

12 Humanist Platonism in seventeenth-century Germany

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Historians have recently begun to recognize that the history of early modern Aristotelian thought is both more complicated and more interesting than was previously believed. Thanks to the groundbreaking work of Charles Lohr, Edward Cranz and especially Charles Schmitt, we have begun to distinguish between the various 'Aristotelianisms' of the seventeenth century.¹ It is now possible to reevaluate the use and abuse of Aristotle's philosophy in this period. The subtle but important manner in which even our philosophical heroes employed Aristotelian ideas has come to be documented.² We have begun to understand, for example, that progressive philosophers, such as Descartes, Galileo and Leibniz, criticized the scholastics, while at the same time making important use of Aristotelian ideas.³ In other words, we are slowly coming to terms with the complicated history of Aristotelianism in the seventeenth century and are beginning to evaluate properly its genuine contribution to many of the most forward-looking elements in early modern thought.⁴

The same is not true of seventeenth-century Platonism. While there is no question that 'a good deal has been written on Renaissance Platonism, its qualities and influences',⁵ seventeenth-century Platonism, especially on the Continent, has not been thoroughly explored. In the literature to date, only four areas are designated on the seventeenth-century philosophical map, and some of these are only vaguely drawn: there is the humanist Platonism that spilled over from the Renaissance; the tainted Platonism that rode into the period on the back of scholasticism; the pansophism of the Herborn encyclopedists; and, of course, the updated Platonism of the Cambridge group. That scholars perceive these to be the only options in the period is nicely documented by a puzzle that persists in Leibniz scholarship. Commentators have long noticed the Platonist elements in Leibniz's works.⁶ Some have speculated about their source. Each of the four options listed above has been identified by more

than one scholar as the source of Leibniz's Platonism. For those few historians who have noticed the Platonism in Leibniz's early works, the source had to be one widely available in Germany in the 1660s. Some have insisted that Leibniz drank from the Platonism that flowed north from sixteenth-century Italy;⁷ others have maintained that he imbibed his Platonism along with his scholasticism;⁸ and still others have pointed to the Herborn pansophists as the main source of his Platonist ideas.⁹ For those scholars who have *not* noticed the Platonism of Leibniz's early works, the assumption has been that he acquired his Platonist leanings from the Cambridge group. For such commentators, the only question has been *which* Cambridge Platonist? Almost every major figure has been proposed: Ralph Cudworth, Anne Conway, Francis Mercury van Helmont and so on.¹⁰ As I argue elsewhere in detail, however, the primary source for Leibniz's Platonism was neither the Renaissance Platonists, nor the tainted Platonism of the scholastics, nor the Herborn pansophists, nor any member of the Cambridge group, although Leibniz read and took seriously all of these sources. Rather, Leibniz's Platonic roots extend only as far as his own backyard.¹¹ Although standard intellectual histories of seventeenth-century Germany do not acknowledge their existence, there was a group of well-respected Protestant German Platonists who energetically lectured on Platonism and furiously published books in which it played a major role.¹² These philosophers constitute an unnoticed area of humanist Platonism. It is this group that I shall discuss briefly here.

But let me make one point clear: the philosophers who concern me were first and foremost conciliatory eclectics, who saw Platonism as just one component (although a major one) of their eclectic system. While they shared some of the fundamental assumptions of earlier humanists, they transformed those assumptions into a philosophy which differs importantly both from their Platonist contemporaries and from their humanist predecessors. In short, I believe that these German eclectics formed a fairly well-defined philosophical school. In an attempt to characterize this school, I have chosen to focus on Johann Adam Scherzer and Erhard Weigel, partly because they are so different from one another and partly because so little is known about them. Scherzer embraced elements of the Kabbalistic tradition and avoided any significant use of 'modern' ideas. Weigel was a committed Aristotelian, while proposing a wholly modern (i.e. mechanical) physics. Despite their genuine differences, Scherzer and Weigel shared a philosophical goal and a methodological strategy. As a pair they neatly represent both the fundamental features of the group in question and the full range of its philosophical options.

