



Faculty  
of Arts

# Pantheism and Panpsychism in the Renaissance and the Emergence of Secularism

*International Conference  
at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*

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**Corey Andrews**

(Ritman Research Institute of the Embassy of the Free Mind):

## **A Pre-Comenian History of Pansophia: Origins, Ideas, and Symbolism**

This paper concerns the pre-Comenian history of 'Pansophia'. The Czech philosopher, theologian, and 'teacher of nations' Jan Amos Komenský (1592-1670) is the person most commonly associated with the Pansophic tradition, but the intellectual current has an earlier developmental history which is this paper's focus. According to several historians of early modern intellectual history, Pansophia, or what has been termed the 'Pansophical tradition', originated in late medieval Spain with the '*ars combinatoria*' of the Catalan Christian mystic and polymath Ramon Lull (1232-1315/16), but experienced an intense rise in activity during the early modern period in central Europe. In my research master's thesis, I explored important early representatives of this Pansophic tradition in locales such as Medicean Florence, Rudolphine Prague, and Kassel Germany under the reign of Moritz of Hesse-Kassel. The research conducted for my thesis serves as the basis for this paper. Excluding scholarship into the pedagogically oriented Pansophic project of Komenský, there has been a void in treatment of the pansophical current leading up to him. Thus, this paper will investigate the Pre-Comenius origins of Pansophia, and the features and respective patterns of thought of some of its important early representatives.

**Elisabeth Blum**

(Palacký University Olomouc):

## **Renaissance Magic as a Step towards Secularism**

A magic worldview presupposes a basic life or sensitivity in all existing things. There is no inanimate matter, only the various degrees of life's manifestation. The assumption of such universal immanent principle, as vital spirits, or a world-soul, renders nature largely independent from the continuous impact of a transcendent divine creator.

Three outstanding Renaissance magicians were well aware of this naturalist or secularist tendency. They each reacted in their own way. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim added a kind of postscript to his *De occulta philosophia*, the diatribe *De vanitate omnium scientiarum*, in which he advocated an Erasmian brand of piety and skepticism as an antidote against scientific hubris. Giordano Bruno celebrated in *The Heroic Frenzies* the philosopher's inevitable farewell to all kinds of mysticism. Tommaso Campanella presents in *De sensu rerum* a world that functions autonomously due to a common intrinsic vital principle, the material spirit, but then introduces a second, immaterial human soul or mind, which has no other purpose or function than to (re-)connect this world with a transcendent, supernatural realm.

**Paul Richard Blum Loyola**

(University Maryland / Palacký University Olomouc):

## **Giovanni Pico's Warning against Pantheistic Implications in Ficino's Neoplatonism**

The famous controversy between Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is known to regard the proper use of Platonism in humanist and Christian context. With special attention to Pico's *Commentary on a Canzone*, the point of disagreement with Ficino, which is not

at all obvious, is examined through a close reading. The result is that Pico sees the temptation of a pantheistic and anthropocentric understanding of the relationship between the human realm and God. Whereas Ficino engaged in making pagan philosophy amenable to Christian theology, Pico was concerned with upholding the otherness of the divine. For the humanist agenda, Ficino made plausible that the human world is divinized, while Pico called for the ascent to God. In Pico's view the Neoplatonists secularized the divine as was evident in Ficino's philosophical theology.

**Gábor Boros**

(Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Hungary):

## **Dilthey's and Misch's "Nachverstehen" of the Neo-stoic "natural system of human sciences" in their unfinished projects concerning the secularisation of pantheism**

Famously, Dilthey praised the neo-stoic lines of thought as the natural system in several disciplines of „anthropology“, „human sciences“. „Natural“ meant for him basically being in accordance with nature. His former pupil Georg Misch collected and published those studies of his that intended to illuminate some aspects of this natural system preparing, at the same time, a book-length study on Spinoza. Yet, this Spinoza-project of Dilthey remained unfinished.

In my lecture I wish to show some possible links between Dilthey's understanding of psychology and theory of knowledge as foundational disciplines the task of which is to replace metaphysics, and Spinoza's deconstruction of transcendence-based metaphysics. I will argue that Spinoza can be "looked for" in the background of Dilthey's efforts to renew the philosophical bases of the human sciences similarly to his antagonist's – Husserl's – recurring to but not accepting the philosophy of Descartes. Both Dilthey and Husserl had a "secularised" Spinoza and Descartes in mind, i.e. systems without their foundational references to God.

