits, and all 'intellectual' activities - perceiving, imagining, reasoning, inventing, and initiating voluntary motion - take place in one ventricle, where these spirits are the most subtle. Note that these animal spirits are not identified with the soul; they are only the chief seat, the main instrument.

The main difference from the medical view, however, is not so much an idiosyncratic physiology of the brain, but the insistence that the animal spirits or the brain alone cannot be responsible for functions such as perceiving or imagining, or moving the body:

I demand therefore, to what in the *Body* will you attribute *Spontaneous Motion*? I understand thereby, A power in our selves of moving or holding still most parts of our *Body*, as our hand, suppose, or little finger. If you will say that it is nothing but the *immiffion* of the *Spirits* into such and such *Muscles*, I would gladly know what does *immit* these *Spirits*, and *direct* them so curiously. Is it *themselves*, or the *Brain*, or that particular piece of the *Brain* they call the *Conarion* or *Pine-kernel*? Whatever it be, that which does thus *immit* them and *direct* them must have *Animadversion*, and the same that has *Animadversion* has *Memory* and also *Reason*. Now I would

know whether the *Spirits themselves* be capable of *Animadversion, Memory and Reason*; for it indeed seems altogether impossible. For these *Animal Spirits* are nothing else but matter very thin and liquid. (AA 33)

According to More, the soul itself is an extended substance, expanded over the whole body so that it can guide the animal spirits. It is the *soul* that does the perceiving, by moving and directing the subtle matter of the animal spirits. It is the *soul* that imagines, by playing with the forms impressed on the animal spirits in the fourth ventricle. The distinction between the lower and higher parts of the soul loses much of its significance for More, and he can treat imagining and reasoning on the same level, as in the citation on the chief seat of the Soul above (IS 94). At one point, More even writes that ‘*Reason* is so involved together with *Imagination*, that we need say nothing of it apart by itself’ (IS 106). For More, the crucial distinction is not between a lower material soul and a higher immaterial soul but rather between a material instrument and an immaterial soul which perceives, imagines, reasons, wills, and remembers: ‘That which *imagines, remembers and reasons*, is an *Immaterial Substance distinct from the Body*, which uses the *Animal Spirits* and the *Brains* for instruments in such and such Operations.’ (AA 36) In this way, More tries to keep the strict distinction between soul and body in place. The animal spirits and the brain are part of the complex but passive armamentarium that constitutes the body, which the soul uses in order to perform her functions.

This is an original view in the early modern debates on the imagination. It is very different from the traditional distinction between a material organic (vegetative and sensitive) soul and an immaterial intellective soul. It also stands in contrast to Cartesian dualism. In Descartes’ system, motion is a *modus* of matter and can be transferred to other matter in a collision. This made Descartes’ animal machine possible: the body and the lower faculties up to the imagination could function mechanically without the help of a soul. Humans had a rational soul that was joined to the body but had no material substrate. This Cartesian dualism was unacceptable for More. He argued that matter is absolutely passive. Any motion is the result of an act of an immaterial substance on matter (for movement in nature, this is the Spirit of Nature). In humans this means that not only reason, but also perception and imagination cannot be material and are acts of an immaterial soul. How exactly the soul can interact with matter, however, still remains mysterious. Of course, one can define the soul, as Plato did, as an incorporeal substance capable of moving the body. More accepts this definition, but he feels that this leaves the interaction unintelligible: ‘The great difficulty is to fancy how this *Spirit*, being so *Incorporeal*, can be able to move the *Matter*, though it be in it. For it seems so subtle, that it will pass through...’ (IS 32). More argues, however, that it is wrong to think of Spirit as a kind of matter so subtle that it passes through everything and does not get a grip on



