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Titus Lucretius Carus
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Anthony Collins' Free Thought
Epicureanism in Great Britain Early Modern Age

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A b s t r a c t

The thesis' object is aimed to show an ancient philosophy and an old-fashioned way to see things which dates back to Ancient Greece. Those old values and thoughts which Latin philosophers and Poets appreciated too. Among the main aficionados of such values there is Titus Lucretius Carus. Obviously, these ethical and moral concepts have not always been appreciated in society, and, since the first pre-Annus Domini insurrections against heathenism, they have been libelled and marginalised by those authorities and entities in society who most retained the power. Wherefore, in the following centuries, with the Christianisation of the Roman empire, such scrolls, books or manuscripts talking of such values were banned, censored, fired, destroyed and pulverised owing to the words' powerfulness contained in them. One of those books was, of course, *De rerum natura* by Lucretius whose ideas and teachings threatened the authoritarianisms and the established religions for ever since then. However, those beliefs were not completely buried underneath, and a few selected men dug up and used such ancient thoughts as to weaken and undermine those reformed institutions which earlier had almost achieved to pulverise the very existence of these values. In particular, the man who will be discussed hereafter is a nobleman of Essex, Anthony Collins. A really controversial figure which in the pre-enlightenment period shed lights on ancient ideas quite close to those once hypothesised by Greek philosophers such as Epicurus and Lucretius Carus himself in the Republican Age of Rome afterwards.

INTRODUCTION

In Great Britain as in almost the whole of Europe, between the Late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age, many sects and groups of dissenters emerged with different objects and purposes. Mostly, they were apologists and worshipped a chosen Shibboleth having a common origin as Jesuits, Lutherans, Protestants, Jansenists, and etc., or rather, they had a totally subversive intention and professed ascetic ideas as latitudinarians, atheists, heretics and so on. In the former case, when sided by strong authorities such as the Established Church or political members, they had the chance to survive and flourish in society, whereas, in the latter case, when differing too much from the stronger established institutions, generally, they died out quite soon. Only in fortuitous circumstances, they stayed alive enough to leave few traces behind, especially linguistic or stylistic strategies, such as the game of ‘dissimulation’, ‘Theological lying’ and the ‘Irony’ and ridicule of Scriptures and Holy Gospels. Amongst these dissidents were there a few individuals whereof much is still unknown, but whom in the last decades, much has been written and researched upon in order to clarify their origins, their roles in English culture and the philosophical heritage left to history, mainly concerning the pre-enlightenment period. These dissenters have been called in different ways throughout the centuries: ‘Deists’, ‘Theists’, ‘Radicals’, ‘freemasons’, ‘Pantheists’ and etc.¹, but in this text, the term more appropriated will be that of “Free-Thinkers”, not only because the term was coined by the English gentleman Anthony Collins whose works will be fundamental for the development of this text, but also because he was one of the most active amongst them and his thoughts and works will be analysed and compared to understand the origin of these dissident points of view that characterised the Early Modern English period, and to comprehend how these subversive thoughts reached these rebellious.

Firstly, it is important to focus on how such thoughts sprang up, and this is partly achievable thanks to Titus Lucretius Carus’ (98/96 BC c. – 55/53 BC c.) Masterpiece: “*De rerum natura*”. A Poem whose concepts and ideas on Natural philosophy have been for centuries world-wide persecuted and banned because of its presumable power considered able to undermine and to weaken harshly the established church and the strongest institutions. This work is an elegy to Epicurus (341c.-270c.) who founded in Athens his own philosophy school. Epicurus was an Empiricist, and thus, he believed that the only way to acknowledge and understand the world was through sensible matter ². Most of his philosophical thought came out from Democritus (460 c. – 370 c. BC) who was the first philosopher to imagine the composition of matter made out of Atoms, and from whom, in the Modern Age (more than thousand years later), the term atom was borrowed, reconsidered and implemented as to finally take to Sir Francis Bacon’s theories and Newtonian and Boylean atomism. Nevertheless, this is only a tiny part of it, indeed, Lucretius considers other epicurean factors such as Free will, Happiness and Erotism as

1. See Margaret C. Jacob, *L' Illuminismo radicale: panteisti, massoni e repubblicani*, Bologna, Il mulino, 1983. Original: *Radical Enlightenment, Pantheism, Freemasons and Republicans*.
2. Lucrezio, *De rerum natura*, a cura di Armando Fellin, Introduzione, pp. 9-10, Milano, DeA Planeta Libri, 2017.

to achieve self-fulfilment in this material life. Likewise, Death is considered as the end of everything, and, therefore, the end of all life's pains so far (no afterlife). Moreover, Epicurus highlights the importance of freedom and the research of Truth as to understand properly the sensible world and the real knowledge, and much more, varying from the star phenomena to the origins of life. Unfortunately, most of the heathen and ancient works went lost because of Christian persecutions, fires, bad weather, lack of prevention and etc. Amongst the most important causes of the disappearance of those ancient volumes, Alexandria of Egypt's Library is the most renowned, and it is still harsh to put up with its end, since in its heyday, the library was said to possess nearly half a million scrolls, but, however, there is no concrete proof about its real size, yet, too many of those ancient scrolls went lost for ever ³.

The "De rerum natura" by Lucretius is one of the few manuscripts which survived the intermittent waves of ignorance and destruction befallen humankind during the centuries, and its lucky rediscovery is to be reconducted to '**Poggius Florentinus**' ⁴, as he liked to be called. Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini was a Florentinum humanist and scholar. His work and his natural feeling for searching ancient manuscripts saw him playing many important social roles such as secretary for the Chancery of Apostolic Briefs for the Pope in the Vatican State and in Florence as Chancellor, but the main deed for which he is remembered is the rediscovery in 1417 (probably in the monastery of Fulda in Germany) of the unique copy of Titus Lucretius Carus' Poem ⁵, and also the only work of Lucretius which has reached us since the Roman age. He perhaps did not even know at that time how important his rediscovery could have been, however, it was going to be one of the most contradictory and debating books ever. Furthermore, its circulation got its high pitch after the following development of the Printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, 1439 c. AD, whereby many of the old and worn out manuscripts, texts, pamphlets, scrolls, etc., could finally be copied with a drastic reduction of production costs and of time ⁶. Thus, suddenly, books could spread out in a faster and easier way all around the old continent, even if always with an active surveillance of the Church and of the Authoritarianisms.

This Ancient Poem, in the Late Middle Ages, was again treated as devilish, as it had been treated during and shortly after the Christian barbarian advance that inexorably led it to the oblivion around the Annus Domini; and in the following decades it was banned and labelled as an atheistic and ascetic book ⁷. Although, furtherly, it would have become an important historical and philosophical manual for many of the philosophers, scholars and scientists of the Modern Age. Actually, at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, some Christian physicians, chemists and philosophers would embrace causes which established religion would have never consented before. For instance, it happened with the English Royal Society ⁸, an apologist circle founded

3. Stephen Greenblatt, *Il Manoscritto*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2018, pp. 89-99.

4. Ibid. p.116

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. pp. 42, 223

7. Ibid. p. 256

8. J. R. Jacob, Boyle's Atomism and the Restoration Assault on Pagan Naturalism, *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (May, 1978), Jstor, pp. 211 – 233: 217.

by John Evelyn and in which took part men like John Tillotson, Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Samuel Clarke, John Wilkins and others so far.

Nevertheless, the object of this text is to consider those dissidents completely against Christian apologists as the Royal Society and any other powerful institution. And particularly, focusing on Mr. Anthony Collins who clearly rejected the manipulation of established institutions and “priest-craft”, figuring out his own way among an overcontrolled and close system imposed by whoever had the power in a determined place or state. In that specific moment, Collins went against the Anglicanism and the Roman Church, but he did not avoid arguments against other religions or powerful institutions which loosed men’s minds in favour of individual wellness and power. This English gentleman wrote much, even though always anonymously as if to avoid issues from the higher authorities (even though some apologists such as Samuel Clarke were often able to identify his hand quite soon) ⁹, particularly, he cared much about natural philosophy and materialism, free will, freedom of thought, anti-clericalism as well as the search for Truth as the only way to achieve happiness and self-fulfilment in material life. Therefore, mainly, the object of this text will englobe the ‘Material World’ and the radical enlightenment of the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, alongside with the development of the Epicureanism inherited by Lucretius, and then evolved with the English radical enlightenment into something new, becoming Deism, anti-clericalism, or perhaps pure Atheism.

9. William L. Uzgalis, *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, 1707-08*, Edited by William L. Uzgalis, Broadview Edition, Toronto, Ontario, 2011, Introduction, p. 12.

I. Epicureanism, the Rediscovery of Lucretius and its Spread

From the beginning of the last millennium scholars, clergymen, philosophers and humanists too, engaged in a process whereby a considerable amount of ancient and lost books, manuscripts, scrolls, and texts of any sort was rediscovered and republished to restore and bring back the old thoughts and the great ancient philosophies ended up into oblivion. This work, obviously, was not easy at all, and it did not always reward properly their hands-in-creating with a worthy or beneficial social prize. Indeed, these ‘book-hunters’ or searchers of manuscripts had not easy ways to get into monasteries and convents. These surely were, indeed, the most consistent museums of books at that time, and as can be easily understood, there were really few places in the world back then containing and storing manuscripts and books. And, thus, they were canonical libraries of monasteries or of remote churches owed to the long-drawn-out amanuensis’ hard work. Moreover, even when these adventurers had the authorisation to have access to those heavily-guarded libraries, they not always had freeway to borrow those books. In fact, when the priests or the monks did not allow them to do it, they had to spend months to recopy the entire texts within the monastery’s walls, and to leave only afterwards. Thus, had it not been for these explorers, perhaps, many of the books found in these remote places of the world, would have disappeared for ever as it unluckily happened for many other ancient and rather important scrolls and texts of whose existence there is evidence in historical books, but whose mention, nowadays, is all we are left with.

However, there were some humanists of the High and Late Middle Ages who obtained their more or less important personal achievements. And in this cause, Italian humanists took over the most, and, namely, they were Francis Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutati, and amongst them, needless to say that the Tuscan Poggius Florentinus¹ played an indispensable role. Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini, indeed, was the humanist and Italian historian who brought back into circulation the only and unique poem of the great ancient Roman poet and philosopher Titus Lucretius Carus (99-96c. BC – 58-55c. BC). Research and studies advanced upon this rediscovery have shown that this poem was rediscovered in 1417 AD from the Italian humanist, but its precise place is not proved because Bracciolini in his various correspondence with Niccolò Niccoli and other friends never mentioned that place, however, thanks to the events happened during that time, it has been possible to reconduct it to the Monastery of Fulda in the south of Germany ² (Notwithstanding this,

1. Stephen Greenblatt, *Il Manoscritto*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2018, p. 116.

2. Ibid.

it is just an estimation of such a place, therefore, there is not any real proof of it as already said before). Poggius Florentinus recopied the book and sent it to Niccolò Niccoli who recopied it a few times and kept it for himself for a long while, as is shown in the letters sent by Bracciolini to his keeper. Indeed, after more than ten years, fed of this situation, Poggio started to write in a fierier manner to Niccoli, almost on the verge of threatening him. Although, the book finally was shipped back to the former owner.

