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## More, Henry

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(Article begins on next page)

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### **Title\***

More, Henry

### **Alternate names**

Morus, Henricus

### **Dates and places of birth and death\***

Born: 12 October 1614, Grantham, Lincolnshire.

Died: 1 September 1687, Cambridge.

### **Abstract\***

Henry More was an expounder of Cambridge Platonism, as he largely relied on a Platonic-inspired standpoint in pursuing his aims: the demonstration of the immortality of soul, the critique of atheism and religious enthusiasm. He maintains that soul emanates from God (being therefore not created and pre-existing body), and argues for the existence of a spirit of nature as means to explain natural phenomena, which cannot be accounted for only in mechanical terms. Moreover, he argues for the extended nature of God and spirits, as only in this way they can act on the world.

Accordingly, More rejects Descartes's theory of immaterial substance, but relies on his ontological argument provide a demonstration of the existence of God. His critique to enthusiasm (especially that one characterizing Neoplatonic mysticism) is medical, as he distinguishes between a rational, religious inspiration and a melancholic one.

### **Biography\***

Henry More was born in 1614 in Grantham from a Calvinist family. He attended the local grammar school, before studying at Eton (1628) and from 1631 at the Christ's College of Cambridge. He took his BA in 1636 and his MA in 1639, and became fellow of the College in the same year. He was acquainted with Platonism from 1635 by reading the *Theologia germanica* (Crocker 1997 and 2003, 4-5), and in 1642 he composed his *Psychodia Platonica*. As he became interested in natural philosophy he started to study Descartes's philosophy and, prompted by Samuel Hartlib, he entered in correspondence with the Frenchman (Descartes 1903, 235-647), while in 1650-1651 he quarrelled with Thomas Vaughan (who embraced Neoplatonism and mysticism), as More accused him of religious enthusiasm (Crocker 2003, 45-61). In 1650 More started a correspondence with the half-sister of his pupil John Finch, Anne (later Conway), which would last until 1677 (Nicolson 1992; Hutton 2004, 73-93). During the Interregnum (1653-1659) More published his main philosophical works: *An antidote against atheism* (1652, 1655), *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653), *Enthusiasmus triumphatus* (1656) and *Immortality of the soul* (1659). After the Interregnum he mainly published apologetic treatises, as the *Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660), since with the Declaration of Breda (1660) Charles II promised more religious toleration (Gabbey 1982, 222-230). In 1663 he entered into a quarrel with the theologians Joseph Beaumont and Samuel Parker, who accused him of being a latitudinarian for his anti-Calvinist positions, and received support by Lord

Conway (Anne's husband) (Crocker 2003, 69-110). From 1670 he was distanced by Lady Conway, as More rejected the mystical Kabbalah of Isaac Luria, to which Anne had been introduced by Francis van Helmont, and her Quakerism, which More considered as a form of enthusiasm (Crocker 2003, 183-198; Coudert 1992; Fouke 1997, 152-156). In 1681-1682 he entered into another theological quarrel, this time with Richard Baxter, who criticized his anti-voluntarism (Crocker 2003, 167-181). He died in 1687. (See also Crocker 1990a; Ward 2000; Henry 2012).

### **Innovative and original aspects**

The main objectives of More were theological, as he aimed to 1) demonstrate the immortality of the soul, 2) refute atheism, 3) explain and eradicate religious enthusiasm (More 1660, v-vi; More 1662, Preface, 6; Gabbey 1982, 222-226; Hutton 2015, 144). In pursuing these objectives he adopted Platonic-inspired arguments (being therefore a main expounder of the 'Cambridge Platonism') and confronted with the philosophy of René Descartes.