it. Spirit is not like a collection of small particles that may be united with a grosser body by filling up small cavities, or fail to be united with it because these particles fail to stick as they pass through too wide a passage. More suggests, however, that spirit may ‘fill up’ a specific capacity of a body to receive spirit. Spirits ‘penetrate’ bodies, but they do not fill up small cavities and passages in order to do so.<sup>24</sup> More suggests, however, that spirit may ‘fill up’ a specific capacity of a body to receive spirit. (AA 153) Another response is that Spirit and matter might form a strong union; that Spirit does not automatically pass through matter, but is connected to it in some metaphysical way. If this is so, spirit-matter interaction would obtain an almost axiomatic and ‘evident’ status. The problem is that this union is very difficult to understand. More counters by arguing that we cannot even understand the union between the parts of matter. It is unclear to us, writes More, why in a solid body the upper part does not automatically slide over the lower part, especially if one pushes against it (FIG. 4). Why do the parts of a solid body stick together? The union of the parts of matter is at once evident and incomprehensible. The same holds for the union of body and spirit (IS 33; EM 324-5).

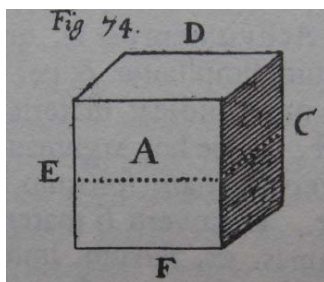


Fig. 4: More illustrates that we cannot really understand what keeps two parts of matter EDC and EFC together. It is even more difficult to comprehend the unity of body and spirit. (IS 33; EM 324-5)

In *The Immortality of the Soul*, More tries to elucidate this in another way. He notes that the unity of body and soul is not mechanical but vital. ‘Vital congruity’ is a property of both soul and matter that makes matter a congruous subject for the soul to reside in. Matter thus modified sends out ‘rays of subtle reek’ to allure the soul. More calls it a ‘*Magick-sphere* [...] that has this power of conjuring down Souls into *Earthly Bodies*’. Matter is brought in harmony with the ‘plastick’ part of the soul. Both are bound together in an ‘unresistible and unperceptible pleasure’ (IS 121). This is a new elucidation of the metaphysical connection described above, but this connection remains at once evident and unintelligible. More writes ‘that a firm union of *Spirit* and *Matter* is very possible, though we cannot conceive the manner

<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, More must have recourse to something material in order to make this ‘capacity’ or ‘receptivity’ of a body intelligible. He writes that spirit offers something ‘so near to a corporeal emanation [...] that it will so perfectly fill the receptivity of Matter in which it has penetrated, that it is very difficult or impossible for any other spirit to possess the same.’ (AA 153).

thereof' (IS 33). It is like a mathematical paradox: 'we must acknowledge there is some other Substance besides the *Matter* that acts in it and upon it, which is *Spiritual*, though we know not how *Motion* can be communicated to *Matter* from a *Spirit*.' (AA 135)

The physiological parts of More's work throw some light on how this interaction happens in practice. It is not a coincidence that the animal spirits located in the fourth ventricle of the brain, where they are the most subtle and vaporous, are identified as the seat of the soul. More accepts 'the general opinion of all philosophers' that the animal spirits, 'this *thin and Spirituous Matter* is the engine of the Soul in all her operations.' (IS 95) It is as if the soul *does* have difficulty acting easily on solid matter and is in need of an intermediary subtle, pure, and almost immaterial substance. Here More cannot cut himself loose from the medical and philosophical traditions that propose a gradual transition from the immaterial to the material. He wants to enlist the authority of medical theory about animal spirits and the brain in support of his Christian philosophy, but at the same time he is wary of the materialistic tendencies in medical psychology.

