

JAKOB BOEHME, THOMAS TRYON, AND THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ETHICAL VEGETARIANISM

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The recent interest in climate change, ecology and environmental studies, and the simultaneous rise of vegetarian and vegan movements inevitably led to stimulating new perspectives in early modern studies, too. The seventeenth century in particular reflects a renewed interest in the question of animal welfare, fuelled by ancient philosophical traditions and religious-spiritualist considerations that stemmed from the roots of radical reformation – and in line with these tendencies, popular handbooks often jump from ancient roots to seventeenth-century phenomena when discussing the intellectual background of vegetarianism.¹ While the famous German shoemaker-turned-mystic, Jakob Boehme (1575–1624) has long been a subject of scholarly interest for historians of religion, spiritualism, and philosophy, in the last few decades his works have been subjected to an examination from the mentioned new perspective: Albala reads Boehme as an important source of “food ideology”, and both comprehensive and more specific histories of vegetarianism make frequent references to him.² Of course, the vast influence of Boehme’s intellectual legacy warrants his emphatic position in such an examination: while many dismissed him as a “fanatic”, he was celebrated by important literary figures like Samuel Coleridge and Ralph Waldo Emerson.³ His reception in England was quick and wide-ranging from an early point, and although the English Revolution and the ensuing collapse of censorship gave a natural boost to this reception, interest in his figure

¹ See Kenneth F Kiple and Kriemhild Ornelas, *The Cambridge World History of Food* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. VI.14., or Margaret Puskar-Pasewicz, *Cultural Encyclopedia of Vegetarianism* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010). For a way more detailed historical account with discussions spanning to early Christianity, Augustine, etc., see Colin Spencer, *Vegetarianism: A History* (London: Grub Street, 2016).

² See for example Ken Albala, “Jacob Boehme and the Foundations of a Vegetarian Food Ideology,” *Petits Propos Culinaires* 76 (2004): 20–29; Timothy Morton, “Joseph Ritson, Percy Shelley and the Making of Romantic Vegetarianism,” *Romanticism* 12, no. 1 (2006): 52–61; Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey, *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics*, Routledge Handbooks in Religion (London: Taylor & Francis, 2018), chap. 22.

³ For an overview of the polarised responses to his works, see Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei, eds., *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception* (New York / London: Routledge, 2014), esp. 1–12.

was by no means restricted to the radical sects newly emerging around that time. A particularly important site of reception was the London Philosophical Society, whose leader, Jane Lead represented herself as a spiritual successor of Boehme.⁴ For Lead, Boehme clearly was a model along which she tried to represent herself.

This paper investigates another English Boehme-follower, Thomas Tryon (1634–1703), who in turn could also gather some illustrious admirers like Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Ritson, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Even if it cannot be compared to the thriving criticism on Boehme, Tryon's name is by no means unknown for scholarship today. Added to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* in 2004, he frequently appears in discussions about (ethical) vegetarianism and its history. For example, in Alan Rudrum's classic study on the topic, Tryon is described as "the most notable vegetarian of seventeenth-century Britain", whereas in the *ODNB*, Tryon is classified as "vegetarian and author", precisely in this order.⁵ In his discussion of Romantic vegetarianism, Morton sees Tryon as an important precursor for the Romantics, and his vegetarianism (along with the Romantic tradition of vegetarianism) appears as a means of political radicalism: "Vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol were signs of revolutionary sobriety, a straight, masculine civic humanism, not the effeminate weakness that it signified later."⁶ Although the influence of Boehme is passingly mentioned here in connection with Tryon's so-called "spiritual economics" of the body, a more detailed comparison between Boehme and Tryon is not undertaken. Naturally, Tryon is also one of the most important seventeenth-century figures in several monographs on the history of vegetarianism.⁷

