

FROM RECONSTRUCTION TO REFORMATION

JACOB THOMASIIUS'S USE OF ARISTOTLE IN THE DEBATE ON THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN SOUL*

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Abstract

This article sheds new light on the complex relationship between Jacob Thomasius's main occupation as a professor of Aristotelian philosophy at the Lutheran University of Leipzig and his works on the history of philosophy, which showed the incompatibility of Aristotle with central Christian doctrines. I argue for a strong inner consistency between these two seemingly conflicting aspects of Thomasius's intellectual activity. Far from paralyzing his way of doing 'Christian Peripatetic philosophy,' the history of philosophy was for Thomasius an indispensable analytical tool for reforming Aristotelianism. To illustrate my thesis, I investigate the way Thomasius used his historical reconstruction of Aristotle's theory of intellect to intervene in a contemporary debate on the origin of the human soul, a debate which played a central role in the crystallization of a Lutheran confessional identity.

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Introduction: an academic debate with narrative aspects

In order to judge between the two currently prevailing opinions on the origin of the human soul, the one affirming its creation out of nothing, the other claiming that it is transmitted by the parents, the philosopher should enquire into the history of the whole controversy.¹ This programmatic statement offers a prime example of the approach which Jacob Thomasius (1622–1684), remembered mainly as one of the mentors and correspondents of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, adopted when faced with a serious philosophical problem. The affirmation stems from the *Disputatio physica de origine animae humanae*, which Thomasius presided over in 1669, as a professor at the arts faculty of the University of Leipzig.² Looking for the historical

1. J. THOMASIUS – (resp.) J. VAKE, *Disputatio physica de origine animae humanae*, sect. II, §§ 1-2, Lipsiae 1669, pp. 7-8: “De quaestione proposita *duae* hodie regnant [...] in scholis Christianorum sententiae: *una* eorum, qui animas nostras volunt a Deo *creari* ex nihilo: *altera* illorum, qui eas ex animabus parentum *traducunt*. Ut de his iudicium fieri tanto melius queat, operae pretium fuerit, quemadmodum in Ecclesias hodiernas ingressae sint eae paulatim, ex historia totius controversiae circumspicere.”

2. For bio-bibliographical information on Thomasius see R. SACHSE, “Thomasius, Jakob,” in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 38 (1894), pp. 107-112, URL: <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd119238098.html#adbcontent> (visited on 17 October 2016); G. ACETI, “Jakob Thomasius ed il pensiero filosofico-giuridico di Goffredo Guglielmo Leibniz,” in: *Jus. Rivista di scienze giuridiche* 8/2 (1957), pp. 259-318, esp. 260-273; G. SANTINELLO, “Jakob Thomasius (1622–1684),” in: G. SANTINELLO (ed.), *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*, vol. 1, Brescia 1981, pp. 438-467, esp. 438-442; H. JAUMANN, “Thomasius, Jakob,” in: W. KÜHLMANN (ed.), *Killy Literaturlexikon. Autoren und Werke des deutschsprachigen Kulturraums*, Berlin/Boston 2012, URL: https://www.degruyter.com/view/Killy/killiy.6712?rskey=D8aeTg&result=73&dbq_0=Thomasius&dbf_0=killy-fulltext&dbt_0=fulltext&o_0=AND (visited on 27.02.2017); H. JAUMANN, “Jakob Thomasius, ein protestantischer Späthumanist. Seine *Dissertationes* und *Programmata* zur Philosophiegeschichte,” in: R. B. SDZUJ – R. SEIDEL – B. ZEGOWITZ (eds.), *Dichtung — Gelehrsamkeit — Disputationskultur. Festschrift für Hanspeter Marti zum 65. Geburtstag*, Wien/Köln/Weimar 2012, pp. 587-603, esp. 587-591. — For an overview of Thomasius’s works and his activities in the context of the contemporary Lutheran educational system, see M. GIERL – H. JAUMANN – W. SPARN, “Einleitung,” in: J. THOMASIUS, *Philosophia practica* (Gesammelte Schriften 1), Hildesheim/Zürich/New York 2005 (reprint Lipsiae 1682), pp. 1-22. — The ascription of the *Disputatio physica* to Thomasius seems unproblematic, although his respondent Vake certainly played a part in it. The text reproduces basic tenets of Thomasius’s conception of pagan philosophy, which I shall have occasion to dwell on in the course of this article, and shows clear parallels to Thomasius’s textbook on natural philosophy, the *Physica perpetuo dialogo [...] adornata* (1670). Moreover, Thomasius himself refers to this disputation as “theses nostrae” (J. THOMASIUS, “Praefatio LXVII. De sententia Aristotelis circa originem corporis & animae humanae,” in: J. THOMASIUS, *Praefationes sub auspiciis disputationum suarum in Academia Lipsiensi recitatae*,

‘origins’ of a contemporary *quaestio vexata*³ was in this case particularly apposite and even necessary. Thomasius’s *Disputatio physica* can in fact be read as a comprehensive response to a work Johannes Zeisold published in 1662, under the somewhat verbose yet informative title *Diatribē historico-elenctica de sententiae creationem animae rationalis statuentis, antiquitate & veritate, nec non de sententiae propagationem animae rationalis per traducem statuentis, novitate & absurditate*.

Zeisold (1599–1667), a philosophy professor at Jena and fervid proponent of creationism, had waged a life-long polemic against the traducianist theories of the famous philosopher and physician Daniel Sennert (1572–1637) and his pupil Johannes Sperling (1603–1658), one of Thomasius’s preceptors at Wittenberg. Among his fellow Lutherans Zeisold was in the minority. Traducianism was more consistent with the Lutheran insistence on the unity of body and soul and, above all, with some distinctly Lutheran teachings on the nature and transmission of original sin. Creationism, on the other hand, had a number of Calvinist supporters and represented the dominant view

argumenti varii, Lipsiae 1681, pp. 418-426, esp. 419) and as “meam de origine animae humanae disputationem” (“Jakob Thomasius an Leibniz, Leipzig, 6. (16. Mai) 1669,” in: G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Philosophischer Briefwechsel (1663–1685)*, ed. M. SCHNEIDER [Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe (Akademie-Ausgabe) 2/1], Berlin 2006, pp. 39-40, esp. 26, 12). The same work was reprinted in 1725 and in 1745 under a slightly changed title and with Thomasius as its sole author (J. THOMASIUS, *Tractatio physica de origine animae humanae*, Halae Magdeb. 1725 and 1745). Finally, it was attributed to Thomasius by the Lutheran theologians and historians of philosophy Johann Franz Budde (1667–1729) and Johann Georg Walch (1693–1775) (cf. J. G. WALCH, “Seelen Ursprung,” in: J. G. WALCH, *Philosophisches Lexikon*, Leipzig 1726, cols. 2330-2343, esp. 2330 and 2340; J. F. BUDDE, *Compendium historiae philosophicae, observationibus illustratum*, cap. VI, § XVII, ed. J. G. WALCH, Halae Saxonum 1731, p. 423). — On the literary genre of early-modern dissertations, their institutional setting, the university disputation, and the problem of their authorship, see H. MARTI, “Einleitung,” in: H. MARTI, *Philosophische Dissertationen deutscher Universitäten 1660–1750. Eine Auswahlbibliographie*, München 1982, pp. 11-77, esp. 13-31; H. MARTI, “Disputation,” in: G. UEDING (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 2, Darmstadt 1994, cols. 866-880; H. MARTI, “Dissertation,” in: G. UEDING (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 2, Darmstadt 1994, cols. 880-884; W. A. KELLY, *Early German dissertations: their importance for university history*, East Linton 31997.

3. As noted already by Giovanni Santinello (“Jakob Thomasius e il medioevo,” in: *Medioevo. Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale* 4 [1978], pp. 173-216, esp. 179-182; ID., “Jakob Thomasius (1622–1684),” pp. 449, 462-463) and as we shall see further down, concepts like *origo*, *initium*, *ocasio*, and *radix* function in Thomasius as fully developed historiographical categories. They serve to designate not only the spatio-temporal beginnings of certain doctrines but also the factors which brought them into being and conditioned their manifestation in the course of history.

among contemporary Catholics, being to a large extent the heritage of medieval scholasticism.⁴ To support his confessionally precarious thesis, in the *Diatribē historico-eleñctica* Zeisold developed a full-fledged narrative argument based on the allegedly Tertullianic adage *antiquissimum quod est, id quoque verissimum*.⁵ Drawing heavily on the Renaissance tradition of *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis*,⁶

4. The role of confessional preoccupations in early-modern discussions on the origin of the human soul is underlined by most relevant studies. On the controversy between Sperling and Zeisold see B. ROLING, “Melanchthon im Streit um den Ursprung der Seelen: Die Debatte zwischen Johannes Sperling und Johannes Zeisold,” in: G. FRANK – F. MUNDT (eds.), *Der Philosoph Melanchthon*, Berlin/Boston 2012, pp. 173-199. On its larger Lutheran context see M. STOLBERG, “Particles of the Soul. The Medical and Lutheran Context of Daniel Sennert’s Atomism,” in: *Medicina nei Secoli* 15/2 (2003), pp. 177-203, esp. 189-194; M. FRIEDRICH, “Das Verhältnis von Leib und Seele als theologisch-philosophisches Grenzproblem vor Descartes. Lutherische Einwände gegen eine dualistische Anthropologie,” in: M. MULSOW (ed.), *Spätrenaissance-Philosophie in Deutschland 1570–1650. Entwürfe zwischen Humanismus und Konfessionalisierung, okkulten Traditionen und Schulmetaphysik*, Tübingen 2009, pp. 211-249, esp. 216-227 and 244-246; S. BORCHERS, *Die Erzeugung des ganzen Menschen. Zur Entstehung von Anthropologie und Ästhetik an der Universität Halle im 18. Jahrhundert*, Berlin/New York 2011, pp. 18-27; D. CELLAMARE, *Psychology in the Age of Confessionalisation. A Case Study on the Interaction Between Psychology and Theology c. 1517–c. 1640* (PhD Thesis), Nijmegen 2015, pp. 197-222 (I would like to thank Davide Cellamare for having kindly sent me a copy of his still unpublished dissertation). L. SPRUIT, *The Origin of the Soul from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era. A Short Introduction*, Lugano 2014, provides a valuable overview of the history of the problem. — Notable exceptions to the creationist credo prevailing among early-modern Catholic and Calvinist authors include Antonio Rocco (1586–1653) (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 73-75) and Rudolph Goclenius (1547–1628) (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 86-87, 88-89), respectively. As for the High Middle Ages, creationism had not enjoyed unconditional acceptance then either. A case in point is Hugh of Saint Victor, who considered it only more probable than traducianism and admitted that the matter remained dubious. (cf. HUGH OF SAINT VICTOR, *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*, lib. I, pars VII, “Quod anima non sit ex traduce,” ed. R. BERNDT, *Monasterii Westfalorum* 2008, pp. 185, 1-187, 21).

5. J. ZEISOLD, *Diatribē historico-eleñctica de sententiae creationem animae rationalis statuentis, antiquitate & veritate, nec non de sententiae propagationem animae rationalis per traducem statuentis, novitate & absurditate*, sect. I, § 1, Jenae 1662, pp. 1-2; *ibid.*, sect. II, art. II, § 39, p. 153; cf. also the programmatic preface, *ibid.*, pp. *3-*15. — The actual words of Tertullian which probably gave rise to this adage are “id esse uerum, quodcumque primum” (cf. TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Praxean*, II, 2, ed. A. KROYMANN – E. EVANS [CCSL 2], Turnholti 1954, p. 1160, 21-22).

