Nathaniel Culverwell's Stoic Theory of Common Notions

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1. Introduction

This chapter takes a closer look at the doctrine of common notions and universal consent developed by Nathaniel Culverwell (1619–51) in his *Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, a work based on lectures delivered at Cambridge in 1645–46, but only published posthumously in 1652, followed by three additional editions in 1654, 1661, and 1669.[1] Culverwell is habitually (but not unanimously) considered a member of the group of thinkers often described, from John Tulloch to Sarah Hutton, as the Cambridge Platonists.[2]

According to the most widespread early modern understanding of *koinia ennoiai* or "common notions"—a somewhat Platonized understanding of them handed down from Cicero and Simplicius via neo-stoics such as Justus Lipisus[3]—such notions are general concepts,

[1] See N. Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, edited by R. A. Greene and H. MacCullum, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001. This paper was written within the framework of the European research project "The Common Notion. Science and Consensus in the Seventeenth Century" (NOTCOM, ERC Advanced Grant no. 101052433), PI: M. Lærke, IHRIM, CNRS-UMR 5317, ENS de Lyon / Maison Française d'Oxford, MFO, CNRS-USR 3129, 2023-2027.

[2] See J. Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, vol. II (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1872); S. Hutton, *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 140. Notable exceptions, or commentators who do not include Culverwell, are D. Scott, "Recollection and Cambridge Platonism," *Hermathena* 149 (1990), p. 77; and C. A. Patrides, "'The High and Aiery Hills of Platonisme': An Introduction to the Cambridge Platonists," in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 12. Culverwell is also strikingly absent from J. D. Roberts's *From Puritanism to Platonism in Seventeenth-Century England* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1968).

[3] On Cicero's reading of the stoic common notions, see M. Cline Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 21–26; Ch. Brittain, "Common sense: Concepts, definition and meaning in and out of the Stoa," in *Language and Learning: Philosophy of Language in the Hellenistic Age*, edited by D. Frede et B. Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 164–209. It is important to realize that, according to much modern scholarship, Cicero's reading does not reflect the position of the Greeks stoics whose outlook arguably was more empirical in nature. See e.g. J. Sellars, *Stoicism* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 74–9; H. Dyson, *Prolepsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

principles, or laws present to any sound human mind. They are also sometimes described as "prolepses" or "preconceptions," "anticipations," or "presumptions." Without necessarily being mentally present, they are innate dispositions or faculties which, when prompted by experience, are realized in all sane human beings in the same way because, as Cicero writes, "reason … is certainly common to us all," and those notions therefore "imprinted on all minds alike."[4] They cannot be demonstrated because they are themselves at the basis of all demonstration (converging with the Euclidian conception of *koinia ennoiai* as axiomatic principles in mathematics.)

Following the stoic doctrine, we can recognise common notions by the fact that they are the object of universal consent. Many prominent early modern thinkers, including Bacon, Gassendi, Descartes, and—most famously—Locke, vigorously rejected universal consent as a general criterion of truth and, by the same token, the stoic doctrine of common notions.[5] Not everyone did so, however. The best known example of an early modern thinker who fully embraced such a doctrine was Edward Herbert of Cherbury who developed an elaborate and original theory of common notions, universal consent, and natural instinct in his 1624 *De Veritate* (1624).[6] But Lord Herbert did not stand alone. Culverwell is another prominent example. In this paper, I study Culverwell's stoic doctrine of common notions and universal consent from the perspective of his critical discussion, contained in chapter XIV of the *Discourse*, of two contemporary works, namely Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (1637) and Robert Greville's *The Nature of Truth* (1640). Several commentators, most clearly Robert Strider and Alan Gabbey, have argued on the basis of that discussion that Culverwell's theory of knowledge is

[4] Cicero, *De Legibus*, Bk. I, sect. 30, trans. C. W. Keyes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 329.
[5] For Bacon, see *The Instauratio Magna Part II: Novum Organon and Associated Texts*, ed. G. Rees and M. Wakely, *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Preface, p. 3; Part I, Aph. 12, p. 69; Aph. 77, p. 123; Aph. 125, p. 189; Part II, Aph. 2, p. 201, etc. As for the three other authors, see in particular their comments and refutations of Herbert. For Gassendi, see *Extrait de la Lettre de Gassendi à Elie Diodati, du 29 août 1634*, edited by B. Rochot, in *Actes du congrès du tricentenaire de Pierre Gassendi*, edited by A. Adam (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), pp. 288–90; and *Ad Librum D. Edoardi Herbertii Angli, De Veritate, Epistola*, in *Opera omnia* (Lugduni: Laurentii Anisson, & Ioan. Babt. Devenet, 1658), vol. III, pp. 411–19. For Descartes, see Descartes to Mersenne, 16 October 1639, in *Oeuvres*, ed. Ch. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris: Cerf 1897–1909), vol. II, pp. 597–98, trans. in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols., edited by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–91), vol. III, p. 139. For Locke, see *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Bk. I, § 15–9, pp. 77–80. For a recent, helpful commentary, see M. Mantovani, "Herbert of Cherbury, Descartes and Locke on Innate Ideas and Universal Consent," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 8:1 (2019), pp. 83–116.
[6] E. Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, & a falso*, (Paris: s.n., 1624 / Londoni: Per Augustinum Matthæum, 1633 / Londoni: s.n., 1645). For an English translation of the Latin edition, see Edward Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, trans. M. H. Carré (Bristol: University of Bristol, 1937). For Marin Mersenne's (anonymous) French translation, see *De la vérité en tant qu'elle est distincte de la révélation, du vray-semblable, du possible et du faux* (s.l., s.n. 1639).

Aristotelian, and his position largely aligned with John Wallis's critique of Greville in his 1643 *Truth Tried*.[7] Here, I argue that, contrary to Wallis who was indeed an Aristotelian who rejected innate ideas entirely, Culverwell adopted a characteristically stoic position, according to which common notions do not directly derive from sense experience, but are innate dispositions common to all which become present to the mind only under the impact of the senses.

