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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8639-2727>WALTER CHARLETON
AGAINST THE DARKNESS OF ATHEISM

Walter Charleton (1619–1707) was a physician of the king, a fellow of the Royal Society and of the College of Physicians, an author of several scholarly publications, and an ardent Christian who addressed in his publications theological and religious issues.¹

In the opening pages of his *Darknes of Atheism*, Charleton lamented the fact that England had recently produced “more swarms of *Atheisticall monsters* ... then (!) any *Age*, then any *Nation hath been infested withal*” (D to the reader [3]). The progress of science in the 17th century was a large part of this “swarming” process, due to the scope of discoveries and scientific explanations of natural phenomena the scope of which was widely extended by the extensive application of the recent invention of the microscope and the telescope. Charleton, a practicing physician and thereby a practicing scientist, wanted to reverse the atheistic trend by using the very same trend that had caused it, namely the progress in natural sciences.² Since “an *Infidell* ... looks upon *Reason* onely” ([9]), he wanted to prove the existence of God and show His attributes by the use of reason and of the discoveries made by scientific observation and experiments in order “to subvert the chief Citadel of *Atheism*” ([13]). This would serve the dual purpose. First, he wanted to convert

¹ For a detailed biography, see *Charleton (Walter)*, in: *Biographia Britannica*, vol. 2, London: W. Innys 1748, pp. 1286–1292, compressed in R. Kargon, *Introduction*, in: W. Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana*, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation 1966, pp. xv–xvii; H. Rolleston, *Walter Charleton, D.M., F.R.C.P., F.R.S.*, “Bulletin of the History of Medicine” 8 (1940), pp. 403–416; E. Booth, “*A Subtle and Mysterious Machine*”: *The Medical World of Walter Charleton (1619–1707)*, Dordrecht: Springer 2005, pp. 4–27.

² And thus, “the project of articulation of natural philosophy with theology and ethics in Charleton’s works is a response to the intellectual challenges posed by the new natural philosophies” (A.M. Oller Adam, *Walter Charleton [1620–1707]: filosofia natural, teologia natural y ètica*, PhD diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 1995, p. 291).

unbelievers since, as it is a settled view of theologians, the existence of God can be demonstrated and “irresistibly enforced upon the most praevaricate understanding” ([11]). Second, that would strengthen the faith of believers. About himself Charleton said, I accept “that Oracle of Sacred wisdom, the Word of God; Yet me thinks I perceive my faith somewhat *Corroborated* and *Encouraged*, when the evidence thereof I can superadd also the concurrent testimony of my *Reason*” (I 57; D to the reader [10]). Moreover, the Lateran Council urges all Christian philosophers to show the existence of God and the immortality of the soul with “solid and Physical Arguments” (I 60).

1. REASON

All the tenets of religion can be confirmed by natural reason (D to the reader [24]). The natural reason says that there is more reality in the efficient cause than in its effect from which it follows that nothing comes from nothing, and: something more perfect cannot come from something less perfect (D 9).

Human rationality is just a part of the human cognitive mechanism. One important element of the latter are innate ideas. The need for them is necessitated by the fact that there are limits to human reason; one such element not fully accessible to reason is infinity, which is relevant in the context of investigating the divine infinity.

Being finite, humans cannot comprehend infinity (D 14), as finite beings, they cannot have a clear and distinct idea of God, an infinite being. Since they can have only a very dark idea of a chiliagon, a figure with 1000 angles, then, surely, they cannot conceive an idea of infinity (23). Infinity cannot be comprehended, but it can be understood. There are no limits in infinity; indefinite is what is finite in some parts: imaginary space outside the world, the multitude of numbers, the divisibility of a quantity. Infinity can be understood by a kind of negation; an infinite thing we understand positively, but not adequately, since we do not comprehend all that is intelligible in that thing (24). To understand a thing with no limits is enough to acquire a true idea of an infinite whole (26).

