



Physico-theology in England and on the European Continent (1650-c.1750)
An international conference

Organizers:

Ann Blair (Prof., Harvard University) & Kaspar von Greyerz (Prof. em., Universität Basel)

Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Augusteerhalle, June 14-16, 2017

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Physico-theology is an understudied phenomenon, hence our plan to devote an international conference to it. To date, it is not even clear whether we are looking at 'currents of thought' or *Denkformen* (e.g. Philipp 1967; Waschies 1988; Michel 2008) going as far back as antiquity or rather, more narrowly, at a new form of natural theology, which reached prominence during the later seventeenth century (Topham 2010; Mandelbrote 2013). Whereas some German specialists see it as a "practical theology of nature" (Krolzik 1996, 591), which, chiefly from about 1650 to the mid-eighteenth century, managed to establish itself as an independent school of thought next to natural theology (Sparr 1994), British research considers physico-theology to be an integral part of natural theology from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, although it is regularly pointed out that it reached its heyday during the period just mentioned (Topham 2010; Harrison 215).

Whether we prefer to view physico-theology as a European development spreading from Britain to the continent, or rather as national phenomena with earlier origins (e.g. in (post-) Reformation Germany; Krafft 1999; Trepp 2009) hinges on the choice presented to us by research to date between a conception of physico-theology as a distinct form of natural theology spanning the centuries and the notion that we are mainly looking at a phenomenon of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (cf. also Steinmann 2008, 11). In establishing this conference's program we have given preference to the latter notion. However, we do not exclude at all that the discussions in Wolfenbüttel will ultimately result in a different consensus. However, we do hope that the papers delivered at the conference, as well as the discussion, will help to dissipate some of the fog that continues to obscure our sight on an otherwise fascinating aspect of the early modern history of knowledge and science.

Illustration: Matthäus Merian sen. (1593-1650): Noah's Ark (c. 1625)

Provisional Program /Provisorisches Programm

Wednesday/Mittwoch June 14th

14:00-14:30 Ann Blair / Kaspar von Greyerz:
Welcome and Introduction

14:30-17:30 **Panel 1: Natural theology and Physico-theology**
Sektion 1: Natürliche Theologie und Physikotheologie

This panel will initiate the discussion on the relationship between natural theology and physico-theology that will undoubtedly be present in most consecutive sections of the conference. While it has been claimed for Germany that there developed an independent *genre* of physico-theological writing during the period in question (Krolzik 1996) it will be interesting to find out whether this categorization could also be made in the case of England. It will be necessary likewise to establish (as this remains controversial in German research; see e.g. Zelle 1990, 231; Krolzik 1996; compared to Büttner 1995) whether we are looking primarily at a reaction against the new mechanical science or rather at an attempt to legitimate mechanical science on religious grounds (or both). In addition, this section will also investigate the physico-theological propensity to consider *maxima in minimis* (see Stebbins 1980; Ogilvie 2008 and 2014).

Chair: Ann Blair (Harvard)

14:30-15:20 Scott Mandelbrote (Cambridge/Oxford): What was Physico-Theology for?

15:20-16:10 Katherine Calloway (Waco, TX): Reading the Book of Nature in England: 1650-1700

16:10-16:40 Break/Pause

16:40-17:30 Brian Ogilvie (Amherst, MA): *Maxima in minimis animalibus*: Insects in Natural Theology and Physico-Theology

17:30-18:15 Break/Pause

18:15-19:30 **Keynote address:**
John Hedley Brooke (Emeritus, Oxford University)
Open to the public.
Was Physico-theology bad theology and bad science?

Thursday/Donnerstag June 15th

09:00-12:00 **Panel 2: Form and Contents**
Sektion 2: Form und Inhalt

Although it is an open question whether physico-theological writing *as a whole* also managed to establish itself as an independent genre (or rather; genres) outside Germany during the period under consideration, this panel will focus on specific sub-genres, such as the attempt at a scientific treatment of biblical wonders (the resurrection and immaculate conception; Vidal 2003), physico-theological poetry (very prominent in eighteenth-century Hamburg; Zelle 1990; Kemper 1998; Hunfeld 2004; Grossmann 2005) and iconography (prominent in Zürich and Holland; Müsch 2000; Felfe 2003; Ogilvie 2008 and 2014).