I proceed as follows. First, I briefly outline the conceptual framework behind Culverwell's doctrine. In the two following sections, I show how Culverwell employs his theory of common notions and universal consent when arguing against scepticism and Platonism, in particular in his polemics against Descartes and Greville. Next, I go deeper into Culverwell's references to stoic philosophy of mind and theory of knowledge. Finally, before concluding, I will compare his use of stoic concepts and tropes with that of others among the Cambridge Platonists.

2. The contextual framework

The contours and implications of Culverwell's doctrine of common notions and universal consent are developed throughout his entire treatise, but perhaps most clearly in chapter X, entitled "Of the Consent of Nations." Here, he presents universal consent or the "consent of nations" (called so from the Latin expression *consensus gentium*) as a kind of alternative route to truth, inferior to reason itself, but still valuable and trustworthy:

> Though Natures law be principally proclaim'd by the voyce of *Reason;* though it be sufficiently discover'd by *the Candle of the Lord;* yet there is also a secondary and additional way, which contributes no small light to the manifestation of it: I mean the harmony & joynt consent of Nations.[8]

[7] See R. E. L. Strider, *Robert Greville, Lord Brooke* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 141: "There was on Cambridge Platonist who had the strange distinction of being an Aristotelian: namely, Nathanael Culverwel"; A. Gabbey, "'A Disease Incurable': *Scepticism and the Cambridge Platonists," in Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. R. H. Popkin and A. Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp. 74–79, esp. p. 74: "Though decidedly a Cambridge man, Nathaniel Culverwell … was not a Platonist, but an Aristotelian." See also Hutton, *British Philosophy*, p. 137: "Culverwell … concurs with Wallis's criticism of Greville's subscription to the theory of anamnesis."

[8] Culverwell, *Discourse*, X, p. 79.

Culverwell's explicit sources for the various aspects of his position developed in that particular chapter are Hugo Grotius, John Selden, and Claude Saumaise.[9] Throughout the work, however, Herbert of Cherbury's *De Veritate* and Kenelm Digby's 1644 *Two Treatises* also loom large.[10] He moreover draws on a multitude of Ancient sources, including Seneca, Cicero, Quintilian, Heraclitus, and Tertullian.[11] In many ways, Culverwell's whole argument comes through as a patchwork of quotations, commentaries, and allusions to other doctrines, ancient and modern, philosophical and theological alike.

This intertextual framework has not been lost on commentators. Culverwell's reading of Lord Herbert has be scrutinized in some detail, with some noting his departure from Herbert's epistemology of common notions when it comes to revealed religion,[12] others on the contrary stressing the proximity to Herbert on questions of natural theology, or noting the sophistication and accuracy of Culverwell's reading of *De veritate* (as opposed, in particular, to the more crude assessments by Gassendi, Descartes, and Locke.)[13] Alan Gabbey has highlighted a possible inspiration from Pico della Mirandola's 1520 *Examen vanitatis*.[14] Culverwell's apparent admiration for Francis Bacon, "the great and noble *Verulam*" has also been highlighted, despite the stark contrast that Culverwell's theory of knowledge represents in relation to Bacon's project for a new art of "interpretation of Nature" in the *Novum Organon*, which emphatically rejects common notions.[15] As one exception, Culverwell's reliance of Kenelm Digby's *Two Treatises* has received comparatively little attention.

Within this complex framework of references, it is difficult to determine which ones to weigh the most and, consequently, how to classify Culverwell's doctrine. But one thing is clear:

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[9] Culverwell, *Discourse*, X, resp. p. 79–80 and 85; pp. 83–4; and p. 86.

[10] For mentions of Herbert, see e.g. *Discourse*, VII, p. 61; XI, p. 81; XV, p. 151; XVI, p. 160. For Digby, see XI, pp. 92, 105; XVII, pp. 170–1. Kenelm Digby is another good example of a prominent early modern defence of common notions. See K. Digby, *Two treatises* (Paris: Printed by Gilles Blaizot, 1644); for some recent commentary, see A. Blank, "Composite Substance, Common Notions, And Kenelm Digby's Theory of Animal Generation," *Science in Context* 20:1 (2007), pp. 1–20; H. T. Andriaenssen, "Common Conceptions and the Metaphysics of Material Substance: Domingo de Soto, Kenelm Digby and Johannes de Raey," in *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 8:1 (2019), pp. 117–40.

[11] Culverwell, *Discourse*, X, pp. 81–2.

[12] H. R. Hutcheson, *Lord Herbert of Cherbury's* De Religione Laici, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944, p. 81. See also Culverwell, *Discourse*, XV, pp. 151–2.

[13] See R. D. Bedford, *The Defence of Truth. Herbert of Cherbury and the seventeenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 71; J. Lagrée, "Lumière naturelle et notions communes: Herbert de Cherbury et Culverwell," in *'Mind Senior to the World'. Stoicismo e origenismo nella filosofia platonica del Seicento inglese*, edited by M. Baldi (Milan: Franco Angeli 1996); Hutton, *British Philosophy*, p. 112.

[14] Gabbey, "A Disease Incurable,"' p. 77; on the Cambridge Platonists and Pico, see also Patrides, "Introduction," pp. 19–20.

[15] Culverwell, *Discourse*, chap. XV, p. 149. For references to Bacon, see note 5.

Culverwell's theory of knowledge is *not* Platonist. As he writes regarding Plato's "connate ideas," he does not know "how to excuse *Plato* for too much scorning and sleighting these outward senses, when that [*sic*] he trusted too much inwardly to his owne fancy" and "being too fantastical and Poetical in his Philosophy, he plac't all his security in some uncertaine airy and imaginary Castles of his own contriving."[16] Gabbey, declaring him an Aristotelian,[17] references passages in the *Discourse* that praise Aristotle for "perceiving the proud emptinesse, the swelling frothinesse of such Platonical bubbles" and instead seeking certainty in "sense": Aristotle "was faine to search for certainty somewhere else, and casting his eye upon the ground he spyed the bottome of it, lying in sense, and laid there by the wise dispensation of God himself."[18] And yet, as we move on in Culverwell's texts we learn that if, as Aristotle showed, the "first rudiments of certainty were drawn by sense, the compleating and consummating of it was in the understanding. The certainty of sense is more grosse and palpable, the certainty of intellectuals, 'tis more cleere and Crystalline, more pure and spiritual."[19] These conceptions of pure "intellectuals" as opposed to the gross and inferior certainty of "sense" should certainly not incite us to revert back to a Platonist interpretation of Culverwell, but they do cast serious doubt on the notion that Culverwell's position was straightforwardly Aristotelian.

