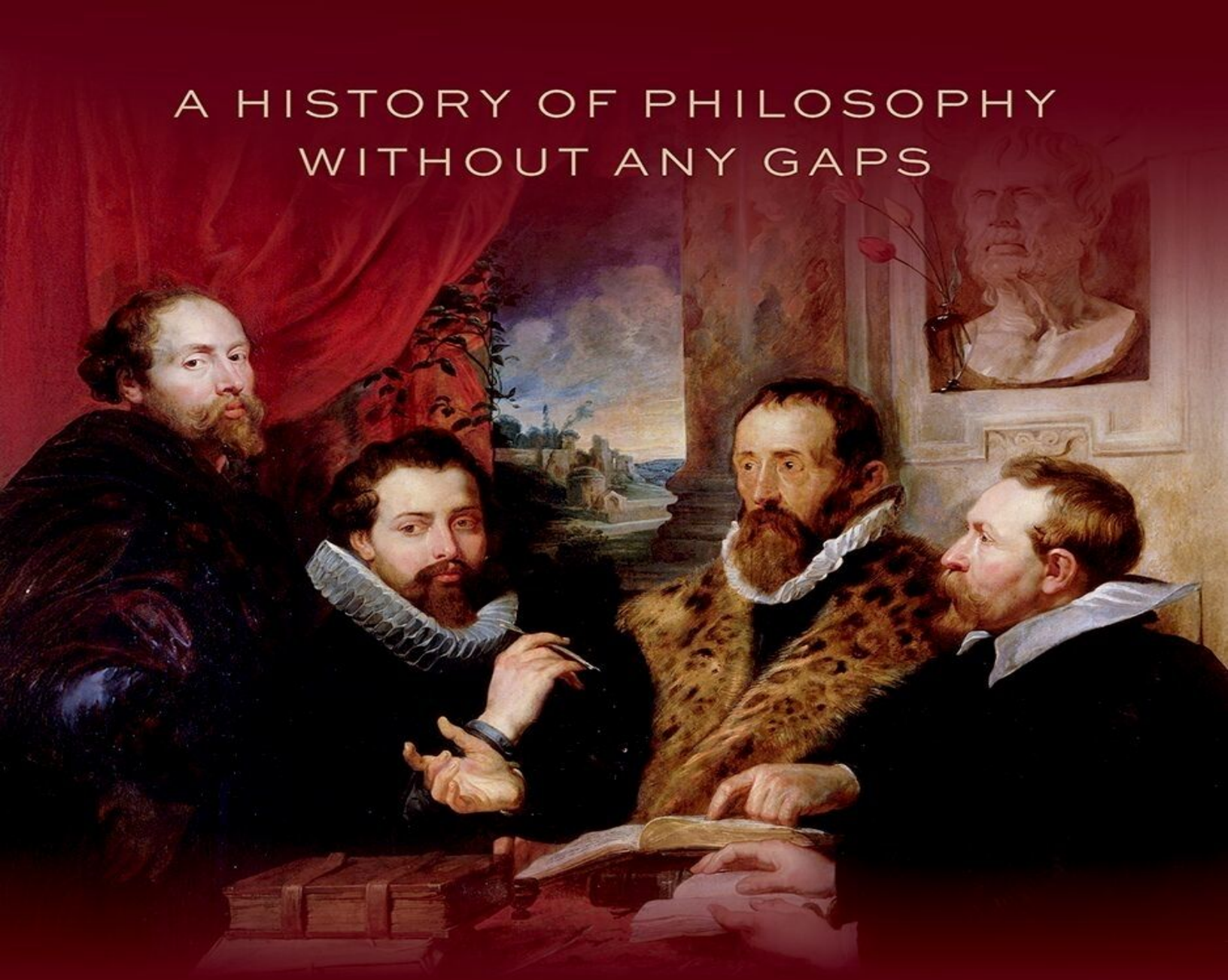
A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY WITHOUT ANY GAPS



# PHILOSOPHY IN THE REFORMATION

PETER ADAMSON

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*A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*

VOLUME 8

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP, United Kingdom

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026932547

ISBN 9780198991236
ebook ISBN 9780198991199

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198991236.001.0001

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd., Croydon, CR0 4YY

The manufacturer's authorized representative in the EU for product safety is Oxford University Press España S.A. of Parque Empresarial San Fernando de Henares, Avenida de Castilla, 2 – 28830 Madrid (www.oup.es/en or product.safety@oup.com). OUP España S.A. also acts as importer into Spain of products made by the manufacturer.

*To the memory of Maria Rosa Antognazza*

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# PREFACE

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are an unloved period of the history of philosophy. They sit awkwardly between "Medieval Philosophy" on one side and "Early Modern Philosophy" on the other. These two periods are covered in most university curricula and overviews of European thought. They boast some of its most famous names, with Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham leaping to mind for the medieval period and any number of heavy hitters (Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, etc.) representing early modernity. So one might be tempted to skip straight from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. This would be a terrible mistake, and not just for someone who has the temerity to claim that their book series covers the history of philosophy "without any gaps."

In explaining why, one might give in to another temptation. Given that the seventeenth century has some claim to be the most exciting period for European philosophy since the time of Plato and Aristotle, one could easily approach these centuries solely as a pre-history for what followed. There's something to be said for this, because a wide array of ideas that we associate with the Enlightenment were indeed also discussed already in the sixteenth century. A short list would include atomism, geocentrism, skepticism, religious toleration, international law, and the separation of church and state. But as the philosopher of science Alexandre Koyré once remarked, "no one has ever regarded himself as the 'forerunner' of someone else…To regard anyone in this light is the best way of preventing oneself from understanding him."[1]

In that spirit, I want to convince you in what follows that this age on the cusp of modernity was in its own right a distinctive and pivotal time in the history of philosophy. There are two main, interwoven stories to be told: how the history of philosophy was affected by the rise of humanism, and how it was affected by the Reformation. We already began to consider humanism in a previous volume of this series, which surveyed the Italian Renaissance and drew attention to the fact that it continued traditions of thought developed originally in Byzantine culture. Much as the Greeks

inspired the Italians, so the Italians inspired the rest of Europe, triggering what is sometimes called the "Northern Renaissance." The leading figure of this movement was Erasmus, the first philosopher to become famous around Europe during his own lifetime. He will appear in the first part of the book, which examines currents of thought in Germany and the Low Countries. The remaining three parts are also defined geographically, as we look at France, England and Scotland, and then the regions where the Reformation never gained much of a foothold. This principally means Spain and Portugal, though we will also return to Italy to finish things off.

As for the Reformation, it is so important in this book that I have used it for the title (even though, as noted in the preface of the previous volume, "Philosophy in the Northern Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation" would have been more accurate). If you were going to point to just one event that is more significant than any other in shaping the course of European philosophy from antiquity to the present day, it would have to be the Reformation; the only plausible alternative would be the fall of the Western Roman empire. Along with two other momentous developments that came around the same time, namely the invention of the printing press and the Europeans' encounter with the Americas, the Reformation completely reshaped European culture. As Brian Cummings has remarked, "without reference to religion, the study of early-modern writing is incomprehensible."[2] And as we'll see, the movement initiated by Luther had consequences that went far beyond the changes to religious belief and institutions he intended. The Reformation had a major impact on political philosophy and ethics, and subtler effects can also be perceived in less obvious areas like metaphysics, epistemology, and scientific methodology.

Because humanism and the Reformation are so crucial, each section of this book begins with chapters devoted to them (or in the case of the last section, to humanism and the Counter-Reformation). Since humanism emerged in explicit opposition to scholasticism, it also makes sense to track the ideas of university-based Aristotelians in each region. Notwithstanding the complaints of opponents that scholasticism was hidebound and unoriginal, in fact it shows continued vibrancy and dynamism in our period. A particular highlight comes with thinkers of Spain and Portugal like Molina, Suárez, and more generally the members of the Dominican and Jesuit orders who were the most sophisticated thinkers of the Counter-

Reformation. Scholasticism remained a significant force elsewhere too, even as it responded to and absorbed ideas from the humanists and from critics within university culture, notably Peter Ramus.

Beyond these broad themes, which run throughout the whole book, the issues covered in each section are more varied. Still, two further subjects do appear with some regularity. First, the new scientific theories that began to appear well before the Enlightenment. The most prominent example is of course Copernicanism, which posed another threat to Aristotelian orthodoxy, raised profound questions about scientific method, and ultimately became a test case for the Catholic Church's ability to enforce its will. A number of other scientific debates will also come up, for instance those concerning chemistry, magnetism, and medicine. Second, the works that made this period a glorious one for the history of literature. There is of course Shakespeare, who I'll be using as a platform for discussion of wider cultural and intellectual trends in no fewer than four chapters. Rabelais and Cervantes will also be featured in chapters of their own. The point of this is not, of course, to wrest these figures away from historians of literature and claim them for philosophy instead. Rather, I'll be calling attention to the philosophical themes that arise in their works and showing how they responded to the ideas swirling around in this turbulent time.

Less famous, but no less worth our attention, is Marguerite of Navarre, whose oeuvre paradoxically includes such works of pious spirituality as her *Mirror of the Simple Soul* and the ribald *Heptameron*. She is something of a one-woman demonstration of the variety of contributions made by female authors in our period. Indeed, this book will be able to cover more women than any previous installment of the series, simply because there are many more surviving texts. A selective list would include Margery Kempe, Anne Lock, Oliva Sabuco, Camilla Erculani, Marguerite of Navarre, Marie Le Jars de Gournay, and Teresa of Ávila. If these names are familiar to you, then you'll already know that the list includes mystics, ethicists, feminists, and scientists, which indicates a range of ambition matching that of male contemporaries. More likely, at least some of the names are not yet familiar. But that applies to the men too. The book does treat such famous figures as Cusanus, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Montaigne, Copernicus, Kepler, Ramus, Bodin, Suárez, and Galileo. Other names will almost certainly be new to you. (Bartholomew Keckermann, anyone? How about Nathaniel Torperley?) If so, you'll be in good company with me, since before tackling

the subject I had never heard of them either. If you learn half as much as I did, and get half as much enjoyment from reading the book as I did from writing it, then you're in for a real treat.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One thing I have learned from doing this series is that academics tend to be extremely generous when it comes to helping people understand their chosen field of expertise. This volume is no exception. Early on I received very helpful guidance on how to approach this period in the history of philosophy from Helen Hattab, Henrik Lagerlund, and Bob Pasnau. I got further input from other colleagues who kindly agreed to be interviewed for the podcast: Ann Blair, Paul Blum, Lorraine Daston, Robert Goulding, Patrick Gray, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Andrés Messmer, Calvin Normore, Tom Pink, Jennifer Rampling, Eileen Reeves, Lyndal Roper, John Sellars, Anna Tropia, and Scott Williams. This book is dedicated to another colleague and friend who appeared on the series, Maria Rosa Antognazza. Though she was best known as a scholar of Leibniz, she had truly formidable and wide-ranging knowledge of the history of philosophy, including the period covered here. I hope that this volume can serve as a fitting, if modest, tribute to that knowledge and to her as a person who inspired me and many others in the field.

I have also continued to receive crucial assistance from several people who were already involved at earlier stages: Jim Black, who produces the podcast; Julian Rimmer, who handles the website (historyofphilosophy.net); Heide König, who compiled the list of further reading; and Konrad Boeschenstein, who has again done the index. My thanks to them and to the team at Oxford University Press for helping this perhaps overly ambitious project from going off the rails.

And finally, I am as always immensely grateful to my parents, David and Joyce, to my brother Glenn (probably the podcast's biggest fan, and the feeling is mutual), and my wife Ursula and daughters Sophia and Johanna.

# DATES

| *Philosophers and Other Authors* | | *Selected Historical Events* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Margery Kempe | d.1449 | | |
| Alonso de Cartagena | d.1449 | First Gutenberg Bible | ca. 1455 |
| Nicholas of Cusa | d.1464 | | |
| Peter Luder | d.1472 | | |
| John Fortescue | d. ca. 1477 | | |
| Dominic of Flanders | d.1479 | Appointing of Torequemada | 1482 |
| Rudolph Agricola | d.1485 | Jews expelled from Spain | 1492 |
| Gabriel Biel | d.1495 | Treaty of Tordesillas | 1494 |
| Peter Crockaert | d.1514 | Reign of Henry VIII | 1509–1547 |
| Magnus Hundt | d.1519 | Luther's 95 theses | 1517 |
| Claude de Seyssel | d.1520 | Diet of Worms | 1521 |
| Johannes Reuchlin | d.1522 | | |
| Antonio de Nebrija | d.1522 | Luther's German Bible | 1522 |
| Thomas Linacre | d.1524 | Founding of Council of Indies | 1524 |
| Thomas Müntzer | d.1525 | Peasants' War | 1525 |
| Konrad Grebel | d.1526 | Tyndale's English Bible | 1526 |
| Jakob Wimpfeling | d.1528 | Sack of Rome | 1527 |
| Sylvester of Ferrara | d.1528 | | |
| Willibald Pirckheimer | d.1530 | Diet of Augsburg | 1530 |
| Huldrych Zwingli | d.1531 | Execution of Michael Servetus | 1533 |
| Diego López Zúñiga | d.1531 | | |
| Thomas Cajetan | d.1534 | Henry VIII breaks with Papacy | 1534 |
| Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa | d.1535 | Anabaptists seize Münster | 1534–1535 |
| Thomas More | d.1535 | | |
| Beatriz Galindo | d.1535 | | |
| Erasmus | d.1536 | Execution of Anne Boleyn | 1536 |
| William Tyndale | d.1536 | | |
| Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples | d.1536 | | |

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|---|---|---|---|
| Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples | d.1536 | | |
| Thomas Starkey | d.1538 | | |
| Juan Luis Vives | d.1540 | Founding of Jesuits | 1540 |
| Bernardino of Laredo | d.1540 | | |
| Guillaume Budé | d.1540 | | |
| Symphorien Champier | d.1540 | | |
| Andreas Karlstadt | d.1541 | | |
| Paracelsus | d.1541 | Holy Office of the Inquisition founded | 1542 |
| Juan de Valdés | d.1541 | Reign of Mary Queen of Scots | 1542–1567 |
| Nicholas Copernicus | d.1543 | Council of Trent | 1545–1563 |
| Martin Luther | d.1546 | First Index of prohibited books | 1544 |
| Francisco de Vitoria | d.1546 | Schmalkaldic War | 1546–1547 |
| Etienne Dolet | d.1546 | | |
| John Mair | d.1547 | Reign of Henry II of France | 1547–1599 |
| Marguerite de Navarre | d.1549 | Book of Common Prayer | 1549 |
| Martin Bucer | d.1551 | Valladolid debate | 1550 |
| Andreas Osiander | d.1552 | | |
| Francis Xavier | d.1552 | | |
| François Rabelais | d.1553 | Peace of Augsburg | 1555 |
| Ignatius Loyola | d.1556 | | |
| Argula von Grumbach | d.1556 | | |
| Thomas Cranmer | d.1556 | | |
| Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo | d.1557 | | |
| Julius Caesar Scaliger | d.1558 | Reign of Elizabeth I | 1558–1603 |
| Jean Fernel | d.1558 | | |
| Sebastián Fox Morcillo | d. after 1558 | | |
| Philip Melanchthon | d.1560 | Geneva Bible | 1560 |
| Melchor Cano | d.1560 | | |
| Domingo de Soto | d.1560 | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Joachim du Bellay | d.1560 | | |
| Marie Dentière | d.1561 | | |
| Omer Talon | d.1562 | French wars of religion | 1562–1598 |
| Peter Martyr Vermigli | d.1562 | | |
| Éstienne de la Boétie | d.1563 | | |
| Sebastian Castellio | d.1564 | | |
| John Calvin | d.1564 | | |
| Bartholomé de las Casas | d.1566 | Iconoclasm in Netherlands | 1566 |
| Guido de Bres | d.1567 | Dutch-Spanish wars begin | 1566 |
| Peter Ramus | d.1572 | St Bartholomew's Day massacre | 1572 |
| Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda | d.1573 | | |
| Georg Rheticus | d.1574 | | |
| Isabel de Josa | d.1575 | | |
| Matthias Flacius | d.1575 | Pacification of Ghent | 1576 |
| Teresa of Ávila | d.1582 | Matteo Ricci arrives in Macau | 1578 |
| Juan Maldonado | d.1583 | Netherlands repudiate Philip II | 1581 |
| Camilla Erculiani | d. after 1584 | | |
| Pierre de Ronsard | d.1585 | Anglo-Spanish War | 1585–1604 |
| Philip Sidney | d.1586 | | |
| Jakob Schegk | d.1587 | | |
| Valentin Weigel | d.1588 | Spanish Armada defeated | 1588 |
| François Hotman | d.1590 | Assassination of Henry III of France | 1589 |
| Girolamo Zanchi | d.1590 | | |
| Dirck Coornhert | d.1590 | | |
| John of the Cross | d.1591 | | |
| Luis de Leon | d.1591 | | |
| Michel de Montaigne | d.1592 | | |
| John Knox | d.1592 | | |
| Jean Bodin | d.1596 | | |
| Franciscus Toletus | d.1596 | | |
| Manuel de Góis | d.1597 | Edict of Nantes | 1598 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pedro de Fonseca | d.1599 | | |
| Edmund Spenser | d.1599 | | |
| John Case | d.1600 | Execution of Giordano Bruno | 1600 |
| Luis de Molina | d.1600 | Charter of East India Company | 1600 |
| José Acosta | d.1600 | | |
| Richard Hooker | d.1600 | | |
| Tycho Brahe | d.1601 | Founding of Dutch East India Company 1602 | |
| Pierre Charron | d.1603 | Union of England and Scotland | 1603 |
| William Gilbert | d.1603 | | |
| Domingo Bañez | d.1604 | | |
| Gabriel Vasquez | d.1604 | | |
| Theodore Beza | d.1605 | Gunpowder Plot | 1605 |
| Nicolaus Taurellus | d.1606 | | |
| Justus Lipsius | d.1606 | Jamestown Colony | 1607 |
| John Dee | d.1608 | | |
| Alberico Gentili | d.1608 | | |
| Bartholomew Keckermann | d.1609 | Muslims expelled from Spain | 1609–1614 |
| Jacobus Arminius | d.1609 | | |
| Joseph Scaliger | d.1609 | | |
| Thomas Sanchez | d.1610 | Assassination of Henry IV of France 1610 | |
| Matteo Ricci | d.1610 | | |
| Fernando de las Infantas | d. ca. 1610 | King James Bible | 1611 |
| David Gorlaeus | d.1612 | | |
| Christopher Clavius | d.1612 | | |
| Isaac Casaubon | d.1614 | | |
| Antonio Rubio | d.1615 | First investigation of Galileo | 1615 |
| Nicholas Hill | d.1610–1620 | | |
| William Shakespeare | d.1616 | | |
| Cervantes | d.1616 | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Richard Hakluyt | d.1616 | | |
| Giovanni Botero | d.1617 | Thirty Years' War | 1618–1648 |
| Francisco Suárez | d.1617 | Synod of Dort | 1618–1619 |
| Cornelius Martini | d.1621 | Pilgrims land at Plymouth | 1620 |
| Guillaume du Vair | d.1621 | | |
| Thomas Harriot | d.1621 | | |
| Francesco Sanches | d.1623 | First Folio of Shakespeare | 1623 |
| Philippe du Plessis-Mornay | d.1623 | | |
| Sebastian Basso | d. after 1625 | | |
| Goclenius | d.1628 | | |
| Johannes Kepler | d.1630 | | |
| Michael Maestlin | d.1631 | Trial of Galileo | 1633 |
| Daniel Sennert | d.1637 | | |
| Robert Fludd | d.1637 | | |
| Walter Warner | d.1643 | | |
| Marie Le Jars de Gournay | d.1645 | | |
| Oliva Sabuco | d.1646 | Peace of Westphalia | 1648 |
| Jakob Cornelius Martini | d.1649 | | |

# MAPS

Map of Europe in the sixteenth century

# PART I

# GERMANY AND THE LOW COUNTRIES

# 1

# EUROPEAN DISUNION

## *Introduction to the Reformation*

The history of philosophy, like God, moves in mysterious ways. Actions and arguments may lead to the emergence of ideas that would surprise, even horrify, the people who first set things in motion. Every historical period offers examples. From the medieval era, a nice illustration would be how a theory of economic rights resulted from the insistence of religious mendicants that they should be allowed to embrace strict, voluntary poverty.[1] But for unintended consequences, you can't do better than the Protestant Reformation. Consider what Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli would have said upon learning that their movement would indirectly give rise to theories of religious toleration, the strict separation of church and state, and arguably even the widespread secularization of European political and cultural life.[2] As if that weren't enough, they could also be informed that thanks to their Reformation, Europe would soon be engulfed in decades of warfare. It's enough to make you think twice next time you nail a list of complaints to a door.

Of course the Reformation had its own pre-history. It was the culmination of developments in religious life that had been going on for generations.[3] In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the Lollards in England and the Hussites in Bohemia already anticipated several items on the agenda of the sixteenth-century reformers. These included doubts about the transformation of bread into the body of Christ in the Eucharist;

enthusiasm for disseminating the Scriptures in vernacular translation; and criticism of hypocrisy and corruption in the church. The right of lay persons to engage actively with religious issues, encapsulated in Luther's famous teaching that all believers are priests, was defended as far back as the twelfth century by Peter Waldes (or Valdesius) of Lyon. He and his followers, the Waldensians, claimed the right to preach publicly without church authorization. They were met with violent repression, as were Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague, Bohemian reformers who were executed for their ideas. John Wyclif, the central figure of the Lollard movement, avoided that fate, but his books were burnt. These events were premonitions of what was to come, as the sixteenth century was marked by suppression of ideas and executions for heresy, on both sides of the religious divide.

The 95 theses Luther nailed on a church door in Wittenberg in 1517 concerned the question of "indulgences," payments made to the church to reduce the time one would have to spend in Purgatory after death before ascending to heaven. The very belief in Purgatory had been rejected by members of these earlier movements. Among those who did believe in it, it didn't need deep immersion in theology to be annoyed when the church used indulgences to pay for new building projects, using slogans like "at the sound of the coin falling into the box, a soul flies to heaven." It was just a particularly egregious example of something that had been causing outrage throughout the medieval period: the staggering wealth of the church and its involvement in secular affairs. The latter was something Luther categorically rejected. But he was hardly the first to do that. So what made him, and the other reformers, something new in the history of Christianity?

The full answer to that question will be given the rest of this book, especially its first section. But for now we can mention a point that connects to the question of Purgatory: Luther's doctrine of sin and grace. Again, his ideas on this topic fit into a long-standing debate, one that goes all the way back to Augustine in the fifth century AD. In his later works, he had vociferously refuted the ideas of Pelagius, who taught that humans can merit salvation by living virtuously. Against this, Augustine argued that the freely given grace of God is a prerequisite for liberation from sin and entry into paradise. In order to avoid the Pelagian heresy, later Christian thinkers always admitted the need for grace, but that left room for moral striving on the part of the believer. According to some theologians, for instance Gabriel Biel, humans could prepare themselves for the gift of grace through their

own power: Biel's slogan was thus that believers should "do what they have in them to do."

Luther rejected that idea. For him, every step upon the road to salvation requires the support of God. Sinners as we are, we are not capable of meriting grace. We can only hope to receive it as an undeserved gift, hence his own slogan that justification is "only by faith (*sola fide*)," not good works. Luther was steering well clear of Pelagianism here, but his position raised other concerns. If it is up to God whether we are saved, why should we even make any effort to be good? And if the whole question of sin and redemption is decided by God's gratuitous choice to save an elect chosen from among the undeserving sinners, then why doesn't God save everyone? Which brings us to John Calvin and his Reformed Church. Embracing outright the determinism that might seem to follow from Luther's teaching, they simply admitted that God predestines some to be saved, others to be damned. To meet the challenge of this potentially terrifying worldview, Catholic theologians, and also Protestants who did not wish to go quite so far, needed to articulate a more robust role for good works and well-intentioned effort on the part of humans. The upshot of all this is that the sixteenth century became a highpoint in the history of reflection on the problem of free will. This is only the most obvious of several philosophical debates that grew immediately out of the thought of the founding fathers of the Reformation.

As if that were not all complicated enough, the Reformation was only one of the three main ingredients that went into the stew that was European philosophy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. If you have read the earlier volume in this series charting Renaissance philosophy in Italy during this same period, you can probably already guess at what the other two might be: humanism and scholasticism. Italian humanists like Bruni and Ficino were matched elsewhere in Europe by such figures as Rudolph Agricola, Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, John Colet, and Antonio de Nebrija. Meanwhile scholasticism continued and indeed thrived in German and English universities, on the Iberian peninsula, and in Paris, where innovators like Peter Ramus didn't stop a broadly Aristotelian approach from remaining relevant. All over Europe schoolmen were carrying on the traditions of thought we associate with medieval figures like Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, which with suitable adaptation could also win the allegiance of Protestants. As Charles Nauert has written,

"scholasticism did not have the decency to turn up its toes and die, but in fact reasserted its dominance over the academic world in the middle and later decades of the sixteenth century and remained powerful well into the seventeenth century."[4]

As in Italy, humanists and scholastics in other lands criticized one another in terms ranging from gentle teasing to full-throated polemic. For the humanists the scholastics were pedants, whose overly abstract and technical approach was at best a waste of time, at worst a distraction from living a good and pious life. Agricola said that scholastic theology was nothing more than "childish riddles," while Vives complained about the effect of logic on religious thought: "there are some theologians who think that there can be no exactitude of speech if it is not seasoned with this most bitter of condiments, adorned with horrid and rank barbarity, and stuffed with the vain devices of sophistry."[5] Since this sort of invective is, if we're honest, quite fun, I'll indulge in quoting another passage from Vives: "scholastic dialecticians have invented for themselves certain meanings of words contrary to all civilized custom and usage, so that they may seem to have won their argument when they are not understood."[6] But the schoolmen were not so amused, and rose to their own defense. They argued that "no one can despise scholasticism without danger to the faith," and that "what some consider futile questions often provide stepping stones to our understanding of Scripture."[7]

The understanding of Scripture was very much at issue once humanists like Erasmus and Lefèvre applied their philological and textual skills to the Bible itself.[8] This project was deeply controversial, since humanist expertise was not seen as a sufficient qualification for understanding the word of God. It was a case, said the school theologians, of a man wielding his sickle to harvest another man's crops. For his pains Erasmus was officially sanctioned at Paris in 1531, on the grounds that even a deep knowledge of classical languages makes one only a "grammarian," not a theologian. Erasmus and other humanists met such accusations with the rather persuasive response that, in order to understand Scripture, you should first establish a reliable original text and learn how to translate it. True, this would occasion changes in the way the Holy Book was understood. That was the whole point, after all: to understand the Bible more accurately than had been managed by the medievals, with their poor or nonexistent

command of Hebrew and Greek. Still, Erasmus dismissed the notion that such philological activity might undermine religion: "there can be no danger that everybody will forthwith abandon Christ, if the news happens to get out that some passage has been found in Scripture which an ignorant or sleepy scribe has miscopied or some unknown translator has rendered inadequately."[9]

But as Erasmus well knew, changing a word here and there could have great significance for religious belief. He caused a stir when his edition of the New Testament left on the cutting-room floor a Scriptural proof text for the Trinity (John 5:7). Not, he hastened to add, because he rejected the Trinitarian doctrine but simply because the passage was inauthentic.[10] In another case, he argued on linguistic grounds that passages used to encourage doing "penance" (Matthew 3:1–2 and 4:17) were in fact not about that at all, but about *repenting*. So this was not a command to, say, donate money to the church or recite prayers as instructed by a priest, but to engage in private reflection on one's sins. Here, a point of vocabulary offered support for the increasing tendency, among both Catholics and Protestants, to focus attention on individuals and their psychological states. It's something we'll be finding in much literature of the period, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the book of spiritual exercises written by Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits.