Chair: Walther Sparn (Erlangen)

- 09:00-09:50 Barbara Hunfeld (Würzburg): Evidenz im Text - Evidenz als Text: Physikotheologie in der deutschen Literatur der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts.
- 09:50-10:40 Rienk Vermij (U. of Oklahoma): (Physico-theological expl. of biblical miracles) "The Biblical and the natural. Denying a demarcation."
- 10:40-11:10 Break/Pause
- 11:10-12:00 Robert Felfe (Hamburg): "Design Argument and Pictorial Strategies. A Relationship of Lure and Failure?"

Lunch/Mittagessen

14:00-17:15 **Panel 3: Forerunners / Biblical chronology**
Sektion 3: Vorläufer / Heilsgeschichtliche Chronologie

The European physico-theological movement during the period in question was deeply marked by Protestant apocalypticism. The Europe-wide debate about William Burnet *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (original Latin edn: 1681; English 1684/1689), including John Ray, William Whiston, Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, Jakob Wilhelm Feuerlein, and many others is a case-in-point. Given this context, traditional biblical chronology played an important role. However, physico-theology, by its utilitarian connotations, may have unwittingly contributed to a loosening of this bond (see e.g. Raven 1954; Zeitz 1994; Harrison 1998 and 2001; Kempe 2003). This panel will focus on this and related aspects and, at the same time, examine the 'forerunners' invoked by physico-theological writers (the best example is Fabricius foreword to his translation of Derham's *Astro-Theology* [first edn 1718] 1765).

Chair: Anthony Grafton (Princeton)

- 14:00-14:50 Peter Harrison (University of Queensland): What was 'Physico-Theology' in Seventeenth-Century England?
- 14:50-15:40 Kathleen Crowther (University of Oklahoma): The situation in German Protestantism before 1650.
- 15:40-16:10 Break/Pause
- 16:10-17:00 Kaspar von Greyerz (Basel): Back to the roots ? J.A. Fabricius's Register of ancient and more recent writers (1732).
- 19:00-22:00 Reception (incl. Buffet) at the Anna-Vorwerk-Haus

Friday/Freitag
June 16th

9:00-12:00 **Panel 4: National perspectives**
Sektion 4: Nationale Perspektiven

This section will highlight the specific aspects of national currents of early modern physico-theology in Germany (most recently Trepp 2008 and 2009), in the Netherlands (Vermij 1991 and 2002; Jorinck 2010), and in Switzerland (e.g. Gisler 2007; Boscani Leoni 2009 and 2010; Leu 2012) while trying, at the same time, to throw new light on the genuinely transnational aspects (see e.g. Vermij 1993; Kempe 1996 and 2003; Gipper 2012) of the texts in question.

Chair: Monika Mommertz (Freiburg i.Br. / Basel)

- 09:00-09:50 Anne-Charlott Trepp (Kassel): Matters of Belief and Belief that Matters: Physico-Theology and Lutheran Protestantism
- 09:50-10:40 Eric Jorink: (Leiden) Physico-theology and biblical criticism in the Netherlands, ca 1660-1730.
- 10:40-11:10 Break/Pause
- 11:10-12:00 Simona Boscani Leoni (Bern): A hybrid Physico-Theology: The Case of the Swiss Confederation

Lunch/Mittagessen

- 13:30-17:15 **Panel 5: Catholicism, Jansenism and the reception beyond 1750**
Sektion 5: Katholizismus, Jansenismus und die Rezeption nach 1750

As an early modern intellectual movement early modern physico-theology primarily was a Protestant phenomenon, but individual Jansenists and Catholics were likewise part of it. This panel is designed, on the one hand, to include this transconfessional perspective in a *pars pro toto*-way, by focusing chiefly on Blaise Pascal (cf. McKenna 1990 and 1993) and the Catholic chanoine Noël Antoine Pluche (Brucker 2010; Blair forthcoming), and, on the other hand, to open up the perspective into the decades beyond 1750, when the physico-theological movement faced increasing challenges by Enlightenment *philosophes*, even though prominent thinkers such as Albrecht von Haller or Charles Bonnet tried to keep the movement alive (Toellner 1971; Wiegrebe 2009; Bonnet 1983).