Following Descartes, Charleton believed that the idea of God is implanted in people, “*congenial* to my very *Essence*,” imprinted in the soul as God’s signature (D 20). Cooperating with this innate idea, it would be “repugnant to reason” to think that anything outside of God was not created by Him (31).

The use of human reason appears to be tantamount to the use of the light of nature, and the reliance of the latter is strongly indicated in the subtitles of the *Darknes of Atheism* and of *The Immortality*, indicating that the discussion is based on the light of nature. Charleton did not quite define what it is, but he was sure that the light of nature is an “infallible Citerion” (D 328), the criterion

“from which Judicature there can be no appeal” (D to the reader [9]), it is the “domestick oracle” (15), the “authentique *Criterion*” (115), and the light of nature “alone is sufficient to teach Men” that there is one God to whom worship is due (110).³ Incongruously, he also admitted that the light of nature can be dimmed (64, 68, 170); in other words, it is not infallible. Just as the human reason is not infallible, so it seems that the reliance on the innate ideas is not infallible, either. Why would atheists even exist? Therefore, it appears that theology requires some arguments that would go beyond pure reasoning and innatism. The reference to what is in front of every person, the physical world would appear to be the answer.

2. ATOMISM

Following Epicurus and Pierre Gassendi, Charleton saw the physical world as composed of atoms. This view was very closely related to his theology. In his view, atoms can be the first matter provided that God created it out of nothing to be used by God “for the fabrication of the World” (P 103), and Charleton saw the atoms of Epicurus to be a much better candidate for it than *materia prima* of Aristotle, the substantial principle of Plato, or the *hyle* of the Stoics (D 44). And so, atoms became the first and universal matter (P 99). Atoms have an ability to move which was imparted on them by God at the moment of creation (D 46), whereby atoms are capable of self-motion (47); that is, God infused them with “Internal Energy, or Faculty Motive, which may be conceived the First Cause of all Natural Actions, or Motions” (P 126). However, Charleton was strenuously opposed to the randomness of the motion of atoms as envisioned by Epicurus. In his opinion, to the sober judgment it appears impossible that the chaos of atoms could order itself to create the universe; only an infinite wisdom and power could accomplish it (P 13).

As in the Epicurean universe, Charleton’s atoms are indivisible, as their name indicates, and of variety of forms. In fact, atoms have no other qualities except for magnitude, figure/form, and motion (P 130), and from figure, order, and position, that is, from an arrangement of atoms of various shapes and sizes an infinity of qualities can be created (131). The number of atoms to be used to form any entity would be enormously large since; Charleton agreed with Archimedes that a speck of dust is composed of “ten hundred thousand millions of insensible Particles” (116), that is, 10^{12} , one trillion atoms.

Grappling with infinity appears to have been the main motivation for embracing atomism. In the dissolution of bodies, nature does not go into infinity. An infinite

³ [Walter Charleton], *The Harmony of Natural and Positive Divine Laws*, London: Walter Kettlby 1682, p. 110.

division is impossible since infinite division would require infinite time, so, nature could produce nothing new since destroying the old would take an infinite time (P 88). However, it is unclear why nature could not stop at a certain point when dissolving physical objects into smaller chunks of matter to use these chunks to create new objects. Also, Zeno's bisection argument – the argument that Charleton knew (92) – could be adapted to say that a certain amount of matter can be divided into two parts in one unit of time, each half into two halves in a half of the unit of time, each fourth part into two halves in the fourth of the unit of time, so that the whole task could be accomplished in a finite amount of time. It would take a divine power to accomplish it, but Charleton would hardly object to such a possibility.

Another argument in favor of atomism was the idea that if a finite body is infinitely divisible, then it consists of infinite parts, “which is repugnant to the supposition [that the body is finite].” The parts put together would be greater than the whole (91). And again, Zeno's argument can be used to show that an infinity of physical elements can render a finite body. Charleton admitted that an infinite division of a line is possible, but that does not mean that a physiologist should “swallow it as really performable” (96). Surely, not by humans, but such a feat should be possible to accomplish for the omnipotent God.