Humanism was clearly a factor in the birth of the Reformation, though scholars debate exactly how important a factor.[11] Certainly the humanists' attention to the text of the Bible resonated with the reformers' focus on that text as the true guide to proper belief, another idea that got its own slogan: "by scripture alone (*sola scriptura*)." The reformers also held that this was a book for all Christians, not only an elite brotherhood of priests. This could help to defuse the charges that the humanists lacked the theological training to understand the Bible. If Scripture is straightforward enough to be suitable for the everyday believer, then the humanists should be able to interpret it without having studied theology for years at a university. Luther duly welcomed the work of Erasmus. He himself was no humanist, though he learned some Greek and a little Hebrew. But he joined with gusto in the mockery of the scholastics, saying that "the poets could fashion nothing more expressive and humorous to ridicule the quarrels, battles, and sects of the philosophers, than such monsters as these."[12] Luther knew whereof he

spoke, having enjoyed (not the word he would use) a scholastic education as a young man. Looking back, he saw this formation as quite literally providential, but only because it deprived his enemies of the chance to say that he was ignorant about the target of his diatribes.

Despite this overt hostility, many modern-day scholars have suspected that scholasticism helped to shape Luther's thought. The brand of philosophy he learned at the University of Erfurt was the so-called *via moderna*, in other words the nominalism of figures like Ockham and Biel. While this tradition was associated with the teachings on grace that he rejected, it was also committed to voluntarism, which seems to play a significant role in Luther's thought, given his emphasis on the unconstrained and arbitrary choice of God. But he also used more technical ideas he picked up during his studies, as when he applied the scholastic theory of motion to describe the progress of the sinner toward redemption.[13] The most important figure in early Lutheranism, aside of course from Luther himself, was Philip Melanchthon. Among the leading reformers, Melanchthon is the one who could most uncontroversially be described as a "philosopher" in his own right. He was influenced by both humanism and scholasticism, the latter thanks to his training at Tübingen. He retained a strong interest in Aristotle and lectured on several of his works even after joining Luther's movement. Yet he also paid due respect to the humanists' favorite classical author, Cicero, attacked the schoolmen, and blamed their inadequate theology on their ignorance of classical languages.

Catholic thought in this period likewise drew on both humanism and scholasticism, traditions that flourished in France and the Iberian peninsula just as they did in Italy. In the Iberian context, we'll be paying particular attention to the work of scholastics at Salamanca and Coimbra, who belonged to either the Dominican or Jesuit order. The Jesuits will be important to our story, in part because they counted among their number such luminaries as Luis de Molina and Francisco Suárez, and in part because of their role in what is sometimes called the "Counter-Reformation," though many scholars now prefer to speak of a "Catholic Reformation." Since its founding by Ignatius Loyola, who was himself from Spain, the Jesuits had laid great emphasis on education and individual spiritual development. Though the original purpose of the order was not to combat Protestantism, their approach put them in a good position to resist Protestant advances. This was a goal they pursued through sophisticated

philosophical argumentation and also the more practical measure of founding schools across Europe, including in Germany and Switzerland, the heartlands of the Reformation. The Jesuits were also involved in the attempt to export Christianity from Europe to more far-flung lands. Catholics were known to say that the loss of so many souls to Protestantism might be compensated by converts in Asia and the newly contacted Americas.

Speaking of geography, I need to explain something about the way I'll be structuring this volume. It's been a long-standing feature of the whole book series that I organize the material in terms of space, as well as time. Thus I dealt with medieval philosophy in three distinct, albeit mutually interacting, cultural spheres: moving from the largest of these, the Islamic world, on to Latin Christendom, each of which got book-length treatment. Then it was on to Eastern Greek Christendom and Italy from, roughly, 1400 to 1600. Readers should thus note that many thinkers who lived in the relevant period have already been covered in earlier volumes of the book series. That applies especially to figures of the Italian Renaissance, but in the Medieval Philosophy volume I also looked at some figures who lived into the fifteenth century, like Julian of Norwich (d. after 1416) and Jean Gerson (d.1429).

As we turn to cover the rest of Europe in the same time period, I'm going to continue with a broadly geographical approach. I'll begin with the Low Countries, Germany, and Switzerland, where we'll explore the so-called Northern Renaissance and of course the rise of Protestantism. From there I will turn to France, then England and Scotland, and finally southern Europe, concentrating mostly on Spain and Portugal with a final trip to Italy. Unfortunately philosophy has an inconvenient tendency to cross borders. As I cover one geographical space after another, I will occasionally have to mention the influence of thinkers we haven't yet covered, as when philosophers in France are reading works written in England. But that would be true no matter how I organized the material, because philosophy in early modern Europe was both prolific and interconnected. Scholars moved around, wrote letters to each other, and printed mutual refutations. Some thinkers resolutely refused to stay put, as if deliberately trying to cause problems for my geographical way of proceeding. Giordano Bruno, covered in the previous volume, is a good example. He was from Italy but passed through a number of cities including the capital of Calvinism, Geneva; the French cities of Paris and Toulouse; and for good measure

London and Oxford. Indeed, one reason that there was a Northern Renaissance, and that humanism played such a major role in the period across Europe, is that Italian scholars went abroad and scholars from other European territories visited Italy.[14] Erasmus stayed in both England and Italy, where he published a book with the famous Aldine press. The humanist Peter Luder first studied at Heidelberg, then spent two decades in Italy before returning to lecture at various universities in Germany; Nicholas of Cusa also spent time in both places. The English may have come from an island, but they were not necessarily insular. Thomas Linacre was an Englishman who studied in Florence under no less an authority than Poliziano. Linacre even helped out with the Aldine edition of Aristotle before returning to England in 1499, where he was attached to the court of Henry VIII.

It wasn't only humanists who were racking up the miles. The Reformation became a European, and not just German, phenomenon because of the movement of the reformers. A key figure in the Scottish Reformation, John Knox, took inspiration from Calvinism as he experienced it in Geneva, a city he pronounced "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in this earth since the days of the Apostles." In England, reform was famously imposed from above when Henry VIII broke with the papacy, but in other places it was often a bottom-up movement with preachers working to reform Christendom one soul, and one city, at a time. This meant that the Reformation had, from its earliest days, a significant political dimension. One man's preacher is another man's insurgent, and secular powers ranging from town councils in the Swiss cities to the Holy Roman Emperor had to decide whether to embrace, tolerate, or wage war against this movement that was spreading across Europe.

An early event that revealed the Reformation's potential to destabilize the existing political order was the Peasants' War, which began in Switzerland in 1524 when villagers living in Stühlingen, in what is now southwest Germany, rose up against the church and secular authorities. This triggered a conflict that raged across central Europe. But Luther rejected the notion that his religious revolution was supposed to come along with revolution of the good old-fashioned kind. He and other leaders of the Reformation aimed to secure the allegiance of authoritarian power structures, not to smash those structures and put republican governments in

their place. These leaders were well educated in the arts of humanism and the university, so they were urbane enough to consort with the governing elite, and did so with great effect in the cause of reform.[15] Which did not mean, of course, that it was smooth sailing in the decades after the Peasants' War. On the contrary, the wars and violence had barely started. There were wars of religion in Switzerland around 1530, in the Holy Roman Empire with the brief Schmalkaldic War in the middle of the sixteenth century, and then starting in the 1560s in France and the Low Countries. We still see the effects of this upheaval in today's maps and cultural divides. You'll know all about that if you've ever been to Belgium and the Netherlands. Closer to home, for me at least, is Bavaria, a Catholic nation that only grudgingly consents to be part of the larger, Protestant nation of Germany.

Even those who weren't in a position to declare war sought to resist rulers whose religious convictions they did not share. The radical Anabaptists seized the city of Münster in 1534, but when they weren't staging such ambitious military projects they contented themselves with refusing to participate in the civil order by swearing oaths or bearing arms.[16] Religious dissidents would assassinate several rulers in the sixteenth century, prompting a philosophical debate as to whether such "tyrannicide" was a legitimate response to illegitimate rule. As the years went on, the blood flowed, and the war chests emptied, it became increasingly clear that Protestants and Catholics were going to have to share Europe. One solution was expressed with yet another Latin motto: *cuius regio, eius religio*, meaning that citizens would adopt the religious confession of their ruler, but with toleration for worshippers of rival confessions. Religious toleration thus became a political and pragmatic necessity before it was a widely held ideology, so that Sebastian Castellio was something of a lone voice when he decried the Calvinists' execution of a man in Geneva for denying the doctrine of the Trinity. We'll be looking at this event as an anticipation of more famous seventeenth-century discussions of toleration, such as we find in John Locke.

And that was only one echo of the Reformation that would reverberate in the seventeenth century and beyond. Another legacy was the educational system and the intellectual values it imparted. Still in today's Europe, some high schools carry on the humanist idea that a proper education means being able to read Latin and ancient Greek (in Germany such a school is

even called a *humanistisches Gymnasium*). Then too, it's often been hypothesized that the turn toward empiricism that so characterized the scientific revolution in the age to come was made possible by the Reformation.[17] A broadly plausible, though difficult to prove, idea would be that Protestantism lent itself to a more concrete approach in science. This might be because of the nominalist metaphysics accepted by many of its adherents. Or, one might draw a parallel between a democratized approach to Scripture and a new movement of investigators who sought to read the "book of nature," with both undertakings being relatively unencumbered by the weight of scholastic authority. Now that Scripture was taken to be aimed at a broader audience, it was less likely to be seen as an authoritative source on such questions as, say, whether the earth goes around the sun or vice versa. That may have opened up space for empirical inquiry independent of religion.[18] We won't have to wait until the seventeenth century to observe such developments, since there were advances in scientific method and practice already in our period, alongside an increasing comfort with the skepticism that will be such an important component of early modern philosophy.

Another point, one that's rather obvious but still worth stressing, is that many modern philosophers were Protestants. That may shed light on, say, the Idealism of Immanuel Kant: was his Lutheranism connected to his anti-metaphysical and critical approach to philosophy? Later still, G.W.F. Hegel would say outright, "I am a Lutheran and through philosophy at once completely confirmed in Lutheranism."[19] The absolute Spirit (*Geist*) of his own Idealist system can be understood as a version of Luther's God, the sole source of all being and all salvation. Which isn't to suggest, of course, that the Reformation was itself the sole source of everything that happened in the following centuries of philosophy. But it is to say that this epoch, and its transformation of medieval Europe into something rather more like the Europe we know today, is something that needs to be included in any worthwhile history of philosophy.

# 2

# STRONG, SILENT TYPE

## *The Printing Press*

If you turn to the nearest shelf, pluck a book off it, and start reading, you'll come quickly to a title page. (Or if you're not near a shelf, this book will do.) Apart from the title and author of the book, it will probably indicate the year the volume appeared in print and the publishing house that produced it. We take this for granted, but books haven't always had title pages. In the era of the manuscript—that is, the literally "hand-written" book—the title, if there was one, was usually just given at the top of the first page of text. Title pages became common only with the advent of printing. It was standard to include blank pages at the start of an unbound book, since the first leaves would tend to get damaged: publishers then realized they could add useful information to these extra pages as a kind of advertisement of the contents within. This is an unprecedented boon to the historian of philosophy. From the sixteenth century onward, it's almost always possible to know exactly when and where books were first published, something the scholar of ancient or medieval philosophy can only dream about.

And that's only one of many things the printing press has given us, usually without our noticing. The English language is full of hidden allusions to the processes of printing. The difference between "lowercase" and "uppercase" refers to the two trays used for storing the two kinds of typeface. Naturally, when putting the individual letters into the cases, you need to "mind your p's and q's" to avoid confusing them. The phrase "out of sorts" may go back to the problem of running out of type while setting

pages. A “stereotype” was a whole plate set permanently for printing and reprinting a given page, rather than using individual letters that could be removed and reused for a different text. The French had their own word for this: *cliché*.

Oh, and one other thing: the printing press changed the course of European history. This is itself a bit of a *cliché*, but for once, I am not going to challenge our stereotypical assumptions. In fact, you could argue that historians of philosophy usually underestimate the importance of printing. If you wanted to divide the whole history of European philosophy into just two periods, it would make a lot of sense to draw the line in the late fifteenth century, dividing the pre-print and post-print eras. You might even argue that this is the deeper truth underlying the more familiar contrast between “medieval” and “early modern” philosophy. Medieval philosophy could be disseminated only through the painstaking labor of scribes. Early modern philosophical works were at first set down in the handwriting of their authors, too, given the absence of typewriters and computers. But they could then be reproduced in editions of hundreds or thousands of copies, reaching a much wider audience. To give you an idea of the difference, it’s been calculated that early in the history of print, having a book copied once by hand would cost about the same as printing several hundred copies of that same book.

The transition from handwritten philosophy to printed philosophy can of course be traced to the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, an artisan from Mainz.[1] Though the word “invention” does seem appropriate here, I should mention a couple of caveats. First, books had been printed hundreds of years earlier in China, using movable type made of wood or ceramic instead of cast metal; woodcuts were also used in Europe before Gutenberg came along. Second, Gutenberg’s breakthrough was an innovative combination of several existing technologies, from paper-making to the winepress, along with perfecting things like the hand-casting of the letter type and improving the viscosity of the ink (which was made from soot, varnish, and egg white). The result was that the metal typeface could be set to make many copies of a page—in this era average print runs ranged from the low hundreds to the low thousands—with the type then being returned to the “cases” to be reused. Gutenberg did not get rich off his epoch-making invention. After a legal dispute resulting from delays in selling the famous Bibles, his press shop passed to the sole

ownership of his business partner Johann Fust (perhaps we could say that Gutenberg had unwisely made a Fustian pact). But others would reap the rewards. Printing became big business by the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

As all that money changed hands, a lot else was changing thanks to the rise of printing.[2] We can start with its effect on education. I'm sure you knew that Gutenberg printed Bibles, but you probably didn't know that he also printed schoolbooks. In generations to come printers would collaborate with scholars and schoolmasters to select works for printing. The most famous example in the realm of philosophy is the press at Venice run by Aldus Manutius, which printed among other things an edition of the original Greek works of Aristotle.[3] Humanists were among the first to see the potential of printing, which would enable them to get good grammar books and examples of fine Latin style into the hands of young students. Scholarship could more easily have a Europe-wide impact. Erasmus is the obvious example here, with two and a half thousand editions of works from his pen in the sixteenth century (with each edition, of course, having a print run in the hundreds or thousands). Among the Italian humanists the most widely read was Poliziano, who received more than 120 editions between 1480 and 1559. A noteworthy but not atypical example of his impact is found in a letter by Philip Melanchthon, in which he spares himself the trouble of translating the cave allegory from Plato's *Republic* by simply reproducing Poliziano's version.[4] This vignette also illustrates the way that texts and translations of classical authors became more widely available thanks to printing. Printings of Ficino's translations of Plato were a huge success, and classical Latin authors also benefited from the Gutenberg effect. Cicero, as the most admired ancient Latin stylist, had his works appear three hundred times in the era of early printings or "incunabula," with another one and a half thousand following in the sixteenth century.[5]

It is scarcely possible to overestimate the effect of this abundance of literature on intellectuals across Europe.[6] In a classic study of the impact of the printing press, Elizabeth Eisenstein pointed out that the work of thinkers as diverse as Copernicus and Montaigne was made possible by the sheer range and quantity of texts at their disposal.[7] As Eisenstein observed, Copernicus as a young student would have had a hard time getting his hands on the astronomy of Ptolemy; by the end of his life he could consult

three different printed editions. Montaigne, meanwhile, "could see more books by spending a few months in his tower study than earlier scholars had seen after a lifetime of travel." No longer would scholars have small private libraries dominated by an equally small number of authorities: Aristotle, Augustine, and little else. A man like Montaigne was now privy to a chorus of many voices, whose echoes make themselves heard in his own writing. And readers were not just engaging with more texts than before, they were using them differently. The possibility to have books more ready to hand reduced the need to commit things to memory, especially since printers made their productions more user-friendly. Consider the index. It would make no sense to go to the labor of compiling a list of names or topics mentioned in a book, and give the page number of each mention, if the book is a unique, handwritten object. But if you are printing two thousand identical copies, an index makes a lot of sense, especially since it would be a selling point to attract potential buyers.

So the printing press fundamentally altered the way that Reformation-era scholars read ancient philosophy and other secular literature. But this is not to say that such works dominated the output of the early presses. On the contrary, most printings were of religious material, ranging from the Bible to liturgical texts, works of church law, and the theological writings of the church fathers and medieval scholastics. The increasing influence of Aquinas in this period, for example, is related to the wider diffusion of his works through printed editions (see Chapter 62 below). It should also be remembered that you can use a printing press to publish things other than books. Short pamphlets and single-page publications (in German *Flugblätter*: "flyers") were common and helped to keep the money flowing in, alongside the sale of books that required a significant initial investment. When we think of this early period of printing, we tend to imagine such productions as the Gutenberg Bibles or the Nuremberg Chronicle, a lavish historical work that was a monument to both the new art of printing and the glory of the city in which it was published. But there are two thousand single-sheet texts that have managed to survive from the fifteenth century alone.[8] Obviously many, many more existed and have been lost since.

It's telling that more than one-third of those surviving single pages are letters of indulgence, that is, church documents forgiving sins in exchange for a financial donation. Just as we usually associate the birth of printing with books, we associate it with the Protestant Reformation, and for good

reason, as we'll see shortly. But as the Catholic Church realized, printing offered the potential for standardizing religious practice and belief, just as much as the potential for destabilizing religion. If you are trying to get as many people as possible to adopt the same liturgy, the power to publish thousands of identical guides to that liturgy is mighty useful. We also observe such ironies as a work called *In Praise of Scribes*, written by the Abbot of Sponheim, one Johannes Trithemius. He decried the rise of printing and extolled the spiritual value of writing things out by hand. And how did he get this treatise to as wide a readership as possible? By having it printed, of course.[9]

Actually we should admit something that Trithemius may have overlooked, namely that printing and writing by hand were not starkly opposed alternatives. I already mentioned that a printed text would obviously have been based on a manuscript original. More unexpectedly, the reverse is also true, as many manuscripts from the late fifteenth century were actually copied from printed texts. Furthermore, readers would annotate their printed editions by hand, making marginal notes or underlining passages, just as they had always done with manuscripts. In some cases printers facilitated that with the layout of their editions, as when school texts included generous spaces between lines and in the margins to give students room to scribble notes.[10] If you have a look at images of early printed books using our own most recent publication medium, the internet, you'll notice that the type is actually based closely on contemporary handwriting style. This is a common pattern with new technologies, as when early electric lights were made to look like candles. For readers around the turn of the sixteenth century, it would have made printed texts look reassuringly familiar.

Such readers would also have been used to seeing navigational markings written in a different color of ink, like red chapter headings in an otherwise black text. Since it was arduous and technically difficult to achieve this with a printing press, the headings might be added by a scribe, again blurring the line between handwritten and printed books. On the other hand, features of texts you might associate more with the handwritten could be achieved in a printed book using engravings. These would include ornamentation and illustration, including scientific diagrams.[11] This is something else that had important implications for the development of the intellectual disciplines. It meant that every reader of, say, a work on astronomy by Copernicus would

be looking at exactly the same pictures. Later we'll discuss the scholastic movement initiated by Peter Ramus, a Parisian schoolman: his use of diagrams and tables for pedagogical purposes was well-suited for the press.

But in the sixteenth century, no thinker made more powerful use of printing than Martin Luther. In the first chapter I raised the question of what made his impact so much greater than that of earlier reformers like Wyclif and Hus. Part of the answer is surely that they did not have access to printing presses, and he did. He lived in the right place, as well as at the right time. In the fifteenth century, Italy (especially Venice) had been a dominant force in publishing. But the center of gravity shifted to Germany, especially after the invasion of Italy by France around the turn of the sixteenth century. Luther's city of Wittenberg started its tradition of printing in 1502 and accelerated quickly, putting out no fewer than six hundred editions in the first quarter of the century.[12] And Wittenberg was only one of many cities where the presses churned out copies of Luther's sermons, treatises, and polemics. Not to mention his translation of the New Testament into German, a work so influential that it was used even by Catholics of the period, and is given credit for helping to fix the form of German still standard today. Some back-of-the-envelope calculations by one scholar suggest that there may have been more than three million copies of works by Luther printed in Europe in just the three decades from 1516 to 1546, representing 20 percent of the total printed literature of that time.[13] This was in part due to the efforts of hardworking printers, like Johann Froben, who wrote to Luther to tell him that he had sent six hundred copies of his writings to Spain and France, including Paris. Here, claims Froben, they were "read and praised by the scholars at the Sorbonne," the theological faculty that would subsequently work hard to suppress the spread of Protestantism.[14]

There's a plausible case to be made that Luther's approach to religion simply lent itself better to the age of the printing press than did the church doctrines he was attacking. Like Wyclif before him, or in his own period William Tyndale, translator of the Bible into English, Luther wanted as many people as possible to familiarize themselves with Scripture. His idea of the "priesthood of all believers" did not mean that each Christian should indulge in developing their own theology. But he did invite all believers to make up their own minds about religious questions—and to help them make up their minds, he issued a torrent of writings to persuade them of the

Lutheran view. His version of the New Testament came along with explanatory material designed to coax its readers to adopt the Lutheran interpretation. Critics of the translation complained that this critic of church indulgences had himself indulged in tendentious renderings of the Greek, as when he took the claim that "humans are made righteous by faith" and added the word "solely," in conformity with his conviction that faith *alone* justifies, not works.[15]

The Catholics who wished to respond to Luther were in a difficult position. They wanted to insist that Scripture can be properly understood only by theologians trained in the scholastic tradition. The Catholic polemicist Thomas Murner satirically remarked that followers of reform movements would proclaim, "I no longer obey anyone, I am a good Lutheran." Looking forward to the effects of this uprising against the church, he predicted, "neither pope, emperor, king, bishop, bath attendant, or pig-herder will any longer be distinguishable."[16] But the importance of higher learning and church authority was not an easy case to make in the popular, vernacular format being used to such great effect by Luther. Then too, by refuting Luther in print they risked spreading knowledge of his teachings.

It seemed then that the church could not beat Luther by joining him at his own game. The obvious solution was keep him out of print in the first place, but this wasn't going to be easy.[17] Church censorship required enforcement by local, secular powers, which might or might not be inclined to carry out the Pope's edicts. The authorities might content themselves with banning outright libelous material, which would leave the reformers plenty of scope to advance their religious views in public, both by preaching and in print. In Leipzig, there was for a time effective suppression of Lutheran writings, which caused the printers to complain bitterly, not necessarily because they were convinced Evangelists, but because Protestant books sold so well. One complained of being allowed to print only Catholic treatises, which are "desired by no one and cannot even be given away."[18] There was also a kind of feedback loop, whereby printers avoided censorship by flocking to cities that were sympathetic towards Lutheranism, making these places even more important centers of the reform movement. And as we'll see in Chapter 56, the church's most systematic attempt to control the spread of problematic literature—the

Inquisition—was not particularly effective even the areas of Europe that remained steadfastly Catholic.

This war of religion in print, which presaged the wars of religion on the actual battlefield, was not a two-sided affair. Luther and his sympathizers aimed their rhetorical fire at the Catholics, certainly, but also at other reformers. A particular flashpoint for debate was the question of how bread is transformed into the body of Christ in the mass.[19] Or rather, whether it is transformed at all. The church adhered to the interpretation put forward by, among others, Thomas Aquinas: in the sacrament of the Eucharist there is a "transubstantiation," meaning that while the accidental features of bread (like its color and taste) remain, the substance of the bread has been replaced by that of Christ's body.[20] Diametrically opposed to this was the view that, when Christ said to his disciples "take this and eat, for this is my body" (Matthew 26:26), he meant only that the bread *symbolized* his body, which was about to be given in sacrifice. This merely symbolic interpretation was defended by Huldryich Zwingli, among others, and associated with the reform movement in the Swiss cities of Zurich and Basel. The humanist Willibald Pirckheimer called these two cities and Strasbourg the "Satanic triad" because they hosted theologians who denied the real presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. Luther, meanwhile, took a middle view—Christ is really present in the bread but it nonetheless remains bread—and like Pirckheimer was harshly critical of Zwingli and his followers.

This looks like a purely theological debate, but in Chapter 12 we'll be seeing that it was of some consequence for the history of philosophy. For now the important point is that it was a dispute carried out in printed texts. A recent study of the controversy by Amy Nelson Burnett found 273 individual works on the topic, in 905 printings, and that's just in the later 1520s.[21] The Lutheran camp made more effective use of the new medium, with Wittenberg outpublishing Zurich by a factor of three. The fact that Swiss German was a dialect with fewer readers was another disadvantage for Zwingli. These were of course entirely new factors to consider in a theological disagreement. No longer were such contests fought in Latin, at universities or before a panel of churchmen. Appeals were now being made to the court of public opinion, something evident even from the use of various literary genres by the protagonists. While the Catholics conservatively stuck to composing formal treatises, Protestants offered their

readers sermons, dialogues, and catechisms. As Burnett remarks, “the printing press subverted central authority by disseminating ideas to a broad audience and encouraging individuals to think for themselves.”[22]

Now, you might be a bit skeptical here: surely, not that many people were interested in such arcane theological matters, and for that matter, most people didn’t know how to read. So they could not have been influenced by written material anyway, whether printed or handwritten. Against the first objection we can note that by the 1520s printers had become pretty canny about what sorts of writing would sell. Those 905 editions would never have appeared if there was no audience for them. The second objection has a more complicated answer. It’s certainly true that in some regions, especially rural ones, literacy rates were low. In eastern German villages, for example, preaching was a far more important vehicle for reform than books.[23] In the cities, though, literacy rates may have been up around 30 percent. And crucially, it’s not as if printed works could only reach those who were able to read. Often the only literate members of a family would be the adult men, but they might read aloud to the rest of the household and were encouraged to do so by the Evangelist movement, which invited them to be “preachers to their families.”[24] The same goes for those who took up preaching as a real vocation and went into the countryside to spread the teachings of Luther or Zwingli. They knew about those teachings because they had read Luther or Zwingli in print. Luther called printing “God’s highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward.” He knew that his movement was fuelled by soot, varnish, and egg white.