⁴ The complexity of the English reception and Böhme's role in the Philadelphia Society is discussed in Ariel Hessayon, "Jacob Boehme's Writings During the English Revolution and Afterwards," in Hessayon and Apetrei, *Introduction to Jacob Boehme*, 77–97; Sarah Apetrei, "VIII. Epilogue: Jane Lead and the Philadelphian Society," in Hessayon and Apetrei, *Introduction to Jacob Boehme*, 92–4, attached to Hessayon's study. More recently, György Endre Szőnyi held a talk about Jane Walk's peculiar Enochian walks: György Endre Szőnyi, "Visions, Voices, Altered States in the Shadow of the English Revolution: The Heterodoxy of John Pordage, the Visions of Samuel Pordage and the Enochian Walks of Jane Lead," in Ágnes Györke et al., ed., *15th Biennial HUSSE Conference* (Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, 2022), 170, <https://btk.kre.hu/doc/konferencia/HUSSEAbstractsFinal.pdf>.

⁵ Alan Rudrum, "Ethical Vegetarianism in Seventeenth-Century Britain: Its Roots in Sixteenth-Century European Theological Debate," *The Seventeenth Century* 18, no. 1 (2003): 80; Virginia Smith, "Tryon, Thomas (1634–1703), Vegetarian and Author," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, September 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27783>.

⁶ Morton, "Joseph Ritson, Percy Shelley and the Making of Romantic Vegetarianism," 52.

⁷ See for example Spencer, *Vegetarianism*, 206–9. Oddly enough, he seems to be completely omitted (maybe again because of the strange chronological order skipping the time between antiquity and the eighteenth century) in the anthology Kerry S. Walters and Lisa Portmess, *Ethical Vegetarianism: From*

Nonetheless, I argue here that the increased interest towards vegetarianism has somewhat suppressed other significant aspects of the oeuvre. A short note from 1861 makes this point clear, as in an article about “*certain theosophists and mystics*”, the mysticism of the “strange but worthy enthusiast” seems to be of greater importance than his but briefly mentioned vegetarianism.⁸ Therefore, in my discussion of Tryon I try to investigate his celebrated vegetarianism within the wider context of his views, regarding his dietary ideals not as a source, but rather as a consequence of his philosophy. Through a brief examination of two central subjects of Boehme (the concept of quality and the question of predestination) in Tryon’s texts, I take the first preliminary steps towards a more systematic analysis of Tryon’s often mentioned, but rarely scrutinised Behmenism. For this purpose, I mainly rely on his late work, the *Letters on Several Occasions* (1700), since it offers the deepest insights into his thinking on topics ranging from every-day matters like the making of bricks and tiles to more philosophical ones like the question of predestination, or the humanity of Christ. In the final part of my paper I briefly refer to the memoirs of Tryon (*Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Thomas Tryon*, 1705), and to his book *The Way to Health* (1697), in order to reveal similarities with a popular Boehme biography, alongside a self-representational technique that appears to conceal these debts.

Jakob Boehme’s writings started to appear in English translation in the turbulent period of the Civil War, when the collapse of censorship led to monumental changes in the world of printing, but even before that, his writings, imported from Amsterdam, were circulating in manuscript form.⁹ The translation project, resulting in the English rendering of most of his works and letters in less than two decades, was clearly an “organised scheme”, and the famous “intelligencer” of the period, Samuel Hartlib, and his intellectual network played a key role in it.¹⁰ In fact, it is the very breadth of this network that turned Boehme into a staple author for everyone (on both ends of the political spectrum) hoping for a new reformation, a theme around which the German author’s writings

Pythagoras to Peter Singer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). A separate section is devoted to him in Spencer, *Vegetarianism; A History*, 206–209.

⁸ Eirionnach, “Notes and Queries Respecting Certain Theosophists and Mystics,” *Notes and Queries*, 11 May, 1861, 361.

⁹ Hessayon, “Jacob Boehme’s Writings,” 79. On the impact of the English Revolution on the world of printing, see N. H. Keeble, *The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. chap. 3: “Texts in Conflict” by Sharon Achinstein.