6. On this topic see the classical studies C. B. SCHMITT, “Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz,” in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27/4 (1966), pp. 505-532; ID., “*Prisca Theologia e Philosophia Perennis*: due temi del Rinascimento italiano e la loro fortuna,” in: G. TARUGI (ed.), *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro*, Firenze 1970, pp. 211-236; W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Philosophia perennis. Historische Umrisse abendländischer Spiritualität in Antike, Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1998.

the work maintains that creationism was already known to Adam before being upheld by Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster, and many other ancient authors.⁷ Against Zeisold's invocation of 'antiquity' and in conformity to what is already known about Thomasius's antipathy to 'syncretistic' perennial assumptions,⁸ the *Disputatio physica* advanced a historical enquiry of a different type. By way of counter-narrative, Thomasius consistently identifies and underlines the points of conflict between pagan and Christian teachings: *A Gentilibus nihil sani possumus expectare*.⁹

Thomasius's disputation opens with a preface, the purpose of which is to establish, in a historically plausible manner, the opinion of Aristotle on the origin of the human soul.¹⁰ The central role accorded to Aristotle in this context is understandable: after all, his writings still formed the basis of the curriculum in the arts faculties in the German Lutheran territories.¹¹ For authors like Zeisold, com-

7. Cf. ZEISOLD, *Diatribae historico-elencticae*, sect. I, art. II, § 64, p. 45; punctum I, §§ 65-78, pp. 46-53.

8. Cf. SANTINELLO, "Jakob Thomasius e il medioevo"; ID., "Jakob Thomasius (1622–1684)"; M. ALBRECHT, *Eklektik. Eine Begriffsgeschichte mit Hinweisen auf die Philosophie- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1994, pp. 297-301; R. HÄFNER, "Jacob Thomasius und die Geschichte der Häresien," in: F. VOLLHARDT (ed.), *Christian Thomasius (1655-1728). Neue Forschungen im Kontext der Frühaufklärung*, Tübingen 1997, pp. 141-164; S. LEHMANN-BRAUNS, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte. Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barock und Aufklärung*, Tübingen 2004, pp. 21-111; A. EUSTERSCHULTE, "Die kritische Revision des christlichen Platonismus bei Jakob Thomasius," in: U. HEINEN (ed.), *Welche Antike? Konkurrierende Rezeptionen des Altertums im Barock*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden 2011, pp. 603-625. In his sharp differentiation between the uncorrupted origins of Christian faith and the blunders and errors of pagan authors (which, however, does not abolish the duty to study and use them), Thomasius appears as a typical representative of the so-called 'Lutheran Orthodoxy' of his time (cf. also the remark to this effect in GIERL – JAUMANN – SPARN, "Einleitung," p. 2).

9. THOMASIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, §§ 2-13, pp. 13-15; quotation at § 2, p. 13.

10. J. THOMASIUS, "Praefatio LXVII. De sententia Aristotelis circa originem corporis & animae humanae," in: J. THOMASIUS, *Praefationes sub auspiciis disputationum suarum in Academia Lipsiensi recitatae, argumenti varii*, Lipsiae 1681, pp. 418-426.

11. Cf. W. SPARN, "Die Schulphilosophie. Einleitung," in: H. HOLZHEY – W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN (eds.), *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie (Ueberweg). Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 4/1, Basel 2001, pp. 293-294, esp. 294; W. SPARN, "Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien," in: H. HOLZHEY – W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN (eds.), *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie (Ueberweg). Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 4/1, Basel 2001, pp. 475-587, esp. 502 and 516-517. — The statutes of the University of Leipzig have been edited only for the period 1409–1559 (F. ZARNCKE [ed.], *Die Statutenbücher der Universität Leipzig aus den ersten 150 Jahren*

mitted to the integrative approach of *philosophia perennis*, it was natural to have recourse to Aristotle's authority even on issues with clear theological implications. As a matter of fact, in 1661 Zeisold had undertaken a systematic attempt to prove the harmony between Aristotle and the Scriptures in matters cognizable by 'natural light,'¹² taking the opportunity to corroborate his creationist views.¹³ Thomasius's case was different. On the one hand, as a member of the academic staff in Leipzig, he was tasked with promoting a *Philosophia Peripatetica Christiana*.¹⁴ On the other hand, as a historian of

ihres Bestehens, Leipzig 1861). The statutes of the faculty of arts from 1617, which were still in force at the time of Thomasius, have been digitized by the Universitätsarchiv Leipzig and are accessible after registration: *Statuta Communitatis philosophicae in Academia Lipsiensi renovata et Serenissimi Pr. Saxonie Electoris auctoritate confirmata anno Christi 1617* (shelf mark: Phil. Fak. Urkundliche Quellen B 009b), URL: <http://recherche.archiv.uni-leipzig.de/Dokument/anzeigen/27755> (visited on 23.02.2017). The sixth chapter (*ibid.*, "De doctrina publica", pp. 22-26) lists the respective competence fields of the eight professors who constitute the faculty. Three of these entries (logic, physics, and rhetoric) explicitly mention Aristotle. In the course of his life, Thomasius held different professorships, first for ethics, then for dialectic, and finally, beginning in 1659, for rhetoric.

12. J. ZEISOLD, *De Aristotelis in illis, quae ex lumine naturae innotescunt, cum Scriptura Sacra consensu, ab eaque apparente dissensu, tractatus in duas partes distributus*, Jenae 1661.

13. *Ibid.*, pars I, disp. V, sect. IV, theorema II, §§ 5-17, pp. 154-159; pars II, disp. IX, sect. IV, art. I, §§ 1-6, pp. 277-280.

14. Cf. J. THOMASIUS, "Oratio XV. De syncretismo Peripatetico," in: J. THOMASIUS, *Orationes, partim ex umbone templi academici, partim ex auditorii philosophici cathedra recitatae, argumenti varii*, Lipsiae 1683, pp. 323-349, esp. 324. — With his concept of *Philosophia Christiana*, Thomasius conforms to a notion of the relationship between philosophy and theology typical of seventeenth-century 'Lutheran Orthodoxy.' On this notion, which shows notable differences to the initial projects of Luther and Melanchthon mainly due to the subsequent strong reception of the Aristotelian metaphysics in the Lutheran territories, see above all W. SPARN, *Wiederkehr der Metaphysik. Die ontologische Frage in der lutherischen Theologie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 13-18 and 163-169; SPARN, "Die Schulphilosophie. Einleitung"; SPARN, "Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien," pp. 476-479. Cf. also W. SPARN, "Formalis Atheus? Die Krise der protestantischen Orthodoxie, gespiegelt in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit Spinoza," in: W. SPARN, *Frömmigkeit, Bildung, Kultur. Theologische Aufsätze I: Lutherische Orthodoxie und christliche Aufklärung in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Leipzig 2012, pp. 253-291, esp. 254-255 (first printed in: K. GRÜNDER – W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN (eds.), *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*, Heidelberg 1984, pp. 27-63); S. SALATOWSKY, *De Anima. Die Rezeption der aristotelischen Psychologie im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 289-291; U. G. LEINSLER, *Einführung in die scholastische Theologie*, Paderborn 1995, pp. 293-294 (on the leading Lutheran theologian Abraham Calov). To summarize, for most Lutheran intellectuals in the seventeenth century, philosophy and theology are two distinct sciences, each with its own subject matter, principles, and method. However, philosophy does not, in principle, contradict theology, i.e.,

philosophy, he believed that Aristotle shared with other pagan authors teachings incompatible with fundamental Christian tenets. This apparent conflict raises the question: In unearthing the historical roots of the Aristotelian tradition, was Thomasius not sawing off the branch he himself was sitting on?

So far, the relationship between these two aspects of Thomasius's intellectual activity has not been studied in its own right. Such an undertaking would require a comprehensive examination of his writings on Aristotelian philosophy and his entanglements in its contemporary debates. Nevertheless, two important evaluations have been put forward in contributions on Thomasius's place in the history of philosophical historiography. Drawing mainly on works like *Schediasma historicum* (1665) and *Erotemata metaphysica* (1670), Giovanni Santinello and Sicco Lehmann-Brauns have analysed Thomasius's treatment of medieval and contemporary scholastic metaphysics. A prominent feature of these works is the harsh assessment of the scholastic tradition as an uncritical and historically ignorant appropriation of the pagan Aristotle. Accordingly (and despite the notable differences between their respective interpretations), both scholars have emphasized how Thomasius's enquiry into the history of Aristotelian philosophy went hand in hand with a highly sceptical, or pessimistic, view of its overall theoretical potential within a Christian framework.¹⁵

philosophical and theological statements do not relate to each other in the sense of the so-called 'double truth.' Philosophy is rather subordinated to theology on account of the lower dignity of the sources it draws on (experience and reason) in comparison to revelation. Practically, this means that philosophy is autonomous, but only as far as theology allows it to be. The *Philosophus Christianus* is the philosopher who recognizes the limits of reason on controversial points and subjects himself to theological truth. Thus, philosophical statements can be rejected on theological grounds and philosophical discussions indeed respect certain theological, often confessionally specific, premises. This subordination is expressed topically by the 'scholastic' formula of philosophy as a 'handmaid' of theology, a designation which Thomasius also makes use of, as we shall see further down. — On Thomasius's polemic against Spinoza in defence of this 'orthodox' relationship see SPARN, "Formalis Atheus?," pp. 257-260.

15. Santinello presents Thomasius as a conservative thinker who adhered to traditional Aristotelian philosophy simply because he saw no better option. By means of his historical studies, Thomasius recognized both the scholastic deformations of Aristotle's metaphysics and the problems involved in following his original pagan teachings in a Christian context. But even though historical truth undermined his Aristotelianism, Thomasius stuck to it because he feared the consequences of too radical philosophical changes. The solution to this dilemma, suggests Santinello, would be provided only by eclectic

At first glance, the so far neglected *Disputatio physica de origine animae humanae*,¹⁶ a text on natural philosophy, might appear to confirm this reading. Nonetheless, the present article suggests that Thomasius saw in his historical studies a means to invigorate, and not to mutilate, the Aristotelian philosophical tree.

My enquiry will unfold in two principal steps. First (sections 1 and 2), I examine the grounds on which Thomasius rejected the creationist position and, more generally, what he termed Zeisold's 'syncretistic' Aristotelianism. I show how this rejection arose from an alternative vision of a 'Christian Peripatetic philosophy' which Thomasius wanted to base on the revived knowledge of the history of philosophy. Subsequently (sections 3 and 4), I turn to the way this alternative form of Aristotelianism played out in Thomasius's

philosophy, which Thomasius to some extent anticipated and which was fully embraced by his son Christian. It would reject the authority of Aristotle in favour of philosophizing in a free manner and use the history of philosophy to identify and adopt only the best from the doctrines of past thinkers. (Cf. SANTINELLO, "Jakob Thomasius e il medioevo," pp. 188-196 and 212-216; ID., "Jakob Thomasius (1622-1684)," pp. 442-447, 454-456, 459-460, and 463-464.) — Sicco Lehmann-Brauns also sees in Thomasius's historical studies a seemingly paradoxical deconstruction of the Aristotelian tradition he himself represented as professor at the University of Leipzig. By means of his historical critique of Aristotelian metaphysics and its Christian appropriations, Thomasius rejected its claim to provide a comprehensive explanation of reality and its divine cause. Metaphysics was degraded to a lexicon of philosophical concepts, which together with logic served simply as an introduction to philosophy. Lehmann-Brauns attributes this destructive undertaking not to certain eclectic tendencies but to what he terms Thomasius's *praktisches Christentum*. Interested in the promotion of piety to the disadvantage of dogmatics, Thomasius believed that Christianity should remain centered on the Bible and abstain from metaphysical super-structures. (Cf. LEHMANN-BRAUNS, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 21-111, esp. 22-24, 26, 33-34, 45-70, and 99-103.) — For the sake of completeness, let me also mention the contribution of Ulrich Gottfried Leinsle (*Reformversuche protestantischer Metaphysik im Zeitalter des Rationalismus*, Augsburg 1988, pp. 139-149). In Leinsle's opinion, Thomasius's historical dismantlement of the scholastic metaphysical tradition is of hardly any consequence for his own theoretical treatment of the subject, which remains profoundly traditional. This judgment accords with Santinello's. — On the uncritical and ignorant Aristotelianism of the scholastics as a *locus communis* in Thomasius's Protestant milieu, which goes back to humanist invectives, see B. ROLING, "*Saeculum barbaricum*. Frühneuzeitliche Stereotypen in der Philosophiegeschichte des Mittelalters," in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 49 (2015), pp. 275-297.

16. Thomasius's disputation is mentioned briefly by FRIEDRICH, "Das Verhältnis von Leib und Seele," pp. 244-246 (as well as in some footnotes to pp. 216-222 and 225), ROLING, "Die Debatte zwischen Johannes Sperling und Johannes Zeisold," pp. 197-198, and BORCHERS, *Die Erzeugung des ›ganzen Menschen‹*, p. 19, n. 3. Among scholars of Thomasius, references do not go beyond an acknowledgment of its existence.

solution to the problem of the origin of the human soul. I show how he used an allegedly historical reconstruction of Aristotle's view on the matter to present the traducianist theory of Sennert and Sperling as a 'reformed' version of Peripatetic physics, in perfect harmony with the needs of Lutheran orthodoxy. In the final analysis, I argue that for Thomasius himself there existed no irresolvable tension between his historical studies and his duty to teach Aristotle at a Lutheran university. Rather, he considered the history of philosophy a precious analytical tool for his own modern way of being Aristotelian.