This was only the beginning from which the circulation of one of the most debated and argued manuscript in the world started so far. As a matter of fact, Lucretius' work not only was a mixture of poetry and elegance, but it also was a combination of pure Epicureanism, materialism and Democritean atomism which retraced the lines of free will, freedom of thought, erotism, happiness, search for Truth, and etc. This elegy to Epicurus and to the ancient Greek philosophy was most criticised and argued since the first Christian riots during the Roman Age. Wherefore, its contents and thoughts had often been under strict surveillance, and, many times, they were also banned or even fired and pulverised in public squares. For the same reason, the manuscript had fallen into oblivion for a long while and it almost risked disappearing for ever (established Church almost reached its purpose), but inexplicably, it survived. Stephen Greenblatt maintains that *the survival of his [Lucretius'] renowned poem was left up to chance*,³ and effectively, it cannot be more than a coincidence that the copies of the *De rerum natura* ended up into a monastery library, the very place which threatened the most its existence. Furthermore, it is also a coincidence that a monk sat in a scriptorium and patiently recopied the text before its irreversible pulverisation, and throughout the centuries it survived fires, bookworms and inundations, and awaited for about 500 years, until a day in the 1417 it ended up through the hands of the Italian humanist.⁴ In that period, there was a businessman who was developing something new that would have changed for ever the way to produce and spread books throughout the world. His name was Johannes Gutenberg (1400c.- 1468). This multi-task businessman introduced printing press and movable types to Europe, and thanks to this very high technology, in Europe arose a real revolution, the *printing revolution*. Its great success and its high functionality allowed a great amount of old manuscripts, pamphlets, scrolls, and every kind of book to be recopied and reprinted as well as to finally assure a longer life to all those weak but immeasurably important texts. After Florentinus' rediscovery, perhaps, printing press can be considered as the most probable cause of Lucretius' work spread hitherto, although, striving and straining against all the bans, fires, censorships, and protests befallen it. But now, it is necessary to

3. Ibid. pp. 116-117.

4. Ibid. p. 116.

focus on the main ideas contained in this manuscript, and particularly, to detect those elements that came out again from the end of the Middle Ages, and that led to a wide-spread epicureanism around the 17th century, even though often slandered and libelled.

Lucretius' elegiac Poem, widely and stylistically, prides some really peculiar and innovative points of view englobed by different Greek philosophers that converged, lately, into Epicurus' philosophy. Namely, they are Leucippus of Abdera (probably scholar under Zenon according to Diogenes Laertius), and his pupil Democritus (460c. – 370c. BC). These thoughts and ideas were not understandable during the Middle Ages because of the strong repression and the manipulation of thought and mind perpetrated by the established institutions. Thus, almost nobody could comprehend those thoughts, and indeed, only from the 14th century they actually began to jolt out consciences and to really shake minds. But why was Lucretius so unpopular and so harshly attacked by censorship?

First of all, according to epicureanism, Everything is made of invisible particles, these particles are the same ones exposed once by Democritus, the *atoms*. However, these particles or atoms are made of Matter, even though we cannot see them. Furtherly, they are infinite in number, but limited in shape and dimension. Those particles move in an infinite vacuum/emptiness (something that may not rather remotely recall Buddhism philosophy). Therefore, Universe is made of Matter – Primary particles and everything they compose – and of intangible and empty space. Moreover, the universe does not have either a creator or an Architect as Platonism supported and as Boyle and Newtonians will too, and, effectively, Epicurus's followers believed that Providence was fantasy, that world order and disorder's patterns were not the result of a plan of God. Already starting from these first points, it is easily understandable how dangerous such theories could be with regard to all those institutions that received, or better said, that conquered all their power and their authority misleading and self-interpreting the scriptures. Someone would say they did it to take fully control over the ignorant population, but this will be plainly illustrated later. However, asserting that no plan of God exists and that everything is self-generated somehow without the help of anyone or anything immaterial could seriously undermine and threaten a whole institutionalised thought. Nevertheless, this was only part of it, and, hereafter some other main beliefs will be shown and analysed.

Epicurus maintains that Everything originates from a deviation ⁵, what he calls *Clinamen*, equally called *Declinatio* and *Inclinatio* too. According to this theory, every particle, as already said made of matter, suddenly receives an energy that gives birth to it-self. This deviation (Clinamen) is the source of Free will, indeed, it would mean that because of given event, free will is, therefore,

5. Lucrezio, *De Rerum Natura*, a cura di Armando Fellin, DeA Planeta Libri, Milano, 2017, Introduzione p. 10: The difference between Democritus and Epicurus upon free will.

allowed for every material body. These very arguments and debates on free will started to swarm intensely between the 16th and the 17th centuries, and, namely, those who mostly engaged in these arguments were Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, Anthony Collins and etc., although, the debates would carry out for much longer.

With respect to Nature and the Origin of life, Lucretius inherited a really bold vision which hereafter will be brought forward. Nature, according to this Epicurean view, experiments endlessly, thus, it means all the phenomena happening to Nature are fruit of an endless movement that allows the Evolution system and the development of the existing beings. Is quite evident its closeness and likeliness to the *Origins of Species* of Charles Darwin (1859) whereby he tried to explain and demonstrate with empirical methods the origin of species by means of Natural selection and natural evolution. Moreover, nature, so as thought from materialism, had another main important feature that implicitly aimed to destroy that wide-spread view according to which Human beings were the most important entities in the whole universe, the so-called *Anthropocentrism* which had its greatest expansion during the Renaissance Age (1350c. – 1500c.). According to anthropocentrism, all human beings had been directly created by God in his likeliness and image, and everyone had been put into existence in an eased way for God's sake who simplified their life by modelling and adapting the whole earth and universe in order to give them the best possible life. Contrarily, Lucretius prizes a Universe that was born independently from human beings, and where humans are as important as all the other living beings, and that every species developed out of other species whose origins are to be found in the mutual straining for survival:

*We all from SEED CELESTIAL rise,
Which HEAV'N, our COMMON PARENT, still supplies.
From HIM tho EARTH receives enliv'ning RAIN,
And strait SHE bears Bird, Tree, and Beast, and Man,
And proper Food for all, by which they thrive,
Grow strong, and propagate their Race, and live;
Thence justly all the Name of Mother give.
And so each Part returns, when BODIES die,
What came from Earth to Earth, what from the Sky
Dropt down, ascends again, and mounts on high.
For DEATH does not destroy, but disunite
The SEEDS, and change their Order, and their Site:
Then makes new Combinations, whence arise
In BODIES all those great VARIETIES:
Their CHANGE in COLOUR, SHAPE, and FRAME; and*

Some for a while ENJOY, then LOSE their SENSE ⁶.

The overwhelming difference between nature philosophy and orthodox philosophy is here clearly distinguishable, and, furthermore, it is evidently demonstrable how this theory might have been able to dismantle such a layered and institutionalised culture as the one of the Renaissance. However, as any reader may notice, in the above-mentioned quotation, there are some other rather heterodox factors that would see men, animals and things all made of the same substance of Heaven and Earth: the same Matter. Thus, not only has man been created by chance from the combination of atoms without any plan of God, but man is also made of the same substance of the other living and non-living beings. And when he dies, all its parts return to their natural state. This is also the anticipation of other important teachings given later on by Lucretius: the Mortality of the Soul and the concept whereby Death is but nothing for us. However, earlier, Lucretius gave some important reasons why he undertook such work, and he accomplishes it in his third book eulogising Epicurus for searching the Truth in this material world:

*Thou, PARENT of PHILOSOPHY, haft shown
The Way to TRUTH by Precepts of THY own.
For, as from sweetest Flow'rs the lab'ring BEE
Extracts her precious Sweets, GREAT SOUL! from THEE
We all our golden Sentences derive;
Golden, and fit eternally to live* ⁷.

But as Lucretius may have known rather well, it was not that easy to teach to man, at that time, how to join reason and how to take advantage of knowledge. This, indeed, was really a harsh work and he explains it in starting his fourth book.

*For, first, I teach great Things in lofty Strains,
And loose Men from RELIGIONS'S grievous Chains:
Next, tho' my Subject's dark. My Verse is clear;*

6. Titus Lucretius Carus, *Of The Nature of Things*. In Six Books, translated into English Verses by Thomas Creech, A. M. Late Fellow of Wadham College in Oxford. In Two Volumes. The Sixth Edition, London. Digitalised by Google, Columbia University's Library in the City of New York, Vol I, Book II, cit., pp. 169-170: Verses 957 – 972.
7. Ibid., Vol I, Book III, cit., p. 198: Verses 9 – 14.

*And this design 'd: For as PHYSICIANS use,
In giving Children Draughts of bitter juice,
To make them take it, tinge the Cup with Sweet,
To cheat the Lip; this first they eager meer,
And then drink on, and take the bitter Draught,
And so are harmlessly deciev'd, not caught:
For, by such Cheats, they get their Strength, their Ease,
Their Vigour, Health, and battle the Disease.
So since our Method of Philosophy
Seems harsh to some; since most our Maxims fly;
I thought it was the fittest way to dress
These rigid Principles in Verse might please;
With Fancy sweet'ning them, to bride thy Mind
To read my Book, and lead it on to find
The NATURE of the WORLD, the RISE of THINGS;
And what vast profit too that Knowledge brings ⁸.*

And after his personal preface describing the reason why Epicurus was so great and why he committed to write this poem in this very way, he carries on explaining what a Mind really is, where does it lie, and its real importance, alongside with the origins of the soul, the sensible world, fears and evilness spread out by religions and wicked prophecies sprung thanks to human actions as well as the plague of men's corruption.

8. Ibid., Vol I, Book IV, cit., pp. 297 – 298: Verses 10 – 29.

II. Mortal Soul, Sensible World and Man's Corruption in Lucretius' Work

Lucretius, as already said upon, wanted to demonstrate the sensible world through the ancient philosophies of the Greeks, but he engaged in a wider and more innovative operation that overtook many Democritean and Epicurean ideas, passing through complicated matters such as the origins of Mind and Soul as well as of God, spirits, demons, angels and much more.

First of all, it is quite important to plainly understand the conception of Lucretius about Mind and Soul. For the Latin philosopher, indeed, they are but one. And this is, evidently, noticeable in the following passage of his masterpiece:

*First then: the Mind, in which the Reason lies,
Is Part of MAN; as Hands, and Feet, and Eyes
Are Parts of Animals: tho' some have taught,
Do no partic'lar Seat, no Part controul;
But are a VITAL HABIT of the Whole;
[...]
And thus, on suddain FRIGHTS Men often SWOON,
A strange effect! From which 'tis plainly known,
The MIND and SOUL are join'd, and make but one.
For here the MIND's Force strikes the Soul, and so
The Stroke goes on, and strikes the Body too.
But, to enlarge this Instance more; this proves
The MIND material too, because it moves
And shakes the Limbs, makes them look pale and wan;
In short, directs and governs the whole Man;
All which is done by TOUCH: And all that Touch,
Are BODIES; therefore MIND and SOUL are such.¹*

1. Titus Lucretius Carus, *Of The Nature of Things*. In Six Books, translated into English Verses by Thomas Creech, A. M. Late Fellow of Wadham College in Oxford. In Two Volumes. The Sixth Edition, London. Digitalised by Google, in Columbia University's Library in the City of New York, Vol I, Book III, cit., pp. 206-208, 212: Verses 93 – 98, 156 – 166.