3. Culverwell on Descartes

To get a better sense of Culverwell's theory of knowledge, let us first turn to chapter XIV where he attempts to steer a difficult course between several positions—scepticism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism—in his discussion of two contemporary writers.

The first among them is Descartes and the position developed in the *Discourse on the Method* (1637) and the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641). Keeping in mind that the lectures that Culverwell's *Discourse* was based on were delivered in 1645–46, he thus figures among the earliest critics of Descartes in the British Isles. Culverwell depicts Descartes's reliance on the *cogito* as a criterion of certainty as incapable of escaping scepticism:

[16] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XIV, p. 144. On Plato, see also VIII, p. 68.
[17] See Gabbey, "A Disease Incurable," pp. 74–9.
[18] Culverwell, *Discourse*, chap. XIV, pp. 144–5.
[19] Culverwell, *Discourse*, chap. XIV, p. 145.

> the French Philosopher resolves all his assurance, into thinking that he thinks, why not into thinking that he sees? and why may he not be deceived in that as in any other operations? And if there be such a virtue in reflecting and reduplicating of it, then there will be more certainty in a super-reflection, in thinking that he thinks that he thinks, and so if he run *in infinitum*, according to his conceit he will still have more certainty, though in reality he will have none at all. [20]

The objection invoking "other operations" perhaps echoes Hobbes's objections against Descartes's inference from thinking to the thinking thing in the *Third Objections*: "It does not seem to be a valid argument to say 'I am thinking, therefore I am thought' … I might as well say 'I am walking, therefore I am a walk'," although Culverwell of course does not embrace the conclusion Hobbes goes on to draw, namely, that "it seems to follow from this that a thinking thing is something corporeal."[21] Rather, he uses a similar observation to undo the privilege of immediacy that characterizes the Cartesian conception of the thought-mind relation and upon which its certainty rests. As for the critique of an infinite regress, it intends to pull out the rug under Cartesian certainty altogether. Both arguments serve to motivate reinstating common notions as the foundations of certainty, for, Culverwell claims, he who refuses to "cast anchor" on "first principles and common notion" always "condemnes himself to perpetual Sceptisme."[22]

It is unclear whether Culverwell's knowledge of Descartes's texts was more than second-hand, although I have not identified any obviously better source for Culverwell than Descartes's own texts which became available in England in the original languages shortly after they were published (translations began to appear from 1649 onward.)[23] A few other possible sources are, however, worth mentioning. According to John Worthington, the first editor of John Smith's posthumous 1660 *Select Discourses*, the introduction of Descartes at Cambridge was mostly due to Smith.[24] Culverwell may have learned from him, and vice versa. Another possible source,

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[20] Culverwell, *Discourse*, chap. XIV, p. 145.
[21] Hobbes, *Third Objections*, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, vol. VII, pp. 172–73, trans. in *The Philosophical Writings*, vol. II, p. 122.
[22] Culverwell, *Discourse*, chap. XIV, p. 145.
[23] See M. Nicholson, "The Early Stage of Cartesianism in England." *Studies in Philology* 26:3 (1929), p. 359. The first English translation was the anonymous *A Disourse of a Method for the well-guiding of Reason, and the Discovery of Truth in the Sciences* (London: Printed by Thomas Newcombe, 1649).
[24] See *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, ed. J. Crossley, Manchester: Printed for the Chetham Society, 1847, vol. I. p. 300 n. 1; Campagnac, "Preface," p. xii. Worthington was master of Jesus College in 1650–1660, vice-chancellor of Cambridge University from 1657 to the Restoration in 1660. On Smith and

explicitly used by Culverwell, is the *Two Treatises* (1644) by Digby, another very early reader of Descartes.[25] Digby's second treatise, in particular, contains a fairly long reflexion on the self-evidence of the *cogito*, although he uses it to establish the nature of the soul as an immaterial substance, not for discussing the criterion of truth.[26] The first treatise frequently refers to Descartes's *Essays* but also alludes to the *Discourse on the Method* on one occasion: "Monsieur des Cartes … by his great and heroyke attempts, and by shewing mankinde how to steere and husband their reason to best advantage, hath left us no excuse for being ignorant of any thing worth the knowing."[27] None of this, however, is specific enough to explain the targeted critique of Descartes we find in Culverwell. As for Henry More, Descartes's principal and best known critic at Cambridge, he only first refers clearly to the French Philosopher in his *Infinity of Worlds* of 1646, and here references the *Principles of Philosophy* of 1644, not the earlier *Discourse* or *Meditations*.[28]

4. Culverwell on Greville and Wallis

Culverwell second contemporary interlocutor in chapter XIV is Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, a prominent puritan well-known among the Cambridge Platonists because Peter Sterry became his chaplain in 1637.[29] Greville's 1640 *The Nature of Truth* is a somewhat undisciplined and

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Descartes, see J. E. Saveson, "Descartes' Influence on John Smith, Cambridge Platonist," in *Journal of the History of* Ideas 20:2 (1959), pp. 258–63; and J. E. Saveson, "Differing Reactions to Descartes Among the Cambridge Platonists," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21: 4 (1960), pp. 560–67. The *Select Discourses* contain only *one* reference to Descartes, at p. 347: "Renatus Des Cartes in Epistol. ad Princ. Elizabetham."

[25] The first recorded discussion of Descartes sent to Great Britain figures in letter from Kenelm Digby to Thomas Hobbes, written on 4 October, 1637. It was accompanied by a copy of Descartes's 1637 D*iscours de la méthode* and *Essais*. According to Digby, "if [Descartes] were as accurate in the Metaphyicall part as he is in his experience, he had carried the palme from all men living" (Digby in Hobbes, *Correspondence*, ed. N. Malcolm, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, vol. I, p. 51; see also Nicholson, "The Early Stage," p. 358).

[26] See K. Digby, *Two Treatises*, Second Treatise, chap. IX, p. 415–17.

[27] Digby, *Two Treatises*, First Treatise, chap. XXXII, p. 275.