It is interesting to note that atoms had been created by God, but coexistent with God was space in which these atoms were placed. Space is incorporeal, but had dimensions, unlike divine nature, angels, and the human mind. Space is not created by God, but it is nothing positive, not a substance nor an accident (P 68). Time is a twin brother of space, incorporeal and independent of the existence of any nature, and as such, coeval with God. Also, motion has no relation to duration (72). Celestial motion is a measure of time. Time is a certain flux independent of motion and rest, an imaginary flowing infinitely before creation and after the end of the world. Space and time are more general than something defined in terms of substance and accidents. Time is unlimited, interminable (75). As God is everywhere in place, so He is forever in time, only God has attributes of immensity and eternity. Time is independent of motion, but indicated or measured by it (76). Eternity is an indefinite duration, time is a certain part of it between the creation of the world and its dissolution (79). This has some serious theological consequences that Charleton tried to quickly resolve. For example, God's immutability is not affected by His being the subject of time succession: God's nature is “so Constant and Perfect, that in the eternal flux of Time it can know nothing of Innovation or Corruption” (82).⁴ But still, the denial of the timeless existence of God is a precarious theological position for Christian theology. The main argument against eternity was for Charleton the

⁴ That would be a reversal of his earlier view that God's existence is “one constant and permanent point, one τὸ νῦν [the now], entire in unity, and incapable of division” (D 118). As he later said, he withdrew his assent from the school's definition that eternity is one permanent now, without succession (P 83).

fact that this is unthinkable, that an eternal now in something incomprehensible. And yet, he frequently spoke about the frailty of human reason and its inability to pierce through the veil of infinity.

Atoms are omnipresent in Charleton's explanations. And so, we learn from him that the fluidity of material objects results from atoms forming fluid being smooth in the surface and contiguous in some points (P 318); firmness/stability is the result of the compression of atoms (320), which is possible in Charleton's universe in which he allows for the existence of the vacuum (e.g., 22, 348). This includes the discussion of temperature in which the atoms of heat are caloric atoms which are "exile in bulk"/small, spherical and fast moving (294). Cold is not just a privation of heat (306). Cold is some atoms, atoms of cold or "frigorifick atoms" that are tetrahedral/tetrahedral or pyramidal with four sides that are equilateral triangles (307).

Converted by Gassendi to atomism, Charleton, like Gassendi, made a great effort to Christianize atomism considering the fact that atomism had at that time a bad name in England to mention an anti-atomistic stance of Henry More's *Antidote against Atomist* and a rather ambiguous attitude of Robert Boyle toward Epicurean atomism that he associated with atheism⁵ and yet he spoke about corpuscles in nature. Charleton saw atomism not only as a good physical theory, but also to be theologically useful.⁶ He also saw atomism as a breakthrough in natural philosophy and in theology which is indicated in the naming of his very unoriginal version of atomism Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana physiologia, thereby seeing his philosophically rather undistinguished discussion of atomism to be on equal footing with Epicurus and Gassendi.

3. THE SOUL

Theologically interesting in this context is Charleton's discussion of the spiritual aspect of humans. At first, he espoused the view that there was only the soul and the body. An important tenet in his discussion of the problem of the human soul was apostle Paul's statement concerning inner spiritual conflict as expressed in Romans 7. For some, this conflict indicated that the soul had two parts, rational and sensitive. However, for Charleton, each person has only one soul with no variety of

⁵ In fact, "Epicurus was associated with atheism from the moment that word entered the English vernacular during the Reformation" (K. Sheppard, *Anti-atheism in Early Modern England 1580–1720: The Atheist Answered and His Error Confuted*, Boston, MA: Brill 2015, p. 30).

⁶ Charleton "showed how powerful this doctrine could be in *promoting* piety by demonstrating that it is a very effective proof of God" (R. Kargon, *Walter Charleton, Robert Boyle, and the Acceptance of Epicurean Atomism in England*, "Isis" 55 (1964), p. 186).

parts (P 70): what is sensitive is also rational. In his view, conflicts are not within the soul but between the motion of the animal spirits caused by the senses and corporeal appetites and those caused by the will (I 71, 75).