Completing this line of thought, I will interpret Georg Misch' efforts to use the concept of *das Unergründliche* in the role of a foundational device as an attempt to provide the human sciences with a secularised-pantheistic foundation. This foundation could have played the role of a secularised metaphysics he missed in Dilthey in his faint critique on his *Doktorvater* one can find in the final part of his *Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie*. I will also maintain that the way Helmuth Plessner and Josef König understood Misch's concept of *das Unergründliche* underpin the proposed interpretation of it as a final stage of the secularisation of a pantheistic metaphysics

**Luka Boršić**

(Institut za filozofiju, Zagreb):

## **The soul as the ,true middle' in Frane Petriš/Patrizi**

Frane Petriš, after having distinguished between *anima*, which denotes human soul, and *animus*, which represents "the soul of the other things", he dedicates the rest of the "Pampsychia" section of his *Nova de universis philosophia* to "the soul of other things". In rare secondary literature that at least partially deals with the concept of the soul in Petriš, it has been already argued that Petriš's positioning the soul in the "real middle" continues the Neoplatonic tradition of the *copula mundi* as well as borrows something from the Stoic tradition (Leinkauf 2019). In my analysis I will be focused the understanding the "true middle"

(*vere medium*) and what it implies for the understanding of Petriš's animus. Based on some passages from the *Discussiones peripateticae* as well as the section "On air" from the "Pancosmia" section of the *Nova de universis philosophia*, I will try to argue for a possible physicalist interpretation of Petriš's animus.

**Dario Gurashi**

(Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa):

## **Ut parturiat deos: Agrippa on the boundless power of human soul**

Following Marsilio Ficino's neoplatonic cosmology, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) upheld that the whole universe was endowed with a soul. His idea of cosmic order envisaged a mutual connection of all beings through love and hate, sharing the power of the world soul (*anima mundi*). This universal harmony, as described in his *On Occult Philosophy* (1533), was based on the 'spirit' (*spiritus*), an ethereal corpuscle which connects body and soul. Its mirific subtlety allowed the influence of the superior beings to be transmitted to the inferior ones, as well as the spread of life over the whole body of universe. Furthermore, Agrippa believed both world and mankind to be God's own images, whose metaphysical bond was at the foundation of the magical virtues of human nature. Starting from his panpsychistic view, this paper aims to decode what Agrippa defined as the mystery of "spiritual regeneration". This enigmatic concept was borrowed from the *Corpus Hermeticum* and developed in his declamation *On Original Sin* (1518) under the influence of Ludovico Lazzarelli. It displayed the anthropological assumption of Agrippa's later occult treatise: the ability of the human being to "create gods", which properly meant to create souls after acquiring through language the boundless power of God.

**Hiro Hirai**

(Center for Science and Society, Columbia University):

## **Giordano Bruno, Living Atoms and Universal Animation**

One of the most striking features of Giordano Bruno's philosophy is the combination of atomism with panpsychism or universal animation. According to his Italian dialog, *Cause, Principle and Unity* (London, 1584), the whole universe is animated and governed by the World-Soul, or more precisely by the universal intellect, and results from the atoms, which are themselves animated and living thanks to their internal psychic or spiritual principle. In my paper I will explore one of the major sources for the construction of this striking aspect of Bruno's philosophy and explain how he used it and elaborated his own ideas and arguments upon it.

**Vojtěch Hladký**

(Department of Philosophy and History of Sciences, Charles University, Prague):

## **Patrizi, Panpsychism, and the Presocratics**

The main aim of our contribution is to show how panpsychism, that is, the idea the everything in the world is endowed with a soul, was varied even during the periods in the history of philosophy when it flourished. In the Renaissance, we concentrate on Francesco Patrizi: he coined the term, which originally meant that everything is ensouled. The article starts by

investigation of Patrizi's attempt to trace panpsychism back to the most ancient thinkers. His conclusions are in general in a good agreement with current scholarly assessment of early Greek philosophers whose views we attempt to reconstruct in a kind of survey. A closer comparison, however, shows significant differences between Patrizi's and today's account of the most ancient conception of panpsychism. While Patrizi uses the concept to state that the world as a whole is ensouled, early Greek philosophers understood it as meaning that each and every thing in the world possesses a particular soul. From a broader perspective, it is clear that the differences between Patrizi's reading of ancient Greek material and interpretation proposed by current Presocratic scholars are influenced by their different understanding of the development of European philosophy. Whereas Patrizi builds on the notion of all-embracing ancient philosophy which he tries to reconstruct in its fullness, modern scholarship assumes a more historical account of ancient thought characterised by a gradual progress from simple, more empirically based concepts to more complex and metaphysical ones.