In a thought-provoking paper, John Henry goes so far as to suggest that More is a crypto-materialist. He concludes: 'More's vision of the afterlife turns out to be, effectively, as materialist and sensualist as Hobbes'.<sup>25</sup> I believe that Henry's claims are exaggerated. Henry argues that More is a crypto-materialist because his view that immaterial spirit is an extended substance and his conflation of immaterial spirit with the material spirits of medicine leads to a materialist conception of spirit. But I have shown that, in discussing the unity of matter and soul, More points out that the spirit should *not* be thought of as a subtle matter that fails to get a grip on the body. More never really conflates medical 'spirit' and immaterial 'spirit'. Rather than materialism, 'gradualism', the gradual transition from the immaterial to the material by means of ever more subtle matter, is a more serious problem for More. I do not think that More is a gradualist, but there are tensions between strict dualism and gradualism in his work. This is particularly clear if one compares his dualist metaphysical statements with his more gradualist physiological descriptions.<sup>26</sup>

The role of the imagination as a mediating faculty in the work of More is most clear in his description of how spirits, demons, and genii act on their aerial bodies. Indeed, according to

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<sup>25</sup> J. Henry, 'A Cambridge Platonist's Materialism: Henry More and the Concept of Soul', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 49 (1986), 172-195 (195). Henry's own position is somewhat ambiguous, stating at the beginning of the paper that it is foolish to see More as a philosophical materialist (174) and at the end pressing the affinities with the arch-materialist Hobbes (195). See also Fouke, *Enthusiastical Concerns*, 228-230 for a rebuttal of Henry.

<sup>26</sup> See n. 24 above, however, where I indicate that More sometimes slips into gradualism, even in his metaphysical analysis. How else are we to interpret something 'so near to a corporeal emanation' of spirit? Note also that gradualism might collapse into monism, dualism or pluralism dependent on how one interprets the intermediate stages..

More, all spirits have their proper bodies, and demons and genii have an envelope of very subtle matter: 'For their whole Vehicle is haply at least as thin and moveable as our Animal Spirits.' (IS 166) This kinship of the spirit's vehicle with man's animal spirits allows them to easily affect the imagination of man. By means of their vehicle, demons can create the wildest fantasies in the imagination of their victims. As we have seen, the ghost of the shoemaker of Breslau could terrify the sleeping with horrible dreams. The vehicle of aerial spirits is made of a kind of vaporous air, purer and finer than the rest, that they can condense in order to become visible<sup>27</sup>: 'But their Bodies being of *diaphanous Aire*, it is impossible for us to see them, unless they will give themselves the trouble of reducing them to a more *terrestrial consistency*, whereby they may reflect light.' (IS 161)

More laughs at the 'ordinary and idiotick misapprehension' that spirits are devoid of any substance as the shadows on the wall (IS 153). Spirits have no less body than we have; only their body is more 'spiritualised'. Our soul moves our fingers and mouth by directing our animal spirits, but the vehicle of the spirits' soul is actually nothing else but 'spirits' (IS 150). Their vehicle is akin to our animal spirits, and their soul can act upon it and shape it by their will and imagination, just as humans send out and direct their animal spirits to move their body: 'And verily, considering the great power acknowledged in *Imagination* by all Philosophers, nothing would seem more strange, then that these *Aiery* Spirits should not have this command over their own Vehicles, to transform them as they please.' (IS 168) In More's spirit theory, the soul can act via the imagination on a quasi-material substance (such as the animal spirits, or an aerial vehicle) by means of local motion. Despite More's assertions of a strong dualism between spirit and matter, a mediating faculty seems to be indispensable. It is the imagination, together with the animal spirits (in the nerves of man or in the aerial vehicles of spirits), which still seems to be the point of contact, the gradational transition between the material and immaterial, between body and soul.

By means of their imagination, genii and spirits can become visible and give the shape they want to their aerial vehicle, 'for these Aëreal Spirits appear variously clad, some like beautiful Virgins, others like valiant Warriours with their Helmets and Plumes, of feathers.' (IS 168) The Aerial Spirits usually take a human shape because this is the most natural for them. Only debased spirits appear more easily in animal shapes.<sup>28</sup> For spirits and the ghosts of deceased men, it would be most natural to appear in the shape of their former body, as can be seen in the story of the shoemaker of Breslau. If they condense their vehicle, it is sufficiently

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<sup>27</sup> More distinguishes different degrees of purification, degrees of aerial or ethereal envelopes, depending on the spiritual perfection and on the location in the cosmic hierarchy.