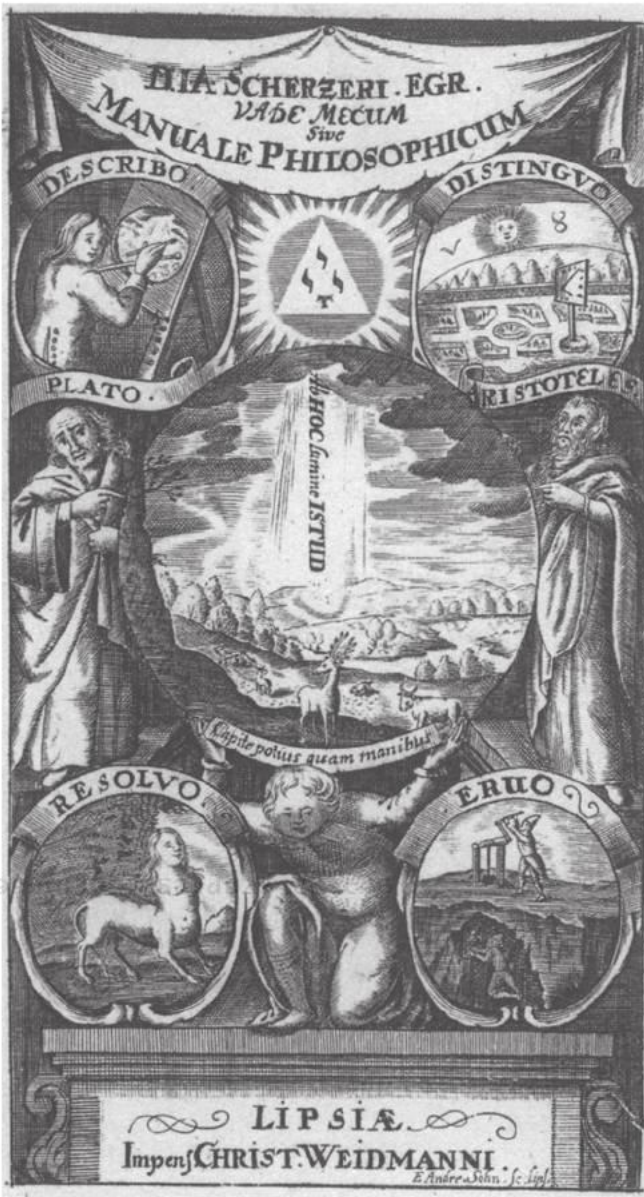


Figure 12.1 Title-page of A. Scherzer, *Vade mecum sive manuale philosophicum quadripartitum*, Leipzig, 1686. (Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.)

earlier humanist proponents, he appears to embrace their basic assumption that syncretism was the means to truth and harmony.

Nor does a quick survey of the *Vade mecum* disappoint. Scherzer insists at the outset that his definitions are consistent with the *expositio* of the Kabbalists;²⁴ and throughout the book he makes thorough use of the major texts and figures of *the prisca theologia*. We find references to ancient theologians such as Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus, whose *Pimander* is often cited, and to Renaissance students of the ancient wisdom, including Pico, Steuco and especially Marsilio Ficino, whose *Theologia Platonica* is an important source for Scherzer. Although these references are interspersed with citations of sundry scholastics, the conception of God and the relation between the divine and the created world are thoroughly Platonist. For example, Scherzer says that he is following Plato in the second book of the *Republic* when he states that God 'always remains most beautiful and simply the best that it is possible to be'.²⁵ He cites Ficino in describing God as 'the clearest truth, the most truthful clarity, or the perfection, the light which sees itself,...the source of light,...the reason of reasons, the source and maker of everything, the uniform and omniform form,...the unity in the multitude'.²⁶ The mind of God contains the Platonic Ideas or archetypes, and the created entities of the world are manifestations of these Ideas.²⁷ The former are perfect, the latter are imperfect; yet the perfection of God is evident in the composition and harmony of created things.²⁸ Embracing the doctrine of emanation, Scherzer describes God as the unchanging principle of all things and their constant source.²⁹ Thus, on the face of it, the *Vade mecum* looks very much like a syncretist text in the tradition of Renaissance thinkers like Pico and Steuco. The salient features of many of Scherzer's other publications seem to confirm this general impression: they contain references to the most important representatives of the ancient wisdom and are scattered with Hebrew quotations. Like Pico and Steuco, Scherzer includes Aristotelian philosophy within his eclectic net and is prepared to draw on Jewish sources as a means to Christian truth.

Scherzer's texts are, however, more complicated than they first appear. On more careful analysis, he is neither a syncretist nor a strict believer in the genealogy of the ancient wisdom. His true intellectual character is something both more difficult to discern and historically more interesting. Let us consider his writings in more detail. In the preface to the *Collegium Anti-Socinianum*, Scherzer explains that many false and misleading claims have been made about the most important matters. For example, there has been a long debate about the Trinity and how it is to be understood. In his view, the problem has