Soon, he found this approach unsatisfactory and rather surreptitiously he spoke about two souls, the soul *tout court* which influenced the body through animal spirits, was immaterial, and resided principally in the brain,⁷ although he did not know where in the brain the soul, “that Coelestial Guest,” resides.⁸ Also, he mentioned the vegetative soul or the plastic spirit residing in the blood where it enkindled life.⁹

However, later, Charleton very forcefully stated that humans are endowed with two souls, sensitive and rational (N epistle [8]), the latter to explain the soul’s influencing the body ([9]) and to explain the inner struggle as described by Paul ([10]).¹⁰ Following Thomas Willis, *De anima brutorum* ([24]) and Gassendi ([27]), he said that the sensitive soul is corporeal spread over the entire body; it is some fiery substance or resembling fire (5) of the subtlest consistency. Parts of the body are instruments of the soul (6). The soul of animals, the sensitive soul, is seated mainly in the blood (9). At death, the particles of this soul disperse and “fly away” (14). This soul is enkindled and its flame of sorts is maintained by “sulphureous fewel/fuel from within and nitrous from without” (15). The souls of different animals have “diverse inclinations” depending on the place that the Creator put these animals in “this great Theatre of the World” (18). The sensitive soul has two innate inclinations: the self-preservation and the propagation of its species by producing other souls as itself. “And to this end, she carefully selects out of her stock of aliment, matter fit for generation, stores it up in the Genital parts, and is possess’d with an earnest longing to transmit the same into a place most commodious for its accension into new Souls” (22). Sensitive soul, as a flame, can mutate and experience disorderly commotions (24) affected by its own passions, by the body, by impressions of objects, and by the motions of animal spirits (25). Humans have also the rational soul “created immediately by God, and infused into the body of a human Embryon, so soon as that is organized, formed and prepared to receive her” (60). The rational soul directs the motion of animal spirits (37) and the faculties of the sensitive spirit (38). This is this soul which is immortal, can self-reflect, and can know God (48). The sensitive soul sometimes disobeys the rational soul (57) resulting in a struggle between the two (58). In any event, effectively, there are two lives in humans, one immortal that is essential to the rational souls and one mortal which also animals have (E 403).

⁷ Walt[er] Charleton, *Natural History of Nutrition, Life, and Voluntary Motion*, London: Henry Herringman 1659, pp. 185, 186, 182, 190.

⁸ [Walter Charleton], *Two Discourses: 1. Concerning the Different Wits of Men, 2. Of the Mystery of Vintners*, London: William Whitwood 1669, p. 41.

⁹ W. Charleton, *Natural History of Nutrition*, pp. 4, 9, 42.

¹⁰ The idea of the two human souls was strongly reiterated in [Walter Charleton], *The Ephesian and Cimmerian Matrons*, [London:] Henry Herringman 1668 [1659], pp. 24–28.

The claim of the existence of two souls in humans is highly controversial as part of the Christian theology and Charleton, in that respect, distanced himself from the orthodox view, even though he always wanted to follow the path prescribed by the canons of the Holy Mother Church (D epistola [4]).¹¹ Moreover, his strongest Biblical argument, Paul's statements about the inner struggle, is misrepresented. Paul very clearly spoke about the conflict between the spirit and the flesh (Rom 7:18, 25) or the body (7:24), not between two souls. Also, Charleton saw the sensitive body as an intermediary between the rational soul and the body since he saw no way that the rational soul could influence the body. However, the latter problem is not at all avoided, since there is still an ontological gulf between the immaterial rational soul and the material sensitive soul. Just the fact that the latter is composed of tiny atoms does not bridge this gulf.