<sup>28</sup> On the shape of aerial vehicles, see IS 151, 153, 176-177.

dense to act on more solid matter -- as is clear from the punches and kicks the shoemaker delivered. These ghosts may also, by means of the strong power of their imagination, change their form so as to deceive others. This is evident from the ghost of the shoemaker's maid, who had transformed herself into likeness of a voracious chicken.

### **The body as instrument and the physiology of religion**

In the previous section I discussed the action of the spirit on the body. In the case of voluntary motion, it is clear that in Henry More's philosophical system the soul moves and directs the parts of the body by sending out the animal spirits. But even in the case of perception, the soul actively sends out and recollects the animal spirits, and reconfigures them in the imagination and in the other faculties of the soul. The proposition that matter is passive and only spirit can act, lies at the basis of More's system. It is from this basic thesis that More is able to argue that immaterial spirits must exist. Nevertheless, in a number of passages More seems to suggest that the body acts on and influences the imagination and immaterial spirit.

I have already indicated that, according to More, enthusiasm and atheism are in fact similar disorders caused by bodily complexion and temperament. I continue the passage cited above that atheism and enthusiasm are the result of an 'over-bearing *Phansy*':

For as *Dreams* are the *Fancies* of those that *sleep*, so *Fancies* are but the *Dreams* of men *awake*. And these *Fancies* by day, as those *Dreams* by night, will vary and change with the weather and present temper of the Body: So those that have only a fiery *Enthusiastick* acknowledgement of God; change of diet, feculent old age, or some present damps of *Melancholy*, will as consistently represent to their *Phansy* that there is no God, as ever it was represented that there is one. And then having lost the use of their more noble Faculties of *Reason* and *Understanding*, they must according to the course of Nature be as bold *Atheists* now, as they were before confident *Enthusiasts*. (ET 1)<sup>29</sup>

Religious convictions may depend on temperament, diet, and even the weather. These bodily impulses not only affect the imagination, they also hinder and corrupt reason and understanding. More writes that 'the Body doth engage the Mind in *Thoughts* or *Imaginations*' and that dreams and imaginations 'steal upon the Soul, or rise out of her without any consent of hers; as is most manifest in such as torment us.' (ET 3) The imagination is a faculty 'though it be in some sort in our power, as *Respiration* is, yet it will also work without our leave, as I have already demonstrated: and hence men become mad and fanaticall whether they will or

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<sup>29</sup> For melancholy, see, most recently, A. Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On dietetics and the life of the mind, also in connection with More, see S. Shapin, 'The Philosopher and the Chicken', in *Science Incarnate. Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge*, edited by C. Lawrence and S. Shapin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 21-50.

no.’ (ET 5) The soul is susceptible to bodily inclinations, transmitted through the imagination, which it cannot control.

Like an accomplished physician, More details a number of pernicious corporeal influences, such as specific tempers of the air, ‘suffumigations’, wine, diseases, imbalances in the bodily humours, melancholic dispositions, and malignant humours. All of these influences are vaporous and easily create fumes that can rise to the brain. Dietary regimes were a constant preoccupation at the time, and because of the influence of food on the life of the mind, intellectuals took particular care. More was proud of his own bodily complexion, which was particularly fit for abstract speculation and philosophising. Nevertheless, he knew that his body and animal spirits had to be refined and purified by means of a temperate lifestyle and strenuous diet -- otherwise, he might end up an enthusiast instead of a divine philosopher. More also gave dietary counsel to his friends, as is clear from his correspondence with Lady Anne Conway, who should take heed ‘to abstain from all gross food, which many times is the most savoury, but breeds melancholy blood.’<sup>30</sup>