gone unsolved for a number of reasons: the scholastics used too many words imprecisely; philosophers have been too ignorant about important philological matters; and theologians have too often simply misread the Bible. Against this background, it is appropriate to ask how we can uncover 'the naked truth without disguise'.³⁰ Scherzer intends to solve the problem of the Trinity by means of a proper interpretation of the words of Scripture. In constructing this accurate understanding of the relevant biblical texts, he emphasizes the need for a correct use of reason; but he acknowledges that human reason must at times be aided by divine revelation. Scherzer warns readers of the *Collegium Anti-Socinianum* that, while it is necessary to be divinely enlightened in order to read Scriptures properly, we must not be seduced by the syncretists who open the door to heresy by shrouding the Bible in mystery. He rejects 'the most wicked syncretism',³¹ along with any other interpretative approach that denies the importance of reason and clarity. Instead, he recommends that we follow the example of Augustine, Ambrose and others who allow Scripture to speak for itself.³² Scherzer's strategy is to apply reason and careful argumentation to 'the words of Scripture'.³³ In the remaining 1,323 pages of very small print, he takes on a variety of theological topics: the Eucharist, Baptism, the Trinity, the tension between human freedom and divine foreknowledge, and so on. Although he makes fullest use of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and especially Augustine, he refers to a wide range of ancient, medieval, Renaissance and early modern thinkers. In his range of sources, Scherzer is very like Pico: he states that we must make good use of all the best thinkers, whether Jews or ancient wise men.³⁴ Scherzer, however, parts ways with Pico in his *relation* to these sources. Unlike the syncretists who, according to Scherzer, cast the ideas of their predecessors into mysterious shadows, he intends to place them under the intense light of philosophical scrutiny and Christian doctrine. While Scherzer is content to borrow from any intellectual tradition that will aid in his pursuit of the truth, he takes only what he considers to be clear and orthodox, happily discarding the rest. His *Trifolium orientate* is an enlightening example of the use he made of his sources. The book contains three commentaries: all on biblical texts; all originally written in Hebrew by Jewish scholars; and all translated into Latin.³⁵ Scherzer offers these commentaries on the Hebrew Bible in pursuit of a true and accurate understanding of the text. Such philosophical and philological commentaries were supposed to help the thoughtful Christian grasp the Christian truths. While he thinks that Jews, along with pagan philosophers, have much to offer, he

believes that one must discriminate carefully among their interpretations. It is in this sense that he is neither a syncretist nor a proponent of the ancient wisdom. Rather, he is a critical and discerning conciliatory eclectic, who hopes to reconcile the great systems of thought and religion, but not at the expense of the imprecision and forced compromises of his predecessors. Only by means of such discrimination could pernicious religious controversies be avoided and peace among the faithful be attained.

In the *Vade mecum*, Scherzer insists that his goal is intellectual peace and personal tranquillity; and he claims that clarity is the means to the goal. Once we take seriously his commitment to forging philosophical agreement by these means, we are able to see that text as a practical guide to achieving this goal. The *Vade mecum* is divided into five parts. Part I contains a long list of definitions in alphabetical order and Part II a list of philosophical distinctions; in the remaining three parts, Scherzer uses this material in an attempt to solve a number of philosophical and theological problems. For example, he insists that the difficult issue of how God can be regarded as the cause of sin will be resolved once the correct definitions and distinctions have been made.³⁶ The clarity which is supposed to bring about peace and tranquillity begins with careful definitions. In the 'Dedicatio', he writes: 'it seems to be necessary above all to maintain the received and common definitions of things, so that we may philosophize with one voice and one mind'.³⁷ After the definitions are clearly laid out, the appropriate distinctions must be made.³⁸ According to Scherzer, his definitions and distinctions are the basic tools with which to solve all philosophical problems.

Scherzer's conciliatory eclecticism is especially apparent in his definitions. He proudly proclaims that his proposals did not spring from him, already perfect and mature, like Athena from the head of Zeus.³⁹ His definitions and distinctions are instead borrowed from the best of his predecessors. Although he claims that his definitions are consistent with the teachings of the Kabbalists,⁴⁰ in fact, most are drawn directly from scholastic sources. He relies heavily on the work of certain celebrated schoolman, although he sometimes edits and supplements their definitions.⁴¹ There are two striking features of Part I of the *Vade mecum*. First, Scherzer cites an enormous range of sources, displaying an impressive erudition. From the Greek commentators on Aristotle (e.g. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius) to late scholastics (e.g. Pedro Fonseca, Francisco Suárez), from the late ancient Platonists (e.g. Plotinus, Proclus) to Hebrew and Protestant theologians (e.g. Maimonides, Luther). Second, there is a clear

division of labour between Aristotle and Plato. For his definitions of corporeal matters, Scherzer makes full use of the Aristotelian tradition, quoting most frequently from Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle himself. In his definition of prime matter, for example, he states that it 'lacks all forms';⁴² in his account of an accident, he draws on the notion of *quidditas*;⁴³ and in his discussions of form, he turns to the whole battery of Aristotelian-scholastic distinctions between complete and incomplete substance, between *per se* and *per accidens* being, and so on.⁴⁴ When it comes to incorporeal matters, however, both the definitions and sources are entirely Platonist.⁴⁵ As noted above, his account of God and the relation between the divine and the created world stands firmly in that tradition. These two features of Part I of the *Vade mecum* make it perfectly clear that Scherzer took his definitions from among the most important texts in the history of philosophy. He did not gloss over the differences between philosophical systems, but rather selected those elements from each which could be fit together into a coherent and precisely drawn plan.