**Emmett L. Holman**  
(George Mason University,  
Dept. of Philosophy):

## **Panpsychism and the Mind-Body Problem in Contemporary Analytic Philosophy**

Not so long ago, the idea that analytic philosophers would be taking panpsychism seriously would have been hard to believe. That is because in its early, logical positivist, stage the analytic movement earned the reputation of being militantly anti-metaphysical. And what could be more extravagantly metaphysical than the thesis that mind pervades all of nature? But analytic philosophy has come a long way since the heyday of logical positivism; and in fact the dialectic of recent debates on the mind-body problem among analytic philosophers has pushed many of them in the direction of panpsychism. In this presentation I want to explain how this has come about and take a look at some of the versions of panpsychism that have emerged. This will involve running thru a quick history of debates on the mind-body problem since about 1960, focusing on how panpsychism has been proposed as a promising, though not unproblematic, way of breaking an apparent impasse that has emerged between more standard physicalist and dualist theories of mind. Along the way I will also have occasion to comment on the prospects of panpsychism as a respectable scientific theory and how a number of scientists stand on this.

**Jacques Joseph**  
(Department for the Philosophy and History of Science,  
Charles University, Prague):

## **God, space and the Spirit of Nature: the inner structure of More's panentheism**

Henry More's arguments against Spinoza, Glisson and the kabbalists are clearly aimed against an immanentist, emanational cosmology. In opposition to a world pervaded by divine presence and in which all matter is conceived as the last emanation from the first source of life and as such, is endowed with some elementary life, More emphasizes the transcendence of God and a dualistic framework in which matter is the passive and inert counterpart of active spiritual substances. On the other hand, More famously argued for the divine character of physical space and posited the Spirit of Nature as a sort of „lower Soul of the world“ cau-

sing those phenomena in matter that cannot be explained by pure mechanical interactions. More thus seems caught trying to walk a difficult path rejecting one form of panpsychistic pantheism while at the same time defending a different form of the same. In my paper I propose to reconstruct the trajectory that led More into this situation and analyze the deeper metaphysical structure of his specific brand of panpsychism.

**Sergius Kodera**  
(Universität Wien):

## Translating Renaissance Neoplatonic Panpsychism into 17th Century Corpuscularism: The Case of Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-65)

Kenelm Digby's approach to the mind-body problem has been characterized as irenic: in his massive *Two treatises* (Paris 1644) Digby advocates a distinct corpuscular philosophy that he applies to physical bodies, whilst the intellectual capacities of human beings remain inexplicable by means of the powers of matter, thereby presupposing an immaterial, immortal soul (Blank 2007). This approach, highly regarded by Leibniz, seems to preclude any hylozoistic or panpsychistic conceptions of nature.

Yet, as my talk will show, Digby's ideas are modified in his later *Discours touchant la guérison des plaies par la poudre de sympathie* (Paris 1658). Here Digby advocates the efficacy of a certain kind of vitriol to cure wounds at a distance, that is, not by treating the affected parts of the patient's body, but rather the weapon that caused the lesion. Digby explains the efficacy of this hotly debated cure as the result of material *effluvia*, that is, in ostensibly chemical and corpuscular terms (Parigi 2009). Yet, as I will show, Digby rehearses virtually all the common tropes that had served Neoplatonic erudite magic since Ficino's *De vita libri tres* (1489) in their attempts to explain action at a distance by means of the workings of a world soul. This evidence will lead me to read Digby's approach to the mind-body problem as a concise attempt to *translate* – to re-fashion rather than *supersede* – the older panpsychistic conceptual framework into a language that is compatible with corpuscular theories that (with Descartes and Gassendi) had become one of the main intellectual agenda of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Balázs M. Mezei**  
(Corvinus University, Budapest):