Some complexions, external influences, or kinds of food particularly affect the mind. Melancholy and wine, for instance, act similarly because both are so spirituous. They easily rise to the head, and, because of their similarity with the animal spirits, they can directly affect the imagination. Melancholy and wine invigorate the imagination and are a direct source of enthusiasm. It should be no surprise, therefore, that More, at the end of his life, said there were only two things he repented. One was not living as a Fellow-Commoner in Cambridge; the other was that he had ‘drunk Wine’.<sup>31</sup> In a story that More also took from Martin Weinrich, he illustrated how some substances have the power to affect the imagination in a drastic way. A maid in Breslau drunk the blood of a cat as a cure for her epilepsy, but, as a result, she descended to the state of that animal, and assumed its habits, crying, jumping, and hunting mice like a cat (ET 6). More writes:

The *Spirit* then that wings the *Enthusiast* in such a wonderful manner, is nothing else but that *Flatulency* which is in the *Melancholy* complexion, and rises out of the *Hypochondriacal* humour upon some occasional heat, as *Winde* out of an *Æolipila* applied to the fire. Which fume mounting into the Head, being first actuated and spirited and somewhat refined by the warmth of the Heart, fills the mind with a variety of *Imaginations*, and so quickens and enlarges *Invention*, that it makes the *Enthusiast* to admiration *fluent* and *eloquent*, he being as it were drunk with new wine drawn

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<sup>30</sup> Henry More to Anne Conway, March 28 1653. A. Conway and H. More, *Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends, 1642-1684*, edited by M.H. Nicolson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1930), 75. For more on Conway and More, see S. Hutton, *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> R. Ward, *The Life of The Learned and Pious Dr. Henry More* (London: Joseph Downing, 1710), 230, cited in Shapin, ‘The Philosopher and the Chicken’, 39.

from that Cellar of his own that lies in the lowest region of his Body, though he be not aware of it, but takes it to be pure *Nectar*, and those waters of life that spring from above. (ET 11)

Enthusiasts mistake the effects of the bodily fumes, which affect their animal spirits and their imagination, for the action of the divine Spirit in their Soul.

It is striking that in these passages More treats the body as an agent that affects the mind by means of the imagination. Nevertheless, not all these passages necessarily contradict More's insistence that matter is passive and only the soul is active. More does not make this explicit at this point, but, if we see the body as the instrument of the soul, it is clear that a failing instrument will affect the proper functioning of the soul without any 'activity' on the part of the instrument. The first problem here, of course, is how decisive and wide-ranging the influence of the body is. If the fumes of the body are really capable of affecting reason, understanding, and the soul at its core, if it co-constitutes imaginations, thoughts, and reasoning, can we still make a clear-cut distinction between the workings of the soul and the bodily substrate? Can we then still deny the body any kind of activity or agency?

A second problem is that More's strategy comes close to a naturalisation of atheism and religious enthusiasm. Religious beliefs seem to be reduced to a question of temperament and bodily constitution. In so doing, More adopts the strategy of his opponents, the materialists and atheists who deny the existence of a spiritual world. Apparitions, spirits, and divine inspiration might all just be fancies of an overheated material imagination. The dangers of this strategy are evident, as the knife cuts both ways. If one can medicalize atheism and enthusiasm, can one not do the same for true Christianity? Of course, the point might be that true Christianity is different from enthusiasm because the former is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit while the latter is the result of a derangement of the animal spirits in the imagination. But the challenge here can easily be reversed. One is in need of additional criteria for differentiating true Christianity from its counterfeits.

On the one hand, a solution More seems to offer is, again, the strong separation of body and spirit. In several places he suggests that the soul is never really conquered by the fumes of the body and the ravings of the imagination. He writes: 'though these causes act necessarily upon the body, and the body necessarily upon the mind, yet they do not act irresistibly, unless a man has brought himself to such a weakness by his own fault; as he that by his intemperance has cast himself into a Fever, who then fatally becomes subject to the laws thereof' (ET 47).<sup>32</sup> More thus suggests a cure for enthusiasm: temperance, humility, and being reasonable. Following this advice or neglecting it is one's own responsibility. Here More suggests that the