Lucretius is concerned about such human problems related to mind such as fears and religious imposed thoughts, and for this reason, he seriously endeavours in his work to demonstrate that death is not something to really care about, warning humankind against spending much time thinking and dwelling on dreads that do not even concern them. Indeed, Death is only the end of a natural state leading to a new atomic composition, therefore, no afterlife will be there waiting for anyone, neither Acheron, nor any demonic or evil world but eternal peace. Says he:

*For not to mention how DISEASES vex
The SOUL; what FEARS of future Ills perplex;
Whence guilty CONSCIENCE shall affright the MIND;
For SINS strike deep, and leave DESPAIR behind:
'Tis MAD, FORGETFUL; sometimes LETHARGY,
And death like sleep fit heavy on the Eye.
Then what has Bugbear DEATH to frighten Man,
Since Souls can die, as well as BODIES can? ²*

Finally, the Latin Poet describes how everything is here, in matter form, and that whatever will ever happen to our body after its death, in no way it may ever seem as wicked and evil as religions describe. Because if everything is here, it will only change in matter form, but will anyway take place in this material universe. This is shown with a kind of parody upon religious credence, superstition or miracles:

*But nothing sinks to hell, and sulph'rous Flames,
The SEEDS remain to make the future Frame:
All which shall yield to Fate, as well as thou;
And Things fell heretofore ev'n just as now:
And still decaying Things shall new produce:
[...]
DEATH is a quiet State, and soft as Sleep.
And all, which we from Poets Tales receive,
As done below, we see, ev'n whilst alive.³*

2. Ibid., Vol I, Book III, cit., pp. 255 – 257, verses: 803 – 810.

3. Ibid., Vol I, Book III, cit., p. 269, verses: 963 – 967, 976 – 978.

Needless to say that the Latin poet does not end his teachings here, but goes much further until describing the birth of established Religions, trying to confute superstitions, miracles and any immaterial being such as angels, demons or spirits. Furthermore, he explicates why religions for their rooted reasons cannot be sane, and thus, how they may be main source of fear, cruelty, and pain.

*The FURIES, CERBERUS, black HELL, and Flames;
Are fairy Fancies all, meer empty Names:
But whilst we live, the Fear of dreadful Pains
For wicked Deeds, the Prison, Scourge, and Chains,
The Wheel, the Block, the Fire affright the Mind,
Strike deep, and leave a constant sting behind.* ⁴

Likewise, in the fifth book, Lucretius asserts that Gods have no powers in the material world as well as they were not involved in its creation:

*As Heav'n does bear no Trees; no Stars below;
But each stones no Blood, and Fish no Mountain know;
But each has proper Place to rise and grow:
So neither Souls can rise without the Blood,
And Nerves, and Veins, and Bones; for grant they
Then thro' each single part, as Arms, or Head,
'T would first be fram'd, thence o'er the other spread;
As Water, into vessels pour'd, will fall
First to one Part; then rise, and cover all.* ⁵

And in the same way, he tries to explain how the world was born; how nature, animals, and human beings came to life, and how throughout the centuries with the process of evolution everything constantly changed hitherto (in this case, it was until the Latin world of Rome). The Latin poet starts to talk of the stars, sky and of the Moon and the Sun. Afterwards, he explains the creation of Nature and of 'Mother Earth' whereby everything came into existence and developed out: animals, primitive men, first human communities, the birth of language, the first political institutions, and,

4. Ibid., Vol I, Book III, cit., pp. 274 – 275, verses: 1015 – 1020.

5. Ibid., Vol II, Book V, cit., p. 444, verses: 140 – 148.

more importantly, the birth and the spread of Religion. Lucretius wanted men to be free, to discover nature's Truths thereby experience. Moreover, perhaps, he believed that men could reach sensible truth through the simple use of mind and reason. Wherefore, the Latin philosopher tries to explain some fundamental concepts and to figure out the origin of everything only by the use of his own mind. He, indeed, studied the ancient philosophers, the old doctrines, the law, the nature, and etc., as to link them all together and to get to a common coherent thought. And this is how he proceeded in this work.

*but when once GOLD was found, the pow'rful Ore
Saw light, and Men gap'd after glitt'ring store;
Then Wit and Beauty were esteem'd no more,
But WEALTH enjoy'd their Honour, fiez'd their place:
The WISE and BEAUTEOUS bow to Fortune's Ass.
But if MEN would live up to REASONS RULES,
They would not scrape and cringe to wealthy Fools:
For 'tis the greatest WEALTH TO LIVE CONTENT
WITH LITTLE: such the greatest joy resent:
And bounteous FORTUNE still affords supply,
Sufficient for a thirsty LUXURY.*

[...]

*Now sing, my MUSE, for that's my next Design,
Why ALL do bow to somewhat as Divine
Why ev'ry Nation has its proper shrine?
Why All do TEMPLES build, why ALTARS raise?
And why all sacrifice on sacred Days?
How this diffus'd, this lasting FAME was spread
Of POWR'S ABOVE? Whence came that awful Dread. ⁶*

And, it is right here where the Latin poet plainly describes the provenience of the Gods and how they reached men's minds. He says that they did it through the half-sleep, the daydreams and during the night-dreams: these revealed that the Gods were sensible, majestic, eternal, and blessed too.

6. Ibid., Vol II, Book V, cit., pp. 563 – 564, 567; verses: 1180 – 1190, 1233 – 1239.

Moreover, the incapability of explaining the regular course of stars, the ordered succession of seasons and heaven and earth's phenomena, induced men in falsely believing that Gods governed the world and dwelled the heaven vault. The fear of the divine ire pushed then men to baleful superstitious practices, and thus, deprived them of the ability to contemplate peacefully the universe's nature. ⁷

*This is an easy Task: For NEW-BORN MAN,
Just sprung from Earth, when first this Frame began,
DIVINE and GLORIOUS FORMS descending came,
And struck his Mind by Day, by Night the same:
But then increas'd, their working Fancies show'd
Great Limbs and Strength, and fit to make a GOD:
And these they thought had SENSE, because they shook
As Fancy told, their Limbs, and proudly spoke;
Their Words were all majestic, as their Look.
ETERNAL too, because a new Supply,
A constant stream, where'er they turn'd their Eye,
Of Forms came in, and shew'd the DEITY. ⁸*

Lucretius also focuses on the main features and elements that may lead men to believe and trust in Gods and Divine figures too. He thinks sensible ideas that strike the mind which cannot be explained influence men to refer to some immaterial entity which may answer to such unknown knowledge.

*The SEASONS OF THE YEAR by constant LAWS
Run round, but knowing not the nat'ral Cause;
They therefore thought, that GODS must rule above,
Poor shift! And all at their Devotion move.
In HEAV'N they plac'd their SEAT, their stately Throne,
For there the SUN, the STARS, and various MOON,
And DAY, and NIGHT, their constant Courses run;*

7. Lucrezio, *De Rerum Natura*, a cura di Armando Fellin, DeA Planeta Libri, Milano, 2017, p. 399.

8. Titus Lucretius Carus, *Of The Nature of Things*. In Six Books, translated into English Verses by Thomas Creech, A. M. Late Fellow of Wadham College in Oxford. In Two Volumes. The Sixth Edition, London. Digitalised by Google, Columbia University's Library in the City of New York, Vol II, Book V, cit., p. 568, Verses: 1242 - 1253.

*And HAIL, and RAIN, and, thro' a broken Cloud,
Swift LIGHTNING flies, and THUNDER roars aloud.*

[...]

What Grief they brought themselves, to us what Fears?

To poor posterity what Sighs, what Tears?

Alas! What PIETY? Alas! 'Tis none,

To bend all cover'd to a SENSELESS STONE,

Lie prostrate, or to visit ev'ry SHRINE,

Or, with spread Arms, invoke the POW'RS DIVINE

Before their TEMPLES, while the ALTAR flows

With BLOOD of Beasts, and we make Vows on Vows.⁹

Actually, it is rather interesting to see his point of view when he explicitly doubts of Gods saying:

Why, do not TYRANTS then, and mighty Lords,

Recall their wicked Deeds, and boasting Words,

And fear, that now REVENGE is surely come?

Do they not tremble at approaching Doom?

Besides, when WINDS grow high, when STORMS increase,

And scatter warlike NAVIES thro' the SEAS;

When Men, for battel arm'd, must now engage

A stronger Foe, and fight the Waters Rage;

Does not the trembling GEN'RAL prostrate fall,

And beg a CALM o' th' GODS, or prosp'rous GALE?

In vain: the STORMS drive on; no OFF'RING saves;

All, shipwreck'd, drink cold DEATH among the WAVES:

And hence we fancy UNSEEN POW'RS in Things

Whose Force and Will such strange Confusion brings,

And spurns, and overthrows our greatest Kings.

Besides; when Earthquakes shake this mighty Ball,

And tott'ring Cities fall, or seem to fall;

9. Ibid., Vol II, Book V, cit., pp. 569, 570, Verses: 1264 – 1272, 1276 – 1283.

*What then if MEN, defenceless Men, despise
 Their own weak selves, and look with anxious Eyes
 For present HELP, and PITY from the SKIES?
 What wonder, if they think some POW'RS countroul,
 And Gods, with mighty force, do rule the WHOLE?
 But farther: pow'rful GOLD fist rais'd his HEAD,
 And BRASS, and SILVER, and ignoble LEAD, ¹⁰*

From Gods and Divine powers, the text goes on and moves its focus on those discoveries which, based on Lucretius, brought humans to an endless fight against each other. Particularly, the discovery of metals was what burst an escalation of destructive and devastating events and that, inexorably, ended up with wars and disputes for the greedy search for power and raw materials. By the way, the value of such metals often changed, and sometimes the battles did not bring the wished gains. Human beings evolved also thanks to the constant changing of such elements and their use. It is self-evident that everything men discovered or invented for whatever reason or purpose finally turned into something to gain power and to destroy enemies. Lucretius knew much about the moral and the ethics, and, thus, could not avoid talking of the main objects of politics and how law was nothing but established rules lately written or tacitly approved in order to control and to manage the cities/states, trying so to avoid any possible revenge or future vengeance. A sort of submission pact whereby the victorious could lead and rule thereby the act thereof upon, and the loser could but obey to the formers. Hereafter, the Latin Poet's opinion about metals' discovery will be cited, and the gradual regression and involution owed to this very *Cause of Misery*.¹¹

*Hot streams of Silver, Gold, and Lead, and
 As Nature gave a hollow proper Place, Brass,
 Descended down, and form'd a GLITT'RING MASS.
 This when unhappy MORTALS chanc'd to spy,
 And the gay COLOUR pleas'd their childish EYE;
 They dug the certain CAUSE of MISERY.
 And then observing, that it shew'd the FRAME,
 And FIGURE of the Hollow whence it came;*

10. Ibid., Vol II, Book V, cit., p. 572, verses: 1304 – 1327.

11. Ibid., Vol II, Book V, cit., p. 578, verse: 1345.

*They thought, these, melted, would with Ease receive
 Whatever SHAPES the ARTIST pleas'd to give:
 Or drawn to Breadth, or take the keenest Edge;
 And so the Hook be fram'd, or subtle WEDGE,
 Or other INSTRUMENTS, all apt, and good
 To CUT, or CLEAVE, or SCRAPE, or HOLLOW Wood:
 But GOLD they try'd in vain; the METAL broke,
 Or the soft Edge was turn'd at ev'ry Stroke:
 This they contemn'd, the blunted GOLD despis'd,
 And feeble SILVER; BRASS alone was priz'd.
 But now the feeble, and the useless ORE
 Gets all the HONOUR: BRASS is priz'd no more.*¹²

The magnificence and wonderfulness of these Books, such invaluable Poem, neither can be wholly illustrated here, nor can be plainly presented in such a few words. Its content is much wider and embarks on a variety of scopes and topics that would take too long to be fully analysed. However, those parts taken into consideration are the ones which will be important for the object of this thesis. The *De rerum natura* had the power to shake and to free minds. Its stylistic and eloquent language whose eulogies were sung in Cicero's and Virgil's writings, along with its plot and the ancient Greek philosophy, made it one of the most renowned works ever. A real masterpiece whose name hardly will ever be forgotten. Surely, this work had a vital role throughout the centuries, particularly, during the end of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period when, despite not being allowed in schools and in the whole society for a long while or, as already said before, even banned in many countries; it did not let obscure or vanish thoroughly its value which, in fact, was fully and greedily caught by individual scholars, writers, clergymen, and philosophers who in different ways interpreted this elegy depending on their personal thoughts and their purposes. Moreover, perhaps, it was Lucretius' rediscovery to help materialism and heathenism to come back into circulation and stick to those dissidents who tried to explain the world in a different way. A complex vision that absorbed ancient philosophies, and that, between Late Middle ages and Early Modern Ages, figured a way out to let new scientific discoveries and ethics merge into new hybrid thoughts. New ideas that, evidently, neither did take root in reformed church nor in society, but rather, became the most persecuted and pursued even though they somehow slipped away and slowly grew up amongst selected men.