Once the definitions have been carefully laid out and the distinctions properly made, Scherzer believes that the thoughtful student will be able to resolve disputes. For example, once we have a clearer understanding of the notions of *Deus* and *causa*, we can better decide whether the divine being can be the cause of itself.⁴⁶ Moreover, the very process of using these definitions and distinctions will elicit understanding. In Part I, he explains that the organization of a discipline derives from 'method', which he defines as a judgement of the mind, correctly and carefully ordering everything that pertains to the discipline.⁴⁷ In Part IV, Scherzer claims that, once everything has been clearly defined, properly distinguished and thoroughly ordered, the human intellect will be able to understand the essence of things.⁴⁸ Because God is 'the goodness itself of intelligible things',⁴⁹ one becomes good through the acquisition of knowledge. The basic assumption underlying the *Vade mecum* is that the truth will set its readers free of controversy and incline them towards peace. His contemporaries apparently agreed. According to one of his colleagues, Scherzer had offered the lost youth of his day a thread of Ariadne to guide them out of the labyrinth of philosophical and theological dispute. According to another, his work showed the path to a serene mind.⁵⁰

To summarize briefly, Scherzer sought wisdom and the peace that comes from its acquisition. The primary means to this goal was, in his view, to construct a true and precisely articulated philosophy composed of the best elements of the great philosophical systems. He wanted to

achieve concord, but not at the expense of imprecision and obscurity. For Scherzer, as for other members of the group, the Platonic tradition constituted a major *part* of the true philosophy.

Erhard Weigel (1625–1699)

Erhard Weigel, professor of mathematics and astronomy at the Lutheran university in Jena, was an important and controversial figure. Students from all over Germany came to study with him, including well-known philosophers such as Leibniz, Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Wolff. While his influence on the development of Leibniz's logic has been discussed,⁵¹ his attempt to combine the new mechanical physics with his own version of Aristotelian metaphysics has not received the attention it deserves.⁵²

In his most important work, *Analysis Aristotelica ex Euclide restituta* of 1658, Weigel proposes a new philosophy built with ancient tools on ancient foundations. In the 'Praefatio', he makes vivid use of architectural metaphors, arguing that he and his contemporaries must restore the edifice which, though well constructed by the ancients, has fallen into utter disrepair. According to Weigel, the ancient philosophers were able to build 'so great a monument in such a splendid and magnificent manner' on account of their 'tireless zeal and ingenuity'. Yet while the atrium and vestibule remained in good condition, the interior rooms were threatened with ruin because of the inadequate philosophical tools of the scholastics.⁵³ Assigning to himself the job of architectural surveyor, Weigel explains that once he became aware of 'the unfortunate ruin of this most valuable structure', he began to search for someone 'to fill the gaping cracks in the walls and to restore the original splendour of the building'. He then realized that the appropriate person to do this was none other than Aristotle, 'the most brilliant Philosopher', who had not only laid the foundations of the original building but had also devised the tools for its maintenance and repair.⁵⁴ In Weigel's opinion, he and his contemporaries were uniquely well situated to repair and restore the full magnificence of the ancient edifice because they had rediscovered those tools—that is, they had recognized the importance and power of mathematical demonstration. With such mathematical skills, the true sophistication of Aristotle's thought could now be recovered and the fundamental truths of the Aristotelian system brought to light.⁵⁵

For all his proclamations of the brilliance of Aristotle, Weigel denies that he is a sectarian philosopher. He insists that he follows the ancients generally in their search for clarity and truth.⁵⁶ He desires 'first and

foremost' to prove that valid, real and most accurate demonstrations are found and employed not only in mathematics but also in other branches of philosophy.⁵⁷ Like Scherzer, he seeks to combine a conciliatory eclecticism with a commitment to methodological precision. Rejecting the disputational style of the scholastics, Weigel says that he will use his non-sectarian, eclectic approach to ascend to the true philosophy; he will then apply the Euclidean method to all its parts so as to make them into a single coherent system.⁵⁸ Through the careful use of this Euclidean or mathematical method, philosophers will be able to resolve disagreements and decide between conflicting hypotheses.⁵⁹

Although Weigel's methodological programme is more thoroughly articulated than Scherzer's, the two philosophers are strikingly similar: both present careful definitions which have been borrowed from a variety of philosophical sources; both use these definitions in an attempt to solve key philosophical problems; both believe that their own proposals will diminish philosophical conflict and encourage intellectual peace. By such means, each hopes to lead wayward souls to the truth.

Nor does Weigel disagree with Scherzer about the division of labour between Plato and Aristotle. Weigel wholeheartedly accepts the account of science and demonstration proposed in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and intends to use it along with the Euclidean method as a cornerstone of his philosophy. Otherwise, he generally restricts his use of the Aristotelian philosophy to corporeal matters and turns for inspiration concerning the incorporeal realm to Plato and the Platonists. It is significant that Weigel, like Scherzer, distinguishes between what he refers to as the mysterious philosophy of the Platonists and the thought of Plato.⁶⁰ Although he was familiar with the key figures of the *prisca theologia*, he rejects that historiography and embraces the Platonist tradition as only one among many sources of the truth. He says at the outset of the *Analysis Aristotelica* that, following Plato, we must proceed by clear and accurate steps to the first causes and absolute truths, finally ascending to God, who is the 'purest source of Truths'.⁶¹ According to Weigel, although Plato's dialogues show this to be an arduous journey, the mathematical approach of Pythagoras and the Platonists will help us on our way.⁶² He insists that the first truths, on which all other truths are based, are ultimately the divine attributes which continually emanate from God to the created world.⁶³ These attributes are like Platonic Ideas,⁶⁴ which can be grasped by our intellect with the aid of the divine light.⁶⁵ For Weigel, 'the Axioms' of the true philosophy 'are strictly speaking nothing other

than *the first truths*,⁶⁶ and they derive from the divine attributes. As he explains:

Not only has our intellect, by the grace of the one Divine Power, always known, from within its own self, these [first] truths themselves in the most perfect manner, but it first of all understands [these] most directly as they are in themselves; and from there it begins, and ultimately ends, its entire learned discourse in them; and from these [first truths], it deduces by means of demonstration all real demonstrative Propositions, especially those which are eternal...⁶⁷

Like Scherzer, when Weigel turns his analysis from God, knowledge and truth to corporeal topics, he makes more thorough use of Aristotelian ideas. But it is enormously important that, unlike Scherzer, Weigel does not restrict the main ingredients of his eclectic mixture to ancient sources. A major part of his philosophical concoction comes from the new mechanical physics. In fact, he embraces the moderns and credits them with having put mathematics in its proper place. He explains that we owe ‘great thanks’ to our new philosophical leaders—such as Copernicus, Gassendi and Descartes—for helping us to see the important use to which mathematics can be put. In his view, although these new systems are merely extensions of older forms of knowledge, they are important for having revealed the correct way to complete ancient philosophy. By combining the old philosophy with the new and sorting out the true from the false, we shall be able to arrive at the true philosophy.⁶⁸

Weigel begins the chapter ‘De philosophia naturali’, by explaining that natural entities are constituted of matter and form.⁶⁹ He goes on to offer what on the surface looks like an Aristotelian account of the principles of nature. This part of Weigel’s book nicely exemplifies his conciliatory approach. He turns the Aristotelian notion of prime matter into *res extensa*, so that all corporeal properties are reducible to the arrangement of matter. According to Weigel, matter, which is ‘pure potentiality’, is indeterminate, while form ‘consists in the substantial determination’ of this matter. Each determination of matter is a kind of natural body. Furthermore, once *res extensa* or matter is made determinate, the affections of the body ‘flow’ from it.⁷⁰ Elsewhere in the book, Weigel explains that there are two kinds of being (*Ens*): substance and mode, with the latter existing in the former;⁷¹ moreover, he claims that all the modes of corporeal substances can be reduced to quantity.⁷² Natural philosophy thus consists in the study of the various

determinations of *res extensa*. By demoting the Cartesian notion of *res extensa* to the passive principle in a 'natural body' and by turning the Aristotelian notion of form into the organization or determination of that principle, Weigel has developed an account of body that is a neat melding of Peripatetic and Cartesian physics. The terminology remains recognizably Aristotelian, while the explanatory model is wholly mechanical: the nature of a body, which is constituted of matter and form, can serve as the cause and explanation of all its corporeal properties.⁷³ With impressive subtlety, Weigel has constructed a philosophy from *parts* of the Aristotelian, Platonic and mechanical traditions.

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General remarks

A summing up is in order. For Scherzer, Weigel and the other German eclectics who interest me—Johann Christoph Sturm,⁷⁴ Jakob Thomasius⁷⁵ and Leibniz himself⁷⁶—philosophy must be commandeered from the hands of the (mostly) incompetent scholastics and set on the correct, non-sectarian and conciliatory course. There is a truth whose foundations are discoverable with divine help, whose basic elements are grasped with the aid of the great philosophical systems of the past and whose individual parts will create a coherent, persuasive and peace-inducing whole. These philosophers use elements of Platonism and sometimes of Kabbalism; but they adhere strictly to neither tradition. They reject the esoteric and historiographical core of the ancient theology, while nevertheless making frequent use of the thought of Ficino and other major proponents of that tradition. They reject the pansophism (and the millenarianism that often motivated it) of their earlier German colleagues in Herborn. They reject the methodology of the scholastics, although they borrow heavily from scholastic sources. They emphasize the need for clarity and precision, especially when it comes to the definitions of philosophical and theological terms, but they claim that reason by itself is insufficient to attain genuine knowledge. With regard to their philosophical method, they are very similar to Renaissance eclectics such as Pico in their general assumptions. In his 'Oration on the Dignity of Mankind', Pico declares: 'I have resolved not to accept anyone's words, but to roam through all the masters of philosophy, to investigate every opinion and to know all the schools.' He insists that we should not devote ourselves to any one particular philosophical sect, noting that 'it was a practice of the ancients to study every school of writers, and if possible, not to pass over any treatise'.⁷⁷

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together: God made rational beings and the world in such a way that, through the contemplation of the products of divinity and the divinely arranged harmony among them, humans could ascend to the truth and thereby acquire wisdom, virtue and peace. While these German philosophers accept many of the same Platonist assumptions of earlier thinkers, they situate these assumptions in a philosophy that differs in important respects both from their Platonist contemporaries and from their humanist predecessors. It is this approach to Platonism that has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