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<sup>32</sup> Note his terminology of body 'acting' on mind, which contradicts his dualist metaphysics.

soul can wrench herself away from the delusions of an overheated imagination, and that she can counteract the pernicious effects of the body. In other passages, as I have already indicated, he is less clear on this point. There he writes that the soul cannot always control the imagination (ET 3, 5) and that reason and understanding can be overcome by the imagination and bodily influences (ET 1). Some kinds of madness can be cured, but maybe not all of them are susceptible to treatment. They are analogous to those kinds of fever one just catches by accident; not all of them seem to be the result of intemperance. Although More suggests at the end of the *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* that we are personally responsible for our physical and psychological disorders, his statements elsewhere do not seem to support this. The issue of responsibility was essential, however, for accusations and persecutions of enthusiasts and atheists.

The idea that the body and imagination should be kept in check by reason and intellect has a long tradition, as I have indicated in my discussion of the Neo-Platonists and Gianfrancesco Pico. As material entities, the spirits and imagination were susceptible to influences and corruptions from diet, temperament, diseases, or the weather. Reason and intellect were immaterial and transcended the bodily realm. But this traditional distinction does not tie in with More's metaphysics. According to More's dualism, perception, imagination, and reason are all on the same level, the level of immaterial spirit: '*Reason* is so involved together with *Imagination*, that we need say nothing of it apart by itself' (IS 106). Sometimes they cannot even be clearly distinguished from each other. This implies that it is much more difficult for More to prescribe rationality as a treatment against the follies of imagination. His view even suggests that both imagination and reason work by means of a bodily instrument, an instrument that can work properly but that can also be deranged.

On the other hand, More admits the importance of the physiological basis of religion, true Christianity included. In a number of crucial passages, he is prepared to go along with the naturalising tendencies of physicians, materialists, and atheists, and claims that true devotion and divine speculation is supported by a specific bodily complexion: 'even in them that are truly good and pious, it cannot be denied but that the fewell of them is usually naturall or contracted Melancholy.' (ET 46) More admits that a supernatural impulse, sensible to oneself, but inexplicable to others, is very well possible. More calls this kind of real inspiration '*Enthusiasm* in the *better* sense.' (ET 21) After dismissing enthusiasms as deranged imaginations due to melancholy and other corporeal causes, More returns at the end of the *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* to the divine form of enthusiasm: 'But there is also a peculiar advantage in *Melancholy* for *Divine Speculations*: And yet the Mysteries that result from

thence are no more to be suspected of proving mere Fancies, because they may occasionally spring from such a Constitution.’ More concludes: ‘*Melancholy* is the onely mother of *Religion*.’ (ET 46)

It is not altogether surprising, of course, that More accepts that divine contemplation is made possible by the right bodily temperament, and by a melancholic constitution in particular. This view was part of the Neoplatonic tradition and was perhaps most forcefully exposed by the Renaissance philosopher and physician Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). In his *De vita*, Ficino expounded various dietary, musical, and magical means to purify the body, the spirits, and the soul in order to be more susceptible to divine inspiration. The imagination becomes the central power in his spiritual magic; it is active, and dominates the body through the mediation of the spirits, which affect in their turn the passions and humours. This is in line with the great store Henry More sets by diet and purification in his own life. A purified body purifies the mind, and vice versa. Indeed, More not only counselled Anne Conway on her consumption of meat, wine, and beer, but also on her intellectual habits. He wrote her not to strain herself with too much thinking: ‘And for my own part I know it by experience, that intension of thoughts, and anxious consyderation of things, will extremely heat a mans spirits, and call them up into the head.’<sup>33</sup> These heated spirits will cause headaches in those who are sensitive.

The purification of soul and body also go hand in hand in More’s pneumatology. After death, the spirits of virtuous men will have a more subtle and purified aerial vehicle than the base spirits of vicious men. According to More, the air is the natural element of departed souls, but, depending on their level of purification reached during their life, these souls will naturally be conveyed to that part of the air most fitted to their nature. Sinners and especially suicides like the shoemaker of Breslau will be wrapped in a base and crude aerial vehicle. They might retain some attachment to their terrestrial body, or their aerial body might be so rude as to be visible and tangible. They will be fettered to this lower region of the air and be doomed to haunt their family and neighbours.

