Religious heterodoxy is the deviation from ‘right,’ socially sanctioned doctrines within a given religion. On many occasions, the wrongful influence of ‘false religions,’ religiones falsae, to use the words of Lactantius, has been considered the cause of this deviation. During the early modern period, the fundamental term for such false, especially heathen religions, was ‘idololatria.’ The intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy can, therefore, also be consequences of an idolatrous religion, of the worship of false, lower deities instead of the true God. Those involved in such idolatry moved along lines of reference which seemed misguided to their orthodox contemporaries; their religious worship was directed towards the stars, towards the world, or towards nature rather than towards the one true God. Because idolatry displaced God from the centre of religious worship, it can be linked to the process of secularization. Given the importance of idolatry in early modern scholarly debates, the attention devoted to it by recent historians seems entirely necessary and appropriate. This essay will expand and develop upon the themes raised in recent writing.

The hermeneutics of this thinking is the formula of ‘anxiety of influence,’ not in Harold Bloom’s sense, but as the fear of harmful influences on true Christianity and true philosophy. Jacob Böhme’s philosophy was often portrayed as the result of the harmful influence of gnosis and Zoroastrianism, the philosophy of Spinoza as the result of the harmful influence of Stoicism and Neo-Platonism, and Socinianism as the result of the harmful influence of Islam, just to take a few examples. These kinds of

3 On Böhme, see Martin Mulsow, ’Den Heydnischen Saurteig mit den Israelitischen Süßteig vermengt: Kabbala, Hellenisierungsthese und Pietismusstreit bei Abraham
genealogies go back at least as far as the Counter-Reformation (to figures such as Possevino and Crispo in Rome), and they peak during the second half of the seventeenth century. In Germany, Jacob Thomasius wrote an influential genealogy of pantheist thought in 1665; around the same time, Cudworth called pantheism ‘world-idolatry’, and Abraham Hinckelmann wrote a history of dualist thought (1693). In the Netherlands, Abraham Heidanus, professor of theology at the University of Leiden, traced heresy and false beliefs to a harmful blend of philosophy and theology in his *De origine erroris* (1678), the title of which echoes not only Lactantius, but also Bullinger’s treatise from 1528 (expanded edition 1539). Bullinger’s work contains a brief history of idolatry—especially as it was found in such Catholic practices as the worship of saints, worship of images, and the worship of the host—and Heidanus develops Bullinger’s work into a long story. Both Heidanus’s *De origine erroris* and Cudworth’s *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, published in the same year, made extensive use of materials from Gerhard Johannes Vossius’s great history of idolatry, *De theologia gentili*, which was published posthumously in 1668. Each of them integrates Vossius’s religious-historical findings into a specific philosophical and theological agenda, in Cudworth’s case a Neoplatonic-Latitudinarian and in Heidanus’ case a Cartesian-Calvinist. Cudworth interprets atheist-atomist views as misunderstandings and degenerative patterns of an original truth, which consists in the doctrine of animate atoms. Conversely, in the course of his survey of human intellectual history, he shows a posteriori that the idea of God was in a certain way always

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