Notes

- 1 See especially C.B.Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983. For the most important works of Lohr, Cranz and Schmitt see the bibliography in B.P.Copenhaver and C. B.Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992; and in C.B.Schmitt *et al.* (eds), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- 2 In my 'The vitality and importance of early modern Aristotelianism', in Tom Sorell (ed.), *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tensions between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 33–67, especially sections I and II, I argue that for too long we have assumed that the criticisms which most early modern philosophers level against scholasticism indicate that they were wholly anti-Aristotelian. In fact, seventeenth-century philosophers were happy to criticize some scholastics severely and to borrow heavily from others.
- 3 Historians of philosophy are slowly beginning to document the subtle ways in which the moderns use the traditional Aristotelian philosophy. For a recent excellent example of the scholarly excavation of the traditional sources for early modern ideas, see D.Des Chene, *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1996. For essays on the use of traditional philosophical ideas by other apparently 'modern' thinkers see Sorell, *Rise of Modern Philosophy*.
- 4 In 'Vitality and importance', in Sorell, *Rise of Modern Philosophy*, I present some Aristotelian philosophers who contributed to the progressive movements in early modern thought and cite other literature on the topic; see especially sections III and IV.
- 5 Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, p. 8.
- 6 I use the term Platonist, instead of Neoplatonist, advisedly. As R.T.Wallis explains in his *Neoplatonism*, London, Duckworth, 1972, p. 1: "'Neoplatonism" is a term coined in modern times to distinguish the form of the tradition inaugurated by Plotinus (204–70) and lasting in its pagan form down to the sixth century A.D. from the teaching of Plato's immediate disciplines (the "Old Academy") and from Platonism of the earlier Roman Empire ("Middle Platonism").' I agree both with P.Merlan, in his 'Greek philosophy from Plato to Plotinus', in A.H.Armstrong, (ed.), *The Cambridge*

History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967, pp. 10–38, at 14, who claims that Neoplatonism as a term is ‘misleading, in that to some it may suggest a more radical difference between the philosophies of Plato and Plotinus than is warranted’, and with P.O.Kristeller, who in discussion has encouraged me to refrain from using the term. There seems no more reason to refer to Plotinus, Proclus, Ficino and others as Neoplatonists than to refer to scholastics like Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham and others as Neoaristotelians. The latter bear the same relation to Aristotle’s thought and writings as the former do to Plato’s: both groups see the ancient author as a source of profound philosophical truth which they intend to interpret and use. Stephen Menn, in his *Descartes and Augustine*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. xii–xiii, distinguishes between a Platonic doctrine, which is one found in Plato’s dialogues, and a Platonist doctrine, which is one extracted from the texts of the Platonists. This distinction seems exactly right, and I follow it here.

- 7 Some studies have taken seriously the relation between Leibniz and ancient Platonists like Plotinus, but they have focused on Leibniz’s later thought and have not acknowledged the role Platonism played in his philosophical development. The best of these are still: J.Politella, ‘Platonism, Aristotelianism, and cabalism in the philosophy of Leibniz’, unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1938; and R.Meyer, ‘Leibniz and Plotin’, *Studia Leibnitiana. Supplementa*, 1971, vol. 5, pp. 31–54.
- 8 For example, Daniel Fouke proposes that Leibniz acquired his Platonic tendencies from the Platonism inherent in scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas; see his ‘Emanation and the perfections of being: Divine causation and the autonomy of nature in Leibniz’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1994, vol. 76, pp. 168–71.
- 9 For the influence of the Herborn school see L.Loemker, ‘Leibniz and the Herborn encyclopedists’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1961, vol. 22, pp. 323–38; and D.Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 36–44. Loemker argues that the Herborn philosophers as a group were a major source of Leibniz’s Platonism, while Rutherford maintains that the Herborn pansophist Johann Bisterfeld may have been a source for Leibniz’s early conception of harmony.
- 10 Among those scholars who have noticed Leibniz’s Platonism, most have thought that it derived from one or another of the so-called Cambridge Platonists, but they have disagreed as to which member of the group most influenced Leibniz and when this influence occurred. To cite three examples: A.Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1995, maintains that the relationship between van Helmont and Leibniz became important in the late 1680s and that the former was the major source of Leibniz’s Platonism; C.Merchant, ‘The vitalism of Anne Conway: Its impact on Leibniz’s concept of the monad’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 1979, vol. 17, pp. 255–69, thinks that Anne Conway had the most significant impact and that it took place in the 1690s; while C.Wilson, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study*, Manchester, Manchester University Press,

1989, pp. 160–2, claims that Ralph Cudworth began to have a strong influence on Leibniz in 1689.