# 3

# LORDS OF LANGUAGE

## *Northern Humanism*

In a satirical novel published in 1872 by Samuel Butler, a traveler visits a topsy-turvy utopia called Erewhon. At one point the traveler learns about the universities of Erewhon, which school their students in "Unreason" on the grounds that living exclusively by reason and its "hard and fast rules" would be intolerable: "extremes are alone logical, but they are always absurd." It would also be narrow-minded and constraining for the students to learn only about reality, and to ignore all the things that *might possibly* be real. So at these colleges great attention is paid to "hypothetics," and a whole "hypothetical language" has been developed to talk about things that don't exist, but could. The traveler comments, "it appeared to me to be a wanton waste of good human energy that men should spend years and years in the perfection of so barren an exercise…but people know their own affairs best."[1]

The same sentiment was expressed hundreds of years earlier during the Renaissance, when humanists mocked the time-wasting disciplines being pursued at the universities of their own day. One such humanist was Thomas More, author of the work whose title gave us the concept of utopia, a place that is "nowhere" ("Erewhon" is of course an anagram of the word "nowhere"). As Butler would later do, More made fun of the schoolmen and their preoccupation with hypotheticals: "the following propositions are not less remarkable, but attractive also, and plausible, since they are of

course true: 'the virgin was a whore,' and 'the whore will be a virgin,' and 'the whore is possibly a virgin.' It is not easy to say which of the two, virgins or whores, are more indebted to such an obliging dialectics."[2] In a letter addressed to the senate of Oxford University, written in 1518, More lamented the way that a faction of scholastic theologians who called themselves the "Trojans" were attacking humanists at the university.[3]

Unlike the original Trojan War, the conflict between scholastics and humanists went on for much longer than ten years. University logicians and theologians sneered at the study of classical literature as an unserious topic fit only for schoolboys, and the humanists returned the favor by calling the university masters "sophists." As More noted in his letter, the conflict often involved academic politics. While humanist studies won adherents across Europe, the scholastics tenaciously defended the educational approach they had been using for generations. They were largely successful, at least for a time. By the turn of the sixteenth century, humanism had made only minor incursions in most German universities. A statement issued in 1502 by masters in Leipzig rejected the humanists' preferred subjects of poetry and rhetoric, asserting, "whoever knows words, is a grammarian, but is not therefore a learned man or a philosopher."[4] Steadily and surely, though, the poets and rhetoricians managed to reform the curricula. In Germany, a breakthrough period was the second decade of the sixteenth century, as the universities at Wittenberg, Erfurt, and finally Leipzig all shifted toward humanist teaching. As I've already mentioned, this helped to shape Martin Luther's approach to philosophy. In his "disputation against scholastic theology," held in Wittenberg in 1517, he proposed to defend such theses as "the whole of Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light. This is in opposition to the scholastics."[5]

One year later, there appeared a text that might claim to be the definitive attack on the quite literally "medieval" preoccupations of the scholastics. This was *Against the Pseudo-Dialecticians*, written by a humanist named Juan Luis Vives.[6] Originally from Valencia, Vives left Spain as a young man to study in Paris, something he very much regretted. At the university there, "the young are taught to know nothing, but rather to babble windy nonsense" (49). Having suffered through years of this meaningless verbiage, Vives says, he would now pay good money to unlearn what he was taught there. Like More, Vives condemns the dialecticians out of their

own mouths, by simply quoting their pedantic absurdities back at them: “only any non-donkey, belonging to this same man, begins contingently to be black” (52), or “no no-man does not possibly not run,” a statement in which negations are crammed together “like dried figs and raisins in a basket” (61). Had Vives been an English speaker he would surely have joked that his logic masters in Paris, Jan Dullaert and Gaspar Lax, were dull-witted and lax in their appreciation of the true subtleties of language.

Actually Vives did stay in England numerous times, at one point visiting Thomas More; he also lived in Bruges in the Low Countries. Connections to the courts in both places, in Brussels and with Henry VIII in England, allowed him to escape academic life. This is a telling biographical detail. In the absence of thoroughgoing reform at the universities that would create professorial chairs in philology, humanism was not really a profession. So these learned men had to find some other way to make ends meet, and might be monks, courtiers, merchants, or preachers.[7] Of course it helped to belong to a wealthy family, like Willibald Pirckheimer, who before his death in 1530 achieved a massive scholarly output, translating dozens of texts from ancient Greek into Latin, including several philosophical works.[8] Vives, who died ten years later, was no slouch either. His productions included numerous original works and an edition and commentary on the massive *City of God* by St. Augustine.[9]

If you think this sounds a lot like what was happening in Italy around the same time, then you’re right. Humanism was originally a Byzantine phenomenon, which was brought to Italy by Eastern scholars along with the Greek manuscripts the humanists so loved to collect, and to study. The movement was in turn brought to other parts of Europe by Italian scholars who traveled abroad, and sometimes secured teaching posts at foreign universities. Then too, foreigners who came to study at Italy’s famous universities were often converted to the humanist cause. Pirckheimer is an example: he went there to study law and returned home as a convinced classicist. (His parents must have been thrilled.) Another case would be Peter Luder. Having studied in several Italian cities, including a stint learning medicine at Padua, Luder gave an oration at Heidelberg in 1456, in which he proposed that rhetoric and history were a more realistic course of education for the young than philosophy. Its abstractions were admirable in

theory, but in practice less likely to lead to virtue than more concrete, literary pursuits.[10]

If Luder's speech was the starting gun for northern humanism, the leader of the pack over its first lap was Rudolph Agricola.[11] He likewise took up the baton of humanist studies from the Italians, after studying in Pavia, where he was allowed to give orations in Latin—a remarkable honor for a foreign student. His name would later be honored by Erasmus, too. Since Agricola was from Groningen, Erasmus was able to take him as a forerunner, another outstanding scholar from the Low Countries. Actually "outstanding" would be underselling Agricola's brilliance, to hear Erasmus tell it. He called his predecessor "truly godlike" and said that "he could have been first in Italy, had he not preferred Germany."[12] What exactly did Agricola do to merit such extravagant praise? His orations were a model of Latin eloquence, of course, and were devoted to such paradigmatic humanist themes as the excellence of Petrarch and the value of philosophy. But his most seminal work was *On Dialectical Invention*, written in 1479 not too long before Agricola's death in 1485.

In this work Agricola goes well beyond what we have seen so far, not simply deriding scholastic logic, but offering to replace it with something better. Drawing on classical treatises by Aristotle, Cicero, and Boethius, and also the work of the far more recent Lorenzo Valla, this book teaches its readers how a speaker can find arguments that will solicit agreement from an interlocutor or audience. In other words, Agricola wants to show you how to be convincing. To do that, you'll need to master two arts: dialectic and rhetoric. Both were already treated by Aristotle. His treatise on dialectic is called the *Topics*, after the *topoi* or argument schemes that he lists in the book. A simple example would be the argument from opposites: opposed things have opposed properties. Thus one might argue that since pain is acknowledged to be bad, and pleasure is the opposite of pain, pleasure must be good. Then there is another work by Aristotle called the *Rhetoric*, which is about persuasive speech-making, for instance in the law court. It also discusses argument form, but touches also on topics like the manipulation of the audience's emotions.

In his own treatise on dialectic, Agricola presents the two arts as being closely aligned, since both explore dimensions of convincing speech. Dialectic takes the lead role, because it helps us find suitable arguments,

which is the main order of business. The study of rhetoric simply gives us the ability to present these arguments in a more "pleasing" way, by adding, as Agricola nicely puts it, "embellishments and elegance of language, and all the baits for capturing ears."[13] With the rhetorician taking care of these more aesthetic features of argumentative speech, dialectic can focus on the arguments themselves. You might expect it simply to establish rules for validity, that is, to establish the difference between arguments whose conclusions actually follow from their premises, and sophistries, which merely *seem* to imply their conclusions. In fact, though, Agricola has a different purpose in mind for dialectic, one that distinguishes it from the general study of logic which was conducted at the universities. The dialectician is the person who can discover arguments that are *best* chosen for convincing an audience. These are the arguments that are "most apt for creating belief."[14] He equates this with speaking "with greater probability (*probabiliter*)."

What exactly does this mean? In Aristotle's *Topics*, a dialectically effective argument is one whose premises are going to be acceptable to the interlocutor. So to go back to the example I used just above, we might start from the premise that pleasure is good, because pretty much everyone agrees with that, and then on that basis argue that pain is bad. But someone might simply reject the plausible-sounding premise. Good luck getting the desert church fathers, or a character in an Ingmar Bergman movie, to agree that pain is always bad. This means that if an argument is *merely* dialectically effective, then it doesn't actually prove anything for sure. To provide real proof, you need to give what Aristotle calls a *demonstrative* argument, which is explained in yet another treatise of his logic, the *Posterior Analytics*. Here one's reasoning must depend ultimately on absolutely undeniable principles. This, at least, is how Aristotle's argument theory was understood by most late ancient and medieval commentators. They took him to be making a strict division between dialectical arguments, which tend to be convincing but are not fully decisive, and demonstrative arguments, which settle the matter once and for all.

Agricola seems to undo this strict dichotomy. When he talks about seeking persuasive or "probable" arguments, he isn't saying that the dialectician should always be content with the *merely* convincing. Nor is he saying that absolute proof is never possible, that we can only hope to convince the audience in front of us but never to secure genuine

demonstration. Rather, he says that a rock-solid demonstration is simply the maximally persuasive kind of argument. So if you're a dialectician who is in a position to give real proof, you should go ahead and do it; and no harm in throwing in some rhetorical flourishes to make sure the audience is enjoying your presentation. Agricola is not a skeptic. He thinks that we can have proofs that lead to certainty. On the other hand, perhaps in deference to Cicero, whose skeptical leanings had to be taken seriously by his humanist admirers, Agricola concedes that such certainty is very rare.

As all this shows, humanists did engage with texts and topics that were discussed by the scholastics, but they usually did so in a very different way. The point is also illustrated by the writings of Juan Luis Vives, who like Erasmus greatly admired Agricola. In fact he recommended the treatise we've just been discussing as a better study of dialectic even than those of Cicero and Boethius.[15] He also adopted a similarly tentative approach to human knowledge, as we can see in Vives' treatment of the human soul. Backing away from some of the more confident psychological theories one might find among the scholastic Aristotelians, Vives says that "nothing is more concealed than the soul," and that he will simply pass over the difficult question of "what the soul is," and focus instead on "what it is like, and what are its operations" (*anima quid sit, nihil interest nostra scire, qualis autem et quae eius opera*).[16] It must be said, though, that late medieval scholastics were also known to express agnosticism on such metaphysical questions as the soul's nature.[17] For a stronger and more telling contrast between the philosophies of these humanists and their scholastic rivals, we need to turn to philosophy of language.

As we just saw with Agricola's treatise on dialectic, the humanists saw language as an instrument of persuasive and appealing discourse. Often, they would emphasize that its function is to "teach." Vives even claims that before the fall of humankind into sin, language was used *only* to impart knowledge, this being its God-given function; only with the onset of sin has language been used to mislead.[18] This is the serious point that lies behind all those passages mocking scholastic sophistry. Whatever the merits of a sentence like "no no-man does not possibly not run," it is certainly not a piece of effective communication. To this accusation, the scholastics might have responded that they were in fact seeking to *free* philosophy from the ambiguities and flaws of natural languages like Latin, German, and

English.[19] Their highly artificial and regimented use of Latin was intended to convey ideas more rigorously and clearly, though the result would of course be "clear" only to someone trained at the schools and accustomed to this highly specialized way of talking. Thus they would stipulate fixed ways of negating terms in a Latin sentence, since otherwise there could be confusion between statements like "no man runs" and "man does not run." A worthwhile project, even if when taken to extremes, it led to the apparently preposterous uses of negation satirized by Vives.

Does this show that the humanists simply failed to understand what the scholastics were up to? I think not (or should I say, "not: I think so"?). Rather, they understood the project full well, and rejected it. We can see this by turning back to Vives' treatise *Against the Pseudo-Dialecticians*. By now the point of that title should be clear. The university logicians were not doing *real* dialectic because they did not use well-formed language to fashion convincing arguments. When it is done right, dialectic does not create an artificial language for playing logical games. On the contrary, it is highly attentive to the nuances of natural language. Again, negation provides an example. Vives points out that double negation equates to affirmation in Latin, but not in French (67), something one needs to understand when mounting arguments in either language. If you make up rules for language use, as the logicians do, then you are retreating into a highly specialized and idiosyncratic use of words. In that case, you might as well let each person devise their own language, and "in the end no person will understand another, since everyone will use words in their own way and not the common one" (63). We should instead do the reverse, looking to actual language use to determine the rules of correct speech. As Vives says in his commentary on Augustine, native speakers are the "lords of language" and it is they, not arts masters at the university, who determine what is grammatical.[20]

We also need to bear in mind, says Vives, that the study of language and reasoning is not an end in its own right. Alluding to the standard Aristotelian conception of logic as an "instrument" (this is why Aristotle's logical works were called the *Organon*, which means "tool" in Greek), Vives says that the scholastics are like someone who wants to sift flour and spends all their time designing the sieve. "Only the foolish," he says, "devote long and anxious effort to putting together a tool" (89). Again, the purpose of language is to teach, and most important thing we can teach is

virtue; we should be devoting much more attention to becoming good than to such topics as the rules of argumentation. For the classicist scholars of this era, antique literature was ideally suited to this goal. Greek and Roman texts impart moral instruction along with eloquence. Hence Vives wrote that studies devoted to such texts are called "the humanities (*artes humanitatis*), and may they render us human."[21]

Like the Italian humanists, northern humanists went well beyond banal, if eloquent, praise of virtue. Vives was especially interested in the topic of the emotions, and the question of how these could be moderated and made to serve virtue rather than vice.[22] This would make us better, and also happier, people, since it would free us from disturbance. He made recommendations at the political level, too. Vives and other humanists moved in elite circles, and took advantage of it. This was an important factor in the uptake of their educational program. Conservative university masters might reject humanism, but autocratic potentates were more sympathetic, being highly attuned to the charm of a well-crafted speech or flattering letter. In several cases German universities changed their curricula to accommodate humanism at the behest of rulers or the wealthy elite. In Vienna, chairs for poetry and rhetoric were founded by the emperor Maximilian I, who, as one scholar reports, "was said to have wrestled with bears, climbed mountains, married twice with vigor, and patronized many Renaissance humanists and artists."[23]

Enjoying patronage of his own, Vives seized the opportunity to show the connections between philology and philanthropy. In a 1526 work inspired by the misery of the poor in Bruges, he traces the very existence of poverty to the prevalence of sin. Alluding to the communist proposals of Plato's *Republic*, where the guardian class have no private property, Vives claims that nature provides sufficiently for all. It is only because of the greed of some that others have less than enough. As a remedy, he argues that work programs and education should be offered to the indigent. Indeed, Vives probably never met a person he didn't want to educate, which is of course consistent with his view that instruction is the purpose of language. He is particularly celebrated for supporting the idea of educating women.[24] Failing to do this, he argues, would be tantamount to treating them like animals. As he warms to his theme, Vives can sound downright feminist, as when he laments, "in their whole life what else do they do but serve us;

their fathers when they are young women, their husbands when they are married, their children when they are mothers?" Yet Vives does remain a man of his time. He repeats with approval the Biblical injunction that women should not teach (1 Timothy 2:12), and issues careful guidelines for what they should read: no love poetry, since it is corrupting, but rather such improving authors as Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and the church fathers.

On this point, and many others, Vives was in full agreement with his more famous humanist colleague Erasmus. Both of them strove to cultivate "learned piety (*pietas erudita*)," fusing knowledge of pagan classics with deep Christian faith. This comes out even in the humanists' polemics against scholasticism. Erasmus commented that "it is better to be less of a sophist and wiser in the ways of the Gospel," Pirckheimer that he was unmoved by "that sophistical and quibbling philosophy which is not able to lead to a good and blessed living."[25] In Vives' case the serene and learned religiosity masked a more troubled story. His family was descended from *conversos*, that is, Spanish Jews forcibly converted to Christianity at the end of the fourteenth century. Such people were suspected of insincere faith, and when the Inquisition erupted in Spain Vives' parents were caught up in it. His father was imprisoned, then hanged and burned; his mother escaped such treatment by being already dead, but her bones were dug up to be incinerated.

Anti-Semitism also played a central role in the career of the humanist Johannes Reuchlin.[26] He was another German scholar who made his way south to Italy, where he met Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Reuchlin was especially excited about the study of Jewish literature, including Kabbalah, an interest he shared with Pico.[27] Upon his return to Germany he became an academic star, hired to teach Greek and Hebrew in Tübingen. After all, who could object to Christians studying Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament? Johann Pfefferkorn, that's who. A Jewish-Christian convert, Pfefferkorn turned violently against his first religion and initiated a confiscation of Hebrew books in 1509. Reuchlin was alarmed and wrote a denunciation, provoking a backlash from Pfefferkorn; other authors piled in on both sides. Ultimately the papacy would step in, condemning Reuchlin's pamphlet in 1520. This literary scandal has often been seen through the lens of the wider conflict between humanists and scholastics, with schoolmen taking the opportunity to slap down Reuchlin, a living embodiment of humanism. While there may be some truth to that, the

core issue does really seem to have been anti-Jewish sentiment. Reuchlin's critics usually professed admiration of his learning before going on to excoriate his admiration for Jewish culture. As for Reuchlin himself, he surely feared that Pfefferkorn's censorship might cause a loss of valuable Hebrew manuscripts, but his motives were not just scholarly. He said of the Jews, "although they may not be members with us, nevertheless they are our brothers."[28]

Unfortunately, this won't be the last time we have to discuss anti-Semitism in this book. Nor will it be our last encounter with the tensions between two models of education, and of philosophy itself: the old scholastic way, and the new humanist impulse to go back to something far older by learning both wisdom and eloquence from classical texts. It should be said, though, that this choice was not as stark as it may seem. The reform of university teaching did not expunge scholastic methods or texts entirely. Rather, humanism was offered as a complement to the traditional approaches. As a result plenty of sixteenth-century writers, among them leading reformers like Luther and Melanchthon, were exposed to both intellectual currents as young students. Meanwhile, some explicitly argued that scholasticism and humanism both had their place.

Take Jakob Wimpfeling, who studied in Germany and taught at Heidelberg, eventually becoming a bishop. He had strongly humanist sympathies, writing a work on elegant Latin style that drew on Lorenzo Valla. Wimpfeling was capable of the usual sarcastic invective against the arts masters, once remarking that these logicians acted as if the welfare of our souls and our political states depended on finding a resolution to the problem of universals.[29] But he also admitted that training in dialectic was useful in defense of the faith, and for this purpose commended the work of such scholastic authors as John Mair.[30] In an oration delivered at Heidelberg in 1499, Wimpfeling offered an olive branch by choosing as his theme the harmony between dialectic and oratory. As the subject of the next chapter will argue, sometimes we can and must reconcile things that are opposed.

# 4

# OPPOSITES ATTRACT

## *Nicholas of Cusa*

Whatever weaknesses I may have as a historian of philosophy, I would be willing to claim one great strength: an ability to work up terrific enthusiasm for whichever philosopher I happen to be reading. Ask me who my favorite philosopher is, and I'm liable to just tell you that it's the one who I'm working on for this book series. But it doesn't hurt when the figure in question reminds me of my real favorite philosopher, the great Ibn Sīnā, known in Latin as Avicenna. Which has made it especially easy for me to warm to Nicholas of Cusa. What could this fifteenth-century bishop from Germany have in common with a Muslim scientist, doctor, and philosopher of eleventh-century Persia? Well for one thing, the quiet confidence of both men that they had achieved greater heights even than Aristotle. But what I have in mind is something else: the strategy both use in offering their philosophical accounts of God.

It's a strategy that is perhaps more familiar from the medieval Christian philosopher Anselm, who posited that God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." On the basis of this single idea, Anselm went on to prove that God exists—this being his famous "ontological argument"—and then to derive all the usual divine attributes of God. Similarly, Avicenna introduced the idea of God as the "Necessary Existent." After proving that there is indeed a Necessary Existent, he argued that such an existent would have to be unique, knowing, immaterial, powerful, generous, and so on.[1]

Nicholas of Cusa does the same thing, and repeatedly. In several of his major works, he puts forward a core idea and uses it to help us understand God—or rather, to help us realize that we do *not* understand Him.

Let's consider three such attempts from his fairly massive corpus of writings, starting with his most famous treatise, *On Learned Ignorance*, written in 1440.[2] In this case his fundamental idea is that God is the "absolute maximum," than which nothing can be greater (*Ign.* §1.2). This is a pretty obvious reminiscence of Anselm, and to some extent Cusanus proceeds as Anselm did, showing that the maximum must be one, necessary, and eternal (§1.5–7). But he is not just trying to derive a series of standard divine attributes from the notion of maximality. Instead, he draws out a series of paradoxes, starting with the apparently contradictory claim that the absolute maximum would also be an absolute minimum (§1.2, 1.4). This is because both the absolute maximum and the absolute minimum are everything that they could possibly be: the maximum because nothing could be greater than it, the minimum because nothing can be less than it. For Anselm, God was that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Cusanus goes him one better: God is that than which there is nothing greater and nothing lesser.

The identity of maximum and minimum is a "coincidence between opposites," the idea for which Cusanus is probably most famous. His idea is that opposition breaks down at the level of God, the absolute maximum, something he tries to convey using mathematical analogies.[3] He equates the maximum with the infinite, which is fairly plausible given that infinity is that than which there can be nothing greater. He then shows how, at the scale of infinity, apparent oppositions collapse. A minimally curved line becomes indistinguishable from a straight line (*Ign.* §1.13). As a triangle's largest angle approaches maximal width—that is, 180 degrees—it too becomes a straight line (§1.19). These analogies help us to see how things we normally take to be different from one another, even contradictory to one another, would come together and achieve identity in the absolute maximum, which is also the absolute minimum. Both curvature and straightness would belong to the maximal line, yet neither would belong to it, insofar as being curved excludes being straight and vice versa.

A similar message is conveyed by a work Cusanus wrote twenty years later, whose Latin title is *De Possest*. Given that this treatise is about possibility, it's ironic that its title is almost impossible to translate. *Possest*

is an artificial term coined by Cusanus as a combination of *posse* and *est*, meaning "to be possible" and "is" (*Poss*. §14). The idea then is that *possest* combines what *could* be with what *already is*. This is meant to express the way that God is everything that He possibly could be; for Cusanus absolute possibility is possibility that is fully and permanently actual (§6). This recalls the reasoning of *On Learned Ignorance*, since it's another way to express that God's being is so maximal that nothing more could be added, and so minimal that nothing could be taken away. Cusanus even reuses the example of the line, observing that a maximal line is the same as a minimal line, since this would be the line that could be neither greater nor less than it is (*Poss*. §17). So there is no unrealized or "unused" possibility in God, as there would be in a created thing: even something as unchanging and impressive as the sun, as Cusanus points out, could at least in principle be different (§8). That would apply even more obviously to you and me. Regardless of your level of talent, there is a limitless range of things you could do, places you could be, and abilities you could acquire, and you can certainly not fulfill all these possibilities. It calls to mind the US Army's advertising campaign that told prospective soldiers, "be all you can be," advice that upon closer inspection turns out to be metaphysically absurd.

For some readers, me for instance, Cusanus' argument also calls to mind the Avicennan conception of God as the Necessary Existent. For Avicenna too, God is eternally everything that He can possibly be. This is the basis of his notorious claim that the universe is eternal: if God were to create the universe after not creating it, then He would have at first been only *possibly* creating, but God cannot have any unrealized possibilities. Cusanus, though, draws a conclusion that Avicenna did not. For him, if God actually realizes all possibility, then there can be nothing "left out" from God's nature. Every possibility there is must be not just present in God, but actually realized in God. Cusanus expresses this by saying that all things are "enfolded" in God, present in Him, but as a unity, not a plurality. As we saw in *On Learned Ignorance*, at the level of the divine, opposition and difference melt away, to be replaced by identity. Only when the things in God emerge into the created universe will they be distinct from one another. They will no longer be fully and necessarily actual, as they were in God, but contingent and subject to change.[4] Thus does God show Himself in a world that reveals its Creator; "or better," says Cusanus, "the unknowable God reveals Himself knowably to the world in imagery and symbolism

(*immo incognoscibilis deus se mundo in speculo et aenigmate cognoscibiliter ostendit*)" (*Poss*. §72). The result is admittedly an imperfect version of the reality that is compressed in God's perfection, but it is the only way that God can express His infinite nature in an outward form, since otherwise He would just have to make a second God.[5] And that would be absurd, because God is already the full realization of what is possible.

In 1461, one year after *De Possest*, Cusanus produced the ultimate statement of the coincidence of all things in God: *De Li non aliud*, meaning *On Not-Other*.[6] Paging through it, you get the sense that it was written in response to complaints that his earlier works, though difficult and paradoxical, were not nearly difficult and paradoxical enough. Here's a typical passage, just to give you a flavor: "Not-other is not other; nor is it other than other; nor is it other in an other. This for no other reason than that it is Not-other, which cannot in any way be other; as if something were lacking to it, as to an other. Because what is other is other than something, it lacks that than which it is other. But because Not-other is not other than anything, it does not lack anything, nor can anything exist outside of it" (*N-O* §6). To which one might fairly respond, "what?" Actually though, what Cusanus is saying here makes sense, or at least, makes as much sense as he intends it to. The fundamental idea is the same as what we have found in his other works: nothing is missing from God, since He is the maximum, that is, already whatever can be. This is why Cusanus says in the middle of this rather mystifying passage that God "cannot be other, as if something were lacking to it."

Again, this is in contrast to the things God creates. The sky (Cusanus' example) is different from or "other than" things that are not the sky, such as a giraffe (not Cusanus' example). We know the sky, or a giraffe, or anything else in the world by distinguishing it from all other things. That kind of knowledge cannot help us to understand God. Since God is the "Not-other," He has all the same things within Himself, but of course as not-yet-distinguished, since they are enfolded together in Him, no different from one another. Cusanus compares this to the way that the distinct colors of a rainbow all emerge from the unity of sunlight (*N-O* §8). He argues that even "nothingness" is dependent on God and refracted from His unity, since in the created world nothingness can be distinguished from the somethings that do exist (§7).

All of this might suggest that Cusanus should be very liberal in the application of human language to God. Since the sky, giraffes, and even nothingness all are contained in Him before coming forth from Him, why not call God "the sky," or "a giraffe," or "nothing"? But this is not the moral Cusanus takes from his own story. On the contrary, he emphasizes that any name we could give God would be inappropriate, since it would imply that God is "other," that is, other than anything apart from the name we've used. If we called God a giraffe, this would not be *entirely* wrong since the essence of giraffe is somehow contained within God's unity. But it would be *mostly* wrong, since the term "giraffe" really serves to distinguish giraffes from everything else. Thus Cusanus says in *On Not-Other* that God is not "deprived" of names but rather "prior" to them (§6, cf. *Poss*. §41). He applies this reasoning even to the transcendentals: the most general properties that, in medieval thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, were considered to apply to all creatures and to be realized most perfectly in God, like goodness, unity, and truth.[7] For Cusanus, calling God "goodness itself" would be to damn Him with faint praise, because goodness can be distinguished from other concepts. Goodness and the other transcendental properties are posterior to God, having been distinguished out of His utter lack of otherness. Or rather, they come *out* of Him and *through* Him, not merely after Him, as if they could have arisen spontaneously (§4: *post ipsum non sunt, sed per ipsum*).

These reflections lead Cusanus to place strict limits on human knowledge of God. He is powerfully influenced by such heroes of negative theology as the Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart and follows their lead by saying that we reach the height of understanding by realizing most fully the failure of our understanding. At the beginning of *On Learned Ignorance* he alludes to Socrates' claim to know only that he knew nothing, and agrees: "the more that one knows one is unknowing, the more learned one will be" (*Ign*. §1.1). He allows that we can make progress toward knowing God more fully, but only by successively stripping away descriptive language (*Ign*. §1.26) or by realizing the inapplicability of different forms of cognition, whether sensation, imagination, or the mind (*Seeking* §49). So long as we are still using the mind to grasp intelligible concepts, each of them a mere likeness of God, we are falling short of God's unintelligible, transcendent reality. Cusanus compares this to the way a polygon grows ever closer to being a circle, the more sides it has (*Ign*.

§1.3). To grasp Him fully, to go from the many-sided polygon to the perfect circle, as it were, intellect would have to stop being itself. Like any created thing, intellect always has differentiation and unrealized possibility. Thus it can never become the "maximum," never be "so great that it cannot be greater" (*Poss*. §17).

It goes without saying that this theory of going without saying has a long history. Cusanus refers explicitly to Dionysius, but it was a more general Neoplatonic doctrine that God, or the One, outstrips intellect by transcending all description and differentiated thought. Indeed, Cusanus is certainly an heir to the Neoplatonic tradition. This becomes clear, for example, in a work called *On Conjectures* in a sequence of chapters describing a series of "onenesses" that track the standard levels of the Neoplatonic hierarchy: God, intellect, soul, the physical world (§1.5–8). But this same treatise betrays a more skeptical view of human knowledge than you could find in a thinker like Plotinus or Proclus. The title alludes to his claim that all human beliefs or affirmations about *anything*, not just God, are mere suppositions or "conjectures." I said before that to use a word like "giraffe" is to distinguish something, namely a giraffe, from all the other things that are not giraffes. Cusanus claims that this is all we can ever achieve using language and mental conceptions (*Conj.* §1.11). We can only grasp that created things are different from one another, not the true natures or essences of the things in themselves (*Hid*. §4).