12. Ibid., Vol II, Book V, cit., pp. 578 – 579, verses: 1340 – 1359.

III. Natural Heathenism in 17th-18th Century Great Britain and the Birth of New Nature Philosophy Sects.

About the end of Middle ages and the Early Modern Age a wide-spread minds' insurrection took place. Scholars, philosophers and clergymen studying and researching in libraries and monasteries began either to partially disagree with or to thoroughly deny the established ideas of Trinity, of God, of World's creation and of its structure, of Anthropocentrism, of Heliocentrism and of Universe as well as star phenomena, and so on. Among the main dissidents there were Giulio Cesare Vanini, Giordano Bruno, Cardano, Tommaso Campanella, Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Gassendi, Baruch Spinoza, Pierre Bayle, and many others. All of them, in a personal and particular way, as already said before, engaged in demonstrating the Nature of things, the World's creation and its complex composition, the Universe's main characteristics, Christian revelation, etc. However, this duty was not easy at all, and many of them risked or even died for it. But this argument will be discussed later. Now, what will be taken into consideration is that English aristocratic society which assembled nature philosophy with Christian scriptures. An operation considered by many a tactical strategy to push back the continual growth of Heathenism and Mortalism in England as well as in the whole continent. And, indeed, this renowned circle tried all its best to limit heathenism and nature philosophy to uncontrollably spread out. It was the English Royal Society. A Private circle founded in 1660 under direct request of John Evelyn who is famous for his essay on environment pollution and for his essay on Titus Lucretius Carus' work, the *De rerum natura*. Its members were obviously Christians, yet, they tried to explain natural and star events throughout mechanic and empirical methods even though not contradicting religious faith. They wanted to mitigate and merge Christian values contained in Gospel and in holy Scriptures with the reviving old natural philosophies which were strongly assaulting Reformed Church so far. Amongst them, there were scientists, scholars, philosophers, and authorities such as Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, Reverend John Tillotson, Sir John Wilkins, John Locke, Gottfried Von Leibniz, Samuel Clarke and etc. Of course, a really important base to the British Society's thought was given by the Irish chemist and philosopher Robert Boyle.

Robert Boyle was a physician, chemist and an empiricist who maintained that matter was composed of atoms which established connections among each other, and, consequently, characterised the typical features of the universe's elements. He tried to demonstrate empirically the presence of corpuscular and indivisible particles governing the natural world. But, all of it, for the Irish scientist, originated from an immaterial God. An Immanent God who omnisciently and

omnipotently created and organised everything exists since ever.¹ This is what can be defined as a fairly distinguishable anomaly to the epicurean system embraced by natural philosophers and anti-Plato movements. However, it is easy to reconduct such theories back to the ancient free-thinkers of the past. Notwithstanding, This very theory will be supported by every other member of the end of 17th and the whole 18th century of thereof Society. This Christianised atomism, *not only grew out of the desire to avoid the implications of Epicurean atomism but also developed in response to another form of heresy*, what R. Jacob calls *Pagan naturalism*². Indeed, between 16th and 17th centuries, many sects and natural philosophies emerged, and many others were to emerge into society soon, and their scholastic and heathen-like opinions aimed at undermining reformed religions. Mainly, they were Roman Church and Anglicanism. According to Jacob, *Boyle may have been responding to the widely current heresy of Mortalism which said that man's soul would perish at the death of the body and that, according to some versions, on or before the Judgement Day God, instead of resurrecting these dead souls, would create them anew.*³ But Mr. Boyle describes this sect and this new worship not as completely Atheistical, but *as well professing Christianity, as pretending to philosophy, who [...] do very much symbolize with the ancient Heathens, and talk much indeed of God, but mean such a one, as is not really distinct from the animated and intelligent universe; but is on that account, very differing from the true God, that Christians believe and worship.*⁴ They, indeed, do not identify into Theism, but they worship a God who dwells in Nature and does not, thus, above. Therefore, they have been finally defined as Deists or simply, *Free-Thinkers*. With respect to such anti-heathenist strategy, in his last will, Boyle wished that lectures upon his studies would be inaugurated, and would be held in universities as to reinforce society's minds with Christianised doctrine. Meanwhile, Isaac Newton, a British physician and mathematician, followed Boyle's teachings and implemented them. Most importantly, he used to define himself as an *atomist*. Therefore, he embraced the same revolutionary considerations dated from Epicurus which passed through Boyle, after that many philosophers and scholars had been labelled as sectarians, atheists and latitudinarians. Now, with this process of Christianisation of heathenism, this arguments become the norm and they spread out naturally also because of this great English scientist. Noteworthy were the discoveries Leibniz and he came up with, still, his main accomplishments vary from gravitational law to mote's laws, and, of course, in developing the scientific revolution as well as in enhancing the progress of the heliocentric theory.

1. J. R. Jacob, Boyle's Atomism and the Restoration Assault on Pagan Naturalism, *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (May, 1978), pp. 211 – 233: 214.
2. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 213.
3. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 215.
4. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 217, in Thomas Birch, *The Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, in WRB, in VI Vol., London, 1772, Vol. 5, lxxxii, p. 183.

Moreover, it is well-known that Newton was really passionate about natural philosophy which he studied too, yet, he maintained Boyle and Christian's theory on immateriality of God and on the origins of the world. De facto, Newton held Boyle's Lectures and supported Plato's theory whereby God is the Great *Architect* of the Universe from which everything originated. During the same period, also other clergymen and great philosophers followed these views, among them Samuel Clarke, a clergyman who is known to be the most influential philosopher between John Locke and the Irish empiricist John Berkeley. He strictly collaborated with Newton, besides being his translator. He developed Boyle's and Newton's studies and held Boyle's lectures for a while⁵. Moreover, he used to define himself as a Newtonian, consequently, supporting those theories. He assumed in that particular moment of the history the major role as apologist of Church and *Revelation*, and for the same reason, he despised the various sects and groups of dissidents his whole life, promptly facing whoever maintained contrasting or rebellious opinions. For instance, he had a few discordances with some so-called Deists, but particularly, he argued for almost his entire life with the English gentleman of Essex, Anthony Collins, a nobleman who clearly was disappointed about those Christian arguments protracted so far, and hence, he attacked them with the publication of anonymous books and also through a long correspondence which lasted for about two years with the same Samuel Clarke in which the two men animatedly and intensely discussed about God, Nature of things, determinism or '*Necessitarianism*', material or immaterial Soul, freedom of thought and free will.

This correspondence took place between the 1707-08. Thus, only few years after Clarke held his Boyle's lectures against Deism (1704) and the same year in which Mr. Collins published the '*Essay Concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, the Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony*' (1707) where he strongly affirmed the necessity to use reason in order to unearth the shields that hide the real Truth. However, this debate had started long before, and an example of this can be found in Richard Bentley inaugural Boyle Lectures in 1692, *The Folly of Atheism*, when he said that *to avoid the odious name of Atheists*, these dissenters, *shelter and screen themselves under a new one of Deists, which is not quite obnoxious*⁶. Likewise, others had engaged in such dispute before. For instance, can be cited the reverend Stillingfleet, the reverend Edwards, John Wilkins and many others who during the 17th century pursued and attacked such men as Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Bayle, Baruch Spinoza, Gassendi, and nature philosophy all. Consequently, it can be said that

5. Peter N. Miller, 'Freethinking' and 'Freedom of Thought' in Eighteenth-Century Britain, *The historical Journal*, 36, 3 (1993), pp. 599-617: p. 602, Cambridge University Press, Jstor.
6. Sarah Ellenzeig, The Faith of Unbelief: Rochester's "Satyre," Deism, and Religious Freethinking in Seventeenth-Century England, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2005), pp. 27-45: 39.

it was just the sequel of an old argument that had taken its roots in a frenetic century in which two main factions engaged in a strong, perhaps endless, debate. On the one hand, there were the Christian supporters and the Holy scriptures. On the other hand, there were those freethinkers who soaked up their lifeblood from the previous centuries' nature philosophers and scholars who engaged in these issues such as Thomas Hobbes, Montaigne, Spinoza, Descartes, Copernicus, Gassendi, Pierre Bayle, Giordano Bruno, and many others. The latter's works picked up those ancient theories and philosophies inherited from Democritus, Epicurus, etc., which, whether by chance or perhaps luckily, merged into such a work as the *De rerum natura* of Lucretius Carus.

It is important, by the way, to shed light upon this kind of sectarian movement, also known as Deism, saying that it was a combination of different minds whose aim was not thoroughly against clergy and Christian works, indeed, many of them appreciated the new scientific studies and the research conducted by Boyle upon atomism and Newton's discoveries too. Moreover, they approved of the growth and the development of new technology and the progress of new scientific methods, trying, each one in a different way, to adapt them for their studies and, thus, adopting those discoveries into their private works too. Amongst the main freethinkers, surely there is Mr. Anthony Collins. He was a landowner and a Justice of the Peace who lived in England for almost his entire life. He was the pupil of John Locke and kept with the latter a really good friendship for his all life, for they considerably esteemed each other and collaborated for most of the time together. Indeed, Collins' writings, as his thought, partly took a leaf from this great English philosopher⁷. However, he revalued some theories and explained them in his personal way. For this very reason, his works can be quite significant to understand this fairly unstable period, particularly, owing to his subversive opinions and ideas about precise topics, and, likewise, also because of his wide relationships in England and on the continent with some really influential *érudit*. But before undertaking this debate, it is indispensable to briefly mention Christians' hostility against any new vision or opinion, even though sometimes just slightly differing from their dogma, for they caused not little damages to free-thinkers who, somehow, had to rely on finding a way out to survive and to write as not to be labelled and marginalised.

Established Church and political institutions were always strong enough to control and to supervise properly every new movement and undermining thought that could in any way entangle or endanger a given crystalized position or institutionalised power. The strongest were, evidently, State and Church. However, Reformed Church was probably the most radical, and it violently defended its

7. Charles T. Wolfe, *Locating Mind in The Causal World: Locke, Collins and Enlightened Determinism*, Dissertation, Boston University, 2007, cit., p.12: "Contrary to O'Higgins, and more recently James Harris, I believe that Collins' main influence is Locke".

status and its credibility in any possible way. Indeed, as it is well-proved, the inquisition, ‘the divine judgement’, had so many heretics, apostates, atheists, pantheists, free-thinkers, philosophers, Deists, ‘witches’, and others killed because they were thought to be against the only and unique will of God, so that, nowadays, it is not easy to make a clear estimation of all the deaths yet. The policy of terror was the weapon used to protect and preserve Christianity and its dogma. None could refute or talk against it, and thus, acting like that, it obtained the hegemony on men’s minds and free will. Today we know of those philosophers and freethinkers such as Giordano Bruno of Nola, tortured for eight long years and finally burned at the stake in *Campo de’ Fiori* in Rome as well as Lucilio Cesare Vanini who was condemned to have his tongue cut out, and to be strangled at the stake, and his body to be afterwards burned to ashes, because nothing had to survive of those dangerous heretics; Galileo Galilei who had to deny all his theories in front of the episcopacy as not to be condemned to gallows, François de la Mothe Le Vayer burned at the stake, and many others who had to face all of this simply because they dared to express freely their thoughts. By the way, in England, the Church had had few changes, mostly structural changes, brought about from Henry VIII Tudor. He decided to divorce from the Roman Church, and therefore, he reformed it in favour of different rules. It became English Anglicanism, and many old Roman dogmas disappeared with it. For instance, Henry VIII wanted the Roman Church to allow his divorce from Anne Boleyn which at the end was not accepted from Christian authorities, and therefore, he suddenly decided to separate from Vatican and to become the Head of the Anglican Church. This major event happened in the beginning of the Early Modern age, thus, it was the same period in which sprung many Christian divergent reformations. With respect to those inner insurrections, the Lutheran scission of Martin Luther and the Calvinism of John Calvin can be quoted. Hence, as can be seen, the Roman Church dealt with few attacks from within, and its original power dangerously split into scattered shibboleths even though all descending from the main one, but, nevertheless, this did not stop the Church to spread terror and closure all around as it used till then. In fact, its power was still too influential and occupied too many important rules in different countries, even because its range was still wide enough to destabilise political institutions or even States’ balances. However, even though there had been a sort of religious scission, in England it was still hard to freely express one’s own point of view, moreover, this got even worse when the English Parliament issued in 1667 the *Blasphemy Act* whereby whoever talked against Trinity or against the Gospel and the Holy scriptures was rendered incapable of holding any official or social position, and, worse, a second accusation of blasphemy could lead to the total and thorough exclusion from society. Though, despite the presence of certain measures, it was not that easy to be condemned to death as it was in Rome, Spain or France; hence, philosophers and freethinkers, even though often anonymously

or through the use of nicknames, wrote much against the church and its corruption, obviously, using a few smart and cunning tricks to avoid any sort of issue with those authorities.