4. PHYSICO-THEOLOGY

Charleton used a physico-theological argument that derived the existence of God from the orderliness of the universe. An atheistic argument to the contrary was that the world was the result of chance, of fortuitous arrangement of randomly moving atoms that through their blind motion gave rise to the observable universe. However, even a superficial observation of nature should suffice to reject such a conjecture. For instance, all outer and inner organs of animals are designed for particular functions and all of them work in unison, which can only be a work of "the infinite *power* and *wisdom* of an *omniscient*, and *omnipotent* Creator" (D 55). The same can be stated about plants: "when the Aliment of a Plant, being the aqueous irrigation of the earth insensibly prolected, ascends from the lowest filament of the shaggy root up to the *Trunck*, and thence works up to the extremities of every branch and twigge; can we imagine, that this thin, insipid juice can be so inspissated, and so ingeniously moulded into a *Bud*; that bud discriminated and variegated into a larger particoloured *Blossom*; that Blossom gradually expanded into a determinate *flower*" and this flower into a fruit; it is impossible that this all resulted from "a *spontaneous range of Atoms*" and not from "a Glorious and Eternall *Cause*, whose *Essence* being incomprehensible, and *Attributes* infinite Intelligence, Goodnesse, Power, Beatitude, Glory, &c. must therefore be the *Ordainer*, *Creator* [!], and Consecrator [Conservator?, cf. p. 106] of all things" (57). Consider the position of the sun which determines seasons and climates (58). Consider various minerals and their properties (60). The hand of God is visible in each part of the universe, even more so in its entirety (61). Even the

¹¹ See also S. Fleitmann, *Walter Charleton (1620–1707), "Virtuoso": Leben und Werke*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang 1986, p. 221.

smallest animal organ is designed with “order, decency, beauty, uniformity, symmetry, constancy,” that is, with wisdom and all organs are put together into “one most elegant and compacted body” (65). If the world can be made by chance, why not a watch? (66). Although “the meanest piece of Nature” is more intricate than “the greatest Masterpeice of Art,” and yet some people see the latter as the result of human industry and skill, and the former the result of chance (67).

For Charleton, a physician, of particular importance was the human anatomy, and, in his view, we are forced to acknowledge the infinite power of the divine Architect particularly by scrutinizing the human anatomy. Just the contemplation of the brain, “the pillars that support it, the arched roof that covers and defends it, the fret-work of the Ceiling, the double membrane that invests it, the resplendent partition that divides it, the four vaulted cells that drain away impurities, the intricate labyrinths of arteries that bring in from the heart rivulets of vital blood to heat and invigorate it,” etc. (E preface [12]), points to the infinite wisdom of God and the fact that all parts of the anatomy work together, their “complex automation,” show God’s goodness. This means that the “study Anatomy diligently and reverently, is to learn to know God, and consequently to venerate Him” and an atheist can be converted by having him study anatomy ([13]).

In all this, only someone whose faculties are in disorder and when “the Oeconomie of his head subverted into a Wildness beyond the absurdities of Melancholy adust” can believe that the world was made by chance (D 53). A person must be “ridiculously stupid” to think that “the bodies of Animals . . . could be so exquisitely configured by meer Chance,” undirected by an infinite Wisdom “in whose eternal intellect the *prototypes* of each *species* were first adumbrated” (54).

However, how much humans can learn about God from nature? From its orderliness and harmonious workings they can derive the existence of the divine Author who designed this universe according to His will, but how much can humans know about God? They can say that God is an infinite substance, independent, omnipotent, omniscient that created the world that is preserved in “perfect order and exquisite harmony.” God’s attributes are “too great and noble to be derived from so mean, frail, and imperfect a being as my self,” thus, because of the presence of the idea “*That God doth exist*” there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite substance (D 13). However, the idea of God is not “*always observant*,” but we have a faculty (31) that we can extract it from our mind (32). And thus, it appears that the investigation of nature may be a good means to stir the mind to make the idea appear in it clear, which would be a Christian version of anamnesis. Since only humans can glorify God; as intelligent beings, humans can admire creation; thus, humans can speculate about it, thereby acknowledging God’s wisdom and power as a Creator (86). It is impossible to think of God and not think that He is most wise, potent, good, and being infinitely wise, God is omniscient and He must act on His wisdom. Being infinitely potent, he is omnipotent (109) and action is a proper manifestation of this power. Being good, God will communicate His goodness to His creation (110).