¹⁰ Ariel Hessayon, “The Teutonicks Writings’: Translating Jacob Boehme into English and Welsh,” *Esoterica* 9 (2007): 130; Hessayon, “Jacob Boehme’s Writings,” 79.

revolve. As a result of this comprehensive translation and publication project, most of Boehme's writings were already available in English by the time a shepherd of humble origins in rural England decided to teach himself reading and writing, and set on a spiritual-intellectual journey not unlike that of the German shoemaker.

The autodidact shepherd was Thomas Tryon, and we know such details from his short autobiography.¹¹ According to that, after mastering letters, Tryon decided to give up his work as a shepherd, sold his flock, and moved to London. There he became apprentice to an Anabaptist ("an honest sober Man"), and as the topics covered in his autobiography reveal, he was exposed to a vast range of new ideas from the discipline of astrology, alchemy, and other sciences, and was engaged in a reading programme that often extended into the night hours, too. Besides rather up-to-date references to different scientific disciplines, he also promotes (and apparently prefers) a certain "inward Wisdom", which was a result of abstinence and singularity, leading to a "blessed Union and harmonious Correspondency amongst all the Properties of the Soul."¹² This already suggests similarities with Boehme, and the references to the "Voice of Wisdom", to "holy Light" and "Clouds of Darkness" bring the two authors even closer to each other, or at least suggest that a detailed comparison between their unique spiritualism is warranted.

Of course, a full comparison is not possible here due to the immense complexity and obscurity of the German mystic's thinking and the sheer amount of writings by both authors, therefore, let me single out one important Behmenian concept, quality, which also appears in several works of Tryon. In his autobiography, he includes an apology of astrology, claiming that

[...] it enabled me in some measure to discern the Complexion and Qualities of Animals, Minerals, and Vegetations; for no Judicious Man can deny the Influence of Coelestial on inferior bodies; and therefore he that is most knowing in their Nature and Operations, he distinguishes best the Natures and Qualities of the things of this World, and likewise best understands the human Nature, and himself; for there is an Astrology within Man, as well as without him.¹³

The whole passage is echoing some of the major concepts of Boehme, but the notion of "quality" has particularly emphatic resonances in Tryon's texts.

¹¹ Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs of Thomas Tryon*, [gratisbooks.com](https://www.gratisbooks.com), 1999, <https://www.gratisbooks.com>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

The German thinker offers a surprisingly straightforward definition of this concept in his earliest work, the unfinished *Aurora oder Morgenröte in Aufgang* (1612): "Alhier Mus Man Nun betrachten was daß wortt qualitet / heist oder ist / qualitet ist die Beweglichkeit. quallen / oder treiben Eines dinges."¹⁴ John Sparrow's contemporary English translation, published in 1656, adds the very first editorial comment to the book here, warning the reader that the understanding of the seemingly simple concept of quality is essential to anyone reading Boehme, and English synonyms for the word are also listed, to name but a few: "seven sources", "seven species", "kinds", "manners", "circumstances", "conditions", "faculties", "fountain spirits."¹⁵ This definition is followed by a description of specific quality pairs, like air-water, light-fierceness, hot-cold, and so on. From Boehme's account, qualities emerge as different sorts of intermingling abstract powers, each having its good and evil sides. As we saw, quality is an important notion already in Tryon's autobiography, but other works offer even more insight into his relevant ideas.