The fundamental reason for this, I think, is that essences are most fully themselves only when they are still enclosed within the unknowable unity of God. In Cusanus' philosophy, there is no perfect intellect or intelligible world, where our minds could grasp Platonic Forms.[8] Instead, the essences of things express themselves only in created individuals, as imperfect likenesses of divine reality, which cannot offer us a basis for adequate knowledge of the essences. There is some debate as to how exactly universal natures exist in the created world according to Cusanus, since he sometimes sounds like a realist about these natures and sometimes seems to be saying that outside the mind there are only particular things. But there is a pretty clear passage on the question—at least, clear by Cusanus' standards—in *On Learned Ignorance*, where he says that the infinity of God is "contracted" into progressively more specific instances, like the genus animal, then the species giraffe, then the individual giraffe Hiawatha. He adds that the Peripatetics are right to say that there are no universals

existing “independently of things.” Only particulars really exist outside the mind. On the other hand, “universals have a certain universal being which can be contracted by the particular” (*Ign*. §2.6). I take this to mean that Cusanus is endorsing a realist position like that of Duns Scotus: there are no universals that somehow float around in extramental reality on their own, but there is a real giraffe nature in Hiawatha that belongs only to her. There is a parallel here to the relation between God and the universe (*Ign*. 2.5). Just as God’s infinity is “contracted” into the limited form of the universe, which cannot realize all possibility the way He does, so the absolute nature of giraffe is contracted as the more limited version of this nature we find in Hiawatha.

Here then we have Cusanus engaging with a theme familiar from medieval philosophy, the problem of universals. And as I’ve mentioned he gives us strong echoes of medieval thinkers like Anselm, Avicenna, and Eckhart. The fact that he is writing around the middle of the fifteenth century shows us that approaches and themes thought to be typical of “medieval” thought were still viable at this period, and we’ll be seeing more evidence of that as we go along. Appropriately enough, though, Nicholas of Cusa reconciles the opposition so often drawn between medieval and Renaissance philosophy. A glance at his biography shows that he can also be classed as an early northern humanist. Like other humanists from the north he spent time studying in Italy, in his case in Padua where he studied law, physics, and mathematics. He then returned to pursue theology at Cologne, but his work for the church took him to Constantinople in 1437. He brought back Greek manuscripts that still exist today in the archive at his home city of Kues.

Of course, the only thing more typical of humanists than collecting manuscripts was complaining about Aristotelian philosophy, and Cusanus did that too. There is nothing in his works to anticipate the anti-scholastic diatribes of men like Juan-Luis Vives or Thomas More, but he does pause in *On Not-Other* to lament the way that Aristotle’s philosophy fell short of grasping God’s full transcendence. This is something he links to the limited resources of Aristotelian logic. To grasp the divine, we must go “beyond reasoning (*supra rationem*).” This means getting past the exclusive choice between affirmation and negation, instead embracing the coincidence of opposites, as Dionysius managed to do (*N-O* §19). Depending on your philosophical tastes, you might find this to be an exhilarating or alarming

remark. It sounds like Cusanus is rejecting the principle of non-contradiction, which is the basis of all reasoning, and not just for Aristotle.[9]

But I think that's not quite right. Saying that oppositions collapse or are no longer applicable in the case of God is not the same as holding that two inconsistent propositions are both true. When Cusanus speaks of the coincidence of opposites, he does not mean that two opposites both hold true of God *while remaining opposed*, as would a modern-day logician who introduces a third truth value for statements that are both true and false. Rather, he means that the opposition breaks down altogether. While the difference may seem rather technical, it's of considerable importance for understanding Cusanus' negative theology. He keeps telling us that we cannot fully understand God. But why not, exactly? On the interpretation I'm suggesting, the problem isn't that we are unable to believe two contradictory things at the same time, like by holding that the same thing is both straight and curved, even though straightness and curvature are mutually exclusive. Rather, what we are unable to do is fully to grasp that the straightness of the infinite line is compatible with its being curved. In favor of this reading is that it fits with what he says about other areas of Aristotelian logic, like the theory of categories. Think again of the maximum and minimum and their identity in God. When explaining this, Cusanus says, "if you free maximum and minimum from quantity, by mentally removing large and small, you will see clearly that maximum and minimum coincide" (*Ign*. §1.4). Later he tells us that the difference between substance and the other categories, like quality and quantity, is obliterated in God because as the maximum He must contain them all (§2.3). This is a clear rejection of Aristotelian logical tools, but a rejection that consists in deeming them simply inapplicable.

Cusanus is critical of other aspects of Aristotelian philosophy, too. Like a number of thinkers in the generations to come, including Copernicus, Telesio, and Campanella, he distances himself from the medieval understanding of the cosmos. The imperfection of human knowledge is matched by that of the physical universe, which is, again, only a likeness of God's maximal perfection. Traditionally the midpoint of an unmoving Earth was taken to be the exact center of the spherical universe. But Cusanus dismisses this, saying that the universe has no center or circumference apart from God Himself (*Ign*. §2.11). In fact the cosmos is infinite, though this seems to mean only that it is in principle without fixed boundaries and

could be increased in size by God "without limit"; Cusanus is not saying that the universe is actually infinitely large.[10] Furthermore, the Earth is moving, which seems a striking anticipation of Copernicus, though Cusanus does not say it is moving around the sun. In fact his most insightful remark along these lines, and the most Copernican, concerns not the spatial arrangement of the cosmos but the fact that up and down, or in astronomical terms center and zenith, are a matter of perspective.[11] If we were at some spot in the heavens, we would think that it is the Earth that is moving above us in the sky. Likewise, it is because we are on the Earth that we don't realize it is moving (§2.12).

If Cusanus' humanist interests and misgivings about Aristotelianism make it reasonable to think of him as a philosopher of the Northern Renaissance, then his political writings suggest that we should see him as an apostle of reform.[12] His aim was to establish the maximum degree of agreement and harmony. As scholars have not been slow to note, this seems to be a political application of his characteristic approach in metaphysics. Cusanus the church lawyer and diplomat was also "Cusanus the Neoplatonist, developing his own cluster of philosophical insights: incorporating all into one, reconciling poles of opinion and their contradictions."[13] Within the church, this meant working to resolve tensions between the papacy and the rest of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. According to a standard view of Cusanus' career, he began as a staunch supporter of "conciliarism," that is, the principle that agreements reached at a church council should be binding for the Pope, but then shifted toward equally staunch support for papal supremacy. This is probably an exaggeration, because even in his earlier "conciliarist" phase he emphasized that the Pope must be involved in reaching consensus at a council. So Cusanus was clearly no Martin Luther. Any reform he hoped to see within the church should be just that, *within* the church and imposed under the remit of papal authority. But equally, he wanted authority to be exercised within an institutional framework, not autocratically.

Still more remarkable were Cusanus' ideas for establishing consensus between Christians and adherents of other religions. Having been to Constantinople, he was shocked by the fall of the city to the Ottomans in 1453. In that same year he turned his harmonizing mind to the question of interfaith dispute. In a dialogue called *On the Peace of Faith*, he drew a

stunning inference from the radical negative theology developed in his other works. Since God is radically unknowable, no one religion can claim to know Him where others do not (*Peace* §6). We're all in the same boat, namely one sunken in ignorance (though, if we've read Cusanus, this could at least be learned ignorance). Thus the diversity of "rituals" masks an underlying unity, with all worshippers honoring the same God and in effect being members of a single religion. What seem to be clear disagreements are in fact just misunderstandings, as when Jews and Muslims think that the doctrine of the Trinity amounts to polytheism (§9). Cusanus is especially optimistic that the more enlightened members of all faiths could find common ground. He even mentions my favorite philosopher Avicenna, as a particularly admirable Muslim who understood that the rewards promised in the Quran are spiritual and not physical in nature (§15).

It must be said that there are limits to Cusanus' ecumenical broad-mindedness. He doesn't even mention atheism, which would obviously be beyond the pale for him, while pagan polytheists can only join in the happy family of the enlightened by accepting that there is a single ineffable God above their various divinities (§6). Of more practical significance are his remarks about Jews, whom he takes to be especially stubborn. The only reassurance he offers here is that the Jews "will not impede harmony, for they are few in number and will not be able to trouble the whole world by force of arms" (§9; cf. *Ign*. §3.8 which has harsh words for both Muslims and Jews). It has also been observed that, while Cusanus does not insist on an exclusive claim to truth for Christianity as it existed in fifteenth-century Europe, he does insist that the ideal religion he is envisioning—worship of a single, utterly transcendent God—is the only true one.[14] Dispute and discord between the faiths is pointless, but only because all mundane religions fall short of the highest truth, which reigns supreme over them all. Of course it's entirely understandable that so many people have fallen short of that truth, since it ultimately exceeds the grasp of humankind.

This is perhaps the deepest sense in which Nicholas of Cusa prepares the way for what is to come in the next century and a half. His unrelenting focus on the inevitable weakness of human knowledge foreshadows Luther's doctrine of the "unknown God," and also a more general trend toward skepticism that we'll be meeting in such figures as Michel de Montaigne and Francesco Sanches. Cusanus' talk of rainbows and infinite lines was not just a stylistic choice. It carried forward themes from

medieval philosophical texts, which likewise favored the use of mathematical analogies to express the nature of God and His relation to the world.[15] But Cusanus delved further into this analogical way of thinking, in his effort to bring readers as close as possible to the divine reality that lies beyond all mere possibility. It was a project he knew to be, like the universe itself, potentially endless. "There is no end of symbolisms (*aenigmatum nullus est finis*)," he wrote, "since no symbolism is so close that there cannot always be a closer one" (*Poss*. 58). The results were bound to be less than fully satisfying, but they were an improvement on what could be achieved through the straightforward language analyzed so meticulously by the university schoolmen. Cusanus would have agreed wholeheartedly with the Russian Symbolist poet Vyacheslav Ivanov, who said: "a symbol is only a true symbol when it is inexhaustible and unlimited in its meaning, when it utters in its language of hint and intimation something that cannot be set forth, that does not correspond to words."[16]

# 5

# BOOKS THAT LAST FOREVER

## *Erasmus*

Over the last five hundred years, standards have slipped quite a lot when it comes to celebrities. Famous names of the early twenty-first century include Piers Morgan, Donald Trump, and *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. In the sixteenth century, they had Desiderius Erasmus. Nowadays you can get famous just by abusing people on reality television. Back then, you had to do something more impressive, like re-editing the Greek text of the New Testament. This achievement, and other prodigious feats of scholarship, gave Erasmus renown across Western Christendom. He has been called "perhaps the first celebrity in European history,"[1] famous in part because he was so famous. Humanists saw him as the greatest exponent of their movement and could think of no greater honor than receiving a word of praise from his pen. Rulers invited him to their courts. Scholastics fretted over his impact. And when the Reformation began, Protestants and Catholics alike hoped that Erasmus' influential voice would speak on their behalf.

But Erasmus was not one for taking sides. Across his life and his works, he sought nuance and subtlety, a master of striking balances. He was a reformer who stayed within the church, a devotee of pagan literature whose worldview was deeply Christian, a proud native of the Low Countries who said that his nation (*patria*) was any place where learning flourished.[2] He was born in Rotterdam in the late 1460s, as the illegitimate child of a priest,

and in due course became a priest himself. Characteristically he had mixed feelings about this, and equally characteristically, he expressed them in eloquent writing. One of his earliest texts is a discussion of monastic retreat from the world, which largely treats this life in favorable terms but warns readers not to embrace it without due consideration. In due course Erasmus would become a harsh critic of the monastic orders he called "mendicant tyrants." He coined an absurdly long word for the battle between them and humanists, the "lovers of the muses": *ptochoturannophilomousomachia*. In this case there was no doubt which side Erasmus was on. Yet his critique of the hypocrisy of the monastic orders came together with the conviction that a *true* life of Christian asceticism would be one worth living.

In the 1490s, Erasmus tried out another road to religious fulfillment, only to find that it led nowhere. He enrolled as a student of theology at the University of Paris, but dropped out. About a decade later he would get his degree from Turin, albeit "by jumping over" certain requirements (*per saltum*). But by this time he had already settled on his true calling, that fusion of faith with philological scholarship that he called "learned piety." His first edition was in 1501, of a work on ethics by (who else?) Cicero, a figure who elicited another balancing act from Erasmus. He greatly admired this foremost Latin stylist, of course, yet he would later write a work mocking Italian humanists who were so enthralled by Ciceronian style that they abandoned the concerns of the Christian faith (see further Chapter 26 below).[3] At the time of that edition he was already traveling around Europe, as he would continue to do for the coming decades. In England, he forged important friendships with the humanists John Colet and Thomas More.

While there he became convinced of the need to acquire deep expertise in ancient Greek, the language of the New Testament. Then, back in the Low Countries, he came across a text by Lorenzo Valla containing notes on that very text. Here, Erasmus realized, was a project suited to his talent, his faith, and his ambition. He would produce a new edition of the Greek text of the New Testament and offer a new Latin translation, improving on the so-called "Vulgate," which had long been the fundamental text of Western Christendom. Erasmus made little effort to hide the part about being ambitious. Contrasting himself to school-trained theologians, he said that they "merely deliver humdrum sermons; I am writing books that may last forever."[4] By taking the Bible itself as an object of scholarly attention, he was implicitly modeling himself on the church father St. Jerome. Just to

make sure no one missed the point, he wrote a biography of Jerome and edited his works. As Lisa Jardine has written in a study of Erasmus' elaborate methods of self-promotion, "he aspired to something more like the renown traditionally accorded only to the major ancient authors and teachers of secular and sacred texts—the international acclaim and recognition accorded to a Seneca or a Jerome. We fail to notice the extraordinary presumptuousness of this aspiration on Erasmus's part only, I think, because in the end he was so entirely and consummately successful."[5]

Erasmus' labors on the New Testament show us how ancient texts were being studied at this point in history.[6] His edition and translation was first printed in 1516 with new and improved versions then appearing throughout his life. It was based heavily on Greek manuscripts brought from the East. Erasmus assumed that these were more authoritative than the Vulgate, even though that Latin version would ultimately have been based on a very old, long-lost Greek text. Like other humanists of the time, he showed a keen understanding of the way that mistakes can creep into texts, for instance confusion between words written with similar letters. A classic example is ἅμα and ἀλλά, meaning "at the same time" and "but": in the older majuscule writing these were written AMA and ΑΛΛΑ, which would obviously be easy to mistake for one another in a handwritten document. Erasmus also knew to worry about the intrusion of annotations into the main text: a scribe or reader makes a note in the margin of their copy, and a later scribe simply integrates the note into their copy of the work proper. Particularly notable is his articulation of what is now called the "principle of the harder reading" (*lectio difficilior*). This means that you might actually prefer a somewhat strange variant reading over a more predictable one, on the grounds that scribes would tend to replace awkward or unusual Greek with a more familiar-looking text of their own invention.[7]

A further, and crucial, aspect of this project was Erasmus' own annotations. These were intended to explain his choices as editor and translator, but also to give the reader a sense of the nuances and difficulties of the Biblical text. "In a translation," he explained, "you can only express one meaning, in annotations you can point out several, from which the reader can freely choose the one he would want to follow."[8] Here we are not that far from Luther and the idea of a personal encounter with Scripture,

albeit that the encounter envisioned by Erasmus would be facilitated by deep study of classical languages. Not everyone was pleased. One Dominican blustered, "what an imposter Erasmus is! He writes annotations on the New Testament. He addresses responses to some theologians, yet he is ignorant of all theology."[9] As we saw in our earlier survey of northern humanism, the schoolmen were reluctant to accept specialism in ancient Greek and Ciceronian Latin as a substitute for university training. There were less principled objections, too. A Franciscan in Bruges who denounced Erasmus admitted to not having read any of his books, but was "afraid he may be able to slip into some heresy, with all that lofty Latin."[10]

Erasmus could give as good as he got, if not better. His experiences at Paris, in what he would later call the "wrestling-schools of the Sorbonne," had convinced him that the scholastics were indulging in "disputation over frivolous nonsense."[11] From its title, you might guess that his *Against the Barbarians* also fits into the familiar pattern of humanists lamenting the bad thinking and worse Latin of scholastic literature. In fact, though, it seems that the schoolmen were not the primary target of this work, or at least the part of it that Erasmus wrote—it is the beginning of a treatise that was never completed.[12] He only got as far as answering those who reject *all* use of classical literature, especially pagan poetry. For Erasmus this was an anti-religious attitude pretending to be religious. He believed that skillful rhetoric could win more souls for Christ than all the scholastic distinctions in the world.

The scholastics are, by contrast, very much a target in what may be Erasmus' most famous book, *In Praise of Folly*.[13] It was written in just one week while Erasmus was staying with Thomas More in London and recovering from kidney stones. In such a circumstance you or I might rewatch all five seasons of *The Wire* or, if that seems too challenging, *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Erasmus, being made of sterner stuff, produced a delightfully eloquent and ironic book in which Folly speaks on her own behalf. This is a pun on the name of Erasmus' host, since "folly" is *moria* in Latin. But it also gives Erasmus a chance to make serious points in a comedic fashion. The work seems to fall into three parts, devoted respectively to, as one scholar has put it, the "natural fool, wicked fool, and the Christian fool."[14] Thus in the first section we learn how foolishness results from the domination of reason by the passions. Philosophers may

lament this, but Folly says it is absolutely necessary for our survival. After all even the Stoics, who claim perfect rationality like gods, must give in to the passions if they are to have children (*PF* 90). In the second section we move on to various sorts of foolish evildoer, including the hypocrites among the monks, whose rivalry shows that they "aren't interested in being like Christ but in being unlike each other" (*PF* 131), and the schoolmen, who "know nothing at all, yet claim to know everything" (*PF* 126).

The Stoics and the scholastics aren't the only philosophers to come in for rough treatment in this work. Erasmus has Folly mock Plato's idea of philosophers becoming kings. In fact "no state has been so plagued by its rulers as when power has fallen into the hands of some dabbler in philosophy or literary addict" (*PF* 100). The same passage makes fun of Marcus Aurelius, who was a good emperor but unpopular precisely because he was a philosopher. Folly even has unkind words for Cicero and Socrates, of all people. We know that Erasmus loved Cicero; as for Socrates, Erasmus was elsewhere so moved by this pagan philosopher's virtue that he prayed, "Saint Socrates, pray for us!" So it seems obvious that we should read at least this passage as ironic. By having the personification of foolishness condemn these figures, Erasmus is indirectly praising them. Yet one can also detect a skeptical undercurrent running through the *Praise of Folly*, which at one point even endorses the views of the ancient Academic Skeptics (*PF* 118). This may be, to some extent, sincere. In other works Erasmus is often tentative about the scope of human knowledge. So he is perhaps at least half serious when he says that a foolish person is no less unhappy than an illiterate horse, since foolishness is in keeping with human nature (*PF* 106).

In this respect, the most difficult part of the text to evaluate is the final section, which still provokes controversy among scholars. Erasmus has Folly describe a holy fool who withdraws from worldly affairs and even the body. She compares this otherworldly person's apparent foolishness to the character in Plato's allegory of the cave, who has ventured beyond the subterranean prison to see things as they really are, in the light of day. He returns to share his newfound insight, but is rejected by the prisoners, who still think that the shadow images on the wall of the cave are real (*PF* 150). Here it would be natural to suppose that Folly is speaking for Erasmus, speaking in praise of withdrawal from the body. But as already mentioned, Erasmus was at best ambivalent about his own youthful experience with the

rigors of asceticism, so one could also take this section to be a parody of an excessive devotion to the spiritual over the physical.

Since Erasmus himself said, in a letter to his fellow humanist Martin Dorp, that the *Praise of Folly* expressed all his usual doctrines, "although the method may have differed,"[15] we might turn to other works to clarify his true meaning. For the theme of spirituality, we can do no better than *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier*.[16] This guide to the moral life wears its classical inspiration on its sleeve: in that title, the Latin for *Handbook* is *Enchiridion*. This can also mean a small dagger kept always on one's person for self-defense, just as one should constantly consult the book for inspiration and guidance (*Ench*. 38). It also echoes the title of a collection of teachings by the Stoic philosopher Epictetus. Epictetus is cited explicitly in the text, too, when Erasmus refers to his idea that virtue alone is under our control, with all other things "external" to the true self (*Ench*. 119). His is only one of many ancient names invoked by Erasmus. We get allusions to Socrates, who taught that philosophy is preparation for death, that it is better to be harmed than to do harm, and that virtue is knowledge (*Ench*. 66, 85, 97). There are also learned references to the differing views of the Stoics and Peripatetics on the emotions, and to the way that the Cynics and Stoics adhered to their rigorous teachings in the face of popular disdain (*Ench*. 44, 93).

But Erasmus' *Handbook* is more than a collection of greatest hits from the back catalogue of classical ethics. When he justifies the use of such pagan material, he describes it as a "preliminary training" in morality (*Ench*. 33).[17] The more advanced form of righteousness is, of course, Christian. Indeed, Erasmus' intellectual achievement in the *Handbook* is not so much to gather together ideas from ancient philosophy—most of those ideas are familiar ones, presented in a rather basic fashion—as to show how the ideas may be fit into a distinctively Christian morality. He is particularly positive towards the Platonists, because they encourage us to subordinate the concerns of the body to the concerns of the soul or spirit. At one point Erasmus even assimilates Plato's division between the rational and irrational soul to St. Paul's contrast between the earthly human and the spiritual human (*Ench*. 47). Like other Renaissance thinkers, such as Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus is convinced by the Platonist doctrine that two very different natures are combined in the human: our souls make us like gods, while our bodies make us like beasts (*Ench*. 41, 52).

This is the metaphysical idea that underlies the most significant, and at the time most provocative, point made by Erasmus' *Handbook*: the outward practices and rituals of religion are unimportant compared to the believer's inner conviction. In a letter to his friend John Colet, Erasmus said that he wrote the *Handbook* "solely in order to counteract the error of those who make religion in general consist in rituals and observances of an almost more than Jewish formality, but who are astonishingly indifferent to matters that have to do with true goodness" (*Ench*. 3). Erasmus takes it for granted that Judaism is a religion of external practices and rules rather than interior faith (*Ench*. 19, 73) and accuses his contemporaries of approaching Christianity in this way too. To someone who supposes that the sacrament of baptism suffices to make them Christian, he says, "outwardly you are a Christian, but in private you are more pagan than the pagans…What does it matter if the body has been washed when the soul remains defiled?" (*Ench*. 71). He asks the person who avoids adultery but has wicked desires, "what good is it to do good on the outside if on the inside one's thoughts are quite the opposite?" (*Ench*. 82). In short, Erasmus wants to draw his readers' attention to their true selves, their immortal souls, and away from the concerns of the body, even those concerns that are meant to be signs of inner piety. In light of this I'd be inclined to read the final, ascetic section of the *Praise of Folly* as closer to authentic praise than ironic parody.

Erasmus' focus on interiority actually fits better with classical philosophy than with the teachings of the church, which of course placed inestimable value on such things as the sacrament of baptism. This is one reason why Erasmus was seen as both harbinger and fellow traveler of the Reformation: he seemed to minimize the institutional role of the church in Christian life, emphasizing instead the private, even invisible, interior attitudes of the Christian. This comes out particularly in his attacks on the monastic orders, which he saw as having fallen away from their original purity, corrupted by concern with worldly affairs (*Ench*. 22). No doubt reflecting on his unhappy youthful experiences with monasticism, he argued that such a lifestyle is just that: only a lifestyle, not to be equated with holiness, and not appropriate for everyone (*Ench*. 127). In an introduction added in a later edition of the *Handbook*, Erasmus defended himself from accusations that he had categorically rejected religious institutions. On the contrary, he was not trying to "turn people away from the monastic life" and was happy to accept "a moderate degree of ceremony" (*Ench*. 17, 19).

But only a page later, he's once again inveighing against monks who "live for their own stomachs and not for Christ" (*Ench*. 20).

The "Christian soldier" mentioned in the title of the work is someone who steers clear of such hypocrisy. He may not be perfect, but he is at least striving for perfection, having enlisted in "the army of Christ" to wage war on sin. This is the battle that Christians ought to be fighting, not the literal battles they pursue against each other, and against members of other faiths. It's a pacifist message that once again echoes the *Praise of Folly*, where Erasmus laments the evils of warfare. He has Folly say that war is "something so monstrous that it befits wild beasts rather than men," and deride churchmen who go into battle in the name of Christian charity (*PF* 139–40). Indeed, the pointlessness and wickedness of war is one of Erasmus' favorite themes. It is the main topic of other works of his, including *War Is Great if You Haven't Tried It*, which is how Folly would want us to translate the Latin title, *Dulce bellum inexpertis*. That phrase is a saying or "adage," one of the many that Erasmus collected and commented upon in another of his most successful publications. He felt so strongly about peace that in this case he expanded his remarks into a full essay, dedicated to the proposition that "if there is any human activity that should be approached with caution or rather that should be avoided by all possible means, resisted and shunned, that activity is war."[18]

In 1516, the same year that saw the publication of his new New Testament, Erasmus came out with two more works that discouraged warfare: the *Plea of Peace* and *Instruction of the Christian Prince*.[19] Both were written for powerful patrons, the former at the behest of Jean le Sauvage, a French chancellor of Burgundy who was trying to make peace between Netherlands and France, while the latter was dedicated to the future emperor Charles V. His approach to the young Charles is in keeping with the tradition of "mirrors for princes," and explains that both political success and the happiness of the people depend on the virtue of the ruler. It's a deeply moralizing work on politics, in sharp contrast to a work written in Italy at about the same time, Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Accordingly Erasmus' *Instruction* is, unlike his *In Praise of Folly*, optimistic about the idea of rulers doing philosophy. It says that a prince who is not a philosopher is inevitably a tyrant, adding that this just means the ruler should "follow what is true and good. Being a philosopher is in practice the same as being a Christian; only the terminology is different" (*Inst*. 214).

Whereas the tyrant enslaves his people, and is concerned only for himself, the good ruler rules over free subjects and looks to their benefit (*Inst*. 222, 232). In this the virtuous prince is like God, who gives humans freedom so that His rule over them may be more glorious (*Inst*. 235).

This is all standard fare in works of political advice, but it gives Erasmus a context for something that was more unusual in his times: an outright rejection of warfare for pretty well any reason. War is unwise just in practical terms, since its expense can almost never be offset by the gains of victory (*Inst*. 282). But it is also unnatural, as we can see from the fact that even animals of the more admirable species, like dolphins or storks, live peacefully with their kind (*Plea* 293). Erasmus dismisses as useless the medieval concept of a "just war," on the rather convincing grounds that in warfare all sides typically think they are in the right. Even war against non-Christians makes little sense to him, since violence is no way to convert souls. As he also argues in the *Enchiridion*, "it would be in the true spirit of the apostles to bring the Turks over to religion by the resources of Christ rather than by force of arms" (*Ench*. 18). On the other hand, in the *Plea of Peace* he does say at one point that if Christians are going to fight, they should at least fight the Turks and not one another (*Plea* 314). And he doesn't go so far as to say that war is *never* necessary. Still, he argues that its costs and "calamities" should be visited on whoever made the war inevitable (*Plea* 312).

Though Erasmus was to some extent a man of contradictions, he was consistent in striving after peace, which he called the "sum and substance of our religion."[20] This goal dominated his response to the outbreak of the Reformation. Given his boldness in revising the text of the New Testament and his emphasis on private spirituality, Erasmus seemed a natural ally of the Lutheran movement; the reformer Martin Bucer said that Erasmus and Luther "agreed in everything."[21] A humanist named Julius Pflug tried to persuade Erasmus to make this agreement explicit by intervening with the church on behalf of the reformist program. And on the other side, many Catholics blamed him for encouraging that very program, saying "Erasmus laid the egg, Luther hatched it."[22] But remember, he was a celebrity, and you can't overestimate the power of a celebrity endorsement. So the Catholics also tried to win him over to their side, putting so much pressure on him that Erasmus ultimately moved to Basel so that he would not be forced to denounce Luther (or at least, this is what he told Zwingli in a

letter).[23] Yet as we'll see in Chapter 8, he did dispute with Luther over free will, in part so he could stay in the good graces of Henry VIII.