However, even the most meticulous investigation of nature will not entirely bridge the gap between finite humans and the infinite God. Divine nature is incomprehensible, since the finite cannot comprehend the infinite, but there are marks of God everywhere in nature and even the smallest insect proclaims the glory of God inciting humans to venerate Him (E preface [11]); as Plato said, the world is an epistle written to humans ([12]). In this, the “profound Contemplation of the Works of Nature, is of it self powerful enough even to compell Human Reason to admire, love, praise, and adore the Transcendent Perfections of the *Author* of Nature; that we are all naturally disposed to form in our Minds such *Notions* of the Deity, as are proportionate to the discoveries we make of the Excellencies thereof, in the Objects we contemplate; and in fine, that our *Devotion* toward the same Deity, is always proportionate to those *Notions*” (E dedication [4]).

5. THEODICY

A common opposition to theism is the presence of some unpalatable elements of nature. Charleton, albeit briefly, did address this thorny theological issue.

There are monsters, irregular births, unseasonable tempests, some “erratick stars.” However, an irregularity renders order to become more conspicuous and deformities stress the beauty. A mole on the face can “sweeten the feature of the face,” clowns in a play can lighten its mood, and a shadow enhances the beauty of a painting (D 127). All so-called deformities are brought by the divine providence for some end often unknown to humans, often to enhance the beauty of the whole (128). Besides, what people consider vile and ugly is not so to nature since nature knows no deformity and so it is for God. Thus, beauty should be defined as “the conformity of every thing holds to its primitive exemplar in the Intellect of the Creator” (121). Only the limitation of the human mind does not see this beauty or it does not appreciate that the existence of the ugly enhances the beauty.

The presence of evil enhances human rationality. Reason is used to make a decision between choosing good or evil (D 184). If nothing were evil or hurtful, wisdom and reason would be useless (185).

However, God, perfect goodness, wants the best for His creation and woes in this life can be considered the divine means of turning people to God. If religion is compared to a plant in the soul, then it shoots out “in the Winter of *Calamity*” showing that the human happiness depends on God; “*all the affaires of man are regulated by the Special Providence of God*” (D 180). God wants human happiness more than humans do. “*God in his Wisdome knows our real necessities, and understands what’s most convenient for us*” (183). Those submitting themselves to the will of God are always happy and seeming evils they experience are “real

Goods” that turn bitterness into sweetness and “*Intrinsic Blessings*” (191). The explanation is given through cold ratiocination, since we can wonder how many of those experiencing hardship would consider them to be blessings and would stoically experience happiness through the sheer power of reasoning.¹² What would be magnanimity without danger, patience without suffering? Virtue without adversity withers (192), which is rather important since happiness cannot be reached through “*The garden of Sensuality*,” but only through “*the prickly stem of Virtue*,” through fulfilling our duties toward God and other people (189).

Moreover, bad seasons, blight, fires, etc. that hamper agriculture do not happen frequently and not generally, i.e., on the large scale. Damage inflicted by wild animals, vipers, lightning (D 92), diseases are the subject of God’s providence and are preordained, “inscribed in the diary of Fate.” People are born helpless, but this state in the infancy is necessary for the perfection and maturity of human organs and human ingenuity replaces the lack of natural defenses (93). Why were the laws not designed that way that, for instance, a thunderbolt would not harm anyone? The ends of the providence humans cannot fully understand and they consider events they cannot understand as mere accidents. However, such a judgment is “a rash and open delusion” (156). After all, when even the most ingenuous minds are stumbled by trying to explain natural phenomena, the “minute Mechanics of *Nature*,” how can they fathom infinite mysteries of the divine preordination? Since the mystery of divine will is concealed from humans, they should conform and cooperate with His revealed will certain that God, being all goodness, can only wish for humans what is good (354).