## Anton Günther's Critique of Pantheism

The ingenious thought of Anton Günther (1783–1863) is rarely mentioned in the annals of nineteenth century philosophy. However, in the eyes of his contemporaries Günther belonged to the key thinkers of his age on par with Kant, Fichte, Hegel, or Schelling. These philosophers, as well as several others, were targets of Günther's merciless criticism in many of his flamboyant writings. His attacks aimed especially at what he termed the unavoidable "pantheism" of these thinkers, a pantheism Günther often identified as monism. Monism, semi-monism, pantheism and semi-pantheism are recurring charges of Günther against many influential thinkers including even Descartes, whose thought Günther considered otherwise epoch-making. Based on a reformed Cartesianism, Günther elaborated his antidote he termed dualism. Yet Güntherian dualism turns out to be a synthesis properly termed organicism. On such a basis Günther carried out a heroic attempt to transcend the horizon of traditional views and open the vista of a radically I-centered philosophy built on a universal notion of revela-

tion. By re-reading this Bohemia-born thinker one can have a better understanding of the scope and influence of what we term Austrian Philosophy.

**Tomáš Nejeschleba**

(Palacký University Olomouc):

## **What is Immanence in Renaissance Philosophy?**

Generally speaking, panpsychism is understood as the doctrine of the immanence of the soul in the world, while pantheism as the presence of the divine, as the immanence of God in the world. Both panpsychism and pantheism are considered doctrines that may have their origins in the Renaissance. The subject of this paper, however, is the analysis of the very notion of immanence: what does immanence mean in the Renaissance? It seems that immanence was primarily an epistemological category as a mental activity that remains within its own activity and has no effect in the external world. As a metaphysical category, associated with both panpsychism and pantheism, it appears only in Spinoza and then in German idealism.

**François Quiviger**

(The Warburg Institute, London):

## **Panpsychism represented: the animated world of Bernard Palissy (1510-1590)**

Multimedia artist, natural philosopher and religious dissident Bernard Palissy described nature in terms particularly evocative of panpsychism, discerning the activity of sensitive and rational faculties in the behaviour of minerals, plants and animals. Since Palissy's writings on nature are the foundation of his artistic practice this contribution examines his remaining works and installation projects in the context of his idiosyncratic philosophy of nature.

**Dale E. Snow**

(Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore):

## **Schelling, Bruno, and the Sacred Abyss**

Schelling's "Bruno" provides a provocative illustration of his conviction that early modern science has adopted a radically flawed and impoverished concept of matter, and therefore of nature. For Schelling, "Matter is the sacred abyss from which everything comes and to which everything returns." He employs Bruno's distinction between nature as it is and nature as it appears to plead the case for an organic pantheism. Only such a pantheism (which is also a panpsychism) can be a true philosophy of nature.

**Daniel Spiro**

(Washington Spinoza Society):

## **Spinoza, the God Intoxicated "Atheist"**

As a religious philosopher, Spinoza has been called many things – an atheist, a mystic, a God-intoxicated man, a pantheist, a panentheist, and "the most theistic, even most Christian." To some degree, he had only himself to blame for being so easily misunderstood and manipu-

lated. But it is never too late to set aside the chameleonlike nature of his teachings and seek his center of gravity as a religious thinker.

In my talk, I will present Spinoza's philosophy of God shorn of an agenda in order to reveal how it stacks up against conventional religious – or non-religious – labels. I hope to reveal the absurdity of the charge of atheism that he faced in his life, and for hundreds of years thereafter. I will explain the ways in which his teachings coincide with pantheism, as well as the sharp divergences between certain common pantheistic principles and Spinozism. And I will focus on why so many thinkers who, quite properly, are determined to take seriously his use of the word "Substance" rather than "Nature" in highlighting his concept of "God" are attracted to the label of panentheism in best capturing Spinoza's thought.

Finally, I will present Spinoza as a bridge builder between secularism and religion, one whose system would have lost a lot had he never used the term "God" and instead spoke simply of "Substance-and-Its-Modes." Yes, Spinoza famously slayed one religious anthropomorphism after another, but I will argue that this was intended to promote God's ultimacy, rather than merely to naturalize religion. In fact, I see Spinozism as being motivated largely by the goal of presenting a concept of God that is truly as great/grand as can be envisioned – one worthy of the term "absolutely infinite," rather than one created in the image of human beings – and it would only stand to reason that such a God would be supreme in relevance as well as power. In other words, I will explain how this God grounds Spinoza's approach to ethics every bit as much as his approach to metaphysics.