With pressure being exerted from both directions, Erasmus ultimately refused to join the reformers. For all his complaints about monks, clerics, and bishops, he stated explicitly that he submitted to the authority of the church, coupling his aforementioned modesty about human knowledge with an acknowledgment of the absolute truth of the Scriptures and church tradition. With typical nuance, he distinguished between the Roman Church and the true "Church of Christ," holding out the prospect of a split between the two. Still, he allowed that as far as he was concerned, these were one and the same church, for now at least. And he was no apostle of tolerance, especially when the Jews were concerned.[24] While his anti-Semitism did not reach the vicious intensity found in the writings of Luther, we've already seen him being openly disdainful of Judaism. He never expanded his scholarly program to include Hebrew philology, nor did he use his considerable influence to defend Johannes Reuchlin and his study of Jewish literature.[25] But Erasmus did want to see concord within European Christianity. Thus on the one hand, he objected to Cardinal Wolsey at the burning of Luther's books in 1520; on the other hand he was vigorously opposed to the radical reformers who went beyond the teachings of Luther. In religion as in politics, Erasmus pled for peace and refused to praise the folly of conflict.

# 6

# ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

## *Northern Scholasticism*

A friend of mine has a theory about why so many philosophy departments are riven by factional dispute: the less money is available, the more people fight over it. Many is the university whose great thinkers have gone to war over a hiring procedure, or just the catering budget. Sometimes, admittedly, the conflicts are more high-minded. Departments may split along ideological lines, like that between the so-called "continental" and "analytic" approaches, or between historians of ideas and colleagues who think that worthwhile philosophy started being produced at around the same time as color televisions. As those "continental" types would say, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (for you analytic philosophers, this means that the more things change, the more they stay the same). Because, as it turns out, rivalries between university philosophers are as old as philosophy at universities. Already in the thirteenth century academia was enlivened by antagonism between the arts and theology faculties, and between secular masters and mendicant friars. And of course universities were one of the most important contexts for the competition between scholastics and humanists in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.

We've already discussed this conflict from the humanist side of the debate. So for the sake of balanced coverage, let's hear from some defenders of the scholastic method. They spoke up in favor of the much-derided proliferation of technical terms and distinctions. For the scholastics, such devices made philosophy more accurate and rigorous. As modern-day

intellectual historian Ann Moss has explained, they worried that the humanists' refusal to use such "specialist vocabulary…signalled a lamentable disregard of disciplines of inquiry that provided efficiently signposted routes to the language of the mind."[1] A command of these tools distinguished experts from amateurs, and theology was no business for amateurs, even amateurs who had learned excellent Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. The scholastic Johann Seitz wrote that "there are important reasons for subjecting theological language to rules from which one must not depart. If you do not observe them, the irregular form of speech…may lead to heresy."[2] Seitz was involved in a paradigmatic conflict between the two camps when he sided with the scholastic Conrad Wimpina against the humanist Martin Polich.[3] Where Polich praised the power of fine speech, especially poetry, Seitz and Wimpina insisted that poetic discourse needed to be eliminated from discussion of serious theological matters.

You can see what was at stake here if you contrast the approaches of, say, Duns Scotus and Nicholas of Cusa. The classic method of scholastics like Scotus was to draw fine distinctions and use language in a very exact, even artificially regimented fashion; theologians with a more humanist bent, like Cusanus, would be more open to the use of metaphor and imagery. We should be careful not to overdraw this contrast. Even in the debate just mentioned, Polich was careful to show his acquaintance with scholastic methods, while Wimpina had produced such humanist works as a guide to good letter-writing. More generally, university masters rarely argued that the cultivation of good Latin skills was a waste of time. While they might object to such daring projects as Erasmus' new edition of the New Testament, their conflicts with humanists more usually had to do with the same matters of non-principle that tend to concern academics nowadays. Admittedly, they did not have to deal with the most common dispute in modern-day academia: whose job it is to clean the microwave? But other debates look familiar. Which discipline should be covered by that newly vacated chair? Who in particular should be hired for it? Were colleagues stealing students by teaching more popular subjects? Just as today's specialist in logic might grouse about another faculty member's well-received class on philosophy and film, so the fifteenth-century logic specialists were annoyed when students flocked to courses on poetry.[4]

But the scholastics could not expend too much energy on their hostility toward the poetry-loving humanists, because they needed it to express their hostility toward each other. The defining confrontation among university philosophers in the fifteenth century has come to be known by the German word *Wegestreit*. As any continental philosopher could tell you, this means "battle of methods" or "ways." It pitted two groups of schoolmen against one another: those who followed the "old way (*via antiqua*)" and those who adopted the "modern way (*via moderna*)."[5] As the names suggest, this contrast was to some extent a chronological one. The adherents of the *via antiqua* looked back to thinkers of the thirteenth century, especially Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, while the upholders of the *via moderna* took up the teachings of such fourteenth-century figures as William of Ockham, John Buridan, and Marsilius of Inghen. But behind this lay a more fundamental philosophical disagreement. For all their differences, the earlier authorities who inspired the *via antiqua* were realists, while the *via moderna* was more or less synonymous with nominalism.

Time, then, for a reminder of what was at stake in the clash between realism and nominalism. Most centrally, the disagreement concerned the problem of universals. For old time's sake (meaning no offense to the *via moderna*), let's consider the same example I often used when discussing this in the volume on medieval philosophy.[6] The four Marx Brothers are all humans, and would thus seem to share some common nature, namely humanity. "Realists" of course accepted that humanity is something real outside the mind. The biggest advantage of this position is that there is something in objective reality for us to grasp when we, say, define human as rational animal. The nominalists rejected this. For them, it was absurd that anything common or universal should exist outside the mind. Such general natures are instead concepts, names, or terms, which is why this group came to be called "nominalists" or "terminists (*terministae*)." Outside the mind there are only the Marx Brothers, no fifth thing that they all share in common.

It may seem strange that so much tension would arise over this apparently rather technical issue. But it was a question that was connected to other debates.[7] Generally speaking, the nominalists of the *via moderna* tended to place severe limits on the capacities of human reason, whereas the realists of the *via antiqua* tended to think, in line with their position on

universals, that the contents of the mind are a good guide to the structure of reality. Nominalists were inclined to doubt, for instance, that we can use reason to understand the decisions made by God in creating the world, or laying obligations on His creatures. Thus another feature of the *via moderna* was divine voluntarism: basically, that both nature and morality are entirely dependent on the arbitrary will of God. Against this, the realists of the *via antiqua* tended to stress that natural reason could support and confirm most, if not all, of the teachings of Christian theology. Such great authorities as Aquinas had showed precisely how to do this. For example, one could use the Aristotelian theory of relations as a way of explaining the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, a strategy that would be undermined by the nominalists' claim that relations are merely conceptual and lack objective reality.

There was also a political dimension to the debate. The *via moderna* steered well clear of the teachings of dangerous, even condemned, figures from around the turn of the fifteenth century, notably John Wyclif and Jan Hus, both of whom had been realists. Upholders of the *via antiqua* could play this game too, by pointing out that Ockham had seen his teachings banned by the church in 1339. Since Ockham was a key figure in the intellectual lineage of the *via moderna*, its proponents had to answer this charge, which they did by pointing out (rightly) that Ockham got into trouble for criticizing the papacy, not because of the technical details of his nominalism.[8] In any case, the compatibility of the two "ways" with the teachings of the church was always central to the *Wegestreit*. It was in these terms, for example, that nominalists responded to a ban on their approach handed down by the French king Louis XI in 1474. According to the terms of this decree, books of the *via moderna* were confiscated while the works of realist authorities like Aquinas and Scotus became required reading. In their defense, the nominalists insisted that their approach was more in conformity with the faith (*pars nominalium semper est fidei conformior*), exactly the reverse of the rationale given in favor of the ban, which declared realism more reliable from a Christian point of view.[9] An exasperated observer remarked at the time that "the nominalists and realists are warring in a ridiculous fashion as gladiators."[10]

As that event shows, the *Wegestreit* was an issue at Paris; but certainly not only at Paris. It was pervasive in the universities of central and eastern Europe, many of which were newly founded during the Renaissance,

including Basel and Ingolstadt in 1459, Freiburg in 1460, and Tübingen in 1476. Northern universities were good places to get really upset about the choice between nominalism and realism, because they focused so much on the arts subjects and theology, offering very little teaching on medicine and law, which were far more important down in Italy. Thus, for example, the first public anatomical demonstration done in Heidelberg was only in 1574.[11] Arts and theology faculties were often dominated by adherents of one or the other *via*. Heidelberg was a home for the *via moderna*, since the great nominalist Marsilius of Inghen had been rector there. This approach was then exported to newly founded schools, like the university at Freiburg. By contrast, Cologne was so dominated by the *via antiqua* that in 1425, the German prince electors had to write to the city to ask that the university teach the *via moderna*. Here they were thinking precisely of the condemned Hussites, who had given realism a bad name.

All of this, of course, had a great impact on the experience of students. At universities where both methods were taught, they were formally required to pick sides, leading to a healthy rivalry reminiscent of today's fraternity culture. The faculty at Ingolstadt actually split in two, so that teachers of the two approaches didn't have to work together.[12] In Heidelberg, one realist professor went around with bodyguards for fear of the nominalist students. No detail was too trivial to feature in the *Wegestreit*. The two camps even differed when it came to grammar: the *via antiqua* preferred to place a dative object after a verb, and the *via moderna* before the verb, so that if you were a realist and wanted to praise the main course at dinner by saying, "this pleases me," you would say *placet mihi*, while a nominalist would say *mihi placet*. More substantively, the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* used different textbooks and offered contrasting interpretations of Aristotle, whose works were of course still the basis of the curriculum.[13] This didn't necessarily mean, though, that each side was ignorant of what the other was doing. They needed to study one another's ideas, if only for the sake of mutual refutation. Then, too, student finalists might be examined by masters from both camps, so that they were obliged to gain at least some acquaintance with the views of their opponents.

To get more of a sense of what they might be learning, let's look at two universities: Erfurt and Krakow. Erfurt was an important center for the *via moderna*, where the masters produced commentaries and textbooks drawing

heavily on fourteenth-century nominalism.[14] Two names particularly worth knowing are Bartholomeus of Usingen and Jodocus Trutfetter, if only because they would both teach the young Martin Luther. In keeping with the *via moderna*'s emphasis on the limitations of human reason, they distinguished between the teachings one could find in Aristotle and the true doctrines of the church that could be learned only from revelation. Bartholomeus forgave Aristotle for supposing that the soul emerges from the material of the body, rather than being created by God separately and out of nothing. After all, Aristotelian philosophy is entirely dependent on observations of nature, and we don't see natural things just popping into existence with no material basis. From the point of view of natural philosophy, the soul can be seen as an immanent form that exists throughout the body, something these nominalists expressed by saying that even a body part of an animal like a leg or hand is also an "animal," because it is ensouled. But this is, they said, only the "connotative" meaning of the soul —using a technical term from Ockham, which here means that the soul is being grasped insofar as it relates to something else, namely the body. In itself, the soul is a separate substance that can survive without the body.[15]

Natural philosophy was also flourishing further east, in Krakow, where a university was founded already in 1364.[16] Krakow tended to follow the lead of the university of Prague, with both institutions shifting from nominalism to realism. One significant idea that took hold in Krakow was the impetus theory of motion, according to which bodies can continue moving without being helped along by an external mover. This meant that they could dispense with the idea of intellects moving the heavenly spheres, as postulated by Aristotle. It wasn't a new idea, but one taken over from the earlier nominalist John Buridan. Still it's worth mentioning, because this revision of Aristotelian cosmology took place at an institution which, between 1491 and 1495, would be home to a student who would go on to propose more far-reaching revisions to that same cosmology: Copernicus.

So these examples hint at the way fifteenth-century university culture helped prepare the way for the intellectual and religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. But I'd like to dive more deeply into the ideas of another scholastic, who will help us understand the context in which Luther's Reformation took place. I have in mind Gabriel Biel.[17] He was appointed Professor of Theology at Tübingen in 1484. Prior to that he had trained at

both Cologne and Erfurt, meaning that he learned both the *via antiqua* and *via moderna*. But it was an idea associated with the nominalism of the *via moderna* that became central to his thought. Since we're talking about scholasticism this idea is of course framed as a distinction between two Latin phrases, namely *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta*, meaning "ordained power" and "absolute power."

God's "absolute power" is His ability to bring about absolutely any state of affairs, so long as it is not logically contradictory. He can create any world He wants, or many worlds, or no world at all. He could bring into existence talking giraffes, people who could survive with their head cut off, fire that freezes water instead of boiling it, even an analytic philosopher who speaks foreign languages. But, of course, the world we live in has different rules. With the exception of the occasional miracle, God has chosen to exercise His influence within these rules; this is called "ordained power." He has freely, and without constraint, decided to maintain certain regularities, which is why giraffes, headless people, and fire all behave in ways we can predict and study scientifically. But the fact that things could in principle have been otherwise constitutes a significant alteration to the Aristotelian conception of science. For Aristotle the goal of the scientist was to find immutable and necessary truths about the nature of things, by discovering for example why fire burns things, or why giraffes can't talk. In the voluntarist way of thinking, which came to the fore in the nominalist tradition followed by Biel, science turns out to be the study of something that is *not* necessary, even though it is regular and well-ordered. The scientist is discovering the world system that God chose, or "ordained," when He could just as easily have chosen differently.

A particularly important application of this idea comes in Biel's moral theory. Like all theologians of the period, he is concerned to abide by Augustine's teaching that humans can be absolved of sin, and merit entry to paradise, only through the freely given gift of grace. This means avoiding "Pelagianism," the position attacked by Augustine and later on seen as heretical, according to which humans can merit salvation through independent effort. Biel flirts with that dangerous position, by teaching that God is obligated to give grace to anyone who deserves it. Thus the classic study of his thought, by Heiko Oberman, goes so far as to say that "Biel's doctrine of justification is essentially Pelagian."[18] (Oberman ought to know, since his middle name was "Augustinus.")

However, as he also points out, Biel's position is more complicated than this. Within the framework of *absolute* power, God is under no obligation to help us, no matter how much we strive to earn His help. After all, within this framework God is never under any obligation. He plays by no rules: the only factor to consider is His untrammeled will. However, God has mercifully *ordained* that grace will be given to anyone who makes a genuine effort—or as Biel famously puts it, "does what is in them (*facit quod in se est*)"—by devoting themselves to the love of God and hatred of sin. If God is "required" to give grace to such people, then it is only because He has placed that requirement on Himself. Thus one might say that in principle Augustine was right, because grace does not need to be offered at all, and also because even under God's ordained rule, we cannot be saved without grace. But in practice Pelagius was right, because God has decided that whoever merits that grace will definitely receive it. To put this another way, it is not within our own power to be saved; but it is in our power to get God to save us.

The voluntarism of the nominalists could often seem unsettling, with our eternal fate and the nature of morality itself left entirely up to God's inscrutable will. We'll later see this line of thought taken to its starkest possible conclusion by Calvin. But Biel presents a thoroughly reassuring possible version of the doctrine. If you really do your best, he tells his readers and parishioners, you'll be fine. As for the more abstract worry that morality would be arbitrary, it is true for Biel that God is above the moral law. His absolute power can decree anything to be good or bad. But Biel also thinks that God's wisdom is applied in ordaining morality as we know it. Thus we can, through independent rational reflection, come to understand quite a bit about the ordained moral order. Biel even defines sin in terms of violating reason, because he assumes that going against reason must be equivalent to going against God.[19] On the same grounds, Biel thinks that someone who is untouched by the message of the Gospel—he gives the example of a person captured as a child by Muslims and prevented from learning about Christ—can reflect rationally and strive toward genuine goodness. This is enough to count as "doing what is in them," so they too will be rewarded with grace.

As Biel's treatment of these issues shows, the questions at the heart of the Protestant Reformation were already being discussed intensely and with great refinement in the fifteenth century. The clash between the church and

the reform movement was not just a new, much more disruptive *Wegestreit*, it also carried on debates that had been involved in the original *Wegestreit*, over such issues as the scope and nature of divine power and of human reason. It has been remarked that if there had been no universities, there would have been no Reformation.[20] Some of the central figures of the movement taught at them, including Luther himself as a professor of Biblical studies in Wittenberg. Lectures were a powerful way to communicate the Lutheran message: a visitor to Wittenberg saw about four hundred students in attendance in his class, with even more going along to the lectures of Luther's fellow reformer Melanchthon. Such students then disseminated the teachings in their career as scholars and churchmen. So in both philosophical and institutional terms, scholastic philosophy set the stage for the Reformation, no less than did humanism. And now it's time for our leading man to make his appearance on that stage. Hold on to your hats, especially if your hat is a papal tiara, because here comes Martin Luther.

# 7

# FAITH, NO MORE

## *Martin Luther*

It seems like a perfectly reasonable assumption that the most impactful figures in the history of philosophy would be, well, philosophers. Figures like Plato, Confucius, Nāgārjuna, Avicenna, and Kant: they are the ones who divert the course of human thought. But there are lots of ways to affect the development of philosophy, and writing about philosophy is probably not the most effective one. If you change the language people speak, the books they read, and the art they enjoy; throw their political arrangements into upheaval; challenge their institutions of learning; make them question their fundamental beliefs and even the meaning of their lives on earth, you are definitely going to influence the way they do philosophy. Martin Luther did all these things. Indeed, I'm tempted to say that he's one of the most influential non-philosophers in the history of philosophy, except that it's not quite clear whether or not he was a "philosopher."

By his own terms, he certainly wasn't. He mentions "the philosophers" as an enemy group, whose views he wants to correct in light of Holy Scripture. But he received a solid education in scholasticism as a student in Erfurt and was able to draw on that training in his frequent polemics, especially those he aimed against scholasticism itself. Having received his bachelor's degree from Erfurt in 1502, his legend really began in July of 1505, when he was almost hit by lightning. All but literally thunderstruck, he wasted no time (or actually, he wasted about two weeks) before joining an Augustinian monastery. His life from then on was not all that dissimilar

from that of other intellectuals in this time. He gained a degree in theology, taught at a university, wrote books, engaged in public disputations. Except that Luther used these activities to express increasingly radical criticism of the church, arguing that the whole fabric of European Christendom needed to be rewoven, or as we usually put it, "reformed."[1]

His critique of Catholicism began with his legendary decision to nail a list of 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, in the year 1517.[2] This sounds like a dramatic gesture, if in fact he really did it. But it was actually a typical way to propose a set of propositions for debate. His target was the practice of offering "indulgences," agreements by which the church would forgive sins in exchange for a generous donation. Luther was certainly not the first to object to this practice. Indeed, it's been argued that the 95 theses grow quite naturally out of a medieval culture of criticism aimed at the worldly ways and wealth of the church.[3] But Luther's intervention was made in a different context, owing to factors we've already discussed: the widespread use of printing to disseminate texts and the new humanist approach to Scripture. The resonances between Luther and humanism sound out at the very beginning of his list, where the opening salvo of propositions allude to the debate over the meaning of the term "penance" in the Bible (21; for this question see above, Chapter 1).

Even if Luther's overall theme in his 95 theses was not that revolutionary, they did hint at what was to come. Most obviously, Luther was concerned to constrain the scope of what can be accomplished by the church, and in particular by papal authority. He said that the Pope can only relieve punishments he himself imposed, and that souls in Purgatory are beyond his power to forgive (23). The following year, Luther would deny the doctrine of Purgatory entirely, saying it was "fabricated by goblins" (59). Even here, early in his career as a theologian, Luther wanted to focus on the individual believer's repentance in this life. This would become the central concept in his mature thought: humans are deeply and permanently sunk in sin, and there is only one hope for avoiding the just penalty for this sin. Which is not, of course, to hand over some money to the church, or indeed to seek intercession from the church in any way. Rather, we must beg God for forgiveness, in all humility, but also in the awareness that He has generously offered us grace. Thus the Christian enters into a direct and ongoing relationship with God. We will not be saved by engaging in rituals or following rules. Justification is by "faith alone," not by works.

Luther said that this principle of justification was the basis of "all we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world" (503). It seems like a pretty simple idea, but as we'll see it gave rise to many implications and complications. Luther would work through these implications over his whole career until his death in 1546. He did so by trying to set a good example himself, by preaching, and above all by writing. For someone who wanted to minimize the importance of works, he sure wrote a lot of them. It's been calculated that he wrote about 1800 pages per year, with the result that the standard edition of Luther takes up more than a hundred volumes.[4] These contain disputations, sermons, polemical works, statements of belief, letters, and informal records of "table talk" that by themselves take up six volumes. Explaining his prolific output, Luther candidly said, "I have a swift hand and a quick memory. When I write, it just flows out; I do not have to press and squeeze." Among his many writings, the single work with the greatest impact was his German translation of the Bible, first of the New and eventually also the Old Testament, the latter despite the fact that, as Luther admitted, his Hebrew skills were modest. He picked up some Hebrew as a young student, but in the 1530s could still remark, "if I were younger, I would want to learn this language."

From the very beginning, this outpouring of words incited alarm and outrage from the church authorities. They did their best to shut him up, putting him on trial for heresy already in 1518, with the interrogation carried out by Cardinal Thomas de Vio, also known as Cajetan, one of the leading exegetes of Thomas Aquinas in this period (see Chapter 62). Luther's ideas were condemned but he received protection from Frederick the Wise, the ruler who established the university at Wittenberg. The church and Luther would have to agree to disagree, though disagreement was the more dominant note, what with the Pope excommunicating Luther and Luther coming around to the view that the papacy was the Antichrist. He sarcastically credited this realization to the Catholic apologists who rose to the defense of the church and its corrupt practices, men like Johannes Eck and Jerome Emser. Reading their arguments in favor of the papacy, said Luther, was what really turned him against it (268).

Let's turn, though, to Luther's arguments in his own favor, in hopes of seeing what all the fuss was about.[5] We can begin with another set of propositions which he proposed for debate in 1517, within a few weeks of

the 95 theses on indulgence. Here he took aim at the scholastic tradition he had been studying at Erfurt. He makes his target very clear, following many of his claims with phrases like “this in opposition to the philosophers,” “this in opposition to the scholastics,” or “this in opposition to the views of Scotus and Gabriel [Biel].” The contrast with Biel is particularly illuminating. As we just saw, he was a nominalist theologian who believed that God is under no obligation to save anyone from damnation. If that was the bad news, the good news was that God has generously promised to give grace and salvation to those who do their best to deserve it. Though we do suffer from original sin, we retain freedom of choice, and if we choose to pursue righteousness God is guaranteed to acknowledge the effort and reward us.

Luther rejects this whole theory, except for the bad news at the beginning. To his mind, it is ridiculous to suppose that God and the human cooperate in achieving salvation. Either divine grace is sufficient by itself, or its presence means nothing (17). More fundamentally, before the bestowal of grace the human can never perform a meritorious action, that is, act in such a way as to earn God’s favor. Absolutely everything we do without grace is sinful, even if what we do adheres to God’s law. Given our corrupt nature, we will only be doing it for our own selfish advantage (18). Imagine for instance that Biel sees a little old lady who needs to cross the street. Admittedly, in the fifteenth century there are no cars. Still, Biel hastens to help her, thinking that through this and other good turns for his neighbors, he will merit God’s grace. But this is itself sin, Luther will cry. The action stems from Biel’s hope of salvation for himself, not from his hope of getting the lady across the way without her being hit by a slow-moving ox cart. Surely, though, you might argue on Biel’s behalf, we do perform selfless deeds sometimes? It must be possible to act in a genuinely altruistic way, even if we only manage it on rare occasions. Luther would disagree. Being corrupted by sin, we would always prefer to satisfy our own desires, without the constraint of moral requirements. As Luther puts it, if it were up to the will, there would be no law (19). This is the meaning of a passage in a letter of St. Paul, which tells us that “everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

So when Biel thought he could merit grace by freely doing his best to be a very good boy, he was sinning twice over. The actions that resulted were sinful, and it was a further sin when he presumed to solicit grace through

these actions (31). And there's yet another, more subtle error here. It is wrong to understand sin only in terms of wicked individual actions. This leads to a view like Biel's, in which you express contrition for your mistakes and try to merit God's help by avoiding them. But for Luther, sinfulness is a permanent and pervasive condition of fallen nature. We should repent for our sinfulness in general, not only for particular misdeeds (535). This continues to be the case even for the faithful Christian who has received grace as a generous, and unprompted, gift from God. Human nature will remain corrupt throughout this life, so that as Luther liked to put it, we are at best both "righteous and sinful at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*)."

Luther is well aware that his analysis of sin might sound like a counsel of despair. It sounds like we should just give up on trying to be good. He draws the opposite conclusion, though. Once we take the full measure of our sinfulness, the correct response is hope, and faith (41). Faith in God, not in ourselves. We do good when our actions flow from faith in God, rather than from prideful belief in our own power to do good or from our interest in being saved. In fact Luther thinks that all actions done out of faith are good, whether great or small. Good "works" thus presuppose grace. They are not, as Biel thought, a trigger for the bestowal of grace, like a decent performance in a difficult test, which God rewards with the ultimate smiley face. Or, as Luther somewhat more soberly puts it in the disputation from 1517, "we do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds" (16). Luther elsewhere explains this in terms of a contrast between the inner and outer person. When the will within us is made righteous by God, our outer actions can also be righteous (157–58).

We can never be certain that we are inwardly righteous. As Luther already said in his 95 theses, "no one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition" (24). But if someone fails to perform good actions on the outside, that's a reliable indication that they are still rotten on the inside. As Luther says, "if good works do not follow, our faith is false" (535). This is an important point. One might at first get the impression that Luther just doesn't care about what Christians actually do. After all, faith justifies, not works. But he can adhere to that position without saying that works are totally irrelevant. They are not a *cause* of justification but a result and hence a *sign* of justification. Luther offers useful analogies to explain this. A

bishop carries out a variety of tasks, like when he consecrates a church. But it is not his doing these things that makes him a bishop, rather the other way around: it's because he's a bishop that he can do them. Likewise "a good or a bad house does not make a good or a bad builder; but a good or a bad builder makes a good or a bad house" (612–13). The upshot is that "being made good or evil by works only means that the man who is good or evil is pointed out and known as such," a teaching that Luther again thinks can be confirmed by Scripture, as when it says at Matthew 7:20, "you will know them by their fruits" (614).

It must be said, though, that Luther does sometimes make outer actions sound like an irrelevant afterthought, not so much fruits as fruitless. He writes that "a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him, and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law, and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law" (601). Or, if that doesn't sound alarming enough, how about this: "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."[6] Such passages sound like an invitation to anarchy. No wonder that when anarchy actually did break out in the form of the Peasants' War, plenty of people thought it was Luther's fault. As we'll be seeing in Chapter 11, Luther was at pains to correct this as a misapprehension. His goal was not to tear apart the hierarchical apparatus of sixteenth-century society.[7]

At least, not all of it. While he did rise to the defense of the secular authorities who were challenged by the revolt of the peasants, he had no interest in defending the authority or traditional role of the church. He argued that the papacy was a human invention, and the Pope merely the bishop of Rome (510). The Catholic version of the Mass was also a human, and strictly unnecessary practice (503). There's a rather amusing passage where Luther says that for all the sins he committed as a young man, the one he regrets most is that he was constantly pestering God by performing pointless Masses (61). All this constituted a direct assault on the role of the priesthood. Christians need no specially qualified clerics to mediate between them and God. Rather, all believers are priests, and anyone can assume the "office" of ministering to others. This may remind us of what humanists like Erasmus were saying about the Bible. It was an ancient text in need of careful philological effort, yet also a book that is largely plain in its meaning, so you didn't need advanced degrees in theology to expound upon that meaning. Luther's approach as translator and exegete of the Bible

was similar. He rendered it into German with an eye to popular speech (*auf das Maul sehen*) and encouraged readers to adopt the plain or obvious meaning of the text, unless this is ruled out by outright absurdity. In that case, one might resort to a more figurative or metaphorical reading.