God is a universal Intelligence that “moves and directs all individual *Agents* to act” to an end that often is known only to Him (D 126). And yet, God should not be blamed for human sinfulness, either. Sins result from the use of our liberty, not from our nature (N 171). People should not complain that God did not give them the power to see through any deception. Also, humans are capable of wisdom which teaches them to subdue human affections (172) and control their desires. Human errors stem not from passions but from not making right use of understanding given by God in human conduct (173). All human errors depend on human will (180) and result from the deficient knowledge of what is true and good (181). A universal remedy against evil is the constant exercise of virtue (185). This brings the intellectual joy which is powerful enough to subdue affections (186).

In all events the providential hand of God is present and His providence can be extended “to the meanest contingents of nature.” Only for the limited human mind may events appear to be accidental (D 124). Not only faith, but also reason indicate that each event “proceeds from the influence of this *Providence* which disposeth and conjoyneth some certain convenient Causes to the production of this or that determinate Effect, in some sort respecting the last of Ends, his own *Glory*”

¹² It is not entirely unjustified to say that “with logical finesse of this kind Charleton succeeded, like a theological wizard, to turn misfortune into happiness” (S. Fleitmann, *Walter Charleton*, p. 246).

(D 217). This included the recent unfortunate events in England. In particular, the “late Warrs and Schisms,” these “vicissitudes of things ordained by the Providence” (I 49) lead eventually to “the Changes appointed to succeed in the fullnesse of their time” eventuating with the spread of knowledge and “in making men true Philosophers” (50).¹³ And, needless to say, Charleton would consider such true philosophy a way of bringing people closer to the knowledge of God.

In this, there is a grain of hubris. On the one hand, Charleton counted himself among those who pick and choose from various sources what seems to be close to the truth: the electing (P 4), to use today’s less ennobling term, the eclectics. On the other hand, for him, medicine was the best if not the only practical philosophy (I 5). Also, the foundational theological truths, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, should be “demonstrated by Philosophers, rather than Divines” (D to the reader [8]). It would just appear that, in spite of his occasionally professed modesty in the scope of possessed knowledge he possessed,¹⁴ humility was not his strong suit. To say that the centuries-long theological tradition should bow before theological pronouncements based on medical knowledge is very bold, to say the least.¹⁵

On the other hand, this was also a way of buttressing religion. The explosion of empirical research and observation provided the irreligious authors arguments in their favor. Charleton wanted to reverse this trend also using scientific research. This is also clear on the terminological level. He was the first, at least, one of the first, who introduced to the English language the term physico-theology (or rather the adjective “physico-theological”).¹⁶ It can be considered a strategy to discover from “visible operations of Nature . . . that invisible cause that made, conserves, and regulates her” (D 154). He used the phrase in the subtitle of his *The Darknes of Atheism*, in the Latin dedication letter in the same work, and in the opening sentence of the preface to the

¹³ Many Charleton’s contemporaries “sought to explain social instability and personal confusion by recourse to belief in Providential design” (J.M. Armistead, *Introduction*, in: W. Charleton, *The Immortality of the Soul*, New York: AMS Press 1985, p. ix).

¹⁴ For instance, we read that “To measure the *Divine Wisdom* elucet in every Organ of an Animal, by the short line of *human Reason*, is indeed extreme folly” (W. Charleton, *Three Anatomic Lectures*, London: Walter Kettlby 1683, p. 37). On the other hand, Charleton’s knowledge was, in fact quite impressive. Just to use a very helpful index added in the 1966 reissue of his *Physiologia*, he referred to some 170 works and named ca. 300 authors and researchers in the *Physiologia* alone.

¹⁵ “Charleton clearly intends to take the offensive in the battle for religious order, again at the expense of the theology” (E. Lewis, *Walter Charleton and Early Modern Eclecticism*, “Journal of the History of Ideas” 62 [2001], p. 658).