1. *'Studium syncretismi': the theological background of a methodological objection*

The numerous polemical references to Zeisold throughout the *Disputatio physica de origine animae humanae* are put into perspective as soon as Thomasius comes to speak of him in the extensive historical section. Zeisold's name is mentioned together with Georg Calixt (1586–1656), a theology professor at Helmstedt, and followers of his like the Königsberg theologian Christian Dreier (1610–1688). Calixt, Thomasius asserts, deviated from the "received doctrine" of the Lutherans, i.e., from traducianism, and opted for the rival theory of creationism, the prevailing view of the Catholic Church since the time of medieval scholasticism.¹⁷ Thomasius identifies two reasons behind this Lutheran opposition to traducianism, the one philosophical, the other theological. In philosophy, he claims, Calixt and his followers stuck to Aristotle, whose reason had been obscured by original sin, and, more precisely, to the scholastic Aristotle, who had been disfigured by the barbarism of the Middle Ages. Thomasius contemptuously discards the Aristotelian teachings on which the Lutheran creationists had based their position as something even a beginner in Christian philosophy (*Tiro Philosophiae Christianae*) would laugh at. In theology, it was again the medieval scholastic heritage which had determined the position of the group around Calixt and Zeisold. According to Thomasius, they had appropriated the scholastic doctrine on original sin, something all

17. THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 136, pp. 45-46. Cf. § 57, pp. 25-26; § 140, pp. 46-47.

genuine Lutherans (*sincere Lutherani*) spit upon.¹⁸ I shall come back to the central issue of Thomasius's objections to the Aristotelianism of the Lutheran creationists in the third section of my paper. Before that, it is necessary to look at the theological background of his polemic.

This background essentially consists of the intense inter- and inner-confessional debates around the doctrine of original sin which were taking place in Thomasius's day and which occupy a prominent place in his *Disputatio physica*. What Thomasius discusses in great detail with regard to the scholastic and contemporary Catholic doctrine of original sin,¹⁹ is succinctly reiterated when he comes to speak of Calixt and his followers. In Thomasius's opinion, the Lutheran creationists can reconcile their doctrine with the transmission of original sin only if they define original sin itself as a pure privation.²⁰ In order to clarify this allusion to a very complex theological debate, let me use an example Thomasius himself gives earlier in the disputation and to which he refers his readers also in this context. To illustrate the state of man after the fall, Thomasius takes the beginning of the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30). A man was attacked by bandits, who stripped him of his clothes and, having beaten him up, left him half dead. In a similar way, Thomasius claims, we are born not only stripped of original justice, i.e., the immortality, wisdom, sanctity, etc., Adam enjoyed before the fall, but also mortally wounded by sin. The scholastics admit our nudity but refuse to see original sin as anything over and above it. Thus they find themselves halfway between Pelagians, who claim we are not even naked, i.e., not at all subject to original sin, and orthodox Lutherans, who believe we are not only naked but also positively wounded, or beaten up, just like the man from the parable.²¹ As to the conceptual link between the creationist position and the 'extenuated' notion of original sin, it can be summarized as follows. The problem consists in explaining how a soul infected with original sin can be created directly by a just and

18. *Ibid.*, sect. III, §§ 137-138, p. 46. The text reads "Tiro Philosophicae Christianae", which is corrected to "Tiro Philosophiae Christianae" in the second edition of the disputation (cf. THOMASIVS, *Tractatio physica*, sect. III, § 138, pp. 42-43).

19. Cf. above all THOMASIVS-VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, §§ 63-73, pp. 27-30; §§ 88-92, pp. 34-35; §§ 97-103, pp. 36-38; §§ 140-144, pp. 46-48.

20. *Ibid.*, sect. III, § 137, p. 46.

21. *Ibid.*, sect. III, § 102, p. 38.

good God. The only possible solution appears to require the reduction of original sin to a pure privation of original justice. But this attempt at theodicy comes dangerously close to the Pelagians' rejection of original sin altogether, a stance which was unacceptable to an orthodox Lutheran like Thomasius.²²

What I have outlined on the basis of certain passages from Thomasius's *Disputatio physica* were in fact the usual Lutheran critiques levelled at the Catholic teachings on original sin.²³ The Catholic position was exemplarily exposed at the end of the sixteenth century by the Jesuit theologian Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), who also drew attention to certain internal difficulties of the Lutheran doctrine. The Lutheran reaction showed symptoms of internal discord. The sophisticated response offered by the Wittenberg professor Balthasar Meisner (1587–1626) aimed at preserving the Lutheran recognition of the gravity of original sin. Although this approach enjoyed great popularity, it proved unacceptable to Meisner's Helmstedt colleague Georg Calixt. But in elaborating his own position, Calixt came alarmingly close to the rival Catholic teachings – a fact underscored by Thomasius.²⁴

22. Cf. the passages listed in n. 19. Cf. also some relevant paragraphs from Thomasius's textbook on natural philosophy: J. THOMASIUS, *Physica perpetuo dialogo [...] adornata*, Lipsiae 21678 (1670), cap. 44, §§ 44-46, pp. 223-224.

23. For the following three paragraphs, I rely on H. SCHÜSSLER, *Georg Calixt. Theologie und Kirchenpolitik. Eine Studie zur Ökumenizität des Luthertums*, Wiesbaden 1961, pp. 1-149; I. MAGER, "Reformatorenische Theologie und Reformationsverständnis an der Universität Helmstedt im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," in: *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 74 (1976), pp. 11-33; C. BÖTTIGHEIMER, *Zwischen Polemik und Irenik. Die Theologie der einen Kirche bei Georg Calixt*, Münster 1996, pp. 42-69 and 73-80; A. SCHUBERT, *Das Ende der Sünde. Anthropologie und Erbsünde zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung*, Göttingen 2002, pp. 32-106; C. T. CALLISEN, "Georg Calixtus, Isaac Casaubon, and the Consensus of Antiquity," in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73/1 (2012), pp. 1-23.

24. Central in the overall debate were the theological notion of original justice (*justitia originalis*), mentioned in Thomasius's example, and the philosophical concept of nature. Put roughly, while Catholics saw original justice as a supernatural grace and a gift added to the human nature of Adam, Lutherans thought of it as something pertaining to human nature itself. Thus, in the Lutheran account, by virtue of original sin, man had lost not just an addition to his or her nature, but that very nature had sustained severe damage. However, this Lutheran insistence on the damage inflicted with the fall drew close to ascribing to original sin a substantial character. For example, (certain extreme interpretations of) the teachings of Flacius Illyricus were accused by orthodox Lutherans of Manichaeism – a label Catholic critics like Bellarmine readily took up and used to attack the Lutheran doctrine as a whole. In order to defend the close link between original justice, original sin, and human nature against Bellarmine and, at the same time, avoid

Calixt's name became famous principally by reason of the so called 'Syncretistic Controversy,' which emerged as the main theological preoccupation of the Lutheran world in the second half of the seventeenth century. This controversy included, but was not limited to, the problem of original sin. In fact, Calixt was among the few prominent figures of his time who, in the irenic tradition of Erasmus, sought ways to reconcile the rival confessions of Western Christianity on the basis of a comprehensive theological vision. In line with the Tertullianic adage *antiquissimum quoque verissimum*, Calixt believed that Catholics and Lutherans (as well as Calvinists) shared a common heritage which could allow them to reunite into one church. His doctrine of the so-called *consensus antiquitatis* saw this common ground in the Scriptures and their interpretation during the first five centuries of the existence of the Church.

However, far from achieving reconciliation by positioning himself in-between the contending parties, Calixt became the butt of attacks from both sides. While Lutherans saw in his teachings a betrayal to the principle of *sola scriptura*, Catholics refused to understand why the authority of tradition should be limited only to the first four ecumenical councils. Calixt's position was branded as 'syncretistic' by his fellow Lutherans.²⁵ For example, the Wittenberg theologian

Flacius's view, Meisner elaborated a specific understanding of 'natural.' From Calixt's perspective, however, such a *via media* was philosophically unsound and, as a consequence, theologically untenable. Since he was as unwilling to embrace the Flacian alternative as Meisner had been, Calixt landed in the Catholic position. Cf. the already cited study SCHUBERT, *Das Ende der Sünde*, pp. 32-106.

25. The concept 'syncretism' goes back to Plutarch and acquired new currency in the Renaissance, above all thanks to Erasmus's *Adagia* (cf. D. ERASMUS, *Adagia* I, i, 11, ed. M.L. VAN POLL-VAN DE LISDONK – M. MANN PHILLIPS – C. ROBINSON (Opera Omnia 2/1), Amsterdam 1993, pp. 125, 521 - 126, 547). Initially it designated – in a positive or at least neutral manner – the overcoming of internal differences within a community in the face of external danger. It retained this meaning also in the context of different efforts for confessional unification throughout the sixteenth century. However, as in the course of the seventeenth century confessional fronts progressively hardened, 'syncretism' came to denote an unacceptable compromise between incompatible doctrinal positions. Crucial for this semantic turn was precisely the Syncretistic Controversy. On these developments, see H. C. BRENNECKE, "Frömmigkeits- und kirchengeschichtliche Aspekte zum Synkretismus," in: V. DREHSEN – W. SPARN (eds.), *Im Schmelztiegel der Religionen. Konturen des modernen Synkretismus*, Gütersloh 1996, pp. 121-142, esp. 125-128; C. MARKSCHIES, "Synkretismus. V: Kirchengeschichtlich," in: G. MÜLLER (ed.), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 32, Berlin/New York 2001, pp. 538-552, esp. 544-545.

Abraham Calov (1612–1686), Calixt's main antagonist on the Lutheran side, published works with the telling titles *Syncretismus Calixtinus* (1653) and *Harmonia Calixtino-Haeretica* (1655). Ultimately, the Syncretistic Controversy addressed the self-conception of the Lutheran Church, calling into question its exclusive claim to Christian truth. But from the very beginning it also had clear institutional dimensions, inasmuch as it centered on the orthodoxy of the theological teachings developed in Helmstedt. These were attacked by the universities of Saxony, above all by the University of Wittenberg, but also by that of Leipzig, viz. the two institutions which were supporting Thomasius's academic career precisely at that time.²⁶

It is against this background that one should understand Thomasius's use of the term 'syncretism' in his closing remarks on the Lutheran creationists:

One should look for the ultimate root of this most unfruitful branch in the syncretistic zeal. In this matter, it has always proved harmful to the good cause. For [...] just as the Papists sought an agreement with Pelagius and Aristotle [...], so did the Helmstedt theologian with the Papists. No Christian should condemn the desire for ecclesiastical peace; but no one should approve of such a means for achieving it.²⁷

With his usual predilection for 'origins' and 'roots,' Thomasius identifies the driving force behind Calixt's view on the origin of the human soul and its implications for the theological doctrine of original sin as the *studium Syncretismi*. This benign striving for peace is, in his opinion, ultimately detrimental to the orthodox course of the Lutheran Church. But Calixt's 'syncretism' with regard to the Catholics proves

26. On the peculiar position of Zeisold's home university, Jena, which distanced itself from Calixt's teachings but at the same time was reluctant to follow the hard course of the universities of Saxony, see W. MÄGDEFRAU, "Der geistige Aufstieg der Universität im Zeichen von Frühaufklärung und Pietismus," in: M. STEINMETZ (ed.), *Geschichte der Universität Jena (1548/58–1958). Festgabe zum vierhundertjährigen Universitätsjubiläum*, vol. 1, Jena 1958, pp. 125–160, esp. 125–128.

27. THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 139, p. 46: "Ultima radix rami tam infelicis quaerenda est in studio *Syncretismi*, quod in hoc argumento bonae causae semper nocuit. Etenim [...] ut cum Pelagio & Aristotele Pontificii [...] ita cum Pontificiis transigere laboravit Helmstadiensis Theologus [...]. Ecclesiasticae pacis amorem nemo improbet Christianus: sed nec tale paciscendi medium quisquam probet." With the derogatory term "Pontificii," Thomasius refers here primarily to Catholic advocates of creationism such as Bellarmin and Albert Pighius (ca. 1490–1542), but also to their medieval scholastic predecessors.

only the tip of the syncretistic iceberg. The label is applied to the *Pontificii* themselves, whose proximity Calixt and his followers had sought, for having attempted a reconciliation with Pelagius and Aristotle. And already the medieval scholastic approach to Aristotle – the common heritage of contemporary Catholics and Lutheran creationists – was for Thomasius ‘syncretistic,’ since it had assumed a basic compatibility between Aristotelian and Christian teachings.²⁸ In all these cases, ‘syncretism’ functions on a universal methodological level strongly coloured by its pejorative theological connotation. It denotes any attempt to bring together heterogeneous doctrines, theological as well as philosophical, by violating their original distinctive characteristics.²⁹

But if Thomasius found fault with the ‘syncretistic’ use of Aristotle on the part of medieval scholastics, contemporary Catholics, and the Lutheran creationists, how did he go about his own task of teaching Aristotelian philosophy at the Lutheran university of Leipzig? What distinguished and rendered his *Philosophia Peripatetica Christiana* superior to the Aristotelianism of his adversaries? Speaking of the scholastics, Thomasius had taken care to underline that the *mutuae dogmatum lacerationes* caused by their approach had been exacerbated by the profound ignorance of the history of philosophy characteristic of their barbaric age.³⁰ The text I am now turning to highlights the central role Thomasius accorded to his historical studies, not just in the context of the debate on the origin of the human soul but in his whole conception of ‘Christian Peripatetic philosophy.’