The way to health, long life, and happiness (first published probably in 1683) is an unconventional guide to healthy and happy life with an eccentric dedication stressing that "I have not consulted Authors in composing this tract, to pay you, like a Banker with other Peoples Coin, or entertain you with a Rapsody of stolen notions."¹⁶ Despite this overconfident denial of debts to other authors, the book begins in a fashion hauntingly similar to *Aurora*. The whole first chapter is devoted to the four qualities and the "complexions" proceeding from them.¹⁷ There is, however, no general definition of quality

¹⁴ Jakob Böhme, *Aurora: (Morgen Rote Im Auffgang, 1612) and Grundlicher Bericht ora Fundamental Report (Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620)*, eds. Günther Bonheim and Michael Spang, trans. Andrew Weeks (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 116. I preserved the edition's transcription, following the editors' advice that the "reader should be confronted with the spelling, syllable division, and punctuation of an author who considered the phonetic production of sounds and syllables the key to meaning." *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵ Jakob Böhme, *Aurora, That Is, the Day-Spring, or Dawning of the Day in the Orient, or Morning-Rednesse in the Rising of the Sun, That Is, the Root or Mother of Philosophie, Astrologie, & Theologie from the True Ground, or a Description of Nature [...] All This Set down Diligently from a True Ground in the Knowledge of the Spirit, and in the Impulse of God / by Jacob Behme, Teutonick Philosopher [...]* (London: Printed by John Streater for Giles Calvert [...], 1656), 34, <https://www.proquest.com/books/aurora-that-is-day-spring-dawning-orient-morning/docview/2240960864/se-2?accountid=163371>.

¹⁶ Thomas Tryon, *The Way to Health, Long Life, and Happiness, or, A Discourse of Temperance and the Particular Nature of All Things Requisite for the Life of Man [...] to Which Is Added, a Treatise of Most Sorts of English Herbs [...] the like Never before Published / Communicated to the World for a General Good, by Philotheos Physiologus* (London: Printed and sold by Andrew Sowle, 1683), A2v, <https://www.proquest.com/books/way-health-long-life-happiness-discourse/docview/2240878074/se-2?accountid=163371>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1–43.

itself, and the explanations reflect a more common sense interpretation of the word “quality”, regarded by Tryon as the determining factor of human (and also: animal) character instead of the all-governing, universe-moving power by Boehme. On one hand, Tryon seems to regard the notion of quality as readily received knowledge; on the other hand, he restricts its scope to the more practical matters he deals with in the book, losing much of the complexity in Boehme’s system.

The collection of essayistic letters by Tryon, *Letters Upon Several Occasions* (1700) discusses topics including the operation of the different senses, religion, “God’s Permission for Killing and Eating of Beasts”, education, languages, predestination, and death.¹⁸ The concept of “quality” plays a fundamental role in the letters, occurring more than a hundred times in a space of 240 pages, not to mention Sparrow’s synonyms mentioned earlier – quality is clearly a ubiquitous presence in this book. Nonetheless, no separate letter is dedicated to the discussion of the notion of quality itself, and none of the instances is surrounded by any sort of explanation about this essential category. In fact, the only thing we learn from the volume is that qualities seem to reproduce themselves, like in this passage from the letter on Death:

[...] every Principle and governing Quality begets and brings forth Children like it self, and endues them with all the Qualifications of the Father, both in Body and Mind, Soul and Spirit, and where he is willing to presage or promise unto himself or Posterity any Good, he must Live first and transact all the Methods of his Life in harmlessness and innocency, avoiding Violence and all sorts and kinds of Oppression, either to Man or Beast [...]¹⁹

Such an approach to quality and its reproduction obviously supports arguments towards religiously driven nonviolence, and the extension of this system to beasts becomes a reason for what is usually called “ethical vegetarianism.” However, for our present purposes it is more interesting that quality is used here in a reductionist, common sense way, without the complex Behmenian background.