[28] See H. More, *Democritus Platonissans, or, An essay upon the infinity of worlds out of Platonick principles*, (Cambridge: Printed by Roger Daniel, 1646). More concludes his introduction "To the Reader" with a quote from Lord Herbert's *De Causis errorum* and a quote on epistemic humility from Descartes's 1644 *Principia Philosophiae*, III, art. 1, heeding us to "bear in mind the infinite power and goodness of God, and not be afraid that our imagination may over-estimate the vastness, beauty and perfection of his works" (Descartes, *Oeuvres*, vol. VIII1, p. 80, trans. in *The Philosophical Works*, vol. I, p. 248). More sent his first of four letters to Descartes in December 1648; they were first published in 1662 ("Epistolæ quatuor ad Renatum Des-cartes," in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* (London: James Flesher for William Morden, 1662).

[29] See Hutton, *British Philosophy*, pp. 137–8.

derivative philosophical attempt at a neo-Platonic idealism or spiritual monism.[30] It is, despite its title, mostly metaphysical and not epistemological in scope.[31] It does, however, make some forays into the theory of knowledge that Culverwell dwells upon in the *Discourse*. He discusses Greville on two separate occasions, criticizing him for holding two (somewhat incompatible) positions, one radically sceptical, the other Platonist.

In chapter XIV, immediately after discussing Descartes, Culverwell goes on to discuss a passage in *The Nature of Truth* where Greville claims that "Contradictions may be *simul et semel* in the same Subject, same Instant, same notion (not onely in two distinct respects, or notions, as one thing may be *causa et effectus, Pater et Filius, respectu diversi;* but even in the same respect, under one and the same notion.)"[32] Incredulous, Culverwell contends that the author, otherwise "well known to be of bright and sparkling intellectuals," couldn't possibly have been serious, but that "if he had liv'd till this time, we cannot doubt but that he would have retracted it, or at least better explain'd it before this time."[33]

Now, Grevillle's position is conspicuously similar to Descartes's infamous thesis of the creation of eternal truths. From the perspective of *Greville*, the similitude is of course coincidental. Descartes's controversial doctrine is not evident from the *Discourse of the Method*; it can be inferred from the *Meditations* but they only appeared in 1641, after Greville published his treatise. Descartes's letters to Mersenne from the early 1630s which contain the clearest expressions of the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths were not available in print until Clerselier's 1657–1667 edition of the *Lettres de M. Descartes*.[34] It is, however, not impossible that *Culverwell* had gleaned Descartes's controversial position from the *Meditations*, in which case his critique of Greville can perhaps be read as a kind of critique of Descartes by proxy. The fact that the refutation of Greville is closely tied in with the refutation of Descartes does lend some credence to such a conjecture. In that context, it is worth noting that, later, in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe* of 1678, Ralph Cudworth explicitly appeals to the certainty of common notions in a way similar to the way Culverwell appeals to them in his comment on

[30] See R. Greville, *The Nature of Truth* (London: Printed by R. Bishop, for Samuel Cartwright ..., 1641). For a longer study of Greville's book, its background and reception, see Strider, *Robert Greville*, pp. 83–123, and pp. 141–5.
[31] In Greville, there is no real difference between the "truth of knowledge" and the "truth of being" because truth just is an "affection of being"—hence the idealist reduction of epistemology to metaphysics in *The Nature of Truth*. See Strider, *Robert Greville*, p. 124.
[32] Greville, *The Nature of Truth*, p. 100.
[33] Culverwell, *Discourse*, chap. XIV, pp. 145–6.
[34] See R. Descartes, *Lettres de M. Descartes*, 3 vols., ed. by C. Clerselier (Paris: C. Angot, 1657–67).

Descartes while explicitly refuting a crucial part of the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, namely the thesis of the evil genius.[35]

Some three chapters earlier, in chapter XI of the *Discourse*, Culverwell does however have another, very different bone to pick with Greville:

> Yet that other noble Author of our own, that has the same title of truth not without a competent mixture of error too, doth choose to resolve all into a Platonical remembrance, which yet that acute answerer of him doth shew to be a meer vanity; for as for matters of fact, to be sure they have no implanted Ideas: And if historical knowledge may be acquired without them, why then should discursive knowledge have such a dependence upon them?[36]

Culverwell here alludes to a passage in *The Nature of Truth* in which Greville proclaims to "wholly subscribe to the Platonists, who make all *Scientia* nothing but *reminiscentia.*"[37] He is not the first to comment on this passage but intervenes in an already established controversy. John Wallis—at Emmanuel College at the same time as Culverwell and the "acute answerer" referred to in the passage from the *Discourse*—had already lodged a complaint in his 1643 *Truth Tried*:

> I cannot with his Lordship subscribe to the Platonists, to make Knowledge nothing but a Remembrance. … I approve rather of Aristotle's *Rasa Tabula*, (then Plato's *Reminiscentia*) making the Understanding, of it selfe, to have no such Idea or Picture at all, but capable of all.[38]

At first sight, then, it appears as if Culverwell simply follows Wallis and places himself on the side of Aristotle against Plato. Other passages could point in a similar direction. Culverwell also rejects Plato's "intellectual optics," [39] which he sees as having equally misconstrued both

[35] R. Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Printed for Richard Royston, 1678), pp. 716–7.
[36] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XI, p. 95.
[37] Greville, *The Nature of Truth*, pp. 46–7.
[38] J. Wallis, *Truth Tried* (London: Richard Bishop, for Samuel Gellibrand, 1643), p. 45. See also the summary of chapter 8–9 in the "Postscript," p. 104.
[39] The description echoes the title of Culverwell's own 1651 *Spiritual Opticks*, but these notions should not be confused. See N. Culverwell, *Spiritual opticks, or, A glasse discovering the weaknesse and imperfection of a*

corporeal and spiritual vision by claiming that they work "by emission of rays" rather than reception of them, leading Plato to mistakenly "phansie such implanted *Ideas*, such seeds of light in his external eye, as such seminal principles in the eye of the minde."[40] Instead, "*Aristotle* (who did better clarifie both these kindes of visions) … did not antedate his own knowledge, nor remember the several postures of his soul, and the famous exploits of his minde before he was born; but plainly profest that his understanding came naked into the world."[41]