Again, there is a suggestion of gradualism, taken from medical and Neoplatonic theurgic traditions, which seems to conflict with More’s dualism. To reconcile these seemingly inconsistent positions we might suggest, simply, that More sees the body as the instrument of the soul. Such an interpretation preserves a strict dualism and explains how the body can affect the workings of spirit. But, in that case, enthusiasm and atheism cannot be dismissed as due to a ‘faulty’ instrument, since More admits that both enthusiasm and true religion essentially

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<sup>33</sup> Henry More to Anne Conway, April 4 1653. Conway and More, *Conway Letters*, 76.



share the same melancholic complexion. The external symptoms of both, such as inspiration, eloquence, and raptures, are also the same. So how are we to determine the difference between enthusiasm and true Christianity? More gives us further guidance on how to distinguish between pure inspired religion and the effects of mere bodily complexion. The difference is moral, theological, and rational rather than physiological. Inspiration comes from God if it effectuates itself in universal piety, goodness, and virtue, if the basic truths of the New Testament are recognised, and if one does not act or believe anything save that which is 'solidly rational at the bottome.' (ET 45) All this, of course, assumes that one's soul can take a certain distance from the maelstrom of its imagination, and is not submerged in it. But we have seen that More is ambiguous as to whether man's reason can keep his overheated fancy under control. Furthermore, in order to know what is 'rational at the bottome,' one's rationality should remain clear and unaffected. This is not guaranteed by More's metaphysics, however, which sets reason and imagination at the same level.

## Conclusion

In the works discussed, Henry More tried to synthesise Neoplatonic humanism and Christianity with medicine and the new philosophy. From a variety of sources, be it Plotinus' metaphysics or Pico's tract on witchcraft, Descartes' mechanical philosophy or Boyle's hydrostatic experiments, More garnered proofs that the spirit world existed. Some have expressed their surprise that More, whose main concern is immaterial spirit, devotes so much of his work to the discussion of bodily states and the physiology of spirits.<sup>34</sup> Despite their ontological difference, spirit and body are closely united in a vital congruity, and a thorough analysis of a medical anthropology and pneumatology is essential for his purposes. In these reflections, I have argued, the imagination plays a crucial role.

On the one hand, More's theory of the imagination is original and follows from his metaphysical dualism. He places both reason and imagination at the level of immaterial spirit and contrasts them with the material body, which serves as a passive instrument to the soul. His notion of spirit as an extended substance makes this plausible. Perceiving, imagining, and reasoning all happen in the fourth ventricle, the chief seat of the soul, where the animal spirits are the most subtle and numerous. But because the soul is extended over the whole body, she can guide and direct the animal spirits, the chief instrument of the soul, where they are needed.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. Henry, 'A Cambridge Platonist's Materialism' and D. P. Walker, 'Medical *Spirits* and God and the Soul' in *Spiritus*, edited by M. Fattori and M. Bianchi (Roma: Ateneo, 1984), 223-244.

Without an immaterial principle the body would be completely passive and would cease to function.

On the other hand, in his physiological descriptions or in his analyses of enthusiasm and atheism, More is much indebted to traditional ideas from diverse medical and philosophical schools. He retains the traditional idea of mediating substances, for instance, such as the imagination, animal spirits, and aerial or ethereal vehicles. These substances consist of a very subtle, almost spiritual matter, which traditionally served as a bridge between body and soul. In More's metaphysics, however, spirit does not need such mediating substances in order to act on matter. Spirit is directly united with matter by means of a vital congruity.