Tryon offers what is the closest to a proper definition of quality in his preface to the reader, when he argues for the necessity of repetitions in the work (a remarkable feature of all of Tryon’s works). He claims that in order to study God or nature in the proper way, one must repeatedly study the “original principles, I mean the four grand Qualities, which

¹⁸ Thomas Tryon, *Tryon’s Letters upon Several Occasions [...] by Tho. Tryon* (London: Printed for Geo. Conyers and Eliz. Harris, 1700), <https://www.proquest.com/books/tryons-letters-upon-several-occasions-tho-tryon/docview/2264201529/se-2?accountid=163371>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

some of the ancient philosophers called Sulphur, Mercury and Salt" (a2v). An even more specific reference to the four qualities is found in the third letter, about the sense of tasting. Here we learn that not only every taste, but, in fact, everything is made out of the four qualities, and even a concise definition emerges: "[the four grand qualities] are Materials all Mankind and all Creatures are compounded of; and according to the Graduation, Strength or Weakness, these are in each thing, so the Creature is better or worse [...]."²⁰ Many other occurrences could be cited to illustrate that on Tryon's hand quality transforms from the dynamic, active, ever-changing force of Boehme into a much more simplified, static constituent of every creature.

Tryon's simplified notion of quality receives its true importance from the way the dominant components of creatures govern whether the given creature is good or evil. A short glance at Boehme's concept of the sweet quality already indicates similarities: "Die Süsse qualitet ist der Bittern End kegen gesetzt / vnd ist Eine Holdselige liebliche qualitet Eine erquickung des lebens / Eine senfftigung der grimigkeit. Sie macht alles lieblich vnd freundlich / in allen Creaturen."²¹ Nonetheless, there is a very important difference between Boehme's and Tryon's stance. Although Boehme describes both the good and the evil side of each quality, it is not at all done with the purpose of establishing oppositions. On the contrary, for Boehme (as Andrew Weeks claims in connection with *Aurora*), "Quality is [...] a first conceptual endeavour to bridge the dualisms of heaven and earth and of good and evil."²²

In Tryon's letters, however, nothing is felt more strongly than a consistent tendency towards dichotomy. Should he be talking about the senses, education, or anything else, the text abounds with harsh oppositions. This tendency is most obvious in a pair of letters, one entitled "Of Employments arising from the Fountain of Darkness", the other, not surprisingly, "Of Employment arising from the Fountain of Light." The structure of the letters is similar, and both begin with the case for children. Tryon claims that "A Child is to be made any thing that his Father, Mother or Tutor pleases to have him."²³ Next, he turns to the problem of language. "Pleasant imaginations, inclinations, courteous language, and free speeches, without reservation or secret meaning, have their birth from the Divine Kingdom", while "impertinent Rhimes, Words, and insignificant and useless

²⁰ Ibid., 8.

²¹ Böhme, *Aurora*, 122.

²² Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1992), 65.

²³ Tryon, *Letters*, 82.

Inventions" arise from the dark Kingdom.²⁴ Both letters continue in the same tone, with the primary argument that people exposed to things originating from the fountain of goodness become good, while people exposed to things with evil origin become bad. But almost any of the letters could be cited here. One concerning foods (*Of Cleanness*), for example, claims that "Every thing in this Visible World doth contain the Nature and Qualities of the two Grand Fountains of Good and Evil. In their very original, they are endued with an influential Vertue or Vice [...]."²⁵ And this is why in Tryon's system we should refrain from eating meat: since food nourishes body and mind alike, and each quality strengthens the one similar to itself, we should only eat foods that are of virtuous origin – and foods prepared with the use of oppression and violence simply cannot be such.

The concept is all the more interesting if we weigh it against a typical quotation from secondary literature: "Tryon [...] believed in vegetarianism as an aid to a virtuous and healthy life."²⁶ I find this statement by Alice Brown highly problematic, because Tryon's quest was not simply for a virtuous and healthy life. Everything he writes is written with the aim of returning to the perfect prelapsarian state of the Union, and since oppression and violence, and foods produced with the help of them are resulting from the breaking of this union, and originate from the source of darkness, vegetarianism is an inevitable requirement for the restitution. But it is by no means enough; it should be complemented by the ever-repeated virtues of order, temperance, cleanness, industry, silence, good methods of learning and speaking and so on.²⁷ His much-discussed vegetarianism should be understood in the context of his wider religious philosophy, not as an end but as a means to something bigger.