The first concern of More was with the notion of individual soul, which he characterizes as incorporeal and as pre-existing bodies. According to his Neoplatonic (i.e. Plotinian and Ficinian) and Origenian conception (Jacob 1985 and 1991), souls become individuated from a unique world soul (which is a hypostasis of God) and degrade from their original perfection as they are joined to three elements (ethereal, aerial and terrestrial): therefore, souls cannot have been created by God, as this would imply that He is responsible for their degradation. Consequently souls pre-exist bodies and, as they ultimately emanate from God, are immortal (More 1642; More 1998; More 1987; Jacob 1987, i-lxxxviii; Crocker 2001; Reid 2012, 349-381). More's main target in his account of soul is Hobbes's materialism, which he rejects since ratiocination, free will and apparitions (Coudert 1990) cannot be explained by matter and mechanism alone. Also, More opposes Calvinist voluntarism, as God is bounded by an absolute goodness (More 1668; Crocker 2001; Henry 2012). This position underlies his moral philosophy, in which he demonstrates that good and evil are absolute values, and pursued by a 'boniform faculty' which includes both reason and sensation (More 1667; Henry 2012; Hutton 2015, 13-14).

In his critique to atheism (which he relates to materialism and mechanism), More uses Descartes's ontological argument for the existence of God (More 1655; Gabbey 1982, 199-204), and adopts Descartes's vortex theory to defend Mosaic cosmogony, in accordance with the tradition of the Christian Kabbalah (More 1653a; Gabbey 1982, 204-205; Popkin 1990; Coudert 1992; Henry 2012). In dealing with the notion of soul, however, More comes to criticize Descartes's account of the motion of animals by matter alone (which is passive), and postulates that such motion is given by immaterial souls co-extended with matter. Even God, in order to act on the world, has to be extended. As extension can be immaterial and void, More argues for the existence of an absolute, infinite space (More 1668, dialogue 1; More 1671; Hall 1990b, 202-223; Henry 1986; Reid 2003, 2007, 2008 and 2012, 185-236; Agostini 2011). The idea of an extended immaterial substance is elaborated into that of 'spirit of nature' or 'hylarchic principle' which is the inferior part of the world soul and serves to account for material causality and for gravitation. This principle explains also the experiments with the air pump performed by Robert Boyle (More 1987, book 3, ch. 12; Hall 1990a, c; Gabbey 1982, 219-222; Gabbey 1990; Reid 2012, 279-348), who however rejected More's theological use of them (Boyle 2000; Henry 1990).

Thirdly, More assumed enthusiasm among his objectives, as he distanced himself from the Platonism of Vaughan, who turned to mysticism (Crocker 1990b; Fouke 1997, 50-95), and from Quakerism (centred on the notion of 'inner light'). More mainly focuses on the physiological causes of enthusiasm, as melancholy, to which he opposes an illumination identifiable by its sobriety, rationality and adherence to Scripture (More 1656; Burnham 1974; Heyd 1995, 92-108; Fouke 1997, 156-174).

**Cross-References (if there are any; please include a list of other entries in this encyclopedia that may be of further interest to your readers.)**

Cambridge Platonists  
Conway, Anne  
Descartes, René - Renaissance Philosophy  
Causality  
Elements, Natural  
Experiment  
Life  
Matter - Renaissance Philosophy  
Motion  
Natural History - Renaissance Philosophy  
Psychology - Renaissance Philosophy  
World Soul  
Ethics  
Hobbes, Thomas  
Will, Free  
Neoplatonism  
Animal  
God - Renaissance Philosophy  
Immanence - Renaissance Philosophy  
Immortality of the Soul  
Materialism - Renaissance Philosophy  
Metaphysics - Renaissance Philosophy  
Mysticism - Renaissance Philosophy  
Origenes (in the renaissance)  
Pampsychism  
Plato (in the Renaissance)  
Theology - Renaissance Philosophy  
Substance - Renaissance Philosophy  
Witchcraft - Renaissance Philosophy  
Spirit - Renaissance Philosophy  
Ficino, Marsilio  
Plotinus (in the renaissance)  
Hypostasis - Renaissance Philosophy  
Vacuum - Renaissance Philosophy  
Gravity  
Infinite

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