Where Luther's defense of secular authority may seem conservative, and his assault on clerical authority was certainly radical, on social issues he tended toward moderate reform. This is well shown by his disagreement with Andreas von Karlstadt, who had been one of his examiners for his theology degree.[8] In the early 1520s Karlstadt was calling for rapid and radical changes in Wittenberg. Luther tried to reign him in, concerned about the disorder it was causing in the city. Despite this caution, some of Luther's most influential ideas lie in the area of social reform. For example, he discouraged the notion that poverty was a kind of holy state that brings one closer to God. Rather, poor people are just unfortunate souls who need the help of the community, a doctrine put into practice when Wittenberg set up a "common chest" for charity in 1522.[9]

Another example along the same lines is Luther's attitude toward family life.[10] Thanks to his letters and the "table talk," we know a good deal about his relationship to his own wife Katharina ("Käthe") von Bora, who shared Luther's background in having had a cloistered youth. They rejected this life of chastity in favor of marriage and child-rearing, a decision Luther most certainly did not regret. He admitted the pressures of family life, remarking wryly that these almost compel one to put one's faith in God. But he saw sexuality as a God-given and natural thing, albeit one always mixed up with sin given our fallen condition. To demand chastity was like expecting that people refrain from eating or moving their bowels. While some "lofty spirits" might be able to live without sex, it was a "doctrine of demons" to make this a requirement laid upon priests (533). Caring for children too is "holy work" (54). There is a striking passage in which Luther pays due respect to fathers who are willing to change diapers,[11] and another where he favorably compares parenthood to going on pilgrimage (635). While this sounds pretty forward-thinking as concerns the duties of men, Luther unsurprisingly takes a fairly traditional view about the duties of women. He says that bearing children is their purpose on earth; that the broad backsides of women show that they were made to sit at home; that it is never a good idea to be led by women; and that his own wife is a more

talented speaker than he is, which he considers a pity since it is more fitting for women to be silent.[12] Still, Luther has no patience for authors who wrote diatribes against the vices of women, remarking that "if women were to write books they would say exactly the same thing about men."[13]

If Luther allowed so much to be known about his intimate relationships, it was because he wanted other people to take an example. This is what a marriage based on faith looks like. It's yet another illustration of the far-reaching influence of Luther on sixteenth-century society and beyond. Which brings us back to the question of his impact on philosophy. "Intimate" is certainly not the word you'd use for his relationship with the philosophers. As we've already seen he castigated them, or the "scholastics," for their teachings. At a more abstract level, his critique of human nature led him to a rather skeptical attitude toward reason. He said for instance that "blind reason gropes about in matters which pertain to God, seeking consolation in its own works, according to its own inventions, without being able to consider Christ and faith" (521). But this might itself be a debt he owed to scholasticism. Remember, he was a student at Erfurt, where nominalism was in the ascendancy. And nominalism is famed for the limitations it places on reason. From the nominalist point of view, the structures of the mind do not necessarily match those of the real world. Notably, we have universal concepts, but there is nothing universal outside the mind. Then, too, as voluntarists, the nominalists believed that all things are decided arbitrarily by God's will, not by the dictates of rationality.

Of course Luther agreed with them about this, but he thought that even the nominalists trusted too much in their natural powers of will and rationality. As we've seen, he rejected Gabriel Biel's appeal to the "ordained" power of God, in which God's freedom to do absolutely anything is constrained by His promise to give grace to those who "do what is in them." On Biel's account God *could* have made faith alone, and not human effort, the sole basis of justification. On Luther's account this is exactly what God has *in fact* done.[14] How do we know this? Not, of course, through rational argument, but by reading Scripture. In this sense Luther can be called a "fideist." The most central truths of Christianity, which are the most central truths of all, are accessible to us only through faith in the revelation, and we must accept them even if they seem to fly in the face of reason. So discussing the resurrection of Christ he says, "against everything reason proposes…we must learn to cleave to the Word and to judge entirely

according to it." Elsewhere he adds that "faith alone, and not reason, is able to think rightly about God."[15]

Still, Luther is willing to use reason when he has to. As we'll see in Chapter 12, he let himself be drawn into a rather "scholastic" debate over the nature of the Eucharist, calling upon his nominalist training as he argued that it is indeed possible for the substance of Christ and the substance of bread to coexist in one and the same place. So while he wanted faith and not reason to lead the way, he allowed reason to defend and clarify the principles of faith. Some have suggested a parallel between Luther's attitude and that of Thomas Aquinas: both thought that God reveals truths inaccessible to reason, but reason can step in to carry on the project of theology from there.[16] Luther himself would probably not appreciate this comparison, given that he once called Aquinas "the source and the basis of all heresy, error, and destruction of the gospel."[17] But this was a typical exaggeration: he thought that other scholastic authors like Scotus, Ockham, and Biel had done a lot of harm too.

If we are looking for medieval precursors to Luther, apart from the obvious case of reformers like Wyclif and Hus, we might instead consider the tradition of German mysticism as found in figures like John Tauler.[18] Like the mystics, Luther challenged the idea that the Christian is working toward righteousness throughout life, by striving to avoid sin and calling upon the intercession of the church.[19] In both cases, the alternative is an unmediated, personal relationship with the divine. But where the mystic ambitiously aims for union with God, Luther is content simply to trust in a God who remains distant and inscrutable. He thus speaks of a "hidden God (*deus absconditus*)" in the context of the free will debate we'll discuss in the next chapter. The only appropriate attitude toward such a God is faith, another reason to be suspicious of rationalist theology, especially when it comes to such mysteries as the Trinity.[20]

Yet, while he certainly thinks that faith outstrips reason, Luther does not seem to think that it *overturns* reason, in the sense of requiring us to believe flat impossibilities. Here Luther is apt to remind us of Nicholas of Cusa. Like Cusanus, Luther loves a good paradox, as in that phrase "righteous and sinful at the same time." But also like him, he steers clear of embracing outright contradiction. A nice example is his famous claim that the Christian is "perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; perfectly dutiful

servant of all, subject to all" (596). Luther goes on to explain this paradoxical remark in a manner worthy of a scholastic arts master. The human is twofold, and while our "inner" nature is justified by grace and free, we must "outwardly" seek to serve other people by helping our neighbors. Admittedly, Luther is not always so forthcoming in resolving the paradoxical formulations scattered through his writings. Nor do his teachings necessarily remain consistent across all his writings, which is hardly surprising given their quantity and the fact that they appeared over several decades. It's been nicely remarked that "he is self-contradictory, but never ambiguous."[21] Some of the further developments of his reformation, including developments that appalled Luther, can be seen as attempts to embrace just one side of a contradiction found in his writings.

Another source of inconsistency was Luther's need to reply to critics who attacked him from a variety of viewpoints. The torrent of words that flowed from his pen were aimed at fellow Protestants, as well as the Catholics. Then there was his invective against non-Christians. Luther was notoriously hostile to the Jews. This hostility grew during his career. A work of 1523 reminded readers that Christ had been born a Jew and accordingly recommended a relatively benign approach. But the later Luther used harsh, even obscene and violent language against the Jews, in a fashion that has only come to seem more shocking in the light of the subsequent history of anti-Semitism in Germany. We can find him, for instance, imagining the devil filling up Jews with excrement until it pours out of their every orifice. He was also paranoid about what Jews might do to him personally. In one letter to his wife he blames their evil magic for a bout of impotence. This is nasty stuff, and scholars have tried variously to contextualize it within his larger body of work, or treat it as a lamentable feature of his thought that can be detached from his other teachings. I'm rather skeptical about the prospects of the latter strategy. His hostility to Judaism certainly affected his approach to Scripture, for example by making him reject the tradition of rabbinical exegesis of the Hebrew Bible. And as Luther would surely be the first to say, there was nothing more central to his thought than his reading of the Bible. Perhaps this is one of the few cases where Luther can still provoke the modern-day reader in the way that he provoked his contemporaries. They might find him to be amusing or infuriating, reassuring or frightening, inspiring or insidious—but they certainly couldn't ignore him.

# 8

# TAKE YOUR CHOICE

## *The Erasmus–Luther Debate*

One of the best things about the place I live is the street market that pops up around the corner from my house every Friday. And one of the best things about that market is a bakery stand, which sells the best apple cake I have ever had. It's vital for the philosophical discussion that follows that you understand just how good this apple cake is, so let me describe it. It has a sturdy, biscuit-like base, topped by a thick layer of succulent, cinnamon-infused apples, finished with a sugar glaze whose consistency I can only compare to the first ice that forms on a freezing lake. Now, I yield to no one in my admiration of the elegantly seductive pastry that is the almond croissant. But if you put a piece of this apple cake and an almond croissant in front of me, I would have difficulty choosing between them. I would, by contrast, have little hesitation in affirming that I can indeed choose between them. In the end I would be able to select one treat or the other, or indeed both, feeling that I have confronted this momentous decision equipped with both an unconstrained power of agency and a fresh cup of coffee.

Medieval philosophers developed a whole theory of the will in order to explain this feeling of agency. Though the scholastics disagreed about pretty much all the details—in particular, the question whether volition follows the lead of rational judgment or operates autonomously from reason—they broadly agreed that humans do have a power called the "will (*voluntas*)," and that we are morally responsible for how we use that will. The idea of the will has a long history, which can be traced ultimately to

non-Christian ancient philosophers, especially the Stoics.[1] But for the medievals, the fundamental authority on the question was the fifth-century theologian Augustine, who had written extensively about the will. Yet Augustine also bequeathed to later Christians a significant worry as to whether the human will is so free after all. In his diatribes against Pelagius, he argued forcefully that humans are in a state of sin, and cannot escape from this state without God's freely given grace. This makes it sound as if, in our current fallen state, the will isn't able to choose after all. Or if it is, then not in the way that would really matter, by making choices that would earn us salvation instead of damnation. I might be able to choose apple cake over an almond croissant, but I'm not able to choose righteousness over wickedness, because my defective nature guarantees that I will not be righteous.

Luther was more than willing to accept this conclusion. Toward the beginning of his career, he flirted with the "semi-Pelagian" view of scholastics like Gabriel Biel, who said that God has graciously promised to bestow grace on anyone who does their best. As late as 1515, we find Luther saying "the theologians (*doctores*) rightly say that God infallibly gives grace to the person who does what they are able to do."[2] But deeper reflection on the teachings of St. Paul and Augustine changed his mind. Just one year later he was insisting that the will is "enslaved" by its own sinfulness. This apparently rather fatalistic teaching, and the range of anti-clerical attitudes that came along with it, was a major factor in Luther's break with the church. When he was condemned in 1520, it was in part for holding that free will exists "in name only." Catholic authors were not slow to issue refutations of Luther's position, and they hoped that the leading intellectual of the day would join their side.

This, of course, was Erasmus. As we've discussed, he was often seen as a standard bearer of the Reformation, and for good reason. His critique of indulgences and other corrupt church practices, and his emphasis on the individual spirituality of the believer, anticipated and helped to inspire Luther. But when he was accused of laying the egg that Luther hatched, Erasmus cried fowl, saying, "the egg I laid was a hen's egg, and Luther hatched a chick of a very, very different feather."[3] He was reluctant to get involved in the dispute between Luther and the church. As I mentioned, he claimed that he left the Low Countries in part to escape pressure to intervene. But around this same time, in 1521, he may have been coming

around to the view that he should critique Luther in print. He would eventually do so in a work called *On Free Choice* (*De Libero Arbitrio*), which appeared in 1524.[4] He was thus able to ingratiate himself with patrons like Henry VIII, who was at this stage still Catholic.

Alongside this pragmatic consideration, Erasmus was genuinely appalled by the deterministic dimension of Lutheran theology. In general, Erasmus seems to have had mixed feelings about Luther; he says as much in *On Free Choice* (45). And as we'll see, he was also rather open-minded about the exact relationship between human freedom and divine grace. But he was sure about one thing: each of us does indeed have a will that is free to make morally significant choices. Erasmus hoped that, by taking a fairly moderate line on the issue and also a moderate tone in the treatise, he would turn the reformers away from their excesses. He sent it to Luther's colleague Philip Melanchthon, who responded in friendly terms. He wrote that the work was received well by Luther, which of course it wasn't, and that Luther would respond in writing and with equal moderation, which of course he didn't.

That is to say, he did respond in the following year, 1525, but not moderately. He churned out a treatise four times the length of Erasmus', full of his trademark invective. It was called, in a play on Erasmus' own title, *On the Bondage of Choice* (*De Servo Arbitrio*).[5] In a letter he complained that "it is annoying to have to reply to such an educated man about so uneducated a book," and his annoyance shows. He starts off in complimentary enough fashion, praising Erasmus' eloquence. But before long he is telling Erasmus, "I felt profoundly sorry for you, defiling as you were your very elegant and ingenious style with such trash…like refuse being carried in gold and silver vases" (102). He goes on to add, "just as I bear with your ignorance, so you in turn will bear with my lack of eloquence" (104). Erasmus was, of course, not best pleased and penned a reply in two volumes (the *Hyperaspites*), which appeared in 1526 and 1527. Throughout this whole confrontation, Erasmus felt that he was a reasonable man of the middle ground, burdened by living in a time of extremists. Catholics continued to attack him as a Lutheran in sheep's clothing, despite the rough treatment he had received from Luther himself.

Erasmus' distaste for strident religious dispute is already made clear in *On Free Choice*. It devotes a remarkable number of pages to his reluctance about addressing this contentious issue. Remember, he was a champion of

peace, especially within the Christian community. While he did disagree with Luther's teaching on free will, he was probably more upset by the fact that with his strident insistence on that teaching, Luther had, as Erasmus put it, lobbed an "apple of strife" into European culture. (If only Luther had gone with apple cake instead!) Erasmus reckoned that disputation over theological and philosophical questions was more likely to "harm Christian concord than advance true religion" (38). If it turned out that Luther was right in denying free will, it would actually be better for people not to know this truth, because they might stop trying to be good. Pacifist though he is, Erasmus can't resist offering the following comparison: if bathing in the blood of babies could cure leprosy, it would be better not to advertise the fact (40). So ideally one should "not waste time and talent in labyrinths of this kind" (42). Of course Erasmus is nonetheless about to devote his time and talent to precisely this thorny issue. But with his long, tentative introduction, he has sought to lower the temperature of the debate. He's also prepared us for the non-technical and non-committal treatment he will offer, one that does not delve into scholastic distinctions but "merely puts forward with simple diligence those considerations which move my mind (*movent animum meum*)" (46).[6]

It has been well remarked that Erasmus' *On Free Choice* "is clear in what it opposes, less so in what it affirms."[7] He is dead set against the view that is nowadays called "hard determinism," that is, the forthright rejection of free will that Erasmus associates with Luther. His fundamental objection is that such determinism would undermine moral responsibility. It is absurd for Luther to insist on our sinfulness while denying efficacious free will, because "sin would cease to be sin if it were not voluntary" (50). Nor would it make sense for God to punish us if everything we do is done by "sheer necessity," and in fact not really done by us, but by God (87). Conversely, whatever reward we will receive from God can only be merited if we had some part to play (84). This of course is just the usual argument that proponents of free will give against hard determinists: their position undermines moral responsibility. Since the context is theological, Erasmus feels the need to back up the point with Scriptural citations. He points especially to the fact that the Bible is full of commands and exhortations, with such passages being so common that looking for them is like looking for water in the sea (58). What purpose could be served by God's issuing commands to us, if we are not free in responding to them? It would be like

telling someone who is bound by unbreakable chains, “get up and follow me” (55).

While Erasmus is emphatic that we do have morally significant freedom, he is elusive on the question of how grace relates to this freedom. He would later write that Luther’s main sources, Paul and Augustine, “leave very little to free choice” and that Augustine in particular “so praises grace that I cannot perceive what there is left for free choice to do.”[8] He of course accepts the standard Augustinian doctrine that we are born in a state of sin, but depicts this as a weakening of will, not its utter destruction. Though we often become accustomed to sinful ways, to the extent that wickedness becomes a kind of “second nature,” we still retain the ability to choose a better path (51). Yet Erasmus cannot say that we have the power to merit salvation without God’s help, since that would be outright Pelagianism. So he needs to find a way to explain why, as he puts it, “the proneness to evil which is in most people does not take away free choice altogether, even though evil is not fully to be overcome without the aid of divine grace” (75).

Erasmus seems to waver between two positions, both of which would enable him to walk this tightrope. The first view is one we have seen in Biel: when we exert ourselves to choose goodness, God helps by offering grace. Erasmus compares this to the way we need light to see, but have first to choose to open our eyes to benefit from the light (53). Once grace has been received, meritorious acts would be a cooperation between the human and God. But Erasmus concedes to Luther that it may come too close to Pelagianism to admit that the original effort to turn toward goodness is entirely up to the human agent. So he suggests a second view, according to which even this initial volition also requires God’s cooperation. Again, he offers analogies. God’s wisdom would assist the well-meaning believer at each stage, as a master craftsperson would guide the work of an apprentice (85). Or, in another passage that makes me look forward to next Friday, the believer is like a toddler who wants to get an apple, while God is like the parent who holds the toddler up as it staggers over to get the fruit (91). Either way—that is, whether or not God’s assistance is required even for the human to try to be good in the first place, or only to help those humans who have already made such an effort on their own—there will be a crucial role for both the human will and divine grace to play. That’s good enough, as far as Erasmus is concerned. As he repeats toward the end of the work, “this

matter is such that it is not conducive to godliness to search into it deeply" (97).

As promised, then, Erasmus' position is, unlike my approach to pastry, moderate. This is one thing that outraged Luther. In *On the Bondage of Choice*, Luther objects to the tentative tone adopted by Erasmus. None of the suggestions made by the great humanist are innovative, so he has contributed nothing toward a solution. Worse still is Erasmus' unwillingness to endorse any particular solution. Luther astutely detects here a tendency toward the sort of skepticism espoused by some ancient philosophers, like (though he doesn't mention this name) Cicero. Such suspension of belief has no place in religion. "Take away assertions," says Luther, "and you take away Christianity" (106). Erasmus' learned dithering over the meaning of Scripture is equally out of place. Though Luther concedes that we may not understand certain passages, this is always because of textual problems or our lack of understanding of the original languages. Scripture in itself is crystal clear, and it teaches to Luther's satisfaction that neither of the compromise solutions sketched by Erasmus is acceptable, because both give the human will too much scope in earning salvation.

The core of the Biblical teaching is that Christ's sacrifice, and grace more generally, is a freely given gift from God. And gifts are not "earned" by the merit or effort of those who receive them (311). Talk of "cooperation" with God or "making effort" to merit grace undermines this fundamental truth. Defenders of free choice are just paying lip service to the need for grace, since they think that the right use of the will guarantees salvation. So "when they assert free choice they are denying Christ" (321). It's worth emphasizing that Luther appeals primarily to Scripture, and not rational argument, in refuting Erasmus. He uses the authority of St. Paul and other Biblical proofs to show that "free choice is nothing but a slave of sin, death, and Satan, not doing and not capable of doing or attempting to do anything but evil" (317). Despite his attack on skepticism, Luther is himself pretty skeptical when it comes to human reason. He delights in quoting Paul's derision of the Greeks and their philosophy (296), and says that reason itself must admit its feebleness in comparison to divine judgment (330).

Nonetheless, Luther does offer a recognizably philosophical rationale for his determinism. It's one that Erasmus already mentioned in his own

treatise, but tried to sidestep: the familiar worry that if God knows what we will do ahead of time, then what we do becomes necessary. Erasmus offered an equally familiar scholastic solution, though he ascribes it to fellow humanist Lorenzo Valla rather than the scholastics. This is to say that foreknowing something doesn't make it happen, any more than astronomers make eclipses happen by knowing in advance that they will occur (66). But Luther gives a powerful response to this solution. If God knows and wills all events beforehand, and does so *necessarily*, then the events too will be necessary (117–20).

Suppose that I am already able to know now that come Friday, I'll be enjoying a delicious piece of apple cake. It does follow from this that I will eat the cake. But it doesn't follow from this that I eat the cake *necessarily*, because my knowledge is itself not necessary. This is just a general feature of logical consequence. If you have contingently true premises, then the conclusion that follows from them may also be only contingently true. Thus if it just happens to be the case that this cake is made with cinnamon, it will follow that the cake tastes like cinnamon. But nothing about that is necessary. By contrast, if you start with premises you know to be *necessarily* true, you know the conclusion you derive from them is also necessarily true. For Luther, this is what's happening in the case of divine foreknowledge. God knows necessarily and "immutably" everything that all humans will do, so their actions are inevitable. This, says Luther, "is a thunderbolt by which free choice is completely prostrated and shattered" (118).

Doesn't this deprive us entirely of agency, making us like puppets in God's hands? Not quite. Luther says that when God foreknows our sins, this does render our sins necessary in the sense that they are inevitable. But it does not mean that God is *forcing* us to sin. It is, as he says, necessity of immutability, not of compulsion (139).[9] He means that sinners deprived of grace do sin necessarily, but also gladly and even enthusiastically. Luther adds that if he could be given truly free will, he would not want it. For he would, he knows, simply use it to sin (328). In this, he is like all other humans. When left to our own devices we constantly choose evil; it is God's involvement alone that makes goodness possible. So in a certain and very limited sense, Luther thinks we do have morally significant choice. We "choose" in the sense of doing what we want, and what we want is always bad, unless grace intervenes.

At this stage I should mention a potential qualification. I just referred to "morally significant choice," and have been focusing on that throughout. This is in keeping with the terms of the debate with Erasmus. He even defined "free choice" as "a power of the human will (*vim humanae voluntatis*) by which a man can apply (*applicare*) himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them (*avertere*)" (47). But we might wonder what is going on when the stakes are lower. What if I'm choosing, not whether to eat the apple from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, but simply whether to have apple cake or an almond croissant? As far as I can tell Erasmus has nothing to say in his treatise about such morally insignificant choices. But some readers think that Luther makes room for them. He says that within the earthly kingdom we *do* have power to choose, but that this gives us no choice over the things of heaven (183), and also that we freely dispose over animals, the way that God does over us (325). This makes it sound as though Luther is not a pervasive determinist after all. He is only a determinist when it comes to the choices that really matter, that is, choices that bear on sin, righteousness, and salvation.

Against this interpretation, though, we should consider that his argument from divine foreknowledge clearly applies to all actions, not just the morally significant ones. If God knows immutably and necessarily that I will go for the apple cake this time, then I am necessarily going to do it (albeit that I do so willingly, without compulsion from God). Also, it's been argued that when Luther says we do exercise choice over earthly things, he means not that we actually have alternative possibilities open to us, but simply that they fall under our jurisdiction or authority.[10] A nice test passage for this is one where Luther remarks, "free choice is allowed to man only with respect to what is beneath him and not what is above him (*tantum inferioris se rei concedatur*)." This looks pretty clear. He seems to be saying that we do have freedom, of the kind Erasmus envisioned, but only over trivial, earthly matters. He goes on to add, though: "even this is controlled by the free choice of God alone, who acts in whatever way He pleases (*licet et idipsum regatur solius Dei libero arbitrio, quocunque illi placuerit*)" (143).[11] The question here is what "controlled (*regatur*)" means: that God is necessitating our lower actions, as He does the things that bear on salvation? Or only that lower actions fall under His theoretical control, so that He could intervene if He wished, like by making me pick the

croissant on this occasion and leave the cake for another member of my family?

If Luther is somewhat unclear on this, it's perhaps because he didn't much care. Like Erasmus, he was focused on free choice as it bears on issues of reward and punishment. Unlike Erasmus, he was convinced that we cannot merit reward on our own, though we do deserve punishment because when we sin we are doing what we want. This, by the way, is how Luther deals with the many Biblical passages cited by Erasmus, in which commands are laid upon humans by God. He of course rejects the inference that we must have freedom as to whether to follow the commands, since it is pointless to tell someone to do something they can't do. Instead, they call our attention to our sinfulness, and encourage us to put faith in God, who alone will enable us to fulfill the commands through His grace (209).

If, like me, you find that rather unpersuasive, then Luther would tell you to stop being so presumptuous. On this point, much though he would be loathe to admit it, he is on common ground with Erasmus. For all his insistence that the teaching of the Bible is clear and that Christians need to make clear assertions about matters of such importance, Luther no less than Erasmus cautions us against arrogance in matters of belief. We are in no position to judge whether God is being just, or fair, in His dispensation of grace. It may seem arbitrary to us that some humans should be given grace, and some not (331–32). But why would we ever have expected to understand the ways of God? We should not feel troubled by this ignorance, but rather liberated. When the philosophers' drive to understand and rationally explain everything is abandoned, what is left is faith in God. If we feel doubt about His saving generosity and whether we will receive it, we should remember that such doubts come from the devil, and that to ask for proofs or guarantees from God is itself a sin, a failure to trust Him.[12] As events would prove, this reassuring message was not enough. In the coming generations, Europe would be wracked with anxieties over predestination and the apparently arbitrary separating out of the elect from the damned. But through it all, the epistemic modesty shared by Erasmus and Luther would become a signature feature of Protestant culture, and philosophy in the Reformation as a whole. With some exceptions, thinkers of the sixteenth century did not typically go so far as Socrates, avowing knowledge only that they knew nothing. But they did usually admit that they couldn't know everything.

# 9

# DEPICTING WHAT CANNOT BE DEPICTED

## *Two Renaissance Artworks*

I have an identical twin brother named Glenn Adamson, who studied art history and still works in the art world as a freelance author and curator. Philosophical ideas are often not too far from his writings about art and craft, which has led me to ponder whether I might conversely try my hand at writing a bit about art history. I must have it in me, at least genetically speaking, right? Now I've got the perfect chance, because between the previous volume and what this book has covered so far, you should have a good sense of the contrasting yet parallel cultures of the Italian and Northern Renaissance. And what better way to explore this relationship more deeply than to consider the artworks produced in both cultures? Not all of them, naturally. I just want to reflect on two of the most iconic masterpieces of the era, by two great Renaissance artists who lived through the Reformation: Albrecht Dürer and Michelangelo Buonarotti, who lived respectively from 1471 to 1528 and from 1475 to 1564.

Dürer was persuaded by Luther's cause, indeed so emotionally committed to it that when Luther was arrested, he wrote, "O all you pious Christians, help me to lament this divinely inspired man and pray that another enlightened one be sent us!"[1] Meanwhile down in Italy, Michelangelo was carried along on the current of the Counter-Reformation, taking an interest in the so-called *spirituale*—the Italian equivalent of the

*alumbrados* we'll have occasion to mention below when discussing Spanish mysticism (Chapter 60). One of Michelangelo's masterpieces may also react to the ideas unleashed by Luther. I have in mind the enormous painting called *The Last Judgment*, found on a wall of the Sistine Chapel, where it complements the frescos he painted some years earlier on the ceiling. It is indeed the Sistine Chapel I want to discuss now, alongside one of Dürer's most famous images, a *Self-Portrait* he painted in the year 1500, in which he seems to have represented himself looking like Jesus Christ.