However, if we take broader look at Culverwell's text, it becomes increasingly evident that we must qualify his agreement with Wallis in important respects. Consider for example Culverwell's description of the "first principles and common notions" as constitutive of "natural Plerophory" in the discussion of Descartes.[42] This notion of "Plerophory" occurs on one other occasion the *Discourse*, in chapter IX, in a passage where the author chastises the Jews for having denied "that there is light enough in the dictates of Reason to display common notions," and for having thus abandoned reason, that "rare and admirable foundation of Plerophory," in a way no different from what is found in some "fluctuating Academick, in a Rowling Sceptique, in a *Sextus Empiricus*, in some famous Professor of doubts."[43] In fact, "nature has distinguisht good from evil, by these indelible stamps and impressions which she has graven upon both; and has set Reason as a competent Judge to decide all Moral controversies, which by her first seeds of light plainly discovers an honourable beauty in goodnesse.[44] Now, the English term "Plerophory" was first coined, it appears, in the previous century by Henoch Clapham (1545–1614), a relatively obscure theological writer and pastor of an English church in Amsterdam who may have been an assisted undergraduate (a sizar) at Trinity College, Cambridge, around 1560. The term refers to the "full assurance" (*plerophoria*; *πληροφορία*) of Hebrews 6:11 and 10:22. Among the Cambridge Platonists, John Smith also uses it in *Select Discourses* in passage where he makes a point not too far removed from the one Culverwell makes against Descartes, namely, that we cannot trust in ourselves for certainly but must have recourse to God: "We can never distrust enough in our selves, nor ever trust too much in God. This is the great Plerophory, and that full

Christians knowledge in this life (Cambridge: Thomas Buck, 1651). If the *Discourse* is one long commentary on Proverbs 20:27, the *Spiritual Opticks* is a commentary on Cor 13:12: "now we see through a glasse darkly." On the optical metaphor in Culverwell, see P. Hamou, *La Mutation du visible: essai sur la portée épistémologique des instruments d'optique au XVIIe siècle* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2001), vol. II, p. 71.

[40] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XI, p. 90.

[41] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XI, pp. 90–1.

[42] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XIV, p. 145.

[43] Culverwell, *Discourse*, IX, pp. 73–4.

[44] Culverwell, *Discourse*, IX, p. 73.

Confidence which the Gospel every where seems to promote."[45] What we should note in Culverwell, however, is the way he associates such "full assurance" with the notion of "seeds of light." For these "seeds" are clearly not derived from experience, but innate in some sense. Hence, "there's scatter'd in the Soul of Man some seeds of light, which fill it with a vigorous pregnancy,"[46] and those seed of light "shine with their native light, with their own proper beams."[47] Clearly, in such passages, the "full assurance" in question is associated with notions that are *not* derived from experience. This is difficult to reconcile with a straightforward Aristotelian rejection of innate ideas such as Wallis's.

5. Culverwell's Stoicism

As we have seen, Culverwell strongly rejects scepticism and Cartesianism, too, but is not a Platonist. He is not a straightforward Aristotelian either but seems, as Dominic Scott observes, "rather ambivalent on the issue of innate ideas."[48] So what is he, if not just confused?

In order to pin down his position in more positive terms, it is helpful to take a closer look at his notion of "seeds of light," already encountered in the previous section. Culverwell also speaks of "sparks of reason," "sparks of divine light," "intellectual sparks," "seminal sparks," "seminal principles," "spermatical Notions," et al.[49] All these more or less equivalent notions are part of the allegorical framework that governs the entire *Discourse*, turning on the interpretation of Proverbs 20:27: "The understanding of a man is the candle of the Lord."[50] As a whole, this allegorical framework is prismatic so to speak, with theological, logical, psychological,

[45] Smith, *Select Discourses*, p. 335. The term is not that common, but Richard Baxter, for example, also adopts it in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest, or, A treatise of the blessed state of the saints in their enjoyment of God in glory* (London: Printed by Rob. White for Thomas Underhil and Francis Tyton, 1650), pp. 389, 595.
[46] Culverwell, *Discourse*, VII, p. 58.
[47] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XIV, p. 139.
[48] Scott, "Recollection and Cambridge Platonism," p. 77.
[49] See Culverwell, *Discourse*, I, p. 12: "seminal sparks"; VII, p. 58: VIII, p. 68:"spermatical Notions"; "seeds of light"; IX, p. 73: "seeds of light"; IX, p. 77: "spark of Truth" ; XI, p. 89: "sparkling and twinkling notions"; X, p. 79: "Seminal Principles"; XI, p. 88: "*Scintilla divinae lucis* [a spark of the divine light]"; XI, p. 90: "seminal principles"; XI, p. 90: "seeds of light";" XI, 101: "an intellectual spark"; XI, p. 111: "divine lineaments sparkling on the soul"; XI, p. 116: "shinings and sparkling of divine light"; XV, p. 149: "sparks and beams of light"; XVI, p. 160: "sparks of Reason"; XVIII, p. 185: "spark of Reason"; XVIII, p. 185: "seminal principles."
[50] As often noted, the focus on this particular verse is something Culverwell shares with John Whichcote. See Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, ed. S. Salter (London: J. Payne, 1753), Aph. 916: "*The Spirit of Man is the Candle of the Lord*: Lighted *by* God, and Lighting us *to* God. *Res illuminata illuminans*." For a commentary among many, see e.g. Patrides, "Introduction", pp. 11–12.

epistemological, and even ontological sides to it. This also applies to the single notion of "seeds of light."