¹⁶ For terminological forerunners, cf. R. Goclenius, J. Caspar, *Disputatio duplex ordine VIII*, vol. 1: *Theologica contra errorem Monotheletarum*, vol. 2: *Physico-theologica de pane & vino*, Marpurgi Cattorum: Ex Officina Rodolphi Hutwelckeri 1610; T. Müller, *Meditationes physico-theologicae*, Hamburg: Hamburg Rebenlein 1642; Aloysius Novarinus [Luigi Novarini], *Omnium scientiarum anima, hoc est, Axiomata physio-theologica*, Lugduni: Sumpt. Haered. Gabr. Boissat, & Laurentij Anisson 1644–1645; Joachim Lütkeemann, *De vero homine, dissertatio physico-theologica*, Wolferbyti: Typis Johannis Bismarky 1650.

reader. However, the term and, with it, the entire approach took off on a massive scale at the end of the 17th and throughout the 18th centuries, particularly in England and Germany, but also to a large extent in France and even in Russia.

ABBREVIATIONS

- D – W. Charleton, *The Darknes of Atheism Dispelled by the Light of Nature: A Physico-theologicall Treatise*, London: William Lee 1652.
E – W. Charleton, *Enquiries into Human Nature*, London: M. White 1680.
I – W. Charleton, *The Immortality of the Human Soul Demonstrated by the Light of Nature*, London: William Wilson 1657.
N – W. Charleton, *Natural History of the Passions*, London: James Magnes 1674.

WALTER CHARLETON AGAINST THE DARKNESS OF ATHEISM

Abstract

Walter Charleton, a physician and a Christian believer, was on the first advocates of physico-theology that started on a large scale at the end of the 17th century and flourished in the 18th century. In his battle with the English deism and atheism, he used the arguments of the orderliness of nature to prove the existence of God. He was one of few authors trying to reconcile atomism with Christian theology. He also grappled with the problem of the immortality of the soul supporting at one point Gassendi's idea that humans have two souls, sensitive and rational.

Key words: Walter Charleton, proofs of God's existence, the immortality of the soul, physico-theology.

WALTER CHARLETON PRZECIW MROKOM ATEIZMU

Abstrakt

Walter Charleton, lekarz i zaangażowany chrześcijanin, był jednym z pierwszych zwolenników fizyko-teologii, którą zaczęto rozwijać na dużą skalę pod koniec XVII wieku, i która rozkwitła w XVIII wieku. W swojej walce z angielskim deizmem i ateizmem argumentował na podstawie porządku przyrody za istnieniem Boga. Był jednym z nielicznych autorów próbujących pogodzić atomistykę z teologią chrześcijańską. Zmagał się również

z problemem nieśmiertelności duszy, wspierając w pewnym momencie ideę Gassendiego, że ludzie mają dwie dusze – zmysłową i racjonalną.

Słowa kluczowe: Walter Charleton, dowody na istnienie Boga, nieśmiertelność duszy, fizyko-teologia.

WALTER CHARLETON
GEGEN DIE FINSTERNIS DES ATHEISMUS

Abstrakt

Walter Charleton, ein Arzt und gläubiger Christ, war einer der frühen Vertreter der Physikotheologie, die im späten 17. Jahrhundert in großem Stil begann und im 18. weiterentwickelt wurde. In seinem Kampf gegen den englischen Deismus und Atheismus argumentierte er auf der Grundlage der Ordnung der Natur, um die Existenz Gottes zu beweisen. Er war einer der wenigen Autoren, die versuchten, den Atomismus mit der christlichen Theologie in Einklang zu bringen. Er setzte sich auch mit dem Problem der Unsterblichkeit der Seele auseinander und unterstützte an einer Stelle die Idee von Gassendi, dass der Mensch zwei Seelen hat, eine sinnliche und eine rationale.

Schlüsselwörter: Walter Charleton, Beweise für die Existenz Gottes, Unsterblichkeit der Seele, Physikotheologie.

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