It could hardly be more obvious that Dürer's artistic production responded to the ideas swirling around Germany at the turn of the sixteenth century. For starters, he was above all known for images that were reproduced many times by that new technology, the printing press. Dürer's godfather established the first press in his hometown of Nuremburg. Dürer was also the son of a goldsmith, so he learned the art of engraving young, and ultimately became an unchallenged master at this technique and the making of woodcuts. Like Erasmus, the wide dissemination of his works gave him a fame that would have been impossible without printing. How appropriate, then, that he made an engraved image of Erasmus himself. Of which Erasmus diplomatically remarked, "it is not surprising that this picture does not correspond exactly to my appearance. I am no longer the person I was five years ago." With his typical blunt humor Luther agreed that the likeness was a poor one, and added, "but then, no one is really pleased with his own likeness."[2]

In general, though, Erasmus was very taken with Dürer. He compared him to the ancient painter Apelles, whose creations were so convincing that they were taken for the real thing, according to the classical author Pliny. In fact, Erasmus said that Dürer outdid Apelles, because he needed only the black lines of a printed image to convey what painters showed with the full range of colors. Warming to his theme, Erasmus enthused, "he even depicts what cannot be depicted: fire, rays of light, thunderstorms, sheet lightning, or even, as the saying is, the clouds upon a wall; all the characters and emotions; in short, the whole mind of man as it shines forth from the appearance of the body."[3] Nor was this the only connection between Dürer and humanism, even if he disarmingly claimed to be "an untaught man of little learning." He was a close confidante of the scholar Willibald Pirckheimer, writing to him at one point, "I have no other friend on earth like you."[4] Like so many humanists, Dürer visited Italy, and while he was

there Pirckheimer asked him to find interesting Greek books to bring home. Pirckheimer was also the subject of a portrait by Dürer, which bears the unbeatably humanist motto "One lives through the mind, all else is subject to death." There are other clear examples of Dürer's involvement with humanism, like a frontispiece he made for an edition of St. Jerome's letters, which shows him as translator of the Bible with the first line of Genesis in three languages. Then there are Dürer's own works on measurement and human proportion. We might be reminded here of the output of an Italian humanist like Leon Battista Alberti and his work *On Painting*.[5]

Erasmus identified Dürer's understanding of proportion as the key to his genius and capacity for verisimilitude, and Dürer would have agreed. He sounds rather like a Platonist when he observes in his book on the subject, "there lives on earth not one beautiful person who could not be more beautiful."[6] Because physical individuals fall short in this way, the best way to make a truly beautiful human image is to take the best parts from different people and combine them. As for what beauty itself might be, he admitted that he did not know. Which might be a key to unlock the visual riddle that is Dürer's *Melencolia*. It shows a discontented winged figure who is holding a compass and has a large number of mysterious items scattered around her: a dog, a cherub, a sphere, a big knife, an hourglass, a set of scales, and strangest of all what looks like an asymmetric block of stone. A study of this picture suggests that it may be inspired by one of Plato's lesser known dialogues, *Hippias Major*, in which Socrates talks to a sophist, the titular Hippias, who boasted competence in all the arts.[7] The various implements in the scene represent arts mentioned in the dialogue, and the melancholic central figure is disgruntled because true beauty lies beyond her grasp. That would be represented by the weird shape, which could be a botched attempt to make a dodecahedron, that is, a twelve-sided Platonic solid, named as the shape corresponding to the heavens in Plato's *Timaeus*.

So I could definitely have chosen *Melencolia* as my representative artwork by Dürer, but instead I've gone with that *Self-Portrait* from 1500, the one where he looks like Jesus. It's not an engraving or woodcut but a painting, something Dürer emphasizes in a text included in the image: "I, Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg, painted myself in special colors at the age of 28 years." In this period there was a kind of competition between drawing and painting, or as the Italians put it, *disegno* and *colore*. If I may myself

paint with a somewhat broad brush, the partisans of drawing, with its exactness and attention to proportion, can be associated with the Platonist leanings of Italian humanists like Ficino; indeed, Florence was a center for expertise in *disegno*. Given what I've said so far, Dürer would seem to be an obvious candidate for a northern artist who followed this line of thought, but he was clearly anxious not to be thought of as *just* a great draftsman. He wrote to Pirckheimer that, thanks to a painted image of the Virgin Mary, he had "silenced those painters who said that I was skilled in printmaking but that in painting I didn't know how to handle colors. Now everyone says they have never seen more beautiful colors."[8]

This painting from 1500 is not his only self-portrait. He made quite a number of them, and appears in such varied guises in them that he almost seems to be playing different characters, like an actor on the stage. Appropriate, then, that the art historian Joseph Leo Koerner has connected these portraits to the theme of individualism in Shakespeare (on which see below, Chapter 45).[9] Of course Dürer was generations earlier than Shakespeare, but he was a contemporary of Erasmus. So it's plausible to say that he expressed in visual media the individualistic approach of Erasmus' "Christian soldier." Indeed, an emphasis on the individual seems to have been a typical of Northern Renaissance art more generally. Another commentator says, "unlike Italian artists, who generally focused on the elaboration of an idealized canon of beauty, German draftsmen strove to capture in their drawings what they perceived as individual, specific, and characteristic in the world around them."[10] If you look through Dürer's output, you'll see plenty of evidence for this claim, as in an astounding drawing he made of his own mother. Even without having met her, you can tell that this couldn't be a picture of anyone else.

But it's one thing to paint recognizable individuals, even oneself, and to show them in different guises; it's another thing entirely to depict oneself as Christ the savior. In the *Self-Portrait* of 1500, Dürer shows himself with a beard and flowing hair, dressed in a robe with a fur collar, and facing the viewer directly with a penetrating stare. The frontal presentation is one associated with pictures of Christ and other religious figures. Art historians, including the great scholar of Renaissance art Erwin Panofsky, have long wondered how Dürer could have been so daring, arguably even blasphemous, as to cast himself in this particular role. One way to avoid the problem would be to deny that Dürer really meant to make himself look like

Christ. Not the easiest case to make, since any modern viewer will instantly adopt that interpretation. In fact while I was writing these very words my daughter came into the room, took one look at the picture visible on my computer screen, and said, "is he supposed to look like Jesus, or what?" But maybe it struck people at the time differently? One study takes exactly this line, solving the blasphemy problem by suggesting that we are misreading Dürer's intentions. It points out that there is hardly any historical evidence for people reading the painting as Christ-like across the following centuries.[11] But I think that in this case we can trust our eyes, modern though they may be. There's an evident similarity between Dürer's painting and a portrait of Christ by Jan Van Eyck, painted back in 1440 (or rather to copies of the Van Eyck, since the original is lost).[12] More convincing still, other portraits of Dürer seem to pull the same trick, especially one where he shows himself as a "man of sorrows," pointing at a wound in his side, just like Christ's.[13]

Let's assume, then, that Dürer did intend to paint himself as Christ. The question is, why? In his lengthy discussion of the painting, Koerner says that Dürer was motivated not just by the idea of individualism, but also by the desire to exalt his own artistic practice. He writes, "by transferring the attributes of imagistic authority and quasi-magical power once associated with the true and sacred image of god to the novel subject of self-portraiture, Dürer legitimates his radically new notion of art, one based on the irreducible relation between the self and the work of art." He also draws a nice connection to another German figure of the time, Nicholas of Cusa.[14] A work of his I didn't mention yet is his 1453 treatise *On the Face of God*. There, Cusanus talks about the illusionistic trick whereby a painted portrait may seem to follow the viewer with its eyes as the viewer moves around the room. For Cusanus, this is comparable to the way divine vision is able to follow events in the created world without involving any change in God. Cusanus also says that God the Creator is like a painter, indeed one who paints Himself! Perhaps Dürer wanted to suggest the same thing.

This reading of the painting sees it as epitomizing the new form of piety emerging in northern Europe at this time. Of course the year it was made, 1500, places it earlier than the outbreak of the Reformation. But if Erasmus could anticipate themes that would come to the fore in Luther, why not Dürer? His *Self-Portrait* captures in a single picture what Erasmus used a

lot more than a thousand words to say: that individuals may have an intimate relationship with God, even that there is a spark of divinity in each person. The task of Christians would be to find and nourish that spark, whether by identifying with Christ's sufferings, as Dürer does in the other self-portrait as a man of sorrows, or by triumphantly using "special colors" to create an astonishingly lifelike imitation of what God has created. So lifelike that Dürer's own dog supposedly licked the *Self-Portrait*, having mistaken it for his master.[15]

Of course, there's no way this could have happened with Michelangelo's paintings on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. They were begun in 1508, about one dog's year after Dürer's *Self-Portrait*, and completed in 1512. The commission came directly from Pope Julius II, as the Sistine Chapel is where he, other high church officials, and members of the papal household worshipped. It's named for Pope Sixtus IV, who had the chapel built to the same dimensions as Solomon's temple, as described in the Bible. It was consecrated in 1483. In the intervening years the painting of starry heavens on the ceiling had been ruined by cracking, and new frescos were needed. Michelangelo was not necessarily the obvious choice for this task. Much as Dürer was known mostly for woodcuts, so Michelangelo was primarily a sculptor. He had already created, among other famous works, the statue of David that became a symbol of the republic of Florence when it was placed in front of the Palazzo della Signoria in 1504. Michelangelo was actually frustrated at being tapped to do the ceiling, because he wanted to be working on the sculptures for a monumentally ambitious tomb, also commissioned by Julius. In a collection of biographical sketches that is more or less a version of the ancient *Lives of the Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius, but for Renaissance Italian artists, Giorgio Vasari claims that the reassignment was the result of conniving on the part of Michelangelo's rivals.[16] Supposedly they assumed he would embarrass himself, taking on this demanding task in a medium that was not his specialty.

If so the plot was a spectacular failure. Vasari echoed the familiar Renaissance rhetoric of a luminous new time following on the dark ages of the past, when he said of the Sistine ceiling, "this work has been and truly is the beacon of our art, and it has brought such benefit and enlightenment to the art of painting that it was sufficient to illuminate a world which for so many hundreds of years had remained in the state of darkness."[17] Like the Italian humanists he would have known through his education and social

circles in Florence, Michelangelo too saw himself as reviving moribund art forms. We can see this in his sculptures, which are powerfully influenced by antique statuary. Michelangelo trained himself by making copies of them, and had an early boost to his career when a *Cupid* he had made was mistaken for a genuine antiquity. His interest in ancient culture is also (literally) visible on the Sistine ceiling. The clearest instance is that Old Testament prophets are depicted alongside pagan "sybils," women seers whose prognostications were thought by Christians to foretell the coming of Christ. This notion itself goes back to antiquity: it can be found in Lactantius, an ancient Christian writer who was, along with Cicero, among the first classical authors to have his works printed in Italy.[18]

I should mention a caveat here, which is that Michelangelo may not have chosen the iconography for the ceiling. He claims that the Pope gave him permission to do whatever he liked, but it's more likely that trained theologians would have been brought in to consult, especially given the importance of the setting. For this reason we should also be hesitant to take them as an expression of Michelangelo's own preferences, or even philosophical leanings. Laid out along the main axis are three groups of three frescos, showing God's creation of the universe, the creation and fall of Adam, and the story of Noah.[19] If we "read" the ceiling from Noah to Adam to God, then this could be taken to symbolize an ascent from the mundane to the spiritual, perhaps an echo of the Platonism Michelangelo would have brought from Florence along with his brushes. The aforementioned Erwin Panovsky was inclined to interpret Michelangelo as a Platonist, and to make the point quoted the great artist as calling the body an "earthly prison" of the soul, a commonplace drawn ultimately from Plato.[20] But it's been observed by the Michelangelo expert Creighton Gilbert (who by the way was a professor at Yale when my brother was there getting his doctorate) that the chapel wall already depicted the story of Moses before Michelangelo came along. This made the scenes on the ceiling almost "an inevitable choice": since "the natural narrative sequence is downwards," the imagery up top would have to be drawn from parts of the Old Testament that come even earlier in the chronology than Moses.[21]

Even if we cannot infer too much about Michelangelo's theological or philosophical ideas from the selection of themes, the way he painted those themes tells us plenty. Perhaps the most striking feature of the ceiling is its

focus on the human form, with minimal depiction of objects or background. Or perhaps I shouldn't say "human" form, since the most prominent character is God Himself, shown as a kind of superhero swathed in pink-purple robes, hurtling through the void as he separates light from dark and summons into existence the sun and moon. Techniques of perspective newly devised in the Renaissance are put to good use, especially in one striking image of God flying up and away with His back turned to the viewer down on the floor of the Chapel. (And by the way, if you want to see a great image showing how artists achieved perspectival effects, check out Dürer's print of a "perspective machine" from 1525.) Many of the other figures on the ceiling are nude (they were partially covered by prudish church officials during the Counter-Reformation), allowing Michelangelo to call on another Renaissance advance, an improved understanding of human anatomy.[22] Admittedly the greatest anatomist of the period, Vesalius, was born only in 1514, just after Michelangelo finished his labors painting the ceiling. But it would be entirely fair to connect Michelangelo's approach to Vesalius' later remark that ancient sculptures were in part so convincing because they accurately depict the muscles of the human body.[23] Of course the naked Adam appears in the iconic fresco of God creating him, the two figures shown with outstretched arms, fingers almost touching. It's such a familiar image, found on t-shirts and fridge magnets around the world, that we may forget to ask ourselves what it means. Again, ancient sources may be relevant. Augustine and other authors speak of the "finger of God" as representing the divine power that creates and then sanctifies humankind.[24] An alternative, or perhaps complementary, idea was suggested by another early biographer of Michelangelo, Ascanio Condivi. He said that the finger is one of command: God is shown here giving Adam "precepts as to what he must and must not do."[25]

If this is right, then the most famous picture on the ceiling of the chapel resonates thematically with the gigantic painting Michelangelo later added to its wall, showing the *Last Judgment*. Here, we see what happens to people who follow those divine precepts, and more memorably, what happens to those who don't. It was commissioned only in 1534, again by a pope, in this case Clement VII. An original plan to show the resurrection of Christ was changed, with the new theme selected under yet another pope, Paul III. Given the dating, we might wonder whether the resulting

masterpiece reflects themes of the Counter-Reformation, much as Dürer's *Self-Portrait* seems to anticipate themes of the Protestant Reformation. As one critic has commented, the very choice of topic may already do so: "the selection of a Last Judgment, far more popular in the Middle Ages than in the worldly Renaissance, has been interpreted as a sign that the era of Humanism was dead and the era of the Counter-Reformation had begun."[26] This is, in the most literal sense, an "apocalyptic" image, a response to unsettled times and unsettling ideas. It insists on the resurrection and (when appropriate) punishment of the body, which is fully in keeping with the church's contemporary doctrinal statements on the afterlife. What Michelangelo adds, as only he could, is an evocation of the contorted physical agony of the sinners who are being dispatched to their fate. It's a terrifying application of his later so-called "mannerist" style, which is already on show in some of the final images he had painted for the ceiling years earlier.

On the other hand, if you had to name just one inspiration for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, it would probably be a fellow Florentine who played a major role in Renaissance Italian humanism: Dante. Vasari already makes the connection, explaining that the painting's portrayal of Charon the boatman was done "in imitation of the description given by [Michelangelo's] very favorite poet, Dante."[27] As Panofsky points out, Michelangelo would likely have read his "favorite poet" along with Platonist commentaries, like the one by Cristoforo Landino.[28] So it is apt when Vasari goes on to a rather Platonist interpretation of the *Last Judgment* as a whole: "this painting is that example and that great picture sent by God to men on earth so that they could see how fate operates when supreme intellects descend to earth and are infused with grace and the divinity of knowledge."[29] A Platonist interpretation could also help to explain Michelangelo's choice to place Christ in the center of the image instead of at the top, which is highly unusual in the history of depictions of the Last Judgment. Christ's role is to separate the wheat from the chaff, sending the good upwards and the sinners down to meet their fate, so a central placement does make logical and graphical sense. But there is also a message here about the radical dependence of all things on God. At the time, a correspondent who wrote to Michelangelo referred to the painting as depicting "the universe and Heaven and Hell."[30] If so, then divinity is

placed at the middle of everything, not as in Aristotelian philosophy at the periphery, tasked with nothing more than steering the heavens.

Let me conclude on a final point suggested to me by my brother. When I told him that I was writing on Dürer and Michelangelo, he called attention to the fact that on the Sistine Ceiling, the outstretched fingers of Adam and God are not quite touching. This could be taken to symbolize the ultimate transcendence of God: we humans can *reach for* Him but not *reach* Him. By contrast, Dürer's *Self-Portrait* can be read as an image of human closeness to God. In fact, never mind mere contact: here the artist has become identical with Christ. We could take this even further by suggesting that the distance between God and humankind suggested on the Sistine ceiling is a good fit for Catholic culture: priestly mediation, through the sacraments, is needed to carry us across that small space between the fingers. Whereas, as we've seen, Dürer's *Self-Portrait* could evoke the individualized and immediate spiritual encounter that was so important to Erasmus and the Protestant reformers. One shouldn't insist too emphatically on this. After all, the interplay of divine transcendence and immanence was already fundamental to medieval spirituality and philosophy. Still, it's one more reason to think that art history can naturally be twinned with the history of philosophy.

# 10

# MORE LUTHERAN THAN LUTHER

## *Philip Melanchthon*

By this point, it should be clear that humanism had quite a bit to do with the Reformation. We've seen how humanists and reformers joined in attacking both the style and the substance of scholastic philosophy, and how the great humanist Erasmus shared many priorities and beliefs with Luther, even if they disagreed over the issue of free will. But it's only now that we're reaching the best example of a reformer who was also a humanist: Philip Melanchthon.[1] If Erasmus and Luther had had a child together, which admittedly is hard to imagine for all kinds of reasons, then Melanchthon might have been that child. Inspired by Agricola and Erasmus, he wrote on rhetoric and lamented the barbarisms of the schoolmen. There is in fact a work ascribed to him that replies to Pico della Mirandola's ironically eloquent letter in defense of bad scholastic Latin; actually it is probably by one of his students, but the sentiment is Melanchthonian enough.[2] Even his name was a humanist joke. It seems to have been Johannes Ruechlin, the humanist famously maligned for his expertise in Hebrew, who suggested the name "Melanchthon" as a Graecizing version of the family name "Schwarzerd" ("black earth").

Erasmus called this fellow humanist "more Lutheran than Luther himself (*ipso Luthero lutheranior*)," and not without reason. Melanchthon taught for many years at Wittenberg and was thus a close colleague and ally of Luther's. Melanchthon used his lectures and writings to promote the

teachings of the Reformation. He unhesitatingly adopted such core doctrines as the priesthood of all believers, the grounding of theology in Scripture alone, and the merely customary status of church rituals. Like Luther he was willing to direct criticism at ancient religious authorities. Instead, Luther and Melanchthon in effect set themselves up as the fathers of their own church.[3] Yet over the course of his career Melanchthon would carefully stake out distinctive positions that did not always agree fully with Luther's. He worked to find a robust role for classical learning and natural philosophy within a Lutheran paradigm. And controversially, he ultimately adopted a position on free will that veered closer to that of Erasmus.

Melanchthon's greatest influence came through his teaching and his pedagogically oriented writings.[4] Like Luther, if not to quite the same extent, he saw his works churned out of printing presses. Melanchthon's textbook on rhetoric went through thirty editions in a single decade, until he replaced it with a new work on the topic in 1530.[5] His treatise on the soul was printed more than forty times in the second half of the century and was made the subject of further commentary.[6] We can get a sense of his approach to teaching, and his understanding of the relation between religion and the sciences, from the orations he gave as a professor at Wittenberg.[7] These set out the case for the curriculum he helped to establish there, which emphasized the study of the linguistic arts, mathematics, and natural philosophy. As Melanchthon was at pains to mention, Erasmus and Luther agreed on the need to study Greek and Hebrew for the sake of understanding Scripture (*Or*. 31–32). Grammar and rhetoric, too, are crucial for doing theology, which is why the church always needs to have a connection to schools that support it (*Or*. 12).

To some extent the rationale here is obvious. You need to study classical languages to read the Bible in the original, and you need grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric to expound its teachings well. Less obvious is that the study of rhetoric helps us to interpret Scripture.[8] Like Erasmus, Melanchthon was impressed by the emotional and persuasive power of Scripture. This is due to the fact that the authors of the Bible, especially St. Paul, were themselves skilled rhetoricians. So we need to master this discipline in order to analyze how they constructed their arguments. As a result rhetoric is, for Melanchthon, as much about appreciating persuasive speech as producing it. He drew on classical authors including Aristotle and Cicero to

understand the rules of dialectic and rhetoric, even writing a commentary on Cicero's *Topics*. That word, "topics," brings us to one of Melanchthon's signature tactics as an educator. As seen above, it stems from the Greek word *topoi*, meaning "places," the Latin equivalent being *loci* (you can recognize the root in English words like "location"). As far back as Aristotle's work on dialectic, also called the *Topics*, the term had been used to refer to standard argument forms that could be deployed in argumentative contexts. By the time of Melanchthon, it had taken on a somewhat broader meaning, since it could also refer to key concepts within a given discipline, that is, points that you need to learn about when studying that discipline.

Melanchthon used the "topics" structure to teach both philosophy and theology. Thus his exposition of selected books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, written in 1532, doesn't so much present a running paraphrase or commentary as a set of points for discussion. These are the *loci*, or fundamental "topics," covered in ethics.[9] They include things like the definition of moral philosophy, the ultimate purpose of humankind, virtue, free will, and the passions. It may surprise you that Melanchthon would use Aristotle to offer moral instruction to his students. What happened to the Lutheran disdain for Aristotle and his scholastic followers? Well, Melanchthon certainly disdained the scholastics, but he thought that pagan philosophers deserved a degree of respect. He admired the way that they directed their attention to the concrete question of how to live, rather than getting mired in pedantic and time-wasting discussions as the schoolmen did. The Greeks, he said, "show the usefulness of philosophy for life" (*Or*. 33, cf. 79). While the ancient philosophers do not teach us to place our trust in God (*Or*. 81), they do offer lessons on the less crucial but still important rules that should govern civic life. In fact, on this point the Gospel adds nothing of substance to what can be discovered with natural reason (*Or*. 23). Both give the same advice as to how to behave well, and how the community can be peaceful and prosperous.

Nor is this all that philosophy can do for us. Just as Aristotle and other pagans were able to use natural reason to discern the correct rules of civic life, so they used reason to discover quite a lot about nature itself. Luther had been deeply skeptical about Aristotelian natural philosophy, remarking, "I dare say that any potter has more knowledge of nature than is written in these books."[10] Melanchthon agreed that many Aristotelian concepts were pointless. He dismissed the distinction between form and matter, for

instance, hardly a minor point (especially since, as we'll be seeing in later chapters, accepting the form-matter analysis of substance is something of a litmus test for real commitment to Aristotelianism in this period). But he admired Aristotle's drive to establish rock solid demonstrations in science and said that this lifted Aristotelian philosophy above its ancient rivals (*Or*. 25, 141). Philosophy is indeed distinguished by its focus on what can be demonstrated, and the best philosophy is that which "departs least from proofs."[11] Taking his cue from this, Melanchthon chose to pursue natural science but follow authors who had improved on Aristotle. One such author was Galen, the great medical authority of antiquity; another was Vesalius, the Renaissance anatomist. Drawing on their works, Melanchthon produced a study of the human soul which diverged from Aristotle by talking much more about the human body (*Or*. 155). Learning in detail about the workings of human organs makes us more appreciative of God's wisdom and providence, which is why Galen himself had called anatomy the "beginning of theology."[12] Something similar could be said for astronomy and even astrology, since the motions of the stars are an impressive sign of divine purpose. Melanchthon was convinced that astrology is a legitimate science, and he saw it as simply another branch of natural science (*Or*. 121–22).[13]

Melanchthon was, then, a theologian who made plenty of room for philosophy in the course of study he offered at Wittenberg. But he was still a theologian. In this sphere, he used the same teaching techniques on display in his linguistic and philosophical writings. The "topics" approach is clear even from the title of his treatise *Loci communes rerum theologicarum*, that is, *Common Places of Theological Matters*, which appeared in 1521 and later in numerous revised versions.[14] This is his most important contribution to explaining Lutheran doctrine, praised extravagantly by Luther himself: "next to Holy Scripture, there is no better book" (*CP* 17). As the title promises, it again uses the "topics" structure, thus making good on advice given by Erasmus to "organize for yourself collections of theological topics" which may serve as "little nests in which you place the fruit of your reading" (*CP* 12). Each major section concludes by itemizing the main points Melanchthon has tried to establish. These can be taken both as lists of things the student reader needs to understand and as summaries of Lutheran doctrine.

The *Common Places* begins with that point of agreement between humanism and reform: the inadequacies of scholastic philosophy. What Melanchthon calls their "theological hallucinations" are based more on Aristotle than on Christ. "One does not know whether it is more godless than it is stupid" (*CP* 19–20). They delve into deep mysteries of the faith that would be better left unexplored, like the workings of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Even worse, they err on other points that *every* Christian needs to understand, among them the Lutheran doctrine on sin and grace (*CP* 21). Melanchthon unhesitatingly parts ways with the church fathers on this point.[15] The early theologians of the church found Scripture's teaching too "cruel," because it makes human will incapable of goodness. So they let themselves be led astray by philosophy, giving a commanding role in moral life to human reason and will. Instead we must accept that all things are predestined by God and "take place by necessity" (*CP* 24–25).

So far, so Lutheran. But as Melanchthon goes on, he lays out very clearly an idea that we saw Luther suggesting only tentatively, if at all: that external human actions *are* subject to our will, but are not morally significant. I have the power to choose between an almond croissant and a piece of apple cake, but I don't have the power to reject wickedness and embrace righteousness. Melanchthon gives similar examples. We are free to perform outward actions, like to "greet a man or not, put on a coat or not, eat meat or not." But this is irrelevant to the question of grace and sin, because these have to do with "the inner disposition of the heart," which cannot be controlled by will (*CP* 27). As Melanchthon sees it, the problem with both the ancient philosophers and the scholastics who have been in their sway is that they always thought about morality in terms of the deeds one performs. But, he asks, "what place do external acts have in Christian teaching if the heart is insincere?" (*CP* 29). And our internal dispositions are not under our control, the way that our actions are.

To some extent, Melanchthon's argument here is just common sense. It is surely true that inner disposition can be at variance with outer action. I might forego that piece of apple cake, despite wanting badly to eat it, or be friendly to someone I despise. It's also plausible that we can't just will to feel differently on the inside. Melanchthon calls the inner disposition an *affectus*, which means something close to "emotion" but could also cover things like desire for cake. Clearly, you can't change your emotions and

desires just by deciding to do so, like by simply willing to transform hatred of that sworn enemy to a warm, affectionate feeling overnight.

But there are a couple of problems here. First, it simply isn't true that this phenomenon escaped the attention of ancient philosophers or their later interpreters. Melanchthon says that whereas "philosophy looks at nothing except the external masks of men, the Holy Scriptures look at the deepest, incomprehensible affections" (*CP* 35). But in fact, Aristotle made a point of distinguishing between genuine virtue, which involves doing good out of a strong inner preference for doing good, and mere "strength of will" or "self-control" (*enkrateia*), where we do good despite wanting to act differently. Second, Melanchthon needs not just to distinguish between the inner "affection" and the outer action, but to insist that without God's help, *all* good outer actions are insincere. Here of course he is simply echoing Luther's stance: justification by faith, not works. Self-interested and sinful as we are, even our most apparently admirable deeds are in fact done for selfish motives, and so are worthless. Truly good works always stem from faith in God and the grace He has offered to the faithful (*CP* 105).

As we know, Melanchthon was an expert rhetorician. How then might he persuade us of this bleak view of fallen human nature? In part just by telling us to be honest with ourselves about our own inner lives. How often are we truly selfless in our motivations, driven by nothing but love of God and our neighbors? He could also connect his teaching here to the exploration of human nature in his work on the soul. As already mentioned, that treatise includes a lot of material on medicine. In fact, Melanchthon revised later versions so that they included even more anatomy. As this shows, he understood human nature in very physical terms, which goes perfectly with the Lutheran idea that humans are inevitably prone to sin, since our souls are under the influence of bodily desire.[16] As Melanchthon puts it, human reason is "fleshly" and is beset by ignorance (*CP* 132). By contrast, more Platonist thinkers of the Renaissance, and also some potential allies of the Reformation like Erasmus, saw humans as independent, immaterial spirits with only a loose connection to bodies. That sort of view could suggest that, even in a state of sin, humans do retain a natural power to dominate their lower desires and be good.