First, on a basic Scriptural level, the reference to "seeds" connotes three well-known parables in the Gospel of Matthew, all concerned with how to spread the Gospel and extend the Kingdom of Heaven, and with the obstacles such efforts encounter.[51] These are connotations that are particular prevalent in passages of chapter X where Culverwell discusses the religious common notions of pagans. On his view, seeds of light are planted by God in man's reason and shared in common by the whole posterity of Adam, among all Nations[52]—even though he complains that the Jews in particular had put efforts into negating their importance, denying the Gentiles their light and elevating the notions of their particular notion alone to the status of God's Law.[53]

Next, as shown by Robert Greene, especially when it comes to moral and theological common notions, Culverwell's light metaphors are part of a creative appropriation of the theological commonplace of *synderesis*. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the stoic doctrine of common notions was perpetuated among more rationally and naturalistically inclined theologians and philosophers in the context of the Christian conception, stemming from Saint Jerome, of an innate moral conscience, or *synderesis*, conceived as a seed or spark of divine light implanted by God and present in all men, which had been more or less obscured by original sin and perversity, but never entirely extinguished. [54]

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[51] The Parable of the Sower of the Seed (Matt 13:3–9); The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt 13:31–32); and The Parable of the Tares (Matt 13:24–43).

[52] See Culverwell, *Discourse*, X, p. 79: "When you see the same prints and impressions upon so many several Nations, you easily perceive that they were stampt *eodem communi Sigillo,* with the same publique Seal. When you see the very same seeds thrown in such different soyles, yet all encreasing and multiplying, budding and blossoming, branching out and enlarging themselves into some fruitful expressions; you know then that 'twas Natures hand, her bountiful & successful hand that scatter'd such Seminal Principles amongst them."

[53] See Culverwell, *Discourse*, IX, p. 73; see also IX, pp. 76, 83–4.

[54] R. A. Greene, "Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52:4 (1991), pp. 617–44; "Synderesis, the Spark of Conscience, in the English Renaissance," Journal of the History of Ideas 52:2 (1991), pp. 195–219; "Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52:4 (1991), pp. 617–44; "Instinct of Nature: Natural Law, Synderesis, and the Moral Sense," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58:2 (1997), pp. 173–98); "Heydon's Plagiarism of Culverwell's Discourse, with its Deceptive Citations of Hobbes, et al.," *Notes and Queries* 64:3 (2017), pp. 445–50. See also P. Kärkkäinen, "Synderesis in Late Medieval Philosophy and the Wittenberg Reformers," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20:5 (2012), pp. 881–901.

Finally, and most importantly, the reference to "seeds of light" betrays a clear inspiration from the stoic conception of *logos spermaticos*.[55] As Seneca writes, "Nature … has given us the seeds of knowledge [*semina … scientiae*], but not knowledge itself."[56] Similarly, according to Cicero, "children, without instruction, are actuated by semblances of the virtues, of which they possess in themselves the seeds, for these are primary elements of our nature, and they sprout and blossom into virtue."[57] Hence, nature "bestowed an intellect capable of receiving every virtue, and implanted in it at birth and without instruction embryonic notions of the loftiest ideas."[58] So, according to the stoic position, as presented by Cicero, we have innate faculties that predispose us to entertain particular ideas or embrace specific principles. Experience and observation will activate those faculties or predispositions or, as the governing metaphor of the stoic doctrine will have it, will make the "seeds of knowledge" grow. The doctrine is most clearly articulated in an author that Culverwell does not quote, but who was well-known in his intellectual context, namely Justus Lipsius:

> We know that the stoics hold that one part of the divine spirit resides in us, and that this reason itself—which if it shines in its light and place is completely pure, genuine, right, and divine. These little flames—or sparks if you prefer (the Greeks call them sparks, living fires, or the remains of fire)—stretch themselves out and reveal themselves out and reveal themselves in certain sensations or judgement which are implanted in us, or innate, in nearly all kinds of people and, eminently, in the highest nature. [59]

On this understanding, the stoics hold that innate faculties of the mind contribute *a priori* to the formal structuration and ordering of ideas given through experience, so that even if the mind does not necessarily entertain given ideas, it cannot be reduced to a mere capacity to have just *any*

[55] See in particular Culverwell, *Discourse*, XI, p. 92: "These are the true and genuine *κοινα εννοιαι* [common notions]; these are the *λόγοι σπερματικοὶ* [seminal principles]." For a full study of the early modern reception of this doctrine, see Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge*.
[56] See Seneca. Epistle 120, sect. 4, in *Epistles*, vol. III, trans. R. M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 383.
[57] Cicero, *De Finibus*, Bk. V, sect. 43, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), p. 443.
[58] Cicero, *De Finibus*, trans. Rackham, Bk. V, sect. 59–60, pp. 461–63.
[59] J. Lipsius, *Manuductio ad Stoicam Philosophiam and Physiologia Stoicorum*, Bk. 2, chap. 11, trans. in J. Lagrée, "Justus Lipsius and Neostocism," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, edited by J. Sellars (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 162. J. Lagrée has shown how John Smith's conception of the stoics was influenced by Lipsius and his 1604 edition of Seneca (Lagrée, "John Smith et la Portique," in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, edited by G.A.J. Rogers, J. M. Vienne, and Y. C. Zarka (Dordrecht: Springer, 1997), p. 87.

ideas but includes innate dispositions to have *certain* ideas. And indeed, Culverwell very clearly embraces exactly such a stoic position in chapter VII:

> Nature has some Postulata, some *πρόληψη* [preconceptions], (which Seneca renders *praesumptiones*, which other call *Anticipationes Animi*,) which she knows a Rational being will presently and willingly yield unto.[60]

Many additional passages in the *Discourse* confirm the impression that Culverwell's conception of common notions is aligned with the stoics and with Seneca in particular. Hence, he goes through considerable trouble to clear the stoics of having held that the human soul is a *pars vel membrum Dei*:: "I finde the Stoicks challeng'd for this errour, that they thought there was a real emanation, and traduction of the soul out of God, *Ex ipsa Dei substantia* [from the very substance of God]" but "the learned *Salmasius* in his Animadversions on both the forementioned Authors [Simplicius and his commentary on Epictetus], though he spend paper enough in clearing some passages of the Academicks, Peripateticks, and Stoicks, concerning the nature of the soul; yet doth not in the least measure take notice of any such heterodox tenent among the Stoicks."[61] In fact, Culverwell writes, Seneca in particular "has very gallant and brave apprehensions of the souls nobility."[62] He also defends the stoics against the charge that, like the Gnostics, Manicheans and Priscillianists, they adhere to the "folly" of thinking that "there was a real emanation, and traduction of the soul out of God": "as for the Stoicks qu'll scarce finde evidence enough to prove them guilty of this opinion."[63] Certainly, Culverwell rejects the Stoics' naturalism, or what he calls "the excessive and hyperbolical vapourings of the Stoicks in their adoring and idolizing of Nature."[64] He also acknowledges that "amongst the Stoicks there are some expressions that seem to depresse & degrade the soul," especially some that suggest the corporality of the soul. Still, he refuses to see this as key aspects of stoicism, and chastises one "stupid Author"—the leveler Richard Overton and his 1644 book on *Mans Mortalitie*[65]—for