IV. Anthony Collins, Free-Thinkers and Dissimulation

Anthony Collins was one of those freethinkers who mainly committed to write against established powers, and alongside, in Modern England, many other erudite men joined this operation such as the Irish John Toland, Charles Blount, Matthew Tindal, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Thomas Woolston, etc.¹ They, in different ways, refuted and wrote against those Christian's behaviours and 'priestcraft' deeds, often collaborating in writing books and in spreading out dissenting and rebellious ideas, even though as already said before, mainly clandestinely and often in private circles or private residences. For instance, Collins' Mason, *Great Baddow Library*, was amongst the preferred places to debate and to discuss of new ideas or new books. After Collins' death, it has been reported that it contained over ten thousand books.² And this last point will be taken into consideration to explain such relationships amongst freethinkers and philosophers who met and worked together for these common purposes.

*A cultivator of new ideas. [...] His library reflects a receptiveness to attempts to break away from the established orthodoxy and the dominant influence of the ancients.*³ Collins was a man interested in different subjects and topics and he managed to work and to research in various fields. He appreciated books either against or in favour of his opinion. He, indeed, possessed any kinds of book and manuscript. For instance, In his shelves there was *Sextus Empiricus*,⁴ different versions of *De Rerum natura* of Lucretius,⁵ as well as works by Tommaso Campanella, Giordano Bruno, Pierre Gassendi, Gerolamo Cardano, Francis Bacon, Descartes, Pierre Bayle,⁶ etc., but there were also works

1. L. Geymonat, *700' Storia del Pensiero Filosofico e Scientifico*, III Vol., Aldo Garzanti Editore s.p.a., Milano, 1977, pp. 20-40.
2. G. Tarantino, *Lo Scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729), I libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore*, FrancoAngeli Storia, Milano, 2007, p. 115.
3. Ibid., p. 122, in Richard Ashcraft, *John Locke's Library: portrait of an intellectual*, in *A Lock Miscellany: Locke biography and Criticism for All*, ed. By Jean S. Yolton, Bristol, Thoemmes, 1990, pp. 226-245.
4. Ibid., *Catalogus Librorum*, C.L., No. 1679.
5. Ibid., C.L. No.1017-1018, 1766, 3295-3000, 8500-8502.
6. Ibid., C.L., T. Campanella, No. 857-8; C.L., G. Bruno, No. 681; C.L., Cardano, No. 871-875; C.L., P. Gassendi, No. 1971-1977; C.L., Francis Bacon, No. 256-271; C.L., Descartes, No. 886-898; C.L., P. Bayle, No. 370-383.

of Samuel Clarke, Robert Boyle, John Tillotson, Edward Stillingfleet, John Evelyn and etc.,⁷ who were partially or totally against his thought. In his library there was also a wide choice of clandestine works and pamphlets, de facto, he owned a copy of *La vie et l'esprit* of Spinoza,⁸ and also anti-clerical manuscripts written by Spanish Jews such as *Troki*, *Mortiera*, and *Orobio*.⁹ Nevertheless, this vast choice of clandestine books was also available in Benjamin Furly's library in Rotterdam as well as in Eugene of Savoy's property. These three figures were in strict contact with each other. According to Justin Champion, they were *the tree men who owned the most dangerous collections of Europe*.¹⁰ Many freethinkers used to frequent such private places for many reasons. For instance, *Toland, like Furly, Collins, Locke, etc., were not just interested in reading 'radical' books, but primarily wanted to engage with the arguments of the mainstream*.¹¹ Indeed, as it is plainly explained by Champion, it is important not to recklessly presume *A rather reductive, and indeed passive, relationship between owner and reader, and between the content of a book and the experience of reading it*. These erudite men thought that books *were not simply as bearers of arguments but as means for brokering political and social transactions*.¹² And, indeed, they used to meet in these close rendezvous such as *the circle 'De Lantaarn' of Rotterdam*.¹³ According to M. C. Jacob, there was a sect which emerged between the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century known as the *Knights of Jubilation* whose members worked together for about half a century to favour the Whig's party and the Orange protectorate in England.¹⁴ In this circle there were English atheists and deists as well as French Huguenots that, owed to the Diaspora caused by the Church and the Absolutism's repression, finally settled in the freer Netherlands. Namely, they were John Toland, Anthony Collins, Prosper Marchand, Charles Levier, Rousset de Missy, Picart, etc.. However, what will be taken into

7. Ibid., C.L., S. Clarke, No. 1106-1107; C.L., R. Boyle, No. 581-607; C.L., J. Tillotson, No. 9885-9889; C.L., E. Stillingfleet, No. 9728-9732; C.L., J. Evelyn, No. 1730-1739.

8. Ibid., C.L., Spinoza [Baruch, *sive* Benedictus de], No. 4966.

9. J. Champion, *John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2003, p. 31, see note 15: according to Desmaizeaux, Collins acquired it in Holland before 1714.

10. Ibid., cit., p. 31.

11. Ibid., cit., p. 41.

12. Ibid., cit., pp. 26-27.

13. G. Tarantino, *Lo Scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729), I libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore*, Milano, FrancoAngeli Storia, 2007, p. 123, in Luisa Simonutti, *Toland e gli inglesi del circolo di Furly a Rotterdam*, in *Filosofia e cultura nel Settecento Britannico. Fonti e connessioni continentali*, John Toland e il deismo, a cura di Antonio Santucci, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2001, 2 voll., I, pp. 249-269; Cfr. Margaret C. Jacob, *Illuminismo Radicale: Panteismo, Massoni e Repubblicani*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1983.

14. Margaret C. Jacob, *Illuminismo Radicale: Panteismo, Massoni e Repubblicani*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1983, pp. 113-180.

consideration here is only the relationship amongst these English dissenters and French Huguenots that, whether or not in such secret or hidden sect, kept strict contacts and wrote and published things together. Their relationships have been deeply proved and discussed in many studies, and, likewise, the significance of such relationships in spreading out texts and manuscripts like the '*Traité des trois imposteurs*' has been clearly shown. This was an anti-clerical and anti-religious work whose redaction, firstly was mistakenly given to John Toland, but finally assigned to Rousset de Missy (Anthony Collins' translator) and Charles Levier, with the great help of Prosper Marchand (P. Marchand was fruit of the Huguenot Diaspora, and based on Margaret C. Jacob research, he was the Head of the Dutch sect, what she calls *The Knights of Jubilation*). This text is amongst the most anti-religious works ever, indeed, it aims at destroying and dismantling any religious foundation upon the three most renowned world religions, namely, Christianity, Hebraism, and Islam. According to this book, the three religious leaders are nothing but impostors, and these three spiritual-guides actually were but only normal men who took advantage of the wide-spread ignorance amongst people to achieve power and personal benefits.¹⁵ By the way, this was only an example of the cooperation that took place for the above-mentioned reason. For instance, Anthony Collins' library was the peculiar place where John Toland obtained most of the means to translate *Spaccio* (1713) of Giordano Bruno,¹⁶ a book that the Irish philosopher jealously kept and printed in order to diffuse it.¹⁷ Moreover, there is a wider and more complex research about this great cooperation. Champion asserts that *Furly was best connected in the Low Countries, being intimate with 'libraires' like Leers, Wettstein and Johnson. Locke conducted most of his business through the services of Awnsham Churchill, while Collins, through the agency of Pierre Desmaizeaux, had efficient relations with French booksellers in London like Vaillant and Du Noyer. These routes for acquiring the latest volumes, or the most valuable edition, were also available to Toland to distribute his own work. And therefore, In these routine, mundane, repeated and habitual transactions the grit of cultural change was gradually deposited amongst this community of friends and associates.*¹⁸ Thus, Collins and his fellowship took advantage of one another's routes in order to reach new books, collections or any valuable document. They had strong contacts within the United Provinces, England, France, and Germany.¹⁹ And their

15. Ibid.

16. J. Champion, *John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2003, p.31, see note No. 20.

17. Ibid., p. 31; Cfr. Margaret C. Jacob, *Illuminismo Radicale: Panteismo, Massoni e Repubblicani*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1983, pp. 265-270.

18. Ibid., cit., p. 39.

19. Ibid., p. 39: *In the letters passed between two of Toland's other close friends – Anthony Collins and Pierre Desmaizeaux – it is evident that the 'traffick in books' was not insular, but involved participation in a European-wide republic of letters.*

works' aim was to open men's eyes and shake their minds throughout the studies and the research upon ancient philosophies, new scientific discoveries, and continual cooperation.

Anthony Collins, hence, had many relationships and for the same reason, he had the chance to spread and let circulate different manuscripts and texts whose contents were highly disapproved in England as in the whole continent.²⁰ However, Free-Thinkers had to be quite careful in making no sort of mistake, whether big or little, because it could see them exiled, banished or even condemned to death. For this very reason, these erudite men adopted different strategies to confound or cheat clergy and church. John Toland said *in all the books I ever wrote, there is not one word against religion; but on the contrary, several vindications of its purity and excellency from the superstitious practices and worldly usurpations with which it has been often deform'd, but chiefly by priests.*²¹ Though, Toland explicitly said that the act of lying was justifiable when its aim was to promulgate undermining thoughts avoiding the persecutions from the hands of Clergy.²² Also Anthony Collins never publicly declared himself to be a deist and never had the intention to. Only Mathew Tindal in *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730) freely defined himself as a *Christian Deist*.²³ But, nowadays, it is quite plain that these erudite dissenters spoke through allegories, paradox, irony and ridicule in order to cheat and trick the religious institutions and its inquisition. But how did they achieve it?