28. *Ibid.*, sect. III, §§ 108-109, p. 39: “Sed qui Abelardum, Lombardumque duces secuti sunt Scholastici, omisso Platone unice Aristoteli haeserunt, cujus Philosophia cum illis temporibus novas subinde vestes acciperet latinas, non minus ei se commendavit, quam illi Patrum vetusto Platonica [...]. Atque hic eadem Aristoteli subeunda fuit servitus, quae olim Platoni, cum ejus doctrina *χριστιανίζειν*, Christiana vicissim *πλατωνίζειν* juberetur. Nempe non alia lege fit Syncretismus, nisi per mutuas dogmatum lacerationes.”

29. The direct source for this methodological dimension of ‘syncretism’ in Thomasius is, in all probability, Georg Horn’s *Historiae philosophicae libri septem* (1655). There the concept designates attempts to forcefully bring into harmony the teachings of rival philosophical schools (cf. G. HORN, *Historiae philosophicae libri septem, quibus de origine, successionem, sectis & vita philosophorum ab orbe condito ad nostram aetatem agitur*, lib. VI, cap. XIII, Lugduni Batavorum 1655, pp. 323-324 and *infra*, n. 35).

30. THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 110, p. 40: “Hoc autem Scholasticorum aevo tanto processit felicius quanto major fuit per seculi barbariem historiae Philosophicae inscitia.”

2. *From Peripatetic syncretism to Christian Peripatetic philosophy: the case of the 'Straw Aristotelians' and its antidote*

Scholars of Thomasius have repeatedly noted the prominent position which the methodological critique of 'syncretism' held in his writings.³¹ However, apart from a few cursory and scattered allusions,³² the strong theological colouring of this critique has not been recognized, let alone worked out in detail. Thomasius's academic oration *De syncretismo Peripatetico*, delivered in 1664, at the very height of the Syncretistic Controversy, should, I believe, be read against its background. Significantly, the oration begins by outlining Thomasius's conception of the right way to do philosophy, which he illustrates with the help of an analogy to the contemporary state of the Lutheran Church. Currently, explains Thomasius, our Church is threatened both by an open war against a fierce tyrant and by a deceitful peace with heretics and false brothers. Similarly, the *Philosophia Peripatetica Christiana*, the received and "temperate" way of doing philosophy in Leipzig, which follows Aristotle but only as far as Christian piety permits it, needs to avert danger from two sides. On the one hand, there are the philosophical *Novatores*,³³ who with their ruthless and insensate critique of Aristotle resemble the Turks demolishing the Christian world. On the other hand, certain "conciliators," or "philosophical syncretists," expose Peripatetic philosophy to derision by trying to harmonize Aristotle with either Plato or the Scriptures.³⁴

31. Cf. the studies listed in n. 8.

32. Cf. W. SPARN, "Religionsmengerei? Überlegungen zu einem theologischen Synkretismusbegriff," in: V. DREHSEN – W. SPARN (eds.), *Im Schmelztiegel der Religionen. Konturen des modernen Synkretismus*, Gütersloh 1996, pp. 255-284, esp. 258, n. 5; MARKSCHIES, "Synkretismus. V: Kirchengeschichtlich," p. 545; GIERL – JAUMANN – SPARN, "Einleitung," p. 12, n. 75.

33. With this conventional label Thomasius refers to representatives of the new mechanical philosophy like Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Gassendi, and René Descartes, but also to more Platonically inspired critics of Aristotle such as Girolamo Cardano, Tommaso Campanella, and Robert Fludd. Cf. THOMASIVS, *Physica*, "Praefatio ad lectorem," p. *10; J. THOMASIVS, "Programma XXXIX. Adversus philosophos libertinos," in: J. THOMASIVS, *Dissertationes LXIII, varii argumenti magnam partem ad historiam philosophicam & ecclesiasticam pertinentes*, ed. C. THOMASIVS, Halae Magdeburgicae 1693, pp. 437-451, esp. 446.

34. Cf. J. THOMASIVS, "Oratio XV. De syncretismo Peripatetico," in: J. THOMASIVS, *Orationes, partim ex umbone templi academici, partim ex auditorii philosophici cathedra recitatae, argumenti varii*, Lipsiae 1683, pp. 323-349, esp. 324-325.

The oration is devoted to the latter threat, labelled “Peripatetic syncretism.” “Syncretists” are for Thomasius those who try to forcefully bring conflicting doctrines into harmony³⁵ – a definition in accordance with the usage in the *Disputatio physica*, which is accompanied by another allusion to the Syncretistic Controversy.³⁶ The first part of the *De syncretismo Peripatetico* provides a historical overview of philosophers who, since Cicero’s time, have tried to reconcile Aristotelian with Platonic or Christian doctrines.³⁷ A prominent place is accorded to the Christianizing approach of Thomas Aquinas, which set the tone for the following two centuries.³⁸ This trend appears to have been very much alive in Thomasius’s own time, for it constitutes the principal object of critique in the second, argumentative part of his speech.³⁹ Here Thomasius insists that ‘Peripatetic syncretism’ should be rejected by the philosophical community in Leipzig and repeatedly refers polemically to certain *straminei Aristotelici*.⁴⁰ Although he mentions no names, one is strongly reminded of the group around Calixt and Zeisold, with its ‘syncretistic’ approach and close affiliations to the Catholic tradition. Accordingly, at one point, Thomasius warns the “straw Aristotelians” that if they wish to belong to “us,” they must keep away from the “impious piety” of the Catholics trying to liberate Aristotle from hell.⁴¹ Another passage seems to

35. *Ibid.*, p. 328: “Illi mihi Syncretistae audient, qui vere pugnantes sententias in concordiam redigere conantur [...]” For his understanding of the term ‘syncretism’ Thomasius approvingly cites the already mentioned *Historiae philosophicae libri septem* by George Horn (*ibid.*, p. 326, n. b).

36. Having touched briefly on medical and juridical ‘syncretism,’ Thomasius then speaks of the last of the higher faculties and states (*ibid.*, p. 329): “De Theologis vero, quoniam res hodie nemini est obscura, verbum dicere omitto.” The theological background also shines through in other passages: cf. *ibid.*, pp. 342-343 and 348.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 330-342. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 326-327.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 342-349. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 327.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 343, 345. — Thomasius specifies (p. 343) that this appellation is inspired by Augustine, who calls Antiochus of Ascalon (first century BC) “foeneus Platonius” because he tried to combine Platonic and Stoic doctrines (cf. AUGUSTINE, *Contra Academicos*, III, 18, 41, ed. W. M. GREEN [CCSL 29], Turnholti 1970, p. 59, 20-37). Antiochus figures prominently in Thomasius’s own account as the initiator of Peripatetic syncretism (THOMASIVS, “De syncretismo Peripatetico,” pp. 331-334).

41. *Ibid.*, p. 346: “Nam ex inferno Aristotelem, ut opinor, non liberant. Pontificiorum impia haec fuit pietas, a qua illi, si nostri esse cupiunt, absunt longissime.” Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 339-340. — Thomasius’s main source on Catholic attempts to assure Aristotle a place in paradise is Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa’s critique of scholastic philosophy and theology.

contain a critical reference to Zeisold's harmonization between Aristotelian and Christian teachings on issues cognizable by "natural light."⁴² Therefore, the continuity encountered in the *Disputatio physica* between the 'syncretistic' approach of medieval scholastics, contemporary Catholics, and the Lutheran creationists is already a leitmotif in the oration from 1664.

The *De syncretismo Peripatetico* advances – much more emphatically than the *Disputatio physica* – a methodological antidote for this kind of Aristotelianism. Only the childish naivety and ignorance of past centuries, Thomasius asserts, have elevated Aristotle almost to the rank of the Apostles.⁴³ Now, thanks to the revived knowledge of the history of philosophy, one is able to see things in a different light:

Nowadays, however, as we are no longer little children, as some most learned men have started to compete, as it were, in bringing to light, little by little, the history of philosophy, which had lain buried for so many centuries,

Cf. AGRIPPA VON NETTESHEIM, *De incertitudine & vanitate scientiarum atque artium declamatio*, cap. LIV, (Opera 2), Lugduni [1630?], p. 95 (this is the edition Thomasius probably used).

42. THOMASIUS, "De syncretismo Peripatetico," p. 346: "Si ethnicum respondebunt [straminei Aristotelici – Z. R.], quomodo ergo cum sacris literis convenire ipse [coni.: ipsi ed.] potuit? Hic fortasse clamabunt se consensum in illis tantum quaerere, quae ex lumine naturali possunt cognosci. Qvasi vero lumen illud non fuerit in Aristotele densissimis errorum tenebris, ut in ethnico homine fuit necesse, obscuratum." – Zeisold's *De Aristotelis in illis, quae ex lumine naturae innotescunt, cum Scriptura Sacra consensu, ab eaque apparente dissensu, tractatus in duas partes distributus* had appeared, as already noted, in 1661, i.e., three years before Thomasius delivered *De syncretismo Peripatetico*. A revised and expanded edition of Zeisold's work was printed in 1667, again in Jena. The previous printing, the preface boastfully explained, had sold out (J. ZEISOLD, *De Aristotelis in illis, quae ex lumine naturae innotescunt, cum Scriptura Sacra consensu ab eaque apparente dissensu, tractatus in duas partes distributus*, "Praefatio," Jenae 1667, pp. *5-*6). Although I have found no explicit mention of this treatise in Thomasius's texts, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that he was familiar with an obviously popular work by a prominent adversary. – Interestingly enough, in 1701 Johann Franz Budde would publish an article titled *De conciliatione philosophorum cum Scriptura S.*, in which he would criticize the 'syncretistic' approach and, in particular, Zeisold's treatise by utilizing works of Thomasius's, including the *De syncretismo Peripatetico*: see J. F. BUDDE, "Observatio XIII. De conciliatione philosophorum cum Scriptura S.," §§ V-VII, in: *Observationes selectae ad rem litterariam spectantes* 3 (1701), pp. 230-258, esp. 239-245. On the authorship of the articles in this periodical, which all appeared anonymously, see M. MULSOW, "Ein kontroverses Journal der Frühaufklärung. Die *Observationes Selectae*, Halle 1700–1705," in: *Aufklärung. Interdisziplinäres Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts und seiner Wirkungsgeschichte* 17 (2005), pp. 79-99.

43. THOMASIUS, "De syncretismo Peripatetico," pp. 344-345.

[...] nowadays, therefore, as we finally have our ears purged, who would rehearse the old lullabies about the concord between Aristotle and the Holy Scriptures? Who, I beseech you, if not someone unaware of the differences that separate the ages? Other means are required, if we want to keep in our schools the way of doing philosophy introduced by the Latin Peripatetics and rendered commendable by their extraordinary intellectual acuteness. Let Aristotle be, as historical truth presents him to us. [...] He was a Gentile: he could not have drawn other conclusions from the principles he himself had posited. For a long time Christian philosophy has been urging that his errors be banished from the schools.⁴⁴

According to Thomasius, one should carry forward the commendable undertaking of the Latin Peripatetics, i.e., the medieval scholastics, and retain Aristotle's philosophy in the schools. But since their 'syncretistic' approach is behind the times, one should employ new means, basing Christian philosophy on the fruits of revived erudition. It is the *historia philosophica* which, in the present age of adulthood, allows the identification of Aristotle's "errors" and helps expunge them from the schools.

But how does this valuable discipline perform its service? Conscious of the *discrimina aetatum*, the historian of philosophy is able to deduce Aristotle's erroneous teachings from certain *principia* which had enjoyed an axiomatic status among all pagans. This remarkable statement rests on a specific vision of the character of pagan philosophy which Thomasius outlines briefly in the following pages and reiterates consistently in a number of other texts. According to this vision, pagan thinkers had posited two equal and contrary principles of all things, God and matter. This *fundamentalis error Gentilis Philosophiae*⁴⁵ was the effect of the conviction that nothing comes out of nothing, combined with an attempt to liberate God from the responsibility for

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 344-345: "Verum hoc aevo, ubi ex infantia emersimus, ubi historiam philosophicam tot seculis desideratam per particulas qvasi certatim eruere caeperunt homines quidam doctissimi, [...] hoc ergo aevo, quo purgatas aures habere coepimus, veteres naenias de consensu Aristotelis cum sacro codice recitare velle, cujusnam hominis est obsecro, nisi qui discrimina aetatum ignoret? Aliis mediis opus est, quibus illam philosophandi rationem, quam latini Peripatetici invexerunt, mirificoqve ingeniorum acumine commendabilem reddiderunt, retineamus in Scholis. Esto Aristoteles, qvalem nobis historica sistit veritas. [...] Ethnicus fuit: per posita semel ab se principia non aliter potuit. Hos ejus errores jam diu est, cum e Scholis exulare jussit Christiana Philosophia." Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 325-326.