Based on the above comparison, it seems that whereas in Boehme qualities are also discussed for their own sakes, as pure manifestations of the divine power, an active, dynamic force, in Tryon their form and nature is not included in the discussion, and they become significantly simpler static constituents of creatures. The most transcendental layer seems to be completely omitted, and the qualities (along with other important and com-

²⁴ On the significance of Tryon's views on language and imagination, see N. S. Boone, "Expanding Identity through Imagination; or, How Thomas Tryon Becomes the Marginalized," in Kevin L. Cope, ed., *1650–1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, vol. 24 (Ithaca, NY: Bucknell University Press, 2019), 167–77, <https://doi.org/10.36019/9781684480760-008>.

²⁵ Tryon, *Letters*, 85.

²⁶ Alice Browne, "Dreams and Picture-Writing: Some Examples of This Comparison from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 90–100, <https://doi.org/10.2307/751053>.

²⁷ See for example Tryon, *Letters*, 32. This is just one example of the group of virtues in the work.

plex notions) are presented in a reduced, dualistic framework. Altogether, Tryon seems to simplify the concepts of Boehme, and often stops precisely at the point where Boehme descends into the deeper layers of those concepts.

The next example will illustrate the differences in a more pointed way. Boehme devoted a whole book to the question of election by grace (*Von der Gnaden-Wahl*, 1623). The book consists of thirteen chapters, and considers the question from a remarkably wide perspective. Despite the precisely defined topic, the volume includes Boehme's views on vastly different matters, from the nature of God and the Word to the creation and the Fall. The chapters refuting election by grace are in fact commentaries to Bible verses often cited in the debate on predestination. Here I only take one almost random example to highlight the huge differences between Boehme's and Tryon's treatment of the matter. In chapter 11, Boehme comments on grace-related passages in the Bible. During this process, the question of salvation by works is touched, and on Pauline grounds Boehme argues that works without proper faith are simply not enough, because the sole source of grace is Christ. Those who present outward works without inner faith are condemned as the whore and the beast of *Revelations*, and the essence of his argument against salvation by grace may be summed in the following quote:

59. For the Universal Father or Steward of All Substances in his Election seeketh only for *good seed*; he chooseth no Thistle seed, and maketh Wheat thereof. 60. As Reason Supposeth, that God taketh the seed that is quite or Wholly false or Evil, and maketh it a child of God, that so he might make known the riches of his Grace, from a Special predestinate purpose: No! that is not so done.²⁸

Tryon provides a less meticulous treatment of the subject. The length of the letters in his collection varies between the extremes of one and twenty-some pages, and the letter

²⁸ Jakob Böhme, *Concerning the Election of Grace. Or Of Gods Will towards Man. Commonly Called Predestination: That Is, How the Texts of Scripture Are to Be Understood Which Treat of Fallen Lost Adam, and of the New Birth from Christ. Being a Short Declaration and Introduction Concerning the Highest Ground, Shewing How Man May Attain Divine Skill and Knowledge. Written in the German Tongue, Anno 1623/ By Jacob Behme. Teutonicus Philosophus* (London: Printed by John Streater, for Giles Calvert, and John Allen), 164, accessed 30 May, 2022, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo2;idno=A76946.0001.001>. The German original: "Denn die Wahl des Hausvaters aller Wesen suchet nur guten Saamen, sie wählet ihr nich Distelsaamen und macht Weizenkorn daraus, wie die Vernunft meinet: Gott nehme den ganzen falschen Saamen und mache ein Kind Gottes daraus, daß er also seinen Reichthum der Gnade eines sonderlichen Fürlaßes sehen ließe, nein, das geschieht nicht [...]." (Jakob Böhme, *Sämmtliche Werke. Bd. 4.*, ed. Karl Wilhelm Schiebler (Leipzig: Barth, 1842), 607.