A complex reading of Collin's works reveals the author's constant intention to deny any rational fundament of Christian revelation and to represent it as an artificial work in the light of the interests of few. But he always proceeds in a cautious way, de facto, he never criticises scriptures and gospel directly but considering them from external points of view. In *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*, Mr. Collins openly subscribe to such orthodox Christian doctrines as the belief in immortality based on the Gospel promise and the Athanasian doctrine of Trinity. Plainly, if Collins meant what he says,

20. Ibid., p. 40: *Collins was not profligate in his purchases: through the agency of Desmaizeaux he exercised a refined discrimination. His books were not for mere ornament. Keen to have them used, Collins encouraged access to his collection at Great Baddow, repeatedly inviting and entertaining men like Toland, Sallengre and another of Toland's friends Hugh Wrottesley. He promised one visitor 'good fires, good books, good wine, philosophers' meals, and country appetites' [see p. 44 note No. 65: J. Almagor Pierre Desmaizeaux (1673-1745), Journalist and English correspondent for Franco-Dutch periodicals, 1700–1720 (Amsterdam, 1989)], [...] Like Furlly's meetings at the Lantern, the evidence of Collins's correspondence indicates that at the same time as ordering his books he made sure a plentiful supply of good wine was bought too.*

21. Andres Juri Virkus, *Deism and Eighteenth-Century Realism*, p. 241: Champion, J. A. I., *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992, p.179.

22. Ibid., Part I, pp. 5-13: Champion, J. A. I., *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1992, p. 253.

23. Ibid., Part I, p. 7.

then he could not be a deist. For a deist, it is agreed, must, minimally, reject Christian mysteries and the authority of Scripture. Hence, those scholars who see Collins as a deist must also accept that he was a liar- that is, he did not mean what he said. [...] The art of theological lying [...] was, I maintain, practiced not only by Collins but by Toland, Tindal, and Blount.²⁴ Thus, there were different ways indicated and adopted by such scholars: *What Toland calls the 'Exoteric and Esoteric distinction' has also been called 'Double Doctrine' by William Warburton, 'Defensive Raillery' by Lord Shaftesbury, 'Irony' by Collins, 'Secret Insinuation' by David Hume, dissembling, dissimulation. And sneering by many.*²⁵ After all, Collins himself considers the use of ridicule, when smartly endeavoured, a worthwhile method as to determine a proposition's truth.²⁶ For instance, Anthony Collins in *An Answer to Mr. Clarke's Third Defense of his Letter to Mr. Dodwell* writes to Samuel Clarke: *I shall conclude this debate with an essay showing a way how to demonstrate the existence of God,*²⁷ and so, he tries to explain God through ancient philosophies such as those of Strato, Xenophantes, and Confucians whose theories, according to Collins, aimed to demonstrate the existence of a unique substance in the Universe: *Matter, which Spinoza calls God, and Strato, Nature,*²⁸ and so on. He clearly refers to natural philosophy and Mortalism. But shortly after, the English Gentleman concludes contradicting himself: *For if once matter be allowed to be a self-existent being, We Christians who believe but in one self-existing being, are obliged by our reasoning to allow matter all possible perfections, and to exclude everything else from being self-existent.*²⁹ The Free-Thinker says that matter must be perfect as God is, but evidently, he is both showing a material God thereby the clear examples of Spinoza and of ancient philosophers, and, in the meantime, he affirms to be Christian and to believe in a self-existing being. In this case, it might be thought he adopted that sort of *Irony* or paradox which he would describe some years later. Lord Shaftesbury in his work, *Characteristics*, gives a reason for these paradox games: *'Tis real Humanity and Kindness to hide strong Truths from tender eyes'*.³⁰

24. G. Tarantino, *Lo Scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729), I libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore*, FrancoAngeli Storia, Milano, 2007, p. 61; D. Berman, *Deism, Immortality, and the Art of Theological Lying*, cit., pp. 61-62.

25. Ibid., p. 65; D. Berman, *Deism, Immortality, and the Art of Theological Lying*, cit., pp. 61-62.

26. Ibid., p. 61.

27. William L. Uzgalis, *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, 1707-08*, edited by William L. Uzgalis, Broadview Edition, Toronto, Ontario, 2011, *An Answer to Mr. Clarke Third Defence of his Letter to Mr. Dodwell*, cit., pp. 245-246.

28. Ibid. cit., p. 245.

29. Ibid. cit., p. 246.

30. G. Tarantino, *Lo Scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729), I libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore*, FrancoAngeli Storia, Milano, 2007, cit., p. 65; note No. 181, from Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, cit., I, p. 63.

Therefore, all things considered, as David Berman asserts and Giovanni Tarantino confirms too, it is conceivable that Anthony Collins and many freethinkers with him were completely committed to this anti-clerical task, sided against established Church and committed to demonstrating the inconsistency of every proof upon God's existence, though recurring to Dissimulative methods.³¹ And for this reason, hereafter, Anthony Collins' works will be taken into consideration and analysed retracing his closest topics: The so-called Logic Determinism which distinguished Collins' ideas on free will and human liberty, anti-clericalism and Priestcraft, materialism and nature of things, and finally, Tolerance and his immortal *Free-thinking*.

31. Ibid., pp. 65-75.

V. ‘Necessitarianism’, Human Liberty and Free will

In the Collins-Clarke’s correspondence the difference of opinions between the two men is clear, and, as has already been said before, they differed and argued on many points like the origins of Life, Soul and mind’s principles, free will, personal identity and determinism too. Indeed, these topics will be the most discussed by the two philosophers in the following years. Collins, contrarily to Mr. Clarke, believed that every sensible thing or creature on earth and in the universe was made of matter, and for the very reason of existing, had to be naturally mortal. Consequently, the soul was mortal too.¹ Everything in this material world as it appears when it comes to birth so it fades away at its death. From this subject, in the second answer of Collins to Clarke, the gentleman maintains that *powers in a determined system are not the results of its belonging to that very system. Nor will there be any ground to suppose a universal to exist without particulars, but a particular power existing to which several particular powers contribute – as every man is a particular man, though various powers are necessary to constitute him of the species. Nor lastly, to suppose an effect produced without a cause, for the different powers in the single and separate parts of the system of matter, by uniting in one operation or power to operate, are the cause of the existence of that power which did not exist in the particles singly considered.*² Accordingly, the nobleman of Essex meant that every power is capable of motion, and every particle has its own capability necessary to transform and to form a new complex of matter with its natural fundamental properties. *For by experience we see that everything by change of form becomes everything. The same parts of matter become parts of dung, earth, grass, corn, sheep, horses, men, etc., and act their parts under these mutations.*³ Finally, as to clarify this aspect upon matter and its inner power, Collins says that it is therefore reasonable to support *the matter of which an egg consists does entirely constitute the young one, and the action of sensation began under a particular disposition of the parts by motion, without the addition of an immaterial and immortal soul.*⁴ This was an example also used by Lucretius in his *De rerum natura* to explain matter’s composition and the appearance of animal species in the world.⁵ Collins asserts that owing to the impossibility to empirically demonstrate an immaterial addition from ‘above’ into

1. William L. Uzgalis, *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, 1707-08*, edited by William L. Uzgalis, Broadview Edition, Toronto, Ontario, 2011, pp. 50-51.
2. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 71.
3. *Ibid.*, cit., pp. 71-72.
4. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 72.
5. Titus Lucretius Carus, *Of The Nature of Things*. by Thomas Creech, A. M. Late Fellow of Wadham College in Oxford. In Two Volumes. The Sixth Edition, London. Digitalised by Google, Columbia University’s Library in the City of New York, Vol. I, Book II, p. 466, verse 885.

matter, and, hence, the lack of instruments to witness the soul immortal, those events and phenomena described before cannot be confuted. Instead, on the other hand, senses and sensible beings are evident and can concretely explain the material reality.⁶ However, despite this Epicurean view upon matter, according to Collins, there is a meaning in matter. Its composition, its particles, have an innate power which has always been there and regulated the whole bodies' features. Says he, *I conceive, no matter in the present state of the Universe, can be compared to Chaos. From whence I grant no regular work can be produced by mere mechanism, but all is disposed by the power of God in a state of regularity.*⁷ Therefore, accordingly, considering that God in this case as almost all the times for Collins is but *Mother Nature*, everything exists in this sensible world is made of matter and did not receive either powers or any special capability from immaterial entities or immanent beings. Everything whereof matter is composed is already present in itself. It has all the characteristics and the elements to create new matter and to originate such structures or powers as the brain, nerves, flesh, and, likewise, the mind, the soul, and Reason itself. With respect to this latter consideration, it is possible to link this argument to the following verse:

*But when the BODY's made, when we begin
To view the Light, if then the SOUL crept in,
How it is likely it should seem to grow,
Increase, and flourish, as the Members do?
No: SHE would live confin'd to her close Cage,
With Pow'rs, as great as Infancy, as Age.
Again then and again, the SOUL is born and dies.
For let's suppose if fram'd without; what Ties
Could knit this SOUL so close? How could this MIND,
As sense assures, with ev'ry LIMB be twin'd?
For now 'tis knit to ev'ry Nerve, and Vein,
To ev'ry Bone, that ev'n the Teeth feel Pain:
As when with suddain Chop they grind a Stone;
Or when cold Water thrills the heated Bone.
Since then 'tis join'd so close, how can this SOUL,*

6. William L. Uzgalis, *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, 1707-08*, edited by William L. Uzgalis, Broadview Edition, Toronto, Ontario, 2011, *Reflections on Mr. Clarke's Second Defense of his Letter to Mr. Dodwell*, pp. 115-150.

7. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 132.

*Loos'd from LIMBS, BONES, and NERVES, fly off secure
And whole?*⁸

Like Lucretius, hence, Mind and Soul are bound to matter: body, nerves, flesh, brain, etc., and nothing can be alive without the whole structure and the matter's order present in itself. What differs from Lucretius in Collins is, instead, the way matter behaves and changes. For instance, while matter for Epicureans does not have a cause, and, therefore, is the result of a chaotic and systematic fusion and scission of atomic particles randomly; Collins engaged in a discourse whereby all that exists has a cause, therefore, everything is Necessary and, finally, cannot be free.⁹ Thus, if there is no cause in an action or in a process, there is no action or process at all but fortuity and chance.¹⁰ Starting from this very point, he decided to enforce the basis upon the real spectre of human freedom, particularly, in his work: *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* where he tries to demonstrate why MAN is a *Necessary agent* and why human liberty is not purely thorough freedom, but rather, a whole combination of external material causes that constantly affect the singles.

The English Free-Thinker finds his evidence explaining the illustration of some scopes such as the Divine Prescience or the pain's and pleasure's value through the social reward and punishment's system. He maintains that man is a necessary agent *because all his actions have a beginning. For whatever has a beginning must have a cause; and every cause is a necessary cause.*¹¹ As a consequence, Humankind has a *cause* as well as his thinking, his mind, and his soul. But if a cause is a necessity, humankind cannot be free, and, therefore, free will is determined by the causes and the following effects that influence perpetually humans. However, his arguments cannot avoid talking of God and his main characteristics too:

The immanent acts of God being supposed free, it is not easy to imagine how they should be one with the divine essence; to which, necessarily existence does most certainly belong. And if the immanent acts of God are Necessary, then the transient must be so likewise, as being the certain effects of his immanent acts: and a chain of necessary fate must run

8. Titus Lucretius Carus, *Of The Nature of Things*. By Thomas Creech, A. M. Late Fellow of Wadham College in Oxford. In Two Volumes. The Sixth Edition, London. Digitalised by Google from Columbia University's Library in the City of New York, Vol. I, Book III, pp. 144-145, verses: 640-664.
9. Peter N. Miller, 'Freethinking' and 'Freedom of Thought' in Eighteenth-Century Britain, *The historical Journal*, 36, 3 (1993), Cambridge University Press, Jstor, pp. 599-617: p. 605.
10. A. Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty*, London, 1715, pp. 39-40.
11. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 39.