The imagination, seen as a mediating faculty, could bring the separation between body and soul into danger. Subtle material substances, such as the animal spirits, were for some physicians and philosophers 'spiritual' enough to explain psychological processes, such as perception and voluntary motion. Hobbes and some radical Cartesians developed this into a materialist programme, and this could lead to a denial of the immaterial soul and even of God. It was precisely for this reason that More posited a metaphysical rupture between passive matter and active spirit. The material part of man was just a passive instrument, and, as complex as it may be, an immaterial soul was needed to set it in action.

More still used traditional ideas of the imagination to discredit enthusiasts and atheists, however. Their visions and ideas were mere figments of the imagination, More argued, caused by a melancholy constitution. An imbalanced body could, via the connection of the imagination, lead to a deranged soul. But Neoplatonic tradition as well as contemporary physicians such as Robert Burton held that the same complexion could be responsible for genuine religious experiences. A traditional dualism between organic and intellective soul might escape the confusion between enthusiasm and true religion. In this case, reason and intellect were thought to be able to control the imagination. If the rational soul is never fully subject to the influences of her bodily disposition, it is possible to hold her responsible. More sometimes comes close to such a view: '*Melancholy usually disposes, and the Mind perfects the action through the power of the Spirit*' (ET 46). The bodily complexion is only a disposition; what matters is how the soul deals with it. Will she choose for a humble servitude to true Christianity, and take care to be moderate, virtuous, and reasonable; or will she let herself be led astray by the excesses of enthusiasm? I have argued, however, that More's own particular form of dualism makes it hard for him to make this case. He accepts the traditional idea that the bodily complexion affects the imagination. But for More, the imagination functions already at the level of immaterial spirit and is similar to reason. Therefore, More

remains ambiguous and cannot guarantee that reason will always be uncorrupted by bodily fumes or an overheated imagination.

I have argued that More uses the imagination to discuss two of his most pressing questions. More sometimes treats the imagination as the connection between the material and the immaterial, as can be seen in his discussion of pneumatology as well as in his analysis of atheism and enthusiasm. He turns the traditional theories of the imagination to his advantage. The imagination, a faculty of the soul that was used by his opponents Vanini and Pomponazzi to naturalise religion and to reduce the spiritual to the material, is now put at the service of Christian faith.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, there is a tension between different conceptualisations of imagination in More's writings, and his treatment of the imagination is a balancing act. In contrast to his gradualist descriptions, his metaphysical dualism gives the imagination a specific role, distinct from the body and on the side of reason and immaterial spirit. If we interpret the material body as an instrument of the immaterial soul, however, his gradualist descriptions do not have to contradict his dualism. In principle, it is not a problem to posit a gradual scale of material substances that are more and more subtle, as long as we do not imagine them to approach immaterial substance in this way. For More, even the most subtle substances remain passive and material, and will have to be set in motion by a true immaterial spirit.

In his life, More was also performing a balancing act. 'Thus far, Madam, I have presum'd to be a physician', he wrote to Anne Conway (1631-1679), changing hats from a medical to a philosophical and theological adviser. Within his religious practice, tensions and ambiguities were not far below the surface. Although he saw himself as one of the main opponents of enthusiasm, his contemporaries increasingly came to see him as an enthusiast himself. As Crocker and Fouke write, More's illuminism is in many ways similar to that of his enthusiast opponents.<sup>36</sup> At some point, More admitted that he had much of an enthusiast in his own nature, so much so that he thought he could be considered an expert on this topic: 'I must ingenuously confess that I have a natural touch of Enthusiasme in my Complexion, but such as, I thank God, was ever governable enough, and I have found at length perfectly subduable. In virtue of which victory I know better what is in Enthusiasts than they themselves.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For the naturalising power of specific theories of the imagination, see e.g. Vermeir, 'The 'Physical Prophet''.

<sup>36</sup> R. Crocker, 'Mysticism and Enthusiasm in Henry More', in *Henry More (1614-1687). Tercentenary Studies*, 137-155 (150) and Fouke, *Enthusiastical Concerns*, 124, 220.

<sup>37</sup> More, *Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, x.