On Predestination is among the shortest ones.²⁹ The letter begins with the following words:

God, without Nature and Creature, is an Incomprehensible, Unfathomable, Eternal Being; and therefore the learned Moses saith, that God made all material Things of Nothing; and this Nothing is the Eternal Unity and the highest Good, even that very Power that preserveth all material being. (126)

Tryon argues that because of this universal divine origin, everything longs vehemently for Unity with God. The source of all evil is the Fall of mankind, which was caused by abusing the greatest gift: free will. The Fall led to division, and it is this division that led to silly notions like predestination. The impossibility of this idea is most obvious in the operation of reason: should there be no free will, the faculty of reason would be useless. This same free will, however, also warrants that man's election depends on himself. If there were elect grace, laws would not have been given, and all preaching and teaching would be in vain. And one of the ultimate arguments: it is simply a wicked opinion that God would be the original cause of evil. According to Tryon, choosing between good and evil depends on nothing else but our own will and desire. Based on these observations, he recommends that we should just be waiting with fervour and devotion, and sooner or later we would feel grace. As seen, talking about grace, Tryon touches upon most of the topics Boehme had dealt with, but the incredible depth of Boehme's argument is again completely lost. And even though Tryon talks about the importance of works elsewhere, his train of thought follows different paths. Compared to Boehme, it seems that Tryon simply uses the results that the German, with a strenuous effort reflected in all his writings, has achieved, and again, stops where things get more complicated.

Moving towards our conclusion there is one more area concerning the relationship between Boehme and Tryon that should be mentioned. Tryon's already cited *Memoirs* have been published posthumously in 1705, and the biography of the author is usually discussed almost solely based on this memoir. However, juxtaposed to Hotham Durant's well-known Boehme biography, doubts may arise as to whether Tryon's memoirs could be truly relied on as a biographical-historical source.³⁰ Suggesting a potential future

²⁹ Account based on Tryon, *Letters*, 126–29.

³⁰ Durant Hotham, *The Life of Jacob Behmen Written by Durand Hotham Esquire, Novemb. 7. 1653* (London: Printed for H. Blunden, and sold at the Castle in Corn-Hill, 1654), <https://www.proquest.com/books/life-jacob-behmen-written-durand-hotham-esquire/docview/2240940290/se-2?accountid=163371>.

research project, I would like to call attention to certain interesting similarities. First, dreams have a decisive role in both texts. The biography of Boehme abounds with miracles from an early point on, and these highlight that despite his humble origins, Boehme is an exceptional figure for whom a unique act of revelation has been awarded. To give just one example: one day a stranger walks into the shop where Boehme works, and reveals a personal prophecy about his future:

Iacob, thou art little, but shalt be great, and become another man, such an one as at whom the World shall wonder. Therefore be Pious, fear God, and reverence his Word; read diligently the holy Scriptures, wherein you have comfort and instruction: for thou must endure much misery, and poverty, and suffer persecution; but be courageous and persevering, for God loves, and is gracious unto thee.³¹

Other scenes speak about the divine light that suddenly surrounded him or about a spiritual gate that was opened to him, and through which "in one quarter of an hour I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at an University" (D5v). The biography also describes the irresistible spiritual force that inspires Boehme to write: "Art [...] hath not written here, neither was there any time to consider how to set it punctually down, according to the right understanding of the letters, but all was order'd according to the direction of the Spirit, which often went in hast" (D4r). As seen, many of the miraculous scenes serve as a justification for personal spiritual revelation as a legitimate source of knowledge.