[60] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XVII, p. 59.
[61] Culverwell, *Discourse*, II, p. 96. He is alluding to Claude Saumaise's *Notæ et Animadversiones in Epictetum et Simplicium* (Lugduni: Ex Officina Ioannis Maire, 1640).
[62] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XI, p. 108.
[63] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XI, p. 96.
[64] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XVIII, p. 106.
[65] See R. Overton, *Mans Mortalitie* (Amsterdam: John Canne, 1644). I have consulted the second, amended edition: *Man wholly mortal* (London: s.n., 1655). For a helpful commentary, see N. McDowell, "Ideas of Creation in the

having seized upon such occasional remarks to misrepresent the stoics' views. In fact, it is "'abundantly clear that their Stoical Philosophy was more refined and clarified, more sublime and extracted from matter, then to resolve the quintessence of a rational nature into I know not what muddy and feculent spirit."[66] Finally, he defends Seneca from a charge leveled by John Selden in his *De iure naturali et gentium* (1640) according to which the stoic philosophers had "made God the *Intellectus Agens* of the soul" in the manner of the Averroists.[67] Indeed, arguing that for the stoics the soul is similar to, but not a part of God, Culverwell concludes that, on this point, stoicism is "not only sound Philosophy, but good Divinity too."[68]

All this strongly suggests that Culverwell attempted to find a path between the scepticism that, according to him, Descartes's inadvertently abandoned himself to, and the Platonism that Greville explicitly embraced, but not by simply by repeating Wallis's staunchly Aristotelian critique, but rather by seeking out a solution in stoicism.

6. Stoicism and Common Notions in Cambridge Platonism

In Culverwell's intellectual context, turning to the stoic theory of knowledge is an original move. Neither of the two contemporary interlocutors discussed above—Greville and Wallis—even considers the stoic option. Universal consent figures only on one occasion in Greville as an argument for the unity of moral beings, but he immediately steers away from any discussion declaring it outside the scope of his investigation.[69] It is completely absent from Wallis. Neither of them refers to common notions; neither of them discusses stoicism, excepting one passage in Wallis's *Truth Tried* where there is question of reproachable divines who make God "to be the

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Writings of Richard Overton the Leveller and *Paradise Lost*," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66:1 (2005), pp. 59–78.

[66] Culverwell, *Discourse*, chap. XI, p. 97. On this point, Culverwell does not, as elsewhere, follow Salmasius's reading of the stoics. Compare with Salmasius, *Notae*, p. 191: "Stoicis anima non tantum substantia est, … sed etiam corpus."

[67] See J. Selden, *De Iure Naturali & Gentium* (Londoni: Excudebat Richardus Bishopius, 1640), Bk. I, Chap. 9, pp. 111–2. Selden quotes Seneca, Epistle 66, sect. 12, in *Epistles*, Vol. II, trans. R. M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), pp. 66–68: "Reason, however, is nothing else than a portion of the divine spirit set in a human body [*Ratio nihil aliud est quam in corpus Humanum pars divini spiritus mersa*]."

[68] Culverwell, *Discourse*, XI, p. 98.

[69] Greville, *The Nature of Truth*, p. 39: "Morall Beings are, by generall consent, of fraternall alliance to spirituall, both in nature and operation; I shall not say any thing of them, but onely what is said by all, that *virtutes sunt concatenatae*."

Author of their Stoicall unavoidable Fate."[70] Similar conclusions follow if we expand our perspective to encompass also the Cambridge Platonists. Jacqueline Lagrée has studied John Smith's use of stoic concepts and tropes, but only to reach the conclusion that it is rhetorically more than conceptually motivated.[71] Henry More, argues John Sellars, may draw on texts by stoic philosophers, Marcus Aurelius in particular, in his *Enchridion Ethicum* (1668), but his "general attitude toward Stoicism is more often than not critical" and his use of them rather reflects a "practice of downplaying doctrinal differences between ancient philosophers."[72]

The closest we will get to a positive use of stoic theory of mind and knowledge is the systematic assessment we encounter in chapter IV of Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*. According to Cudworth, "The Stoicks and their chief Doctors, Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus, were no better Naturalists and Metaphysicians, than Heraclitus, in whose footsteps they trode: they in like manner admitting no other Substance besides Body." Hence, "according to these Stoicks, the Souls not only of other Animals, but of Men also, were properly Corporeal," and "it being supposed by these Philosophers, that Cogitation, Reason and Understanding, are lodged only in the Fiery Matter of the Universe."[73] Nevertheless, he continues,

> though these Stoicks were such Sottish Corporealists, yet were they not for all that Atheists: they resolving that Mind or Understanding, though always lodged in Corporeal Substance, yet was not first of all begotten out of Sensless Matter, so or so Modified; but was an Eternal Unmade thing, and the Maker of the whole Mundane System. … And that, *Ratio nihil aliud est, quàm in Corpus humanum Pars Divini Spiritus mersa*; Reason is nothing else but Part of the Divine Spirit merg'd into a Humane Body; so that these Humane Souls were to them, no other than … certain Parts of God, or Decerptions and Avulsions from him.[74]

Just as Culverwell, Cudworth is unwilling to declare Stoicism outright atheist. Still, he insists upon attributing to them two, from the Christian viewpoint, highly suspect doctrines, namely, the

[70] Wallis, *Truth Tried*, p. 54.
[71] Lagrée, "John Smith et le Portique," pp. 79–92, esp. p. 80.
[72] J. Sellars, "Henry More as a Reader of Marcus Aurelius," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25:5 (2017), pp. 916–31, here p. 916.
[73] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System*, chap. IV, sect. XXV, p. 419.
[74] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System*, chap. IV, sect. XXV, p. 420.

materialist doctrine that souls are corporeal and the Averroist doctrine that human reason is a part of God's spirit.