**Detlef Thiel:**

## **Cosmopsychology around 1900: Paul Scheerbart**

Philosophers have ignored him so far, except Walter Benjamin. Media theoreticians, historians of literature, art, and culture know at least about his *Glasarchitektur* (1914), a classic work of modern architectural theory. Author of about 30 books of 'phantasy' (*Lesabéndio*, *Astral Novelettes*, etc.), of 400 short stories and art criticism, of theatre plays, poems and drawings, Scheerbart, a decided skeptic, is a diagnostician of culture who presents his ideas in satirical and humoristic form.

The Egyptologist Jan Assmann calls "Cosmotheology" the last phase of the ancient polytheisms in late antiquity. The concept of a living cosmos, an organic continuum allowed for transparency and compatibility of different cultures. The introduction of the difference between true and false in religious matters ("Mosaic Distinction") established barriers between God and world (nature), God and humans, humans and animals, etc. – the *scala naturae* or "Great Chain of Being". Such barriers are confirmed by e.g. Nicholas of Cusa: There is no proportion between the infinite and the finite.

Kant was working on a similar problem: the relation of mechanism and teleology, of dead matter and organized beings. Hylozoism would be "the death of every natural philosophy". On the other hand, he admits that self-organization is an "impenetrable property" of nature. In a "risky adventure of reason" the late Kant touches on the idea that our "all-breeding Earth globe" is an organic body, though not a living one.

The theory of a cosmogonic whirl (Kant-Laplace), and the "degrading" of time and space to mere forms of intuition are in Scheerbart's eyes just blocking the way to Cosmopsychology: the cosmic bodies are living beings of a different order. His concept shows some affinities with Fechner's psychophysics, and with Lovelock's Gaia theory, as discussed by Bruno Latour and others. Scheerbart raises the basic question of every debate on Panpsychism: Is there a definite caesura between life and death?

**Jeffrey C. Witt**

(Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore):

## **An Introduction to Lombard's Distinction 37 and God's Omnipresence through the „Four Ways“ of Francis of Meyronnes O.F.M.**

In this talk I want to introduce the discussion of God's omnipresence in the Sentences Commentary tradition through the lens of one 14<sup>th</sup> commentator, Francis de Meyronnes (fl. 1320). The theological „locus classicus“ for the discussion of God's omnipresence is found in Peter Lombard's distinction 37, but any exhaustive historical overview of this distinction will be too long and complex to pursue here in any systematic fashion. Thankfully, however, Meyronnes' commentary reviews three historical positions on God's omnipresence before offering his own unique explanation of how and in what sense “God is everywhere”. Surveying these “four ways” will allow us to understand the variety of ways scholastic thinkers explained God's omnipresence and at the same to explore a new answer to this puzzle that has received little attention in the scholarly literature.

**Martin Žemla**

(Palacký University Olomouc):

## **A “Balsamic Mummy”: The Medical-Alchemical Panpsychism of Theophrastus Paracelsus**

In the popular imagination, Paracelsus is a great Renaissance panpsychist, whose whole world was a living entity inhabited by countless natural beings, like demons, angels, fairies, and gnomes. In my contribution, I will argue how Paracelsus' concept of the universal ensoulment of nature may relate to his understanding of the self-healing capacity of the body, as shown in his *Grosse Wundartzney* (1536). In various texts (e.g., *De vita longa* or the partly pseudonymous *De natura rerum*), he calls the innate power of the body a “balm”, a “mummy”, an “astral spirit” etc. It is here that his generally new approach to medicine starts, focusing not on retaining the balance of bodily humours but on strengthening the inner “essence” of life. This is possible by means of life-endowed essences of various other substances which can affect the body on the principle of inner sympathies. Here, a link is established to medical alchemy as a way to produce more subtle medicines, the “essences” of things. Of course, this is possible only in the framework of the natural magic concept with its fundamental micro- and macro-cosmos analogy. It is my aim to show not only the principles of Paracelsus' new medicine, alchemy, and his worldview, but also how his theories fit those of Marsilio Ficino -- one of the few authors praised by Paracelsus.