*through the whole order of things: and God himself then is no Free Being, but acts by a necessity of NATURE. And this necessity, to which God is thus subject, is, no absurdity to some.*¹²

Not only does he want to demonstrate free will and liberty to be impossible in Humans, but he wants to put these at the same level of God, saying that all that exists is a *Necessary cause*, and, therefore, not free. For Collins, a God that is a Necessary being is not free, and, therefore, cannot be a God. Yet, Collins's argument aims to demonstrate that human freedom is confined to sensible events and it is not handled by any immanent being.¹³ Man, indeed, necessarily perceives ideas as a natural and involuntary act.¹⁴ Moreover, to clarify it, Collins makes a difference between Ideas of *Sensation* and *Reflection*. The idea of Sensation is what necessarily is acquired by the senses when a man is awake in order to analyse and to decode the surrounding reality. On the other hand, the Idea of Reflection is that faculty whereby man is conscious he thinks, when he does think.¹⁵ Furtherly, *the power of man to order the beginning or forbearance, the continuance, or ending, of any action, is called the WILL, and the actual exercise thereof, WILLING.*¹⁶ Essex's book-hunter maintains that will, being a choice coming from a previous will, cannot be taken into consideration by a man until its experience first occurs. Wherefore, being everything a Necessary experience, consequently, it determines the final act too, *Doing as we Will.*¹⁷ It is nothing but the necessary act experimented by humans to do as they will, and as it has been shown by Collins, it is circumscribed to the rational spectre of matter. Nevertheless, even though man needs knowledge and experience to obtain and select information, it is in his natural faculty to adopt his mind and his reason as to evaluate and to decide which action whether is better or not to another. It is given to man by Nature, and he can use it the best they can to enhance and to develop the environment, but also to better off and to allow the evolution of man itself as well as of the society where they dwell.

In this immense universe man is not the only valuable being, and, of course, he is not the centre of anything in it but a mere lodger. At the beginning of the times, when he did not have any experience at all of the outer space or of star and natural phenomena, he thought the world to be the centre of everything, and that 'something' somehow produced, caused and conducted such unaccountable phe-

12. Ibid., cit., p. 53.

13. Ibid., pp. 57-65.

14. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., cit., pp. 30-34: p.32.

17. Ibid., p. 35.

-nomena, perhaps, the same thing which created the world and humankind itself. But, as already explained earlier, many took advantage of such ideas and used them to empower themselves and to control minds to enslave other men to their wills. And to crystallise their powers, and to avoid being criticised, these men established religions, reigns or states. In so doing, they conquered men's will, or better said, by sword and blood, they forced the weakest amongst them to obey their masters to their will, and protected their selves by issuing laws ad hoc in order not to let anyone riot against the mainstream. They made up superstitions, evil prophecies and miracles as to numb minds, and, finally, condemned as sectarians and atheists all those freethinkers who disrespected or disagreed with those fake ideas. De facto, it can be said that religion is but a heresy with a strong army which obtained too much power and none was able to prevent and stop its spread. Although, according to such freethinkers as Anthony Collins himself, every man can have access to knowledge, and, equally, he is able to think freely without the help of anyone, but judging and experimenting freely everything in the sensible world which is by nature empirically demonstrable. For this reason, Collins believed that reason is our natural weapon against powerful institutions and crystalized thoughts, and whatever may be its origin or its real purpose, surely, humankind was born with this natural gift where everyone can draw from and thereby reach a personal and rationalised opinion. Hence, whoever maintains to be superior or to possess the real instruments to verify the truth of everything, probably, does not really mean it, otherwise, he would be a fool. But supposing the former case is right, he ought to be only a quack, and surely his intent is not to help anyone at all, for whoever knows the importance of knowledge and of '*propositions*' would never divulgate them carelessly, but only after a serious commitment in understanding them as well as possible, and, eventually, to spread the real meaning of such propositions or of such knowledge only afterwards.

To conclude, Collins tried to demonstrate that the incredible power of human mind, despite its great limits, can be the only way to salvation in the sensible world. Reason, however, can be used properly only through the free act and the free choice of that process which Collins calls '*Free-Thinking*'. This is the path shown by the English Justice of the peace in order to achieve the best perception of Truth and of knowledge on earth. And, for this reason, these topics will be closely investigated in the following chapter, trying to understand the real thought of Anthony Collins as far as it is concerned.

VI. Collins' 'Free-Thinking' and a New form of Tolerance

Anthony Collins wrote both books and articles during his life, besides holding some correspondence as the one with Samuel Clarke. He, as already said before, wrote always anonymously, and, most importantly, never publicly declared himself to be a Deist or whatever as not to be pursued by Church and State. Also because Collins covered important social roles, thus, he could not risk being accused of blasphemy, otherwise, he could be condemned and expelled from public institutions for ever. His great career as a writer started with the publication of the *Essay Concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, The Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony* in 1707. This book is a pillar in order to understand Collins's thought, and his opinions can be easily inferred from his clear criticism to the institutions.

Firstly, unlike his master and close-friend John Locke's assertion about revelation, he maintained that *Reason is that faculty of the Mind whereby it perceives the Truth, Falsehood, Probability, or Improbability of Propositions*.¹ Indeed, for Collins, the only available criteria for men to perceive Truth are to be found in the perception of ideas' concordance. Revealed Truth, differently from Locke, *whatever exists which falls not within the compass of our ideas, is nothing to us, nor can we talk or think about it*.² Collins in his work wants to directly attack the main source of narrow-mindedness in the world, and thus, he cannot avoid talking of the established Church, and he finds his way out borrowing an invented word, *Blictri*, from his Irish friend John Toland, becoming here *Cousheda*, in order to demonstrate the impossibility to have faith in something of which there is no empirical evidence. He asserts *We have no evidence for the truth or revelation, equal to our perception of the truth of those propositions' call'd self-evident: and therefore our perceptions must be our rule against any such pretended revelations. [...] While things appear repugnant, we must judge them to be repugnant, if we will ever make any judgement at all*.³

Furthermore, he was strongly in disagreement with clergy, especially for their pretensions to relegate Christian doctrine to an unintelligible dimension: *And truly the clergy in all ages, some out of pride, unwilling to profess their ignorance, the more cunning to get power and dominion over the*

1. G. Tarantino, *Lo Scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729), I libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore*, FrancoAngeli Storia, Milano, 2007, pp. 20-21, in A. Collins, *Essay Concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, The Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony*, London, 1707, cit., pp. 23-30: 29.
2. Ibid., A. Collins, *Essay Concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, The Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony*, London, 1707, cit., pp. 23-30: 29.
3. Ibid., cit., p. 22, see Note No. 15.

*minds and consciences of men, have agreed to talk unintelligibly.*⁴ Reformed Church, for Collins, had determined the wide-spread absence of Free-Thinking, a peculiar mind openness which he so defined:

*By Free-Thinking then I mean, The Use of the Understanding, in endeavouring to find out the Meaning of any Proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of the Evidence for or against it, and in judging of it according to the seeming Force of Weakness of the Evidence. This Definition cannot, I conceive, be excepted against by the Enemys of Free-Thinking, as not including the Crime with which they charge Free Thinkers, in order to render them odious to unthinking People (for it there is any Crime in Free-Thinking, that Crime must be contain'd in a Definition which lays no manner of restraint upon Thinking) and they must allow, that if I vindicate Man's Right to think freely in the full extent of my Definition, I not only apologize for myself, who profess to think freely every day de quolibet ente, but for all the Free-Thinkers who ever were, or ever shall be.*⁵

This was a significant cornerstone for Anthony Collins, and either the limitation of such virtue or its total obscuration had to be pursued and put to an end. He, as Toland or Tindal, understood the importance of freedom of thought and identified its first enemy in established religion. And this can clearly be inferred in the following passage where Collins rethinks about the probable usage of propositions in building up a society starting all anew, and how it could finally end too:

The several Propositions will be said by them to be Above, but not contrary to Eye-sight. Instances will be given of ten thousands Mistakes in using our Eyes. It will be esteem'd dangerous trusting to carnal Eye-Sight, and be said that we ought to rely on the Authority of those Men who have Pensions and Salarys on purpose to study those things, and would not deserve that they receive, should Men use their own Eyesight. And as for those few Men who should dare to use their own Eyes, no Punishments would be too bad for them; and the least Evil they could expect would be to be render'd odious to the Multitude, under the reproachful Ideas of Scepticks, Latitudinarians, Free-Seers, Opiniators, Men

4. A. Collins, *Essay Concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, The Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony*, London, 1707, cit., p. 36.
5. A. Collins, *A Discourse on Free-Thinking, Occasion'd by The Rise and Growth of a Sect call'd Free-Thinkers*. First edition published in 1713, London, cit., p. 5.

*ty'd by no Authority, and who lay all things in common, how universally forever receiv'd; to be represented sometimes as Madmen, at other times as subtle cunning Fellows who acted by Confederacy, and had secret underhand Pensions from the Lord knows who, and who were acted by assisted by the Devil.*⁶

Nevertheless, he enclosed a wider range of institutionalised powers within his disappointment, mostly religious-like, and this can be seen in *A Discourse of Free-Thinking, Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect call'd Free-Thinkers* (1713) where he criticised almost every existing religion as well as Heathenism. Indeed, Pagans adopted the same sort of coercions and constrictions protracted successively by Christian authorities upon their followers. *Not only the unbelieving Christians and Epicurean were excluded from Free-Seeing, but the Pagan believers were allow'd to SEE no further than their Faith qualify'd them to do with safety.*⁷ Thus, Collins' purpose concerns the Vindication upon those 'Above' stories, miracles and prophecies that should be men's primary free choice to be able to confute those lies, but, rather, it does not happen at all. Indeed, whoever decided to pursue such path would evidently see himself labelled and condemned as Atheist or Impious. Says he:

*Should any one desire to inspect the "ANNUAL MIRACLE" of the Liquefaction of St. Januarius' Blood at Naples, or any of their numerous Sweating, Bleeding, Nodding, and Weeping Statues; or to examine strictly those Men upon whom the daily Trick of casting our Devils is perform'd; or to see the famous "Candle" of Arras, which the Virgin MARY deliver'd to the Bishop of that place before a great Assembly of the People in the Church above 600 years ago, and which has burnt ever since without wafting.*⁸

The argument is harsh and dangerous, but, for a freethinker as Collins, the search for Truth is what really matters in this sensible world, and, according to Collins, it can be done only through the use of senses and of the right and free employment of mind, and consequently, through the good employment of Reason.

I have no way of knowing Truth from Falsehood, or whether I am in a safe or a dangerous

6. A. Collins, *Essay Concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, The Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony*, London, 1707, cit., p. 18.
7. A. Collins, *A Discourse on Free-Thinking, Occasion'd by The Rise and Growth of a Sect call'd Free-Thinkers*. First edition published in 1713, London, cit., pp. 19-20.
8. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 22.