Admittedly, if Culverwell was alone among his peers in embracing stoicism, he was not alone in embracing *common notions*. Whichcote already argued that "truth is *connatural* to our souls. The *common notions* of our minds and truth, are not at any odds at all. The mind makes no more resistance to truth, than the air does to light."[75] In these passages, however, he attributes a more Platonist meaning to them than does Culverwell, speaking of them as "rays" and "beams" from God that come to us by way of descent.[76] Universal consent does not play any role in this conception. Moreover, other texts in Whichcote seem to pull in the opposite direction, as when he writes that "the understanding, as it comes into the world … is as *rasa tabula*, or a "white sheet of paper, whereon nothing is writ; but when it doth receive notions of truth, it is then beautified …. Such is the understanding when it is illuminated."[77] In the *Select Discourses*, John Smith proclaims "the Common Notions of God and Vertue imprest upon the Souls of men" to be "more clear and perspicuous then any else," even to have "more evidence, and display themselves with less difficulty to our Reflexive Faculty then any Geometrical demonstrations."[78] Henry More, for his part, takes up common notions in the *The Immortality of the Soul* as axiomatic principles whose truth is intuitively grasped, i.e. as "what ever is Noematically true, that is to say, true at first sight to all men in their wits, upon a clear perception of the Terms, without any further discourse or reasoning".[79] But the governing conception of common notions here seems mostly to be the originally Euclidian one as self-evident axioms or mathematically certain propositions, not the stoic one as commonly shared conceptions.[80] In both the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* and *A Treatise of Freewil*, Cudworth appeals to common notions to demonstrate the

[75] B. Whichcote, *The Works of the Learned Benjamin Whichcote* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers, 1751), II, p. 13.
[76] See Whichcote, *The Works*, III, pp. 20, 29, 54–5; see also Roberts, *From Puritanism to Platonism*, p. 68.
[77] Whichcote, *The Works*, III, p. 215.
[78] Smith, *Select discourses*, p. 14. He argues that that "Common Notions of a Deity" are "strongly rooted in Mens Souls" (p. 31). At the same time, however, he also considers common notions with some suspicion, as potentially "tainted with a deep dye of mens filthy lusts," for "though these Common notions may be very busie somtimes in the vegetation of divine Knowledge; yet the corrupt vices of men may so clog, disturb and overrule them, … that they may produce nothing but Monsters miserably distorted & misshapen" (pp. 6–7; see also pp. 64–5). He acknowledges that "there are some Common Notions and a Natural instinct of Devotion seated in the Minds of men, which are ever and anon roving after Religion," but also cautions in the same breath that those notion are only too often "nothing else but an Inbred belief of a Deity, accidentally run into; nothing else but an Image and Resemblance of their own Fansies which are ever busie in painting out themselves" (p. 350).
[79] H. More, *The Immortality of the Soul, so farre forth as it is demonstrable from the knowledge of nature and the light of reason* (London: Printed by J. Flesher, for William Morden, 1659), pp. 7–8.
[80] See Euclid, *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's 'Elements'*, trans. Th. L. Heath, 3 vols., New York: Dover 1956, vol. I, p. 155.

existence of God and to confirm the creationist axiom that nothing comes from nothing.[81] God's existence is suggested by the "Instincts of Mankind," the "Common Notions, Sentiments of Mankind," and by the "Instincts of Nature."[82] He claims that divine foreknowledge of future event follows from "the Perswation of the Generality of Mankind" and by "the consent of all Nations."[83] Still, none of these authors embrace common notions with a frequency or systematicity anywhere close to what we find in Culverwell's *Discourse*.

7. Conclusion

I have depicted Culverwell's theory of knowledge as a form of stoicism, as opposed both to the scepticism to which—according to Culverwell—Descartes's doctrine lends itself and to the Platonism embraced by Greville, but also different from the Aristotelianism propounded by Wallis in his critique of Greville. I do not want to insist too strongly on this strategic cartography of positions. The sources of Culverwell's doctrine are too varied and entangled to establish his allegiance to a given school in a univocal manner and I share some of Dmitri Levitin's reservations about the categorisation of thinkers according to doctrinal "-isms," in general as well as specifically in relation to the Cambridge Platonists.[84] This said, Culverwell himself navigates among philosophical positions by reference to fairly basic features—sometimes verging on caricatures—of what characterizes Plato, Aristotle, the sceptics, the stoics, and so on. In this respect, placing him within such a cartography of "-isms" simply amounts to following his own lead.[85] Moreover, Culverwell's explicit, frequent, and predominantly positive references to stoic common notions are, in his intellectual context, an original feature. Among the Cambridge Platonists, he stands out in his willingness to bracket the naturalist aspects of stoicism. He also

[81] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System*, pp. 176, 449, 642, 712, 720–1, 727–8, 731–2, 746, 766, 774, 783; see also Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, with A Treatise of Freewil*, edited by S. Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 167, 183; including Hutton's "Introduction," p. xx.
[82] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System*, p. 774.
[83] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System*, p. 712. In a discussion of Boethius' *communes animi conceptiones*, Cudworth does however concede that some true common notions are common only to wise men. Conversely, in his refutation of Atheist materialism, he also claims that some notions about existence and extension which are common among men are in fact false (see Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, pp. 776, 780).
[84] D. Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 4.
[85] On the heuristic and historiographical-epistemological advantages of reconstructing the meaning of past philosophical texts by adopting such internal perspectives on the construction of the controversies to which they contributed, see M. Lærke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz. Controverses avec Huet, Bayle, Regis et More* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), "Introduction: Le perspectivisme historique," pp. 11–46.

clears stoicism of the possible charge of Averroism and denies that anything in the stoic doctrine suggests the corporality of the soul. Generally, he does everything he can to conclude that stoicism is, after all, "not only sound Philosophy, but good Divinity too." There is thus every reason to question the frequent depiction of Culverwell's theory of knowledge as "Aristotelian." If anything, it was stoic. And perhaps Culverwell himself told us as much when he chose to entitle the introduction to his book: "The Porch."[86]

[86] Culverwell, *Discourse*, Chap. I: "The Porch, or Introduction," p. 10.