45. J. THOMASIUS, *Schediasma historicum, quo, occasione definitionis vetustae, qua philosophia dicitur γνῶσις τῶν ὄντων, varia discutiuntur ad historiam tum philosophicam, tum ecclesiasticam pertinentia*, § 37, n. s, Lipsiae 1665, p. 28.

evil.⁴⁶ It is obvious that this general conception postulates a blatant contradiction between the axioms of pagan thinking and basic Christian dogmas. As I shall show in the next section, it provides the basis for Thomasius's allegedly historical reconstruction of Aristotle's view on the origin of the human soul.

Without a doubt, for Thomasius, Aristotle remains the best guide to secular learning, better than any other pagan or modern thinker.⁴⁷ But within the framework of a 'Christian Peripatetic philosophy,' Aristotle's erroneous doctrines must first be recognized as such with the help of the history of philosophy; thereupon they need to be corrected through reference to Christian faith and "right reason" (*recta ratio*).⁴⁸ It is this

46. Cf. THOMASIUS, "De syncretismo Peripatetico," pp. 346-348. See also, among other passages, THOMASIUS, *Schediasma historicum*, § 19, n. c, p. 12; § 34, n. k, 1-2, p. 23; § 37, n. s, 1-11, pp. 28-29; ID., *Exercitatio de stoica mundi exustione*, dissertatio II, Lipsiae 1676, pp. 29-36; cf. *ibid.*, dissertatio XII, § 1, p. 162. — Thomasius's notion of the character of pagan philosophy has been examined in several studies. See above all SANTINELLO, "Jakob Thomasius e il medioevo," pp. 194-196; ID., "Jakob Thomasius (1622-1684)," pp. 452-454 and 457; LEHMANN-BRAUNS, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 36-43. Cf. also HÄFNER, "Jacob Thomasius," pp. 148-149; EUSTERSCHULTE, "Die kritische Revision," pp. 615-617. — Thomasius does not explicitly clarify which ethnic groups and historical periods fall under his notion of 'paganism.' The concept is applied consistently to the four main ancient Greek philosophical schools, the Platonists, the Peripatetics, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. But Thomasius repeatedly derives their allegedly dualistic doctrines from Zoroastrian teachings and ultimately from the Devil. It would thus seem that 'paganism' is for him closely connected to 'dualism' and opposed to the three Abrahamic religions, themselves characterized by the dogma of creation out of nothing. For a recent study of the notions of 'paganism' current in the 'Long Middle Ages,' see J. MARENBOON, *Pagans and Philosophers. The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz*, Princeton/Oxford 2015; for the problem of pagan knowledge in the period 1400-1700, see pp. 235-262.

47. Cf. THOMASIUS, "De syncretismo Peripatetico," p. 345.

48. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 326: "[...] illa mihi semper visa fuit maxime sobria secundum Aristotelem philosophandi ratio, ut praemissa dogmatum ejus severa inquisitione, quae fidei Christianae rectaeque rationi non repugnant, iis grati fruamur: in caeteris (quis enim credat immunem eum ab omni errore fuisse?) res eum suas habere jubeamus. Debet omnino affectum, quo accuratissimae alias inter Ethnicos Philosophiae auctorem ex merito prosequimur, moderari tum amor veritatis Christianae, tum conscientia depravationis quae illi, ut homini non exigua, ut Ethnicismi tenebris involuto longe profecto maxima non potuit non adhaerescere." — As shown by Luca Bianchi, the *topos* of Aristotle's fallibility, quite common in Renaissance and early-modern critiques of Aristotelian philosophy, had been elaborated within the medieval Peripatetic tradition itself. It is this very same tradition which Thomasius repeatedly accuses of having blindly followed Aristotle and believed in his complete compatibility with Christian faith. See L. BIANCHI, "Aristotele fu un uomo e poté errare": sulle origini medievali della critica al 'principio di autorità,'" in: L. BIANCHI, *Studi sull'aristotelismo del Rinascimento*, Padova 2003, pp. 101-124 (first published in: L. BIANCHI [ed.], *Filosofia e teologia nel Trecento*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1994, pp. 509-533).

sophisticated procedure of reconstruction and reformation which, in Thomasius's eyes, distinguished his own way of doing philosophy from that of the *straminei Aristotelici*. If the latter are indeed to be identified with Calixt's party in the Syncretistic Controversy, Thomasius's confessionally motivated self-demarkation from their 'syncretistic' approach in general, and from Zeisold's Aristotelianism in particular, did not limit itself to specific doctrinal matters like the origin of the human soul. Rather, it informed the very heart of his intellectual project. Against the antiquated pursuit of reconciliation and peace, which had led to so many deviations from the true celestial doctrine,⁴⁹ Thomasius recommended the antidote of the history of philosophy, a precious instrument for dealing with Aristotle in a modern, 'critical' manner.

3. *Reconstructing Aristotle: a mysterious passage and its creationist misunderstanding*

3.1. The origins of the agent intellect

Let me now turn to the way Thomasius applied his historically informed, 'anti-syncretistic' approach to Aristotle to the hotly debated issue of the origin of the human soul. As already mentioned, the *Disputatio physica* is preceded by a preface, which provides an allegedly historical reconstruction of Aristotle's opinion on the matter. Central for this reconstruction is Thomasius's reading of a well-known passage from *De generatione animalium* (II, 3, 736b27-29). Although Zeisold is not explicitly mentioned, it is again possible to see Thomasius's account as a critical response to his interpretation of this passage. On the face of it, Aristotle states that only the intellect ($\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma/mens$), in contrast to the vegetative and sensitive parts of the soul, enters into the embryo from outside ($\theta\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha\theta\epsilon\nu/forinsecus$) and is divine, for intellectual activity has nothing to do with corporeal activity.⁵⁰ In both the treatise on the conformity of Aristotle with the

49. Significantly, this affirmation, which I already highlighted in the *Disputatio physica*, appears also in the *De syncretismo Peripatetico* (cf. THOMASIUS, "De syncretismo Peripatetico," pp. 342-343).

50. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Generation of Animals*, transl. A.L. PECK, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1979, p. 171: "It remains, then, that Reason alone enters in, as an additional factor, from outside, and that it alone is divine, because physical activity has nothing whatever to do with the activity of Reason."

Scriptures and in the *Diatribē historico-eleñctica*, Zeisold interprets this text as evidence of Aristotle's endorsement of creationism. The *mens* is construed as the human rational soul, which, in contrast to the lower parts of the soul, does not originate with the body. Albeit admitting that Aristotle did not explicitly specify its external source, Zeisold sees here a reference to its creation by God.⁵¹ This particular interpretation is part of Zeisold's overall Christian reading of Aristotle's psychology. According to both Aristotle and the Bible, he believes, the human soul is an immaterial and immortal substance. It is multiplied according to the number of human beings and relates to the human body as an informing, not as an assisting, form, i.e., not as a helmsman to a ship.⁵² For Zeisold, traducianism represented a serious threat to this conception. As he puts it, the traducianist position implies that the rational soul is educed from matter, a state of affairs which would go against Aristotle and preclude its immateriality and immortality.⁵³

Thomasius's exposition of Aristotle's teachings on the soul, summarized in the historical section of the *Disputatio physica* and elaborated at length in its preface, *De sententia Aristotelis*, challenges

51. Cf. ZEISOLD, *De Aristotelis [...] cum Scriptura Sacra consensu*, pars I, disp. V, sect. IV, theorema II, §. 5, p. 154; §§ 12-13, p. 157; ID., *Diatribē historico-eleñctica*, sect. I, art. II, punctum I, §§ 68-69, pp. 48-49. – A similar interpretation is found in Christian Dreier, whom, as already noted, Thomasius mentions together with Zeisold among the followers of Calixt (cf. C. DREIER, *Gründliche Erörterung etzlicher schwerer theologischer Fragen bey unterschiedenen Stücken der christlichen Lehre*, "Bey der Lehre von der Erbsünde, die dritte Frage," Königsberg 1651, pp. 311-312).

52. Cf. ZEISOLD, *De Aristotelis [...] cum Scriptura Sacra consensu*, pars I, disp. V, sect. IV, theorema I, §§ 2-4, pp. 153-154; theoremata IV-VIII, §§ 21-45, pp. 161-172; pars II, disp. IX, sect. IV, art. II, §§ 7-12, pp. 280-283. – On the history of the terminological opposition between informing, or inhering, and assisting forms, see SALATOWSKY, *De Anima*, pp. 185-203; A. DE LIBERA, "Formes assistantes et formes inhérentes. Sur l'union de l'âme et du corps, du Moyen Âge à l'Âge classique," in: *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 81 (2014), pp. 197-248. For the helmsman-ship comparison cf. ARISTOTLE, *De anima*, II, 1, 413a8-9.

53. Cf. ZEISOLD, *De Aristotelis [...] cum Scriptura Sacra consensu*, pars I, disp. V, sect. IV, theorema II, §§ 16-17, pp. 158-159; ID., *Diatribē historico-eleñctica*, sect. II, art. II, § 24, p. 145. Cf. also DREIER, *Gründliche Erörterung*, "Bey der Lehre von der Erbsünde, die dritte Frage," pp. 311-312. — For numerous other statements of the incompatibility between traducianism and the immaterial and immortal nature of the soul (without explicit recourse to Aristotle), see ZEISOLD, *Diatribē historico-eleñctica*, "Dedicatio," pp. *4-*10; sect. II, *passim*. On Zeisold's creationist position cf. also ROLING, "Die Debatte zwischen Johannes Sperling und Johannes Zeisold," pp. 189-196.

Zeisold's on a number of fundamental points.⁵⁴ Like Zeisold, Thomasius takes Aristotle's (agent) intellect to mean the rational soul and affirms, with reference to *De generatione animalium*, II, 3, 736b27-29, its immateriality and immortality. However, he believes that Aristotle envisaged it as a unique substance which relates to humankind as an assisting (and not as an informing) form. By reason of these features, Thomasius underlines, the immortality of the single agent intellect fails to guarantee the individual immortality of human beings. A human individual partakes of this general immortality just as much as a ruined ship of the survival of its helmsman.⁵⁵

Thomasius is well aware that such a clear-cut account of Aristotle's psychology calls for substantial justification. In the process, he takes special care to underline the historical plausibility of his reading. Thus he claims that the unicity of the agent intellect is consistent with other important Aristotelian tenets.⁵⁶ If and only if the immortal agent intellect is unique for all humankind, runs his main argument, can Aristotle affirm both the eternity of the world and the impossibility of actual infinity. Should the individual human souls be immortal, he would either have to admit that they are actually infinite in number or negate that the world is eternal.⁵⁷ Thomasius appears to have taken this otherwise traditional argument from Francesco Vimercati

54. A practically identical presentation of Aristotle's psychology is also found in another preface of Thomasius's from 1665 (J. THOMASIUS, "Praefatio XLVI. Controversia de tribus in uno homine animabus," in: J. THOMASIUS, *Praefationes sub auspicio disputationum suarum in Academia Lipsiensi recitatae, argumenti varii*, Lipsiae 1681, pp. 262-270, esp. 265-269).

55. THOMASIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," pp. 421-422 (n. c and d contain references to *De gen. an.*, II, 3, 736b27-29). – For the sake of precision, let me note that the plain identification of the agent intellect with the rational soul, which Thomasius repeatedly makes when interpreting *De gen. an.*, II, 3, 736b27-29, is specified in several paragraphs of the *Disputatio physica* (see sect. III, §§ 10-12, pp. 14-15; § 165, p. 53; sect. IV, § 10, p. 56). There Thomasius draws on the Aristotelian comparison of the agent intellect to the sun. At the birth of an individual human being, the agent intellect emits a quasi-individual ray (*radius quasi peculiaris*) into the body. When the human individual dies, this ray gets reabsorbed into its source. A further interpretative nuance is provided by some parallel passages in Thomasius's schoolbook on natural philosophy (THOMASIUS, *Physica*, cap. 49, §§ 76-83, pp. 286-287; §§ 92-97, pp. 290-291). For the proponents of the view that the agent intellect is a single separate substance and for Aristotle himself, explains Thomasius here, the individual human souls are identical with the (mortal) patient intellects.

56. THOMASIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," pp. 422-423.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 423.

(ca. 1512–ca. 1571), an Italian translator and commentator of Aristotle who taught at Paris and whose writings exhibit a strong penchant for Averroes.⁵⁸ While the parallel discussion in the *Disputatio physica* indeed mentions Averroes,⁵⁹ here Thomasius is careful to stress the historical reliability of his source: Vimercati is presented as *vir in antiquitate philosophica versatissimus*.⁶⁰ But over and above individual arguments and authorities, decisive for Thomasius's interpretation and its claim to historical veracity is his general conception of the dualistic nature of pagan philosophy. On its basis, he even ventures to determine the mysterious origin of the agent intellect, on which *De generatione animalium*, II, 3, 736b27-29 had remained silent and which Zeisold had construed creationistically:

Finally, where does that agent intellect of Aristotle's, or the rational soul, [...] come from? For we have learned from him that it comes from outside, but we

58. For a detailed exposition of this argument, which Vimercati uses often, see F. VIMERCATI, *De anima rationali Peripatetica disceptatio*, in: V. STRIGEL, *In Philippi Melancthonis Libellum de anima notae breves et eruditae, [...] quibus ob argumenti similitudinem accessit Francisci Vicomercati Mediolanensis [...] De anima rationali Peripatetica disceptatio. Item Dn. Victorini Strigelii in primam Tusculanarum quaestionum Cicer. luculentus commentarius*, Lipsiae 1590, pp. *460-*582, esp. *551-*553 (this is the edition Thomasius seems to have used). — On Vimercati and his Averroistic theory of intellect, as presented in the *Disceptatio*, see D. N. HASSE, "Aufstieg und Niedergang des Averroismus in der Renaissance: Nicolò Tignosi, Agostino Nifo, Francesco Vimercato," in: J. A. AERTSEN – M. PICKAVÉ (eds.), *'Herbst des Mittelalters'? Fragen zur Bewertung des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin/New York 2004, pp. 447-473, esp. 461-466; ID., *Success and Suppression. Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2016, pp. 222-224 and *passim*.

59. THOMASIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 10, p. 14.

60. THOMASIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," p. 424. — The unicity thesis is also linked to Averroes in the *Controversia de tribus in uno homine animabus* (THOMASIUS, "Controversia de tribus in uno homine animabus," p. 269). Two further texts which explicitly set out to give a *historia* of Aristotle's teachings on the agent intellect, ascribe it to Averroes and Vimercati as well as to thinkers like Roger Bacon and Pietro Pomponazzi (J. THOMASIUS, "Programma XXVIII. De intellectu agente," in: J. THOMASIUS, *Dissertationes LXIII, varii argumenti magnam partem ad historiam philosophicam & ecclesiasticam pertinentes*, ed. C. THOMASIUS, Halae Magdeburgicae 1693, pp. 290-300; ID., *Physica*, cap. 43, §§ 30-38, pp. 212-214; cap. 49, § 65, p. 283; §§ 75-103, pp. 285-293). — Interestingly, the argument Thomasius takes from Vimercati is cited (and refuted) by Leibniz in the *Discours préliminaire* to his *Théodicée*. Here Leibniz is occupied with an interpretation of Aristotle's theory of intellect which he attributes to the "Averroists" and which is very similar to the one offered by Thomasius. See G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*, "Discours préliminaire de la conformité de la foy avec la raison," §§ 7-11, ed. C. J. GERHARDT (Die philosophischen Schriften 6/2), Berlin 1885, pp. 53-57; cf. G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Considerations sur la doctrine d'un Esprit Universel Unique*, ed. C. J. GERHARDT (Die philosophischen Schriften 6/2), Berlin 1885, pp. 529-531.

have not learned whence exactly. Indeed, if you take only the words we adduced from *On the Generation of Animals*, Book II, Chapter 3, the matter remains quite obscure. But if you consider not just his doctrine but the one of all Gentiles, everything becomes perfectly clear. The pagans believed that nothing could be created out of nothing. They were convinced that everything derives either from God or from prime matter, a principle they regarded as coeternal with God. Therefore, since Aristotle denies that the intellect is educed from corporeal matter, he had no other choice but to make it proceed from the substance of God himself, either through an intermediary or directly.⁶¹

According to Thomasius, the external source of the agent intellect, or the rational soul, becomes clear only if the famous passage is seen within the historical context it belongs to, namely that of the fundamental dualism characteristic of pagan philosophy. This claim automatically excludes Zeisold's creationist reading. Given that for Aristotle the agent intellect does not derive from matter, it necessarily has to stem from the substance of the second principle assumed by pagan thinkers, i.e., from God himself. It is an outflux of the divine essence.⁶²

The heterodox character which Thomasius, in contrast to Zeisold, ascribes to Aristotle's psychology is obvious.⁶³ At the same time, Thomasius consistently affirms the historiographical plausibility of his reading – both by having recourse to authoritative Aristotelian interpreters like Vimercati and by situating *De generatione animalium*, II, 3, 736b27-29 within the framework of his own general conception of pagan thinking. The reason for the centrality of this passage in Thomasius's argumentation does not remain implicit. Currently, he complains towards the end of the *De sententia Aristotelis*, Christian

61. THOMASIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," p. 424: "Ille Aristotelis Intellectus agens, illa rationalis anima [...] unde tandem est? Nam forinsecus eam quidem accedere, ex ipso audivimus, unde accedat, non audivimus. Enimvero, si sola illa verba, quae ex lib. II. de generatione animalium cap. 3. recitavimus, inspicias, res obscura est satis: sed si veritas animum non ad ejus dicam, sed totius Gentilismi doctrinam, planissima. Nihil pagani crediderunt e pure nihilo creari posse; omnia vel ex DEO esse, vel ex materia prima, quod illi Deo coevum dedere principium. Cum itaque neget Aristoteles, Intellectum illum ex materia educi corporea, nihil aliud reliquum fecit sibi, nisi ut ex ipsius DEI substantia sive mediate, sive immediate illum propagaret."

62. The notion of the two eternal principles of pagan philosophy and the way these conditioned pagan views on the origin of the human soul are also discussed in the *Disputatio physica* (cf. THOMASIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, §§ 2-13, pp. 13-15).

63. A systematic overview of the main points of conflict between Aristotle's teachings on the soul and respective Christian doctrines is given in THOMASIUS, "Controversia de tribus in uno homine animabus," p. 269.

thinkers labouring to save the dignity of Aristotelian philosophy profit from the obscurity of this particular text to promote their own competing views on the origin of the human soul. But doing this, Thomasius believes, is like hunting with unwilling hounds, i.e., forcing someone's words to render a meaning the author himself would never accept. All in all, Thomasius outlines three such positions, the first of which is unsurprisingly that of the creationists.⁶⁴

3.2. *Hunting with unwilling hounds (1)*

With regard to the creationists, the *De sententia Aristotelis* remarks only that their attempt to draw on Aristotelian teachings was favoured by the false but long-established scholastic belief that creation out of nothing was not unfamiliar to Aristotle. Since *De generatione animalium*, II, 3, 736b27-29 stated that the rational soul comes from without, proponents of creationism chose to read this as an allusion to its creation by God and thus turned the passage into an important testimony in support of their thesis.⁶⁵ Thomasius provides further details in the historical section of the *Disputatio physica*, which, as I already noted, attributes the creationist utilization of Aristotle to medieval scholastics, contemporary Catholics, and to the Lutheran followers of Calixt. As to the medieval scholastics, Thomasius describes how they used the passage from *De generatione animalium* as a stepping stone to an overall Christian interpretation of Aristotle's psychology. Aristotle, he explains, had posited only two types of forms: those educed from the potency of matter, which are corruptible; and those supervening on their subject from outside (*forinsecus*), which are incorruptible. In *De generatione animalium*, II, 3, 736b27-29 medieval scholastics saw an excellent opportunity to classify the human rational soul as a form of the second type, affirming both its immortality and its creation out of nothing.⁶⁶

64. THOMASIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," pp. 424-426. – The proverbial metaphor of going hunting with unwilling hounds goes back to Plautus (cf. PLAUTUS, *Stichus*, 139 [I, ii, 82], ed. W. M. LINDSAY, Oxonii [ca. 1903]): "stultitias, pater, uenatum ducere inuitas canes"); see also D. ERASMUS, *Adagiorum collectanea*, # 514, ed. F. HEINIMANN – M. L. VAN POLL-VAN DE LISDONK (*Opera Omnia*, 2/9), Amsterdam 2005, p. 196, 355 ("Dici potest in eos, qui coactis operis vtuntur officiumque ab inuitis exigunt.").

65. THOMASIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," p. 425.

66. THOMASIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 111, p. 40.

Summing up the results of the scholastic ‘syncretistic’ approach, which was strongly favoured by the ignorance of the history of philosophy typical of the Middle Ages, Thomasius states:

Thus, Aristotle was forced to teach in the schools of the Latins doctrines he had never upheld in his own Peripatos. He was forced (to mention only the points which pertain to the present topic of the origin of the human soul) to admit creation out of nothing; he was forced to postulate a plurality of agent intellects equal to the number of human individuals; he was forced to grant an informing form in lieu of an assisting one. Accordingly, it became easy to derive also the doctrine of infusionism from his writings.⁶⁷

The scholastics believed, claims Thomasius, that for Aristotle the agent intellect is not one but multiplied according to the number of human beings. They considered these multiple agent intellects as informing rather than assisting forms and asserted that they were created out of nothing. This is a remarkable paragraph, for it offers both a mirror image of Zeisold’s reading of Aristotle’s psychology and a complete reversal of Thomasius’s own allegedly historical reconstruction. One is even tempted to say that Thomasius projected Zeisold’s interpretation onto the medieval scholastics in order to disqualify it as an ignorant misunderstanding of Aristotle.⁶⁸

The reference to Zeisold himself comes a few pages later, when Thomasius says of the Lutheran creationists that they had not managed to go beyond the medieval scholastics in the way they interpreted and blindly relied on Aristotle. In Thomasius’s opinion, the philosophical motive behind Calixt’s and Zeisold’s opposition to traducianism was their belief that there was no middle way between creationism and eduction from the potency of matter, i.e., between the two types of

67. *Ibid.*, sect. III, § 110, p. 40: “Coactus ergo fuit Aristoteles docere in Scholis Latinorum, quae in Peripato suo nunquam crediderat: coactus fuit, (ut ea sola memoremus, quae ad institutum de origine animae argumentum faciunt:) fateri creationem ex nihilo; coactus fuit statuere intellectuum agentium parem humanis individuus multitudinem; coactus fuit pro assistente forma largiri informantem. Sic facile fuit infusionis dogma etiam in Aristotele reperire.” – The text of the *Disputatio* from 1669 has “intellectum agentium” instead of the correct reading “intellectuum agentium”, which renders the plurality of agents intellects according to the scholastics. This correct reading is provided in the second edition of the disputation (THOMASIUS, *Tractatio physica*, sect. III, § 110, p. 36).

68. In any case, here Thomasius neither mentions any names of medieval authors nor refers to medieval sources. In the texts on the ‘history’ of the agent intellect, Thomasius declares the view of the agent intellect as a faculty of the individual soul to be the dominant one in his time and again derives it from medieval scholastics (see the references in n. 60).

Aristotelian forms. And since the second alternative implied the mortality of the human soul, the Lutheran creationists embraced the first, just like their medieval predecessors.⁶⁹ On the level of doctrinal content, this is a fairly precise recap of Zeisold's view.

In sum, the position of the Lutheran creationists represented the main target of Thomasius's critique. In order to discredit it, he constructed a historical genealogy which derived Lutheran creationism from the teachings of the medieval scholastics. Scholastic creationism itself was dismissed as based on a false, historically ignorant interpretation of the passage from *De generatione animalium* which turned Aristotle's psychology upside down. Claiming for himself competence in matters pertaining to the history of philosophy, Thomasius affirmed that according to Aristotle the single agent intellect is consubstantial with God, a view which ruled out both the creation and the immortality of the individual soul and which he linked to Averroes. In Thomasius's eyes, the blatant heterodoxy of this position excluded any systematic relevance of the historical Aristotle for a debate touching on essential Christian truths. Accordingly, as I shall show in the last section of my paper, Thomasius also criticized attempts of convinced traducianists to draw directly on *De generatione animalium*, II, 3, 736b27-29. But far from using his historical studies to discard Aristotelian thinking as a whole, Thomasius aimed only at disposing of what he considered its illegitimate, because uncritical and outdated, forms. For Thomasius the history of philosophy – an analytical tool required to trouble-shoot the pagan elements in Aristotle's teachings – decisively advanced the cause of 'Christian Peripatetic philosophy.' It was thus only consistent of him to present his own traducianist solution as a product of a 'reformed' Aristotelian philosophy which responded perfectly to the needs of Lutheran orthodoxy.