*state, but by using the Understanding and Reason God has given me; and yet I must without any reason at all suppose myself in a right and safe way. [...] I should be deterr'd from using my Eyes for fear I should mistake in using them, and I should walk abroad with my Eyes shut, because of the possibility of falling if I should walk abroad with my Eyes open.*⁹

Therefore, as long as priestcraft artefacts and divine powers will carry on plaguing mother earth, men cannot be thoroughly free. Collins worked out these issues trying to demonstrate that Superstitions are nothing but evilness and wickedness brought on earth to control weak minds, and he achieved it by declaring them to be pure *Allegory*, stories which had to be seen and considered no more than how it is normally done for a simple fuss or tale. *Happy is the Man, says the Divine Virgil, who has discover'd the Causes of Things, and is thereby cured of all kind of Fears, even of Death itself, and all the Noise and Din of Hell.*¹⁰ Virgil's quotation here, particularly, of this very passage, probably is not to be underestimated, because it directly refers to an ancient philosophy which not only was eulogised by the latter, but that involved also Collins and freethinkers all in their growth: Epicureanism. According to the main Freethinker, *There is but one complete Ancient System of Atheism (viz. Epicurus's system written by Lucretius) left us upon Record, and the Priests will not suffer that to lie hid in a learned Language; but one of them, the late Reverend Mr. Creech, has translated it into English verse, for the Benefit and Entertainment of the English Reader. And there are more Recommendations of Divines prefixed before his performance, than ever I saw before any Religious or Devout Author whatsoever.*¹¹ Epicurus and his philosophy were amongst the most renowned and unbelievably virtuous combination that ever existed, his ideas stroke the minds of every free-thinker ever born upon earth, and, as already shown in the first paragraph, it somehow reached us through Titus Lucretius Carus and his rediscoverer Poggius Florentinus. In *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* is deeply acclaimed the highness of such Greek philosopher who *has in all Ages been distinguished as a great Free-Thinker, and not less as a Man of VIRTUE among the Learned; in which last, he seems to have exceeded all other Philosophers.*¹² Moreover, in this work are cited two important ancient authors, namely, Diogenes Laertius and Cicero, in order to prove the major peculiarities of Epicurus and his followers. Amongst those qualities, surely, appeared 'Friendship',

9. Ibid., cit., pp. 26-27.

10. Ibid., cit., pp. 36-37, see Tullius, Horace and Virgil's quotations used to describe Superstitions by Collins.

11. Ibid., cit., pp. 91-92.

12. Ibid., cit., p. 129.

*that Noble Quality*¹³ whose beauty and power was admired and prized also from a great adversary of his philosophical opinions, says Cicero:

*The Epicurus declares it to be his Opinion, That of all things which Wisdom can procure towards a happy Life, Friendship is the noblest, most extensive, and delicious Pleasure. And this he did not only assert in his Writings, but gave a practical proof of it in his Life and Conversation. How great a Commendation this is, appears from the rare Instances of Friendship, of which the Mythology of the Antients, as voluminous and full of variety as it is, will hardly afford us three from THESEUS's time down to ORESTES. But oh! What a numerous, what an harmonious Company of Friends, did EPICURUS croud into his own little Habitation! And the Epicureans follow his example at this day.*¹⁴

There are values upon which Epicureans would never compromise. Those values can be found back in Diogenes Laertius' *Vita Epicuri* where he describes Epicurus outstanding *Piety towards his Parents, his Kindness to his brethren, his Meekness to his servants, his Humanity to all, his Love to his Country, and his Chastity, Temperance, and Frugality.*¹⁵ Collins knew well the importance of such ethical and moral approaches, and therefore, implemented those ancient teachings with new perspectives, ideas, approving empirical methods and new scientific discoveries, but especially relying on friends' collaboration.

Resuming, Anthony Collins maintained that every single man on earth shall think freely and have access to his own mind without the evil and wicked artefacts or priestcraft made up to paralyse and to numb man's natural process of reasoning. Although, in order to achieve it, mankind must take a decision to finally get loose from superstitions, prophecies and miracles which, accordingly, are nothing but allegories. Once made such choice, this would allow everyone to verify and to seek the real Truth throughout the experience of the senses, scientific means, and the act of reasoning: An act naturally given by God. Thus, this infers that no 'above' powers or institutionalised no-provable entity shall ever either lead or clamp down any society, and, likewise, none shall ever mislead a given mind to submit or subjugate it. Therefore, based on his opinions, everyone should profess and worship his own belief, shibboleth or any personal idea reached through an openly reasoned decision. And, thus, as used to happen in the ancient Greek polis and in the Epicurean schools, the political and religious

13. *Ibid.*, cit., pp. 129-130.

14. *Ibid.*, cit., p. 130, in *De Finibus*, Ciceronis, L. I. ad finem.

15. *Ibid.*, cit., pp. 129-130, in *Vita Epicuri*, Diogenes Laertius.

Tolerance should be allowed and appreciated for it is the only and unique form available to spread out culture and new ideas to all men, and, in this way, to grow up, to evolve and to better humankind itself as the environment where they live. As explained in the third Paragraph, Free-thinkers were, evidently, aware of the primary concern of books, of culture, and, as a consequence, they spread new and ‘dangerous’ ideas; endorsing, therefore, the relationship and the cooperation among different minds and different opinions, considering this practice, ipso facto, absolutely indispensable to better and to enhance the progress and the proliferation of brand-new beliefs. For this reason, Collins believed that humankind had to bridge the gap with absolutisms, fears, tyrannies and institutionalised powers. And, finally, They should allow a heterodox society which provided the constant transmission and share of information despite the ideologic, ethical, religious and political differences.

The first erudite that engaged in a discourse upon Tolerance surely was Sir John Locke. And it is quite probable, particularly for the likeliness in contents,¹⁶ that Mr. Collins first came across such topic through Locke’s works. Though, as already said earlier, he travelled a few times in the Netherlands and kept a good relationship with many free-thinkers in such country. Indeed, the United Provinces deeply differed from the old and conservative traditions inherited from the old continent. For instance, the Dutch country was a melting pot of different cultures and religions thoroughly divergent one from another, thus, unlike other Republics or States of the 17th and 18th century. This country obtained its independence after a long eighty-years-struggle against its coloniser, Spain, and unbelievably embraced a political and cultural system of openness towards new cultures as well as confessional freedom. It was a place, perhaps the only one back then, where Religious Tolerance and freedom of conscience were allowed. Therefore, Collins surely had few living examples from which to draw his ideas too. Tolerance, as thought by Collins, can be found back in some radical journal’s articles. Indeed, according to David Berman and David L. Jacobson, he wrote for the Independent Whig, a weekly anti-clerical journal that despite its relatively short life, only one year, saw, within thirty-five years, seven English and two American editions, and in 1767 was even translated by the Baron D’Holbach into French.¹⁷ Its major exponents were John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, the two Irish men renowned for their free republican thought.¹⁸ Collins is believed to have written some articles published during the 1720, and, particularly, in issue n. 51 he reintroduced given Lockean theme, *Tolerance*.¹⁹ However, his view was quite more radical than that of his friend. Indeed, what

16. See Third Capitol, p. 25, note No. 7 of thereof text.

17. G. Tarantino, *Lo Scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729), I libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore*, FrancoAngeli Storia, Milano, 2007, p. 45.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

Locke intended for Tolerance was essentially the freedom of Religion for which he recognised to everyone the right to pursue his/her salvation adhering to whatever worship or confession persuaded the most his/her conscience. Thus, Locke excluded Atheists and heretics from the Toleration range. The society he thought of, consequently, would see a peaceful coexistence of religious worships, close communities anyway. Leaving, hence, no way for anyone to be outside of those, and, evidently, such outsiders by law would lose all their civil and political rights renouncing, therefore, to every social position or prestige.

On the other hand, instead, Collins reviewed it, and, as well as Spinoza, thought that every individual must be free to express whatever he/she believes, marginalising and libelling any sort of formation of influential ecclesiastic hierarchy.²⁰ It can be affirmed that the society imagined by Anthony Collins was a kind of Utopic world never existed but in Constitutions' treaties. An abstract conception not achieved even nowadays. A World community sharing scientific discoveries and divergent ideas, working together as to reach common objectives, and, all of this, independently from ethnical, political, religious, cultural or social factors. A free world made of free men. An idea both so simple and deeply complicated at the same time. Those, evidently, were the values which Epicurus, Epicureans after him, Lucretius, Virgil, and free-thinkers like Anthony Collins all agreed upon in order to forge a worthwhile, healthy and developed society.

20. Ibid. p. 51: J. I. Israel, *Locke, Spinoza and the Philosophical debate concerning toleration in the Early Enlightenment*, (c.1670-c.1750), Amsterdam, Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1999, pp. 5-20.

CONCLUSIONS

Since first man's records, human history has seen the birth and the death of different minds and of various organisations which in the centuries have followed each other uninterruptedly hitherto. A few gave privilege to values and ethics, putting the moral in the main stage. Others appealed to fearfulness and terror as to achieve power to undertake a greedy career. Many others rather relied on different ones. The focus of this thesis was, however, on those men who engaged in studying and spreading those values such as ethics, freedom, moral and knowledge. And thus, it tried to show as plainly as possible how harsh a similar work might have been for them, retracing those ancient ideas and conceptions which, perhaps, introduced the world into a new epoch. And, as to explain such process, Titus Lucretius Carus' immense work was illustrated and taken as an example. The values exposed in this masterpiece are friendship, freedom of conscience, tolerance, adversity to tyranny and to deprivation of free-thinking. Moreover, it engaged in exploring and confuting those contents and those areas of human knowledge which had been forcefully established in society by few who did not, and still do not, allow the refusal and the arguments against them. Among the main apologists, there are the Roman Church and what it represents, Christianity; the Jews, the Heathens, and afterwards, it would have enclosed Islam and other religion-like organisations as well as other sects. Lucretius did not live enough to see the birth of such worships, but he already theorised that many were still to spring up in the world. And, as claimed by the Latin poet, they who defended such circles and those kinds of shibboleths, generally, carried out real wars against their opposers in order to keep their privileges and their wellnesses.

On the other hand, there were the opposers who were not kings, reigns or armies, but, rather, they were scholars, intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, naturalists, explorers and freethinkers who through their whole life fought to demonise and to weaken those very institutionalised powers. Despite the hostile political activity and the heavily-guarded flaw of ideas, These *érudit* did not fear them and promptly faced these kinds of social and intellectual tyrannies and absolutisms. And, many of them died as to shed lights on something they believed to be more important than their own life: *Freedom of Conscience*. For instance, this thesis has also mentioned the awful deeds brought about by reformed institutions against men like Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella, Lucio Cesare Vanini, Cardano, Montaigne, Gassendi, Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Descartes and many others who died or heavily risked dying for what they thought and said in public square.

Nevertheless, those rebellious ideas are still present among men and their strain to survive, world-wide, are not easy at all yet, because of the still deeply rooted stereotypes and the widespread actions of repression and coercion which do not conceive freedom of speech and tolerance in society. In this

thesis, particularly, has been shown how the most libelled and demonised men of pre-enlightenment period were, actually, the main apologists of such contents and ideas. In Great Britain, indeed, Anthony Collins, like John Toland, Charles Blount, Lord Shaftesbury, John Trenchard and many others, engaged in defending those ancient values contained also in the Latin poem of Lucretius. In the various centuries, therefore, the Epicurean philosophy inherited by the *De rerum natura* with its thoughts of freedom, tolerance, knowledge empirically discoverable, friendship and innovation were adopted by those very ‘atheists’ or ‘heretics’ who wanted, in reality, only to free minds and open men’s eyes in order to build an open and healthy community able to share and develop out new ideas independently from ethnical, moral, political, or religious divergencies. A world hypothesised by many, but never achieved in reality. After all, the social conformation did not really change much since then. De facto, nowadays, humankind still fights every day to protect, and eventually, gain more rights in society, and even in the most peaceful periods, the awareness upon human corruption and his yearns for power stands high. For when there is an influential hierarchical organisation springing up and none is ready to counterattack, such achieved freedoms may disappear as fast as they came out. Though, most of the men who engaged in fighting against the strongest institutions knew that, and, perhaps, decided to counterattack. However, what they desired most was, of course, a world wherein both thinking freely and the free access to knowledge were allowed to understand as well as possible the sensible world, and, in the meantime, to avoid the crystalized and coercing impositions adopted by impostors. But, particularly, they were moved from their great calling, the seek for *Truth*, for men come into being thoroughly free, and naturally master their innate action of reasoning to experience the outside world. Likewise, men have the capability to act and decide freely whether something is right or not. Therefore, none should ever be mentally subdued to another man because it would determine the limitation of a man’s natural state. Thus, for Freedom of Conscience and Tolerance cannot be taken for granted, *Free-Thinking* shall be the object and real purpose of every society of men in order to enjoy those ‘*Epicurean*’ values which, otherwise, would not even exist at all.

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