- 11 None of the standard accounts of Leibniz's early thought recognize the Platonism of his intellectual culture. See, e.g., G.E.Guhrauer, *Gottfried Wilhelm, Freiherr von Leibniz: Eine Biographie*, Breslau, 1846; W.Kabitz, *Die Philosophie des jungen Leibniz*, Heidelberg, 1909; K.Moll, *Der junge Leibniz*, Stuttgart, Frommann-Holzboog, 1978, vol. I; E.Aiton, *Leibniz*, Bristol, Adam Hilger, 1985; and Y.Belaval, *Leibniz: Initiation à sa Philosophie*, Paris, Vrin, 1962. Although Belaval is aware of Leibniz's early Platonist leanings, he identifies neither its source nor its important role in his early thought. In my forthcoming book, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development*, New York, Cambridge University Press, especially chaps 5 and 6, I argue that the Platonism which he learned as a young man strongly influenced the development of his philosophy.
- 12 The standard histories include: M.Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen, J.C.B.Mohr, 1939; J.Bohatec, *Die cartesianische Scholastik in der Philosophie und reformierten Dogmatik des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1912; S.Wollgast, *Philosophie in Deutschland zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung, 1550–1650*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1988; U.G.Leinsle, *Reformversuche protestantischer Metaphysik im Zeitalter des Rationalismus*, Augsburg, Maro, 1988.
- 13 I have not been able to find any accurate account of Scherzer and his work in the secondary literature. Wundt offers a brief account, but like Fischer incorrectly places him squarely among the Protestant Aristotelians. See M. Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik*, pp. 141–2; and K.Fischer, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Leben, Werke, und Lehre*, Heidelberg, 1920, pp. 38–9. Leinsle, *Reformversuche*, pp. 20–6, notes that Scherzer borrows ideas from Plato and Aristotle but does not explore this conciliatory aspect of his thought. In fact, Scherzer was more interested in Kabbalistic and Platonic doctrines than those of Aristotle.
- 14 In the introduction to the fourth edition of A.Scherzer, *Vade mecum sive manuale philosophicum quadripartitum*, Leipzig, 1686 (which is the edition cited here), there appear a number of reviews which proclaim the book's importance. One of these is by Jakob Thomasius, the mentor of Leibniz and father of Christian Thomasius. The elder Thomasius was himself a member of the German conciliatory school to which I call attention here. For more on the conciliatory eclecticism of Jakob Thomasius see below, esp. n. 75. For Leibniz's positive comments see G.W.Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Berlin, Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1966, Series VI, Vol. II, pp. 15, 310.
- 15 Scherzer, *Vade mecum*, 'Dedicatio', [p. iii]: 'tot habemus definitiones, quot definitores, tot capita et sensus, quot cudones, tot Philosophias, quot Philosophos'.
- 16 Apart from the 'Dedicatio' of the *Vade mecum*, [p. vi], see also A.Scherzer, *Collegium Anti-Socinianum*, 3rd ed., Leipzig, 1702, 'Praefatio', especially sigs. c4^r–d2^v.
- 17 Scherzer, *Vade mecum*, 'Dedicatio', [pp. vi–viii].
- 18 *Ibid.*, [p. iii].
- 19 See D.P.Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from*

- 26 Ibid., Part I, p. 52: '*Deus* est perspicacissima veritas, et verissima perspicacia, sive perfectio, lux seipsa videns,...luminisque fons... *Ficinus Platon. Theol lib. 1, cap. 6. Deus* est ratio rationum, fons rerumque artificum omnium, forma uniformis, et omniformis,...in multitudine unitas ...*Ficinus. Epist. lib. 2.*'
- 27 Ibid., pp. 110, 137.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 29, 52, 100.
- 29 Ibid., p. 52.
- 30 Scherzer, *Collegium*, 'Praefatio', sig. d2': 'nudam sine fucio veritatem'.
- 31 Ibid., sig. d2': 'Et hoc est grande *Mysterium illud nefandissimi Syncretismi*'.
- 32 Ibid., sig. d2': 'Hinc porro fulget, SCRIPTURAE luce nitente, Unica *Christicolis gloria, vita, salus.*'
- 33 E.g., *ibid.*: '[verba Scripturae] non nisi ex iudicio per limitationem ac determinationem Rationis humanae sint intelligenda...'
- 34 At *Collegium*, 'Praefatio', sig. c4r he expresses his dismay that, in the name of orthodoxy, some of his contemporaries wanted to silence 'Judeos, ...Philosophos,...et Doctos
- 35 A.Scherzer, *Trifolium orientate, continens commentarios R.Abarbenelis... R.Sal.Jarchi...et R.Mos.Maimonidae...cum versione, notis philologico-philosophicis et appendice speciminis theologiae mysticae Ebraeorum, junctis Autoritatum SS Scripturae*, Leipzig, 1663.
- 36 Scherzer, *Vade mecum*, Part II, p. 25
- 37 Ibid., 'Dedicatio', [p. iv]: 'maxime necessarium esse videtur, receptas et communes Rerum Definitiones retinere, ut uno ore et una philosophemur mente.'
- 38 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 'Dedicatio', [p. vi]: 'Desideravi enim adhuc viam aliquam de vero Distinctionum usu, nondum, quod sciam, expositam.'
- 39 Ibid., 'Dedicatio', [p. vii].
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., Part I, p. 29.
- 42 Ibid., Part I, p. 126: '*Materia prima* est primum subjectum, ex quo aliquid sit, in quod insit, et si quid corrumpitur, ultimo resolvitur.... Est substantia incompleta, ex se omni forma carens...'
- 43 Ibid., Part I, p. 3: '*Accidens* est, quod est extra rationem quidditatis.'
- 44 Ibid., pp. 67, 90, 126, 195.
- 45 One is reminded of Augustine, who in *Confessions* VII.xx explains: 'Sed tunc, lectis Platoniorum illis libris, posteaquam inde admonitus quaerere incorpoream veritatem, invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi...' Cf. Pico, *De hominis dignitate*, p. 142: 'Quid erat cum Peripateticis egisse de naturalibus, nisi et Platoniorum accersebatur academia, quorum doctrina et de divinis semper inter omnes philosophias—teste Augustino (*De civitate Dei* IX.1)—habita est sanctissima...'
- 46 Scherzer, *Vade mecum*, Part IV, p. 25, concludes that the answer to this question is no.
- 47 Ibid., Part I, p. 131, he writes: '*Methodus* est animi iudicium, apte riteque ordinantis ea omnia, quae ad universam aliquam scientiam pertinent, ex quo totius illius scientiae ordo nascitur.'
- 48 Ibid., Part IV, pp. 3–5.
- 49 Ibid., Part I, p. 53: '*Deus* est...ipsa rerum intelligendarum bonitas...'