4. *Reforming Aristotle: in search of the right reasons for traducianism*

4.1. Hunting with unwilling hounds (2)

In addition to the creationist usurpation of Aristotle's authority, the preface *De sententia Aristotelis* discusses two forms of traducianism which also used the *De generatione animalium* passage as a hound that could

69. THOMASIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, §§ 136-138, pp. 45-46.

help them catch their prey.⁷⁰ Both pertain to post-reformation times, when scholastic creationism, which appeared suspect to Martin Luther, began to lose its authority (as the historical section of the *Disputatio physica* takes care to underline).⁷¹ The first view is qualified by Thomasius as “eductive,” or “improper” traducianism. It claimed that the soul of the embryo is educed from the potency of matter, i.e., of the semen, and was upheld by the Strasbourg philosopher and physician Johannes Ludwig Hawenreuter (1548–1618). Since he wanted to take the *De generatione animalium* passage away from the creationists, explains Thomasius, Hawenreuter proposed a different interpretation. In this reading, the phrase about the intellect coming from outside was part of a still uncompleted train of thought, which Aristotle rejected later in the text. Although Thomasius cannot accept this explanation, he thinks Hawenreuter did his best to defend traducianism under the conditions of his time. Due to Melanchthon’s decision to retain Aristotle’s texts as the basis of academic curriculum, in Hawenreuter’s age philosophy was still dominated by the scholastic alternative of forms educed from the potency of matter versus those created out of nothing. Having opted against creationism, Hawenreuter was forced to consider the human rational soul as a form of the first type.⁷²

On the second variant of traducianism mentioned by the *De sententia Aristotelis*, the soul of the embryo stems from the soul of the parents.⁷³ As we shall see in a moment, it is this opinion, termed “self-promotive,” or “proper” traducianism, to which Thomasius himself subscribes. But he first dismisses an attempt on the part of unnamed authors to justify this position by ascribing it to Aristotle himself. These authors, explains Thomasius, drew on a forced interpretation of *De generatione animalium*, II, 3, 736b27-29, proposed by the influential Paduan Aristotelian

70. THOMASIIUS, “De sententia Aristotelis,” pp. 424-426.

71. THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 114, pp. 40-41.

72. THOMASIIUS, “De sententia Aristotelis,” p. 426; THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 125, p. 43; § 127, pp. 43-44; cf. sect. II, § 20, p. 10. – Thomasius refers to L. HAWENREUTER, “Sitne animus nobis ingeneratus a Deo, necne,” in: R. GOCLENIIUS (ed.), *ΨΥΧΟΛΟΓΙΑ: hoc est, de hominis perfectione, animo, et in primis ortu hujus, commentationes ac disputationes quorundam theologorum & philosophorum nostrae aetatis*, Marpurgi 1590, pp. 294-301. Hawenreuter’s position, as presented in this text, has been recently touched on by SPRUIT, *The Origin of the Soul*, p. 86, and examined in more detail by CELLAMARE, *Psychology in the Age of Confessionalisation*, pp. 218-220.

73. THOMASIIUS, “De sententia Aristotelis,” p. 425.

Jacopo Zabarella (1533–1589), who was arguing against the Averroists that for Aristotle the rational soul is an informing form of the human being.⁷⁴ Such an approach was unacceptable for Thomasius, given his own Averroistic construal of the intellect coming from outside.

Thomasius thus used his historical reconstruction of Aristotle's psychology to reject not only creationist, but also traducianist appeals to *De generatione animalium* II 3, 736b27-29. But far from being part of a self-destructive undertaking, this procedure set the scene for the solution which his own 'Christian Peripatetic philosophy' had to offer, a solution he considered superior from a systematic point of view. The general attitude which the *Philosophus Christianus* should assume with regard to the problem of the origin of the human soul is outlined both in the concluding remarks of the *De sententia Aristotelis* and on the initial pages of the *Disputatio physica*. Although the question pertains to natural philosophy, the text reads, it is also theologically relevant, for some of its possible answers can prove harmful to religion. The Christian philosopher, who is looking for the true opinion (*sententia vera opinio verissima*), should not stick to the pagan Aristotle; he should rather follow the word of God, which cannot be wrong.⁷⁵ But over and above appeals

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 425-426. – Thomasius refers to J. ZABARELLA, *Liber de mente humana*, cap. 9, in: J. ZABARELLA, *De rebus naturalibus libri XXX*, Francofurti 1617, coll. 954A-962A. Zabarella's interpretation is indeed a very elaborate one and tries to neutralize a reference to the passage on the part of the "Averroists." Its main objective apparently consists in showing that this text has no direct relevance to the problem of the 'informing' or 'assisting' nature of the rational soul. On Zabarella's psychology, see e.g. B. MITROVIC, "Defending Alexander of Aphrodisias in the Age of the Counter-Reformation: Iacopo Zabarella on the Mortality of the Soul according to Aristotle," in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91/3 (2009), pp. 330-354. Unfortunately, Thomasius does not specify how exactly and in what context Zabarella's reading was used in support of self-promotive traducianism. So far, I have not been able to identify the addressees of his critique. Some clues are provided by J. MUSAEUS – (resp.) N. V. FISCHER, *Disputatio physica prior, in qua Aristotelis de generatione hominis, & in specie de animae origine sententia exponitur*, Jenae 1639, to which Thomasius refers in a general manner at the beginning of the *De sententia Aristotelis* (p. 420, n. b). In the last paragraphs of this disputation (§§ 33-40, pp. *21-*24), Musaeus discusses and ultimately rejects Zabarella's interpretation. He mentions that it can be used in favour of traducianism (claiming also that it does not seem to reflect Aristotle's teachings). However, Musaeus does not indicate any names of traducianists actually drawing on Zabarella. It thus seems possible that Thomasius over-interpreted Musaeus's remarks, assuming the real existence of such usage of Zabarella's reading.

75. Cf. THOMASIIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," p. 426; THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. I, §§ 12-18, pp. 5-6; §§ 23-24, p. 7. As long as the *Philosophus Chris-*

to authority, Thomasius believes that truth in this matter can also be established with the help of reasons (*rationes*).⁷⁶ Let me now turn to the way this general stance took shape in Thomasius's own argumentation in favour of traducianism.

4.2. *Beyond dualism: self-multiplicative souls*

This argumentation is developed in the concluding, 'systematical' section of the *Disputatio physica*, but it draws heavily on the previous sections, which have elaborated the necessary conceptual instrumentarium and unfolded it within the extensive historical narrative. Presented in some detail, Thomasius's "self-promotive," or "proper" traducianism affirms that the soul of the child originates directly from the immaterial souls of the parents at the moment the two souls, carried by the male and the female semen, meet. Thomasius traces this opinion back to Gregory of Nyssa and claims that it has been accepted by most contemporary Lutheran theologians.⁷⁷ Self-promotive traducianism represented for Thomasius a theologically sound solution because it guaranteed the transmission of original sin on the level of souls themselves. Only if one assumes that the soul of the embryo originates from the souls of the parents can one regard the human rational soul, and not just the body or lower parts of the soul in contact with the body, as the primary subject of original sin. For Thomasius, solutions of the latter type reflected the scholastic and Catholic tendency to downplay the gravity of original sin and infringed on the deep Lutheran conviction that the whole of human nature, body and soul, suffered from the consequences of the fall.⁷⁸

tianus keeps away from theologically unacceptable solutions, he can enjoy his freedom of thought (*libertas sentiendi*). But in general philosophy should serve as a handmaid (*ancillari*) to theology.

76. THOMASIIUS, "De sententia Aristotelis," p. 426. These affirmations are in line with the reference the *De syncretismo Peripatetico* had made to both faith and 'right reason' as guides to the correction of Aristotle's errors and the practice of 'Christian Peripatetic philosophy' (see n. 48).

77. THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. IV, §§ 14-19, pp. 56-58. Cf. sect. II, § 28, p. 11; sect. III, § 47, p. 23; § 165, pp. 53-54.

78. Cf. *ibid.*, sect. IV, § 21, p. 58; cf. sect. III, § 66, p. 27; § 78, p. 31; § 90, pp. 34-35; § 104, pp. 38-39. See also THOMASIIUS, *Physica*, cap. 44, § 46, p. 224. Cf. FRIEDRICH, "Das Verhältnis von Leib und Seele," pp. 244-246.

In order to establish his self-promotive traducianism, Thomasius needed to show that forms like the human rational soul can originate directly from forms of the same species and that, against one of the main objections from the creationist side, such generation does not jeopardize their spirituality and immortality. Fundamental for this undertaking is a single quasi-historical postulate, almost buried under the explicit lines of argument in the *Disputatio physica*. Thomasius is convinced that the dualism of corruptible forms educed from the potency of matter versus incorruptible ones created out of nothing, a dualism accepted as an axiom by the scholastics and based on Aristotle's pagan teachings, has been surpassed. It is precisely the adherence to this tenet which he had ridiculed in the Lutheran creationists' choice to regard the rational soul as a form of the second type. The same dualistic starting point had conditioned Hawenreuter's 'improper' traducianism, i.e., his decision to oppose the creationists by embracing the first alternative. Instrumental for Thomasius's overcoming of the dualistic standpoint is an idea expounded by the Helmstedt philosopher and theologian Cornelius Martini (1568–1621) in his *Theologiae compendium*.⁷⁹ It was Martini, notes Thomasius, who claimed that between traducianism in the gross (or 'improper') sense and creationism there is a third way. It consists of assuming that the soul of the child originates directly from the souls of the parents and conceiving of this process as an emanation of spirit from spirit. Elaborating on Martini, Thomasius compares this emanation, on the one hand, to the generation process within the Trinity, on the other hand, to the way a candle lights another candle.⁸⁰

The latter example only confirms how crucial to the philosophical underpinning of Thomasius's position is a theory developed by

79. As Johannes Hermann von Elswich would later observe while commenting on the controversy on the origin of the human soul, Martini had been one of Calixt's preceptors (J. H. VON ELSWICH, *Recentiores de anima controversiae*, § XXX, Vitembergae 1717, p. 50).

80. THOMASIVS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. II, §§ 26-33, pp. 11-12; sect. IV, §§ 32-39, pp. 60-62. Cf. C. MARTINI, *Theologiae compendium*, Helmstadium 1650, pp. 194-211. – Thomasius's argumentation in support of self-promotive traducianism is very elaborate and addresses different aspects of the theory as well as several objections arising from rival solutions. The importance of overcoming the false dualistic premise and the role of Martini's idea are more evident in Thomasius's schoolbook on natural philosophy, where the topic is presented in a clearer and more simplified manner. Cf. THOMASIVS, *Physica*, cap. 44, §§ 1-27, pp. 214-219; §§ 48-66, pp. 225-229.

Daniel Sennert and Johannes Sperling, both listed among the main exponents of self-promotive traducianism.⁸¹ The paragraphs devoted to Sennert and Sperling in the historical section of the *Disputatio physica* describe how they had managed to break through the traditional Aristotelian and scholastic patterns. The Wittenberg physician Sennert, states Thomasius, started doing philosophy in a “freer way” (*liberius philosophari*), i.e., more independently of Aristotle. He rejected the education of forms from the potency of matter, claiming instead that they are self-multiplicative by their own nature. Forms proceed from forms, just as light is kindled by light. Prompted by the judgments of the Lutheran theologians in favour of traducianism, continues Thomasius, Sennert postulated the same manner of propagation for the human rational soul. This doctrine was later defended by Johannes Sperling, *conjunctissimus illi Collega*.⁸² Concluding his account of Sennert’s and Sperling’s theory, Thomasius remarks:

In this way, thanks to the industry of certain medics engaged in reforming Aristotelian physics in accordance with the needs of their own profession, we have obtained a proper traducianism from the improper one. It is of the kind which was once advocated by Gregory of Nyssa (as shown in § 47) and it should also prove most pleasing to our theologians. We called it “self-promotive traducianism” in section II, § 28 [...] and backed it up in the next paragraph by adducing the authority of Mr Calov.⁸³

81. THOMASIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 165, pp. 53-54.

82. *Ibid.*, sect. III, §§ 130-132, pp. 44-45. — On Sennert and Sperling in general, see W. U. ECKART, “Die Renaissance des Atomismus,” in: H. HOLZHEY – W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN (eds.), *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie (Ueberweg). Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 4/2, Basel 2001, pp. 926-936, esp. 928-935. On Sennert’s theory of the propagation of souls see STOLBERG, “Particles of the Soul”; FRIEDRICH, “Das Verhältnis von Leib und Seele,” pp. 220-224; H. HIRAI, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy. Renaissance Debates on Matter, Life and the Soul*, Leiden/Boston 2011, pp. 151-172; H. HIRAI, “Living Atoms, Hylomorphism and Spontaneous Generation in Daniel Sennert,” in: G. MANNING (ed.), *Matter and Form in Early Modern Science and Philosophy*, Leiden/Boston 2012, pp. 77-98; ROLING, “Die Debatte zwischen Johannes Sperling und Johannes Zeisold,” pp. 184-185 (pp. 185-189 on Sperling); SPRUIT, *The Origin of the Soul*, pp. 106-109; H. HIRAI, “Human and Animal Generation in Renaissance Medical Debates,” in: S. BUCHENAU – R. LO PRESTI (eds.), *Human and Animal Cognition in Early Modern Philosophy and Medicine*, Pittsburgh 2017, pp. 89-98, esp. 95-98.

83. THOMASIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 133, p. 45: “Sic ergo Medicorum quorundam in suae artis usum Aristotelicam Physicam reformantium industria factum est, ut *modum Traducis* ex improprio *proprium*, eumque talem nancisceremur, qui jam olim Gregorio Nysseno per §. 47. probatus, Theologis quoque nostris maxime posset placere. Is enim est, quem *sui promotivum* Sect. II. §. 28. [...] vocamus & §. seq. Dn.

The reference to Abraham Calov, Calixt's main adversary in the Syncretistic Controversy and, like Sennert and Sperling, active at Wittenberg, presents self-promotive traducianism as the orthodox solution to the problem of the origin of the human soul. Sennert and Sperling themselves are credited with having provided its philosophical justification by "reforming" Aristotelian physics. This step beyond Aristotle is exactly what Thomasius had stipulated was necessary for his *Philosophia Peripatetica Christiana*. A further remark helps better clarify the scope of the 'reformation' performed by the Wittenberg physicians. In a way, continues Thomasius, the propagation of souls from souls picks up and transforms Aristotle's idea that spiritual substances proceed from other spiritual substances and ultimately from the immaterial divine essence itself, rather than being created out of nothing (or educed from matter).⁸⁴

The philosophy promoted in the *Disputatio physica* sees itself as a form of Aristotelianism which goes beyond the Aristotelianisms of the past. Aristotle, a gentile whose natural light had been obscured by original sin, and the scholastic tradition, which had attempted to mingle his only partially understood doctrines with Christian teachings, have all been philosophically surpassed by modern thinkers like Sennert, Sperling, and Martini. Thomasius's solution is meant to represent a point on the same progressive line.

Conclusion: historical roots and philosophical heights

If my analysis is correct, this paper sheds new light on the complex relationship between Jacob Thomasius's marked interest in the history of philosophy and his practice as philosophy professor within the Lutheran Aristotelian tradition. Previous evaluations of this relationship

Calovii quoque autoritate firmabamus." Here Thomasius refers first to the paragraph discussing the view of Gregory of Nyssa (sect. III, § 47, p. 23), who had affirmed both that the soul is in the semen and that it is immaterial. Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Περὶ κατασκευῆς ἀνθρώπου / De hominis opificio*, cap. 14-15, ed. J.-P. MIGNÉ (PG 44), Paris 1863, cols. 176B and 177B-C (for the soul's immateriality); *ibid.*, cap. 29, col. 236A-D (for the propagation of the soul). On these passages see SPRUIT, *The Origin of the Soul*, p. 31. — The second reference is to sect. II, § 28, p. 11, where Thomasius gives a definition of the *tradux sui promotiva*, invoking in the following paragraph (§ 29, pp. 11-12) the authority of Abraham Calov.

84. Cf. THOMASIIUS – VAKE, *Disputatio physica*, sect. III, § 134, p. 44.

have focused on Thomasius's treatment of Peripatetic metaphysics and stressed the subversive role of his historical studies. By examining a so far neglected text on natural philosophy, I have attempted to illustrate their constructive function. The *Disputatio physica de origine animae humanae* is not the product of an intellectual who has lost faith in the theoretical potential of Peripatetic philosophy. It is an ambitious attempt to elaborate a dogmatically sophisticated stance on one of the most intense and speculatively challenging debates of Thomasius's time. Far from paralyzing Thomasius's way of doing Aristotelian philosophy, the study of its history provides, in this context, its decisive impetus.

Indeed, Thomasius's solution to the problem of the origin of the human soul profits considerably from the historical narrative unfolded in his disputation. One can even say that it arises as a result of this narrative. Central tenets of Aristotle's psychology, Thomasius believes, have become obsolete with the advent of Christian revelation. Accordingly, they no longer possess any systematical relevance for the solution of an issue which involves key elements of Christian truth. Medieval scholastics rightly introduced Aristotle as the basis of university curriculum but were unable to understand the real import of many of his teachings and naively sought to harmonize them with Christian faith. Against their 'syncretistic' approach, continued by contemporary Catholics and Lutheran creationists, Thomasius invokes the history of philosophy – a precious avant-garde instrument for dealing with the Aristotelian tradition. By deconstructing the misunderstandings of Peripatetic 'syncretism' and reconstructing the actual contents of Aristotle's psychology, Thomasius the historian of philosophy identifies the points on which the latter runs contrary to the postulates of Christian religion. Since he proposes an Averroistic reading of Aristotle's theory of intellect, these points prove particularly blatant. But once recognized as such, the heterodox elements can be 'reformed' by Thomasius the Aristotelian philosopher with reference to Christian faith and 'right reason.' His orthodox solution to the problem of the origin of the human soul claims to move beyond scholastic and pagan dualism and draws on Sennert's and Sperling's conception of souls as individual immaterial forms able to multiply themselves. A specimen of mature 'Christian Peripatetic philosophy,' this synthesis of historical erudition and theoretical ingenuity should substitute for its naive 'syncretistic' antecedents.

In the second half of the seventeenth century it was far from self-evident to affirm, as Thomasius did, that recent improvements *within* the Aristotelian tradition could lead to more veritable and consistent views on highly relevant philosophical issues. Both Thomasius and opponents of his like Zeisold considered themselves adepts of Aristotelian philosophy. But they developed their theoretical positions on the basis of completely different visions of its historical *fortuna*. Zeisold's 'syncretistic' motto *antiquissimum quod est, id quoque verissimum* ascribes to the pagan Aristotle direct systematical relevance in the context of Christian truth. Thomasius, by contrast, dismisses this monolithic vision of Aristotelianism as belonging to an ignorant and uncritical past. For him, Aristotle's teachings are not the plain and undisputed, quasi ahistorical embodiment of Peripatetic philosophy, but only its starting point, its 'origins' or 'roots.' Thomasius perceived and appreciated what may be called the historicity of the Aristotelian tradition, the continuous transformations its original contents experienced in the course of time. And he believed that the discerning examination of both origins and transformations, precisely because it dismantled the illusion of a monolithic Aristotelianism, offered new chances for theoretical advancements. With Thomasius, the history of philosophy turned into an indispensable analytical tool for doing Peripatetic philosophy in the best possible way, here and now.

This high-profile function of the history of philosophy would seem to draw Thomasius very near to the practices of eclectic philosophy. As is well known, the eclectic approach would be embraced and decisively promoted by Thomasius's son Christian, but was growing in popularity already in the seventeenth century. Interest in philosophical historiography was constitutive for the eclectics, who, following the example of Potamo of Alexandria (first century BC), strove to adopt only the best from the doctrines of past thinkers.⁸⁵ The question

85. Potamo is famously recorded by Diogenes Laertius as having founded "an Eclectic school" (Ἐκλεκτικὴ τις ἄρρεσις) and having philosophized by choosing among the tenets of existing sects. (Cf. DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, I, 21, ed. T. Dorandi, Cambridge/New York 2013, p. 78, 225-234.). This passage became a *locus classicus* for early-modern eclectics. — For a brief presentation of eclectic philosophy and the programmatic role the history of philosophy had to play in it, see H. HOLZHEY, "Philosophie als Eklektik," in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 15 (1983), pp. 19-29; W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Theodizee und Tatsachen. Das philosophische Profil der deutschen Aufklärung*, Frankfurt a.M. 1988, pp. 31-50; H. DREITZEL, "Zur Entwicklung und Eigenart der

of Thomasius's relationship to this movement has received some cautious but nonetheless divergent evaluations.⁸⁶ A comprehensive response is out of the scope of this study and would require a better understanding of Thomasius's vast literary production and multifaceted intellectual environment. I would only like to draw attention to the fact that, on the whole, Thomasius is very reserved in his use of the term 'eclectics.' The only reference I know of stems from the *De syncretismo Peripatetico*. Here Thomasius contrasts the "syncretists" with the followers of the *veteres Eclectici*, who, rather than reconciling contradictory doctrines, simply collect the pieces of truth which are dispersed throughout the writings of pagan authors and are compatible with Christian revelation.⁸⁷ Despite this approving usage in a text of central importance, Thomasius's general reticence should warn against overestimating his openness towards eclectic philosophy. One reason for this stance might lie in the strong link between

'eklektischen Philosophie,'" in: *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 18 (1991), pp. 281-343; U. J. SCHNEIDER, "L'éclectisme avant Cousin. La tradition allemande," in: *Corpus* 18-19 (1991), pp. 15-27; ID., "Eclecticism and the History of Philosophy," in: D. R. KELLEY (ed.), *History and the Disciplines. The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, New York 1997, pp. 83-101. For a detailed history of the term 'eclectics' see ALBRECHT, *Eklektik*.

86. Already Christian Thomasius attempted to present his father as an anticipator of eclecticism, who, however, had remained true to Aristotle's authority (cf. C. THOMASIUS, "Benevolo lectori," in: J. THOMASIUS, *Dissertationes LXIII, varii argumenti magnam partem ad historiam philosophicam & ecclesiasticam pertinentes*, ed. C. THOMASIUS, Halae Magdeburgicae 1693, pp. *10-*12). A similar stance is taken by Jacob Brucker (cf. J. J. BRUCKER, *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta*, vol 4/1, lib. II, cap. III, § LVIII, Lipsiae 21766 [1743], pp. 335-338). The question has been repropounded by Giovanni Santinello ("Jakob Thomasius e il medioevo," pp. 214-216; "Jakob Thomasius (1622-1684)," pp. 447 and 463-464). While Sicco Lehmann-Brauns has emphasized the points of contrast between Thomasius and contemporary eclectic authors (cf. LEHMANN-BRAUNS, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 47-53), Michael Albrecht has found Thomasius's Aristotelianism surprisingly open vis-à-vis the eclectic approach (cf. ALBRECHT, *Eklektik*, pp. 298-299).

87. THOMASIUS, "De syncretismo Peripatetico," pp. 327-328: "Syncretistas voco, non qui e Philosophis Gentilium, veteres secuti Eclecticos, proba tantum, sacrisque consentanea literis excerptunt, atque, ut Lactantius loquitur, veritatem sparsam per singulos, per sectasque diffusam colligunt in unum, ac redigunt in corpus. Non enim hoc est conciliare quae pugnant, sed congregare, quae sunt dissipata, & similia similibus componere. Quod si moderate fiat, & absque tortura dogmatum vel sacrorum vel profanorum, reprehensionem non incurrit." The positive connotation of this reference is obviously reinforced by the citation of the Church Father Lactantius. Cf. LACTANTIUS, *Divinae institutiones. Buch 7: De vita beata*, 7, 4, ed. and trad. S. FREUND, Berlin/New York 2009, p. 122, 4-6 (Lactantius, however, does not use the term 'eclectics' in this context).

eclecticism and the contemporary notion of *libertas philosophandi*, or the freedom to philosophize independently of any philosophical tradition. With regard to this option, which of course included an abandonment of Aristotle's authority, Thomasius showed notorious hostility.⁸⁸ Within Thomasius's *Philosophia Peripatetica Christiana*, the history of philosophy was meant to strengthen the Aristotelian tradition by rendering it more responsive to the exigencies of the time. Within the new eclectic programme of Thomasius's son Christian, by contrast, it would prove useful in abolishing Aristotle's authority completely and relegating Peripatetic philosophy to the past.

Despite their different objectives, both Jacob Thomasius and the eclectics appreciated the history of philosophy for its potential to reform philosophy. In both cases, reconstructing the historical roots of the philosophical tree ran parallel with constructing for oneself a position at its very top. Narrating philosophy's past in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was an undertaking which presupposed, and at the same time lent further support to, the superiority of the narrators' own 'critical' modernity.

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88. On the notion of *libertas philosophandi* in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, see K. ZENKER, *Denkfreiheit. Libertas philosophandi in der deutschen Aufklärung*, Hamburg 2012. On Thomasius's stance, cf. SPARN, "Formalis Atheus?," pp. 257-260; ZENKER, *Denkfreiheit*, pp. 99-106.