A similar strategy of legitimation is at the very heart of Tryon's autobiography as well. He also describes several dreams or visions, the first at a quite early age:

Being about Six Years of Age, I had a Dream, wherein it pleased God to show me the Kingdom of Love, and the Kingdom of Darkness. I thought that God appeared to me and talked with me Face to Face, in a very friendly and loving manner. Not long after I had another Dream, wherein methought the Devil stood before me, and scourged me.³²

In the wider structure of the work, these dreams and visions come close to becoming an organising principle, while they also clearly serve as an alternative source of knowledge, a spiritual wisdom that complements outward sciences in Tryon's view.

³¹ Ibid., D2v.

³² Tryon, *Some Memoirs*.

Another shared feature of the two texts is the emphatic representation of the subject as a simple craftsman, in Tryon's case, first, a shepherd (just like Boehme),³³ then apprentice to a castor-maker, or hatter. Tryon renders himself as an autodidact who, besides his duties as an apprentice, had read a lot at night (mostly about astrology, physics, and other natural arts and sciences) on his own initiative. While thus working and studying, the voice of wisdom warns him to lead a self-denying life, and this is when Tryon's dietary experiments begin. Writing is a late undertaking for Tryon, only begun at the age of 48. As he puts it,

[...] I had an inward Instigation to Write and Publish something to the World: and this Impression was upon my Spirit to that degree, that I could not be satisfied, till I had set down in Writing several things the Lord had manifested to me, relating both to Divine and Natural Wisdom; recommending to the World Temperance, Cleanness, and Innocency of Living; and admonishing Mankind against Violence, Oppression, and Cruelty, either to their own Kind, or any inferior Creatures.³⁴

It is remarkable that despite the strong parallels, no mention whatsoever is made of Jakob Boehme or any other specific author, and that his reading and his writing experiences, though both highlighted, are in no ways linked. Just like in one of the prefaces quoted earlier, even when reading is in the focus, no names are mentioned here, only the subject areas. Instead of other authors, Tryon suggests that divine inspiration is the true source for his knowledge. A detailed comparison of the two biographies should be conducted to decide whether the popular biography of Boehme could have served as a pattern for the fragmentary memoir, or if we see a conventional pattern of spiritual biographies here. The latter suggestion might be reinforced by the postscript, according to which the worth of the published memoir lies in the fact that Tryon's life may serve as a perfect model for anyone to imitate.

To sum up: there is a huge incongruity in Thomas Tryon's works between the wide range of contemporary scientific, religious and philosophical notions he employs and the total lack of references to any relevant authorities. This haunting silence about the sources is one of the most striking features of the whole oeuvre, and seems to be a conscious self-representational technique. It is clear that most of his central notions are borrowed from Jakob Boehme, and the similarities between the way Boehme is represented in a popular

³³ "His first employment being the care of the common cattle amongst the rest of the youths of the Town." (Hotham, *The Life of Jacob Behmen*, B3r.)

³⁴ Tryon, *Some Memoirs*.

biography and how Tryon represents himself in his autobiography further reinforce the potential connection between the two authors, even if Boehme's fascinating intellectual struggles disappear on Tryon's hand. All in all, we may be not far from the truth in supposing that Tryon's works are part of a project of repetition on a grand scale, that is, a somewhat reductionist repetition of Boehme's ideas at a time when the first great wave (the huge translation and publishing project) had already passed. Why this project was performed with a careful omission of Jakob Boehme's name, and why many of the concepts are either brutally simplified or taken too much for granted, how and why did he transform the final questions addressed by Boehme into the very first questions of everyday domestic life are intriguing research problems yet to be explored. Yet, it has hopefully become clear by now that they are also problems that may shed light on the transmission and transformation of radical spiritualist ideas in the seventeenth century³⁵ – but in order to explore them, we need to extend our focus beyond his vegetarianism, which is clearly the most celebrated aspect among contemporary scholars and readers.

³⁵ Or, as Hessayon puts it, answer to these questions might shed light on „what happens when texts are circulated within contexts for which they were not intended.“ Hessayon, “Jacob Boehme's Writings,” 77.