- 63 See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 109, 177–8, 183.
- 64 See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 178, 181–3.
- 65 See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 179–80.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 109: ‘Sunt igitur *Axiomata* stricte loquendo nihil aliud quam *veritates primae*...’
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 108: ‘Et has ipsas veritates intellectus noster singularis Divini Numinis indulto non tantum ex semetipso perfectissime semper novit, sed et primo et prout in se sunt directissime cognoscit indeque tum omnem suum discursum scientificum inchoat, eumque in iis ultimate terminat; tum ex iis omnia Effata demonstrativa realia, cum primis aeterna, demonstrando deducit...’
- 68 *Ibid.*, pp. 93–6.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 193.
- 70 *Ibid.*, pp. 193–4: ‘Haec vero nempe Forma consistit in substantiali determinatione tum ipsius extensionis et repletionis, tum praecipue mobilitatis, qua determinata constituitur corporis naturalis species...nos *Actum corporis naturalis* dicere solemus, cuius respectu Materia sit instar purae potentiae, de se indeterminatae, sed ad quamcunque speciem determinabilis. Et ab hoc principio, corporis naturalis determinativo, determinatae quoque fluunt affectiones...’ For a more thorough account of extension and related matters see E.Weigel, *Idea Matheseos universae*, Jena, 1687, esp. pp. 34–49.
- 71 Weigel, *Analysis Aristotelica*, p. 181.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- 73 *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 196. Leibniz’s early conception of the relation between substance and matter has much in common with Weigel’s. I discuss the views of Weigel and Leibniz in greater detail in *Leibniz’s Metaphysics*, chaps 1 and 3.
- 74 See especially Johann Christoph Sturm, *Philosophica eclectica*, Altdorf, 1686.
- 75 See especially his *Exercitatio de Stoica mundi exustione: cui accesserunt argumenti varii, sed imprimis ad historiam Stoicae philosophiae facientes, dissertationes XXI*, Leipzig, 1676. For a more complete account of Thomasius’s views see my *Leibniz’s Metaphysics*, especially chaps 1 and 3; and also my forthcoming article, ‘The young Leibniz and his teachers’, in S.Brown (ed.), *The Philosophy of the Young Leibniz*, Dordrecht, Kluwer.
- 76 For an account of Leibniz’s conciliatory eclecticism and Platonism see my *Leibniz’s Metaphysics*, especially chaps 1, 4, 5 and 6.
- 77 Pico, *De dignitate hominis*, pp. 138–40: ‘ego ita me institui ut in nullius verba iuratus, me per omnes philosophiae magistros funderem, omnes schedas excuterem, omnes familias agnoscerem...Fuit enim cum ab antiquis omnibus hoc observatum, ut omne scriptorum genus evolventes, nullas quas possent commentationes illectas praeterirent.’ For the English translation see Pico della Mirandola: *On the Dignity of Man, On Being and One, Heptaplus*, trans. C.G.Wallis et al., Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1965, pp. 21–2.
- 78 Pico, *De dignitate hominis*, pp. 142–6: ‘...omnigenae doctrinae placita in medium afferre volui, ut hac complurium sectarum collatione ac multifariae discussione philosophiae, ille veritatis fulgor, cuius Plato meminit in *Epistulis* [VII.341D] animis nostris quasi sol oriens ex alto clarius illucesceret...Proposuius primo Platonis Aristotelisque concordiam a multis

antehac creditam, a nemine satis probatam... Addidimus autem et plures locos in quibus Scoti et Thomae, plures in quibus Averrois et Avicennae sententias, quae discordes existimantur, Concordes esse nos asseveramus.' For the English translation see Pico, *On the Dignity of Man*, pp. 23–5.

79 J.Thomasius, *Schediasma historicum*..., Leipzig, 1665, p. 13.