Chair: Anne Saada (Paris)

- 13:30-14:20 Martine Pécharman (CNRS): What kind of proofs of religious truths? The case of Pascal and Port-Royal
- 14:20-15:10 Nicolas Brucker (Metz): What Abbé Pluche owes to Early-modern Physico-Theologians
- 15:10-15:40 Break/Pause
- 15:40-16:30 Jonathan Sheehan (Berkeley): The Form of Flowers: Teleology and Immanence after 1750
- 16:30-18:00 **Panel discussion**
 (Ann Blair; Brendan Dooley; Udo Krolzik; Matthias Pohlig)

List of participants (*provisional*)

Blair, Ann, Henry Charles Lea Professor of History, Harvard University
Boscani Leoni, Simona, assistant professor, Dept. of History, Universität Bern
Brooke, John Hedley, prof. emeritus, University of Oxford
Brucker, Nicolas, professeur, Département des lettres modernes, Université de Metz
Calloway, Katherine, Postdoctoral Fellow, Dept. of English, Baylor University, Waco (TX)
Crowther, Kathleen, associate professor, Dept. of the History of Science, U. of Oklahoma
Dooley, Brendan, professor, School of History, University College Cork
Felfe, Robert, professor, art history, Universität Hamburg
Gipper, Andreas, Professor, French and Italian cultural studies, Universität Mainz
Grafton, Anthony, Henry Putnam Professor of History, Princeton University
von Greyerz, Kaspar, professor emeritus, Dept. of History, Universität Basel
Harrison, Peter, professor, Australian Laureate Fellow, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Queensland
Hunfeld, Barbara, Dr., research associate, German literature, Universität Würzburg
Jorink, H.G.M. (Eric), Teylers Professor, Centre for the Study of Religion, Leiden, University
Krolzik, Udo, Professor emeritus, systematic theology, Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal/Bethel
McKenna, Antony, professor, Littérature française, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne
Mandelbrote, Scott, Director of Studies in History at Peterhouse, Faculty of History, Cambridge University
Mommertz, Monika, Dr., Dept. of History, Universität Freiburg im Breisgau
Ogilvie, Brian, professor, Dept. of History, U. of Massachusetts, Amherst
Pécharman, Martine, Dr., CNRS researcher
Pohlig, Matthias, jun.prof., Dept of History, Universität Münster
Saada, Anne, Dr., CNRS researcher at the Ecole Normale Supérieure
Sparn, Walter, professor emeritus, systematic theology, Universität Erlangen
Treppe, Anne-Charlott, professor, Dept. of History, Universität Kassel
Vermij, Rienk H., associate professor, Dept. of the History of Science, U. of Oklahoma

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Bonnet 1983	Bonnet, Charles: The correspondence between Albrecht von Haller and Charles Bonnet, ed. Otto Sonntag, Bern etc.: Huber, 1983.
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Boscani-Leoni 2010	Boscani-Leoni, Simona (ed.): Wissenschaft - Berge - Ideologien: Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733) und die frühneuzeitliche Naturforschung / Scienza - montagna -ideologie: Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733) e la ricerca naturalistica in epoca moderna, Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2010.
Brucker 2010	Brucker, Nicolas: Noël-Antoine Pluche, entre sciences de la nature et apologétique, in idem (ed.), <i>Apologétique 1650-1802: La nature et la grâce. Actes du colloque de Metz (16-18 octobre 2008)</i> , (Recherches en littérature et spiritualité, 18), Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, 325-341.

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