Melanchthon, no less than Luther, wanted to deny that we have such a power. On the other hand, no less than Erasmus, he wanted to avoid depriving humans of all agency in their moral lives. After all, sinners do

bear responsibility for their failings. Melanchthon's position on this matter seems to have evolved to some extent, as he became aware of the threat of determinism within the reform movement. He was alarmed by the teachings of John Calvin, whom he called "Zeno," an allusion to the founder of the ancient Stoic school, which was notoriously determinist.[17] Melanchthon was concerned that if God is admitted to cause everything, leaving no place for human agency, then God and not humans will be blameworthy for all evils that are committed. To avoid this he added a line in a revision of his theological treatise: "God is not the cause of sin, nor is sin something which was created or ordained by God." Luther would have been happy with this remark, but more nervous when Melanchthon speculated that there must be some factor within the human that decides whether that person becomes a sinner or receives grace. It would, he said, be "much too crude (*viel zu grobe*)" to hold that the human will does nothing at all.[18] This is dangerously close to the position Luther always wanted to reject: that the human and God have to cooperate in achieving a state of justification.[19]

As you may have noticed, there's a pattern developing here. Even as he relentlessly supported the reform theological agenda, Melanchthon tended to take up fairly "moderate" positions, where others were taking Luther's ideas in a more radical direction. Indeed, for Melanchthon, being extremely committed to Lutheranism meant avoiding extremism. Thus he agreed with Luther that philosophy has nothing to say about the most important matters of all, yet spent a lot of his time exploring what philosophy has to say about other matters. Similarly he agreed with Luther that sin is overcome by faith alone, and that no one should fret about whether they have in fact received grace and justification, since such worries themselves manifest a lack of faith (*CP* 99, 113–14). Yet he also tried to find a role for human reason and will in the scheme of redemption. In Melanchthon's philosophy, nature is given its due, without being able to do everything.

We can see another example of this by returning to the question of the moral law. As I said, Melanchthon thought that natural reason can discern the guidelines that should govern both ethical and political life. In the terms of his theological treatise, this means that philosophy can explain which external actions are to be performed (*CP* 47), but it cannot help us to reform the interior "affections." Melanchthon adopts a long-standing bit of terminology here, used famously by such bugbears of the reformers as

Thomas Aquinas. He talks about "natural law."[20] The natural law is simply the law as we can discern it using our power of reason, so it is to be distinguished from the revealed law which we know about only from Scripture (see Chapter 66 below). Now, the natural law only applies to external actions, which as we know are rendered hypocritical by our sinful inner dispositions. But that does not mean the natural law is unimportant. On the contrary, it turns out to be central to Melanchthon's political philosophy.

We can best understand this by considering the position that he sets out to reject.[21] Beginning with William of Ockham back in the fourteenth century, quite a few political thinkers had come to think that legitimate political authority can only come from the consent of the governed. Still in the time of Melanchthon, Ockhamite thinkers like John Mair (on whom see Chapter 49) were arguing that by nature we are free. Thus we rightly fall under the power of someone else only if we agree to do so. This applies both in secular life, where the ruler should be selected by the people, and in religious life, where the Pope's position depends on the support of the clergy. Melanchthon disagrees with all this. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*, he observes that the natural law places some people under the authority of others all the time, as the child is subject to the father. Of course institutions *can* be set up by the consent of the governed, but this is not the only way to do it. He says, "princes also rule the unwilling by right, and rightfully hold authority (*imperium*) not merely by the consent of the people but also through legitimate war, legitimate succession, etc."[22] In keeping with this, Melanchthon disapproves of insurrections against rulers, even if they are tyrannical. Nonetheless, he thinks that the ruler is constrained in the exercise of power—by the natural law, of course, since that constrains all of us, and also by the particular laws of each nation, since the ruler falls under these laws just as much as the rest of the populace.

Thus far Melanchthon's approach to politics is "secular," in the sense that civic life and its laws are set by nature and the natural power of reason. Everything just explained would apply equally well to non-Christian peoples, though Christians have an extra reason not to do violence against unjust rulers, namely that Scripture tells them to turn the other cheek. Here Melanchthon is as so often echoing Luther, who also took a rather secular approach to political life (we'll see more on this in the next chapter). Luther distinguished between the political duties and the religious duties of the

ruler, and said that as far as religion is concerned, the ruler is just like anyone else. But as he also often does, Melanchthon departs subtly from Luther on this issue.[23] He recognizes that rulers of Christian communities have an additional set of powers and duties, which would not belong to rulers of other communities. Since a Christian people has salvation as its ultimate end, the ruler must see that this end is pursued. Thus he has wide latitude to punish heresy and blasphemy, support the teaching of the Gospel, and more generally establish religion. As Melanchthon puts it, "princes and magistrates must abolish ungodly worship and see to it that true doctrine is taught and that godly ceremonies are established in the churches."[24]

Yet again, Melanchthon is motivated here by the need to avoid extremism. Just as he was troubled by the determinism of Protestants like Calvin, he was troubled by the civic unrest caused by radical reformers such as the Anabaptists. His distaste for these radicals comes out even in his orations about philosophical education, as when he says that the more revolutionary groups within the reform movement would never have emerged if their leaders were not so unschooled in grammar and dialectic (*Or*. 130, 137, 185).[25] (Notice that he's saying here to the Anabaptists just what the Catholics were saying to the Lutherans!) Whether in theology or in politics, Luther and Melanchthon sought to contain the forces they had unleashed, maintaining the peace while reforming Christian belief to bring it in line with their understanding of Scripture. As we'll see next, the biggest threat to that ambition was the one memorably identified by the British politician Harold Macmillan: "events, dear boy, events."[26]

# 11

# NO LORD BUT GOD

## *The Peasants' War and Radical Reformation*

Given Martin Luther's political ideas, it's rather ironic that he was the namesake of Martin Luther King Jr. Whereas King committed his life to resisting oppression and seeking racial and social equality, the original Luther was apoplectic with disapproval when an uprising against oppression and inequality arose in his own time, even though—or more likely, precisely because—his own teachings had helped to inspire it. In 1525, peasants staged a revolt against church and secular authorities, initially along the Rhine and in Swabia, and spreading from there across southern Germany and parts of modern-day Switzerland and Austria.[1] Luther responded by denouncing the uprising with violent rhetoric. When he was criticized for this he doubled down: "rebels are not worth rational arguments, for they do not accept them. You have to answer people like that with a fist, until the sweat drops off their noses. The peasants would not listen; they would not let anyone tell them anything, so their ears must now be unbuttoned with musket balls till their heads jump off their shoulders."[2]

We should not be too quick to suggest a posthumous renaming of Martin Luther King Jr, though. There is actually a distant parallel between Luther's ideas and the pacifist tactics King employed in the Civil Rights struggle. Before we get to that, we need to learn more about the so-called "Peasants' War," its connection to the Reformation, and Luther's political views, which evolved in response to this quite literally revolutionary event. It did

not come out of nowhere. After a period of improvement in peasant conditions following on the Black Death, which gave survivors more bargaining power and more access to land, the fifteenth century saw an increase in the overall population. This shifted the balance of power back to landowners, who gradually increased rents and kept serfs, especially, under tight control.[3] Chafing under this treatment the peasants, who of course constituted the vast majority of people in Germany and right across Europe, staged intermittent revolts. They would continue to do so after 1525, too: it's been reckoned that there were sixty-six such events between the Peasants' War and the French Revolution.[4]

Yet 1525 was unparalleled in scope. The war involved as many as three hundred thousand people and led to one hundred thousand deaths. The horrific violence would have been uppermost in the mind of Luther and others who deplored the revolt. Yet things had begun more peacefully, as local "communes" submitted lists of grievances and demands to their local authorities. They wanted changes to the social and economic order, such as an abolition of serfdom, permission to hunt and fish on common lands, and most ambitiously, a say in the appointment of authorities both secular and clerical.[5] At this stage the situation was more labor strike than revolution. But things escalated quickly to the point that there were pitched battles between peasant armies and the nobility. Though the latter were vastly outnumbered, they were also vastly better armed and better trained, and within just weeks the uprising was put down, with huge loss of life.

From our modern point of view, it's hard not to think that this was a case where the bad guys won. Reformation-era governments had little in common with the states we know today, and from the peasants' point of view might have seemed more like organized crime syndicates. Like mobsters, the lords extorted payments from their subjects in return for "protection," meaning protection from themselves and other nobles like themselves: "nice hovel! Be a shame if anything happened to it." Making matters worse, there was a parallel hierarchical government in the form of the church. They collected payments too, though these were called "tithes." The tithes were material in nature, yet had to be surrendered in return for services that were entirely spiritual, like the performance of the sacraments and of course regular reminders that the violent thugs who called themselves "nobles" had been chosen by God to enjoy their lofty status.

Then came Luther with his Reformation. As we know, he restated long-standing grievances about the worldliness, wealth, and hypocrisy of the church. But he went further by undercutting the whole need for a church. If all believers are priests, why should only some priests receive taxes (sorry: "tithes")? No wonder that throughout the uprising, monasteries and churches were frequently raided and sacked. And there was a deeper way in which Lutheranism provided a rationale for revolt. The reformers never tired of issuing their own demand, that Christian rituals and beliefs should be grounded in Scripture alone. If you can't find a Biblical passage in favor of something, then it is at best optional, at worst a blasphemous distortion of God's plans for humankind. Where exactly does Scripture say that nobles can treat peasants like slaves, or prevent them from fishing in common ponds? On the contrary, the book of Genesis expressly says that animals are put at the disposal of all humans, in a way that humans are never put at the disposal of other humans.

The peasants' agenda for social and economic reform explicitly echoed this methodological constraint of the religious reformers.[6] A list of principles issued in Mühlhausen said that "judgments should be made according to the [standard of] justice in the Bible," later adding, "every work and action should be measured by God's commandments and justice, and so tested: are they harmful to God and the people?" (228, 230). The peasants realized that pursuing this policy would lead to conflict, and said in effect, so be it: "we would much rather have God as a friend and people as enemies than have God as an enemy and people as friends" (230). Similarly the *Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian Peasants* emphasized that tithes should be paid strictly in line with Scriptural requirements. Though they did not go so far as to reject all social hierarchy, they accepted it only with a major caveat: "we should gladly be obedient to our elected and established authorities, *if* established for us by God" (234). At Schaffenhausen on the Rhine, rebels put the point more boldly still: "we have no lord but God."

Another aspect of the ideology driving the peasants' revolt can be connected to humanism. Close study of ancient literature had confronted the late medieval world with the admirable achievements of republican Rome. Republicanism, modeled on the example of Rome, would be a factor in later political upheavals like the French Revolution and American Revolution. But it was already in the air in the early sixteenth century. The

Peasants' War occurred a scant decade after Machiavelli was writing his *Discourses* based on the Roman historian Livy and expounding on his theories of republican government.[7] This is not to say that the many thousands of rebellious peasants were paging through Cicero or Livy in their spare time. But we can see the influence of these ideas in justifications of the revolt. The anonymous author of a letter encouraging the peasant uprising goes on at length about the fact that Rome was more prosperous as a republic than when under tyrannical, imperial rule. It also links this fact to the religious preoccupations of the Reformation: "hereditary and powerful lordship commonly turns into true idolatry" (114–15).

The peasants of Germany weren't the only ones taking inspiration from Luther in ways he found distasteful. There were also the preachers of Germany. I've mentioned already that in Luther's own city of Wittenberg, the program of reform was pushed forward by Andreas von Karlstadt, and in Luther's opinion pushed too quickly. Karlstadt, one of the few men in Europe who thought Luther was too moderate, was chased from the city. He did not take the defeat lying down, composing a treatise called *Whether One Should Proceed Slowly*, whose content can be summarized as: "no, one shouldn't." As far as Karlstadt was concerned, Luther had no grounds to be solicitous toward those who would be alarmed by a program of speedy reform. If one knows that it is wrong to, say, venerate images of saints in churches, one should put a stop to it immediately. If this is unpopular, well then, the fact that the majority of people accept something does not make it any more right, "even if the whole world hesitates and does not want to follow." After all, "may one steal until the thieves stop stealing?" (52). He makes a nice distinction here that is applicable more widely in moral philosophy. Some commandments are operative at all times, and can therefore never be violated: for instance, it's never acceptable to commit murder or adultery (62). Other obligations are context-sensitive. You have no duty to take care of offspring if you have no children. For Karlstadt the core policies of Lutheranism were of the first kind, and should therefore be instituted right away rather than waiting for the time and situation to be right.

The point was echoed by Konrad Grebel, who was a thorn in the side of the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli, much as Karlstadt was a problem for Luther. Grebel encouraged the leading reformers to "stop sparing the weak" by going slow with the pace of change or recognizing the validity of long-

standing traditions (45). Church services should not involve singing, for the usual reason: it is not foreseen in Scripture. More momentously, Grebel rejected the practice of infant baptism. This was on the basis of the good Lutheran premise that works are useless without faith. Since a baby can't resolve to embrace God and righteousness, and thus cannot yet have faith, it is pointless to baptize the baby (43, 162). Or actually, worse than pointless. Grebel called infant baptism "a senseless, blasphemous abomination, contrary to all Scripture" (44). He and like-minded reformers came to be called "Anabaptists," because they wanted to *re*-baptize adults (though in their eyes this would of course be a first valid baptism). The ritual would be only an outward symbol of the really important purification, the "inner baptism" that is, in the words of the Anabaptist Hans Hut, the "struggle to kill sin throughout one's whole life" (168).

The project of Anabaptists and other so-called "radical reformers" was comparable to that of the peasants, and not just because of their irreverence and insistence on immediate action. The radicals expressed sympathy for the less prosperous, idealizing them as true Christians laboring under the oppression of wicked priests and nobles (154).[8] They sought to reform not only religious practice but society as a whole, envisioning villages where all lived in pious simplicity and shared all things. "People will eat from one pot, drink from one vessel," as one radical author, possibly Hans Hergot, wrote around the time of the Peasants' War (211). When the Anabaptists managed briefly to take control of the city of Münster before being defeated after a siege in 1534, they introduced communist policies. So the radical reformers were part of a trend toward utopian thinking in this period, even if the staunchly Catholic Thomas More would certainly not appreciate being lumped in with them.

In a short-term expression of their long-term utopian goals, Anabaptists and other radicals embraced a form of separatism, rejecting the norms of even reformed cities like Wittenberg and Zurich. As one author put it, "we simply will not have fellowship with evil people, nor associate with them, nor participate with them in their abominations" (175). This could involve refusal to pay tithes and other taxes, perform military service, accept government offices, and even to take oaths (179). Konrad Grebel argued in favor of this sort of exceptionalism. Better to be one of the few who worship and believe correctly than the many who still follow a form of religion "adulterated" with falsehood (40–41). Admittedly, it may seem

strange to connect the massive uprising of the Peasants' War to the formation of small groups of pacifist religious purists. But we might think of the radical reformers as reacting to the disappointment of 1525 by lowering their sights. When the swords of the nobility and the pen of Luther were turned against them, and they saw that European society would not be made over to follow what they considered to be God's will, they settled for reforming their own lives.[9]

No figure unites the radical Reformation and the peasant uprising better than Thomas Müntzer.[10] He began by trying to persuade the secular powers to use the "sword" of civil authority to impose true religion from above (28). When this did not happen, at least not to his satisfaction, he cheered on the peasant revolt. He complained that "it is the greatest monstrosity on earth that no one wants to defend the plight of the needy" (80) and warned rulers of the violence that would rise up against them if they did not reduce "their rents and extortions" (88). Luther considered Müntzer to be a "prophet of murder," and Müntzer returned the favor. He excoriated the more famous reformer as "Doctor Liar" (a pun: *Doktor Lügner* instead of *Doktor Luther*). Müntzer blamed him for throwing in his lot with the upper classes and for welcoming the execution of the peasants (81). In the end Müntzer was disappointed in the uprising, which focused on economic concerns rather than religious ones. As he put it, "everyone sought his own profit rather than the justification of Christendom."[11] He died in the fighting at Frankenhausen, among the victims of the decisive defeat of the peasants in May 1525.

Müntzer's diatribes against Luther return us to the question of why Luther was not prepared to support the peasants' revolt, despite the fact that he supported at least some of their goals, for instance permission to elect their own pastors. One answer, which is rather cynical but surely at least partially true, would be that it was a matter of tactics. Luther did not want his movement to be associated with violent insurrection and chaos. He clung to the same hope initially expressed by Müntzer, that secular authorities would be strong allies against the papacy. This was not going to happen if the Reformation involved dismantling the whole structure of society. And Luther's strategy proved successful. After his condemnation and excommunication he received protection in Saxony from Frederick the Wise, and Frederick's successor John officially embraced Lutheranism. The reward for moderation was the spread of what is sometimes called a

"magisterial" reformation, imposed from above by princely lances, not from below at the end of an angry farmer's pitchfork.[12]

Another way to look at this is that non-radical reform prevailed over radical reform because the secular authorities could live with it. Indeed, they could profit from it handsomely. Until the sixteenth century the nobility were forced to compete with that parallel government that was the church. Popes and bishops could have vast estates and command armies, so they were the natural rivals of kings and secular lords. The toppling of the religious quasi-state left the secular state as the sole, unchallenged authority and repository of riches. As Quentin Skinner has remarked, noble sponsors of the Reformation from Frederick and John in Saxony, to Henry VIII in England, to Gustav Vasa in Sweden, "were largely unconcerned with the doctrines of the Reformation, except for their obvious value as ideological weapons in their struggles to control the wealth and power of the Church."[13] By contrast, these figures were never going to embrace a version of the Reformation in which part of what was to be reformed was the social order that gave them their exalted positions.

But Luther did also have a more principled reason for leaving that social order in place. A treatise of his from 1523 deals with the question of how far one should obey secular power. Even posing that question sounds daring, if not subversive, but this is no manifesto for insurrection. Luther makes a central distinction between worldly affairs and affairs of faith, calling these two separate "kingdoms."[14] Secular authorities have no authority whatsoever in what we might call matters of conscience. They shouldn't try to enforce adherence to any particular set of religious beliefs, if only because this is simply not possible. As Luther puts it, "every man runs his own risk in believing as he does, and he must see to it himself that he believes rightly," because "faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced."[15] When it comes to the external world, though, good Christians ought to be obedient subjects of their rulers pretty much no matter what those rulers do or say.

Ideally, the rulers oversee peace and worldly justice in their realms. This actually has little effect on the true Christian, who naturally performs good works as an automatic result of faith. Requiring these Christians to act morally would, says Luther, be like legislating that apple trees produce apples. But most people are not good Christians, and it is good for the

wicked to be restrained by the rulers, so the Christians should not interfere with this by being insubordinate. What about cases where the ruler is not good, something Luther in fact expects to be pretty common? Here he concedes that no one should perform an evil act if they are commanded to do so. But he forbids active resistance, even against tyrannical princes. Wicked authorities are sent by God as a punishment for sins, so their outrages "are not to be resisted, but endured."[16] This is what I had in mind when I said that there is after all some basis to compare Martin Luther King Jr with his namesake. The original Luther might have admired the strategy of non-violent "resistance," precisely because of its non-violence. He thought that the most a Christian may do to defy a secular ruler is to refuse to cooperate. Obviously this rules out things like, say, armed peasant uprisings.

On the other hand Luther might not have admired King's approach, because non-violent political resistance is indeed resistance, and is political. In this same treatise Luther does express dismay at lords who exploit peasants. But ultimately, he thinks that energy spent in remedying earthly injustice is a waste of time, given that one could be looking to the far more important matter of heavenly salvation. Thus in his first reflection on the tensions between the nobles and peasants he is even-handed: he once again laments lordly oppression, then encourages the peasants to bear that oppression with patience. While he is sympathetic to the poor, he really thinks that both the nobles and the malcontent peasants are far too interested in material goods, like land ownership and fishing rights, and not interested enough in spiritual goods.[17] Once the peasants actually tried to do something about the way they were mistreated, Luther was accordingly unsparing in his condemnation of their actions. From his point of view all of political and social life is, relatively speaking, an irrelevant sideshow. The objective of human governance is simply to keep things peaceful and stable enough that the vast majority of people who are not faithful Christians, but are in thrall to sin, don't go around expressing their worst urges.

How, given this attitude, could Luther ever have encouraged sympathetic rulers to support his Reformation? He ought to say, you would think, that such matters of faith are none of their affair. Here he makes another, more subtle, distinction (you can tell he was trained by scholastics, even if he didn't like them). Secular authorities are, by virtue of their office, involved

in the "worldly kingdom" and have to deal with such trivialities as civic laws, the economic welfare of the people, and warfare. But if these same rulers are also Christians then they belong to the other kingdom too, and with this in mind, they will seek to promote true religion. As he wrote some years later, "a prince can indeed be a Christian, but it is not as a Christian that he must rule…the office has nothing to do with his Christianity."[18] Thus for example a king might call a church council, not by virtue of his royal status, but as a Christian who just happens to be so powerful that if he makes this announcement everyone will take it seriously.[19]

Furthermore, many things that we would nowadays take to be a matter of private religious conviction were, for Luther, matters of public concern and thus subject to governmental oversight. Thus the Christian ruler may punish heresy or blasphemy as soon as it reaches the ears of other people. The ruler cannot force people like the radical reformers to give up their false beliefs, but they can and should stop the radicals from expressing or promoting those beliefs. Luther even attacked Müntzer and the Anabaptists for teaching in private homes. As soon as you open your mouth you may affect the beliefs of your fellow citizens, so you are subject to repression by the Lutheran state. If there are no thought police, this is only because thought itself cannot *be* policed. Clearly then, Luther was very far from defending anything like a separation of church and state, religious pluralism, or freedom of religious expression. Yet just as clearly, his writings sowed the seeds for those developments, by distinguishing the worldly kingdom from the kingdom of faith and admitting that faith is up to the believer. Contemporary thinkers were beginning to embrace the more radical implications, as when the Anabaptists opted out of their political and social duties on religious grounds, or when the Nürnberg humanist Georg Frölich argued that it should be possible for groups of different religious convictions to live together in a harmonious political union.[20]

So as with the Peasants' War, when it came to freedom of thought, speech, and religion, Luther had to work hard to block the implications of his own ideas. This pattern will be repeated as we turn to other leading reformers. They asserted the "freedom of a Christian," to quote the title of one of Luther's treatises, and sought autonomy from the established church and any ruler who supported it. But once individuals and groups started asserting autonomy, things threatened to spin out of control, which the leading reformers could not accept, for both pragmatic and ideological

reasons. Thus we'll see John Calvin offering teachings that plenty of his contemporaries found heretical, while giving his blessing to the burning of a heretic. First, though, we'll be meeting Huldrych Zwingli, who agreed with Luther that faith cannot be compelled by violence (*der Glaub liess sich nicht mit Gewalt eingehen*).[21] Yet he was far from willing to just let other Christians, including other reformers, believe whatever they wanted. Both Anabaptists and Luther himself would find themselves the target of his refutations, adding to our sense that we are not talking about the Reformation here, but about numerous reformations.

# 12

# SLOWLY BUT SURELY

## *Huldrych Zwingli*

One of the questions we've been following so far is whether humanism can be credited with, or blamed for, inspiring the Protestant Reformation. The relevance of humanism for early Lutheranism seems undeniable, especially when you look past Luther himself to the work of a man like Melanchthon. But any lingering doubts can be put to rest by following the example of the von Trapp family in the *Sound of Music* and going over the Alps into Switzerland. Here the Reformation had a second emergence, with the city of Zurich as its main stage, not unlike Wittenberg in Germany. Playing the central role upon that stage was Huldrych Zwingli, a preacher and theologian who agreed with Luther about many things but disagreed with him violently about one thing in particular. We'll get to that in due course. First though we should recognize that a common inspiration for both the Lutherans and Zwingli was that man Erasmus.

Zwingli was, like Melanchthon, a committed humanist.[1] Trained at Vienna and Berne, he became proficient in ancient Greek and Hebrew in order to study the Bible. His private book collection included many works by Erasmus and other authors important for the humanist movement, like Pico della Mirandola. If Pico's example inspired Zwingli to go further in the study of Hebrew than Erasmus had done, Zwingli's unrelenting study of the Bible in its original language was deeply Erasmian. Like Luther, he made Scripture the sole source of authority in religion. Never mind what the Pope

says; never mind the traditions that had evolved over many generations of Christianity; never mind, even, the doctrines of the late ancient church fathers. All that mattered was the clear message taught by Scripture. Zwingli would judge all religious matters by this standard. On this basis, he led his followers out of the trap laid by Catholic theology, saying "so long, farewell" to a few of the papacy's favorite things, including the worship of saints, the use of images in church, clerical celibacy, fasting during lent, and most decisively, the Catholic Mass.

Actually it might be more accurate, if somewhat paradoxical, to say that Zwingli did not lead his followers, but followed them. He discouraged fellow reformers in Zurich from acting too quickly: "we achieve our ends by going slow."[2] Slowly but surely, though, he was drawn into a total breach with the Roman Church. A famous early step was taken, appropriately enough given the central role of the printing press in this period, in the home of the printer Christopher Froschauer. He hosted a dinner at which sausages were eaten, in violation of the laws for fasting during Lent. Zwingli was in attendance, and rather typically, he didn't eat the meat himself but evidently gave his tacit approval. As always the rationale was to look to Scripture for guidance. Since it doesn't ban the eating of meat in Lent, there should be no ban. This was only a humanly devised, and thus optional, custom. As Zwingli commented, "If you desire to fast, do it. If you do not want to eat flesh, don't eat it. But in this, leave me, the Christian man, free."[3]

He took a similar stance on the question of images. On the one hand he supported the execution of a man who took a knife to an image of Christ, since the man in question acted alone and for the sake of provocation. On the other hand, just a few years later he oversaw the removal of imagery from the churches of Zurich. He instructed that this be done in a calm and temperate fashion, without mobs smashing pictures and statues, and even invited the sponsors of the artworks to take them home safely. This aspect of the Reformation recalls the iconoclast movement in eighth-century Byzantium.[4] But the Swiss iconoclasts' motivation only partially overlapped with that of their Greek predecessors. Both groups did worry that the veneration of images constituted idolatry. But in Byzantium there was no principle of "Scripture alone," whereas it was at the core of Zwingli's movement. This was to be a stripped down version of Christianity, purified of everything that was not explicitly stated the Bible.

This sounds uncompromising, and in a sense it was. Zwingli was adamant that good Christians should resist the Catholic Church, or anyone else, who tried to enforce religious authority without a sound basis in Scripture. But like Luther and Melanchthon he left ample space for *civic* authority. He asserted that "the Christian man is nothing else than the faithful and good citizen,"[5] and worked closely with the council of Zurich to oversee the pace and measures of reform. A good example of his policies here would be the practice of tithing to the church. When extremist reformers started refusing to pay tithes in 1522 and 1523, Zwingli conceded to them that there is no basis for the practice in Scripture, but told them to pay up anyway because the civic magistrates were empowered to demand this form of taxation. Earthly authorities should be respected; though merely "human righteousness is a poor righteousness, one is as needful of it as eating."[6] In a short treatise laying out the principles of religion as he understood it, he agreed with Luther and Melanchthon that even tyrannical powers should be obeyed patiently, while one waits for God to change the situation (267).[7] Zwingli wavered on this point, though, sometimes suggesting that tyrants could be removed by force, though his preference was clearly that injustice should be confronted without violence.

As with Luther, Zwingli's respect for secular power and distaste for hastiness in reform were in part a matter of pragmatism. Zwingli was a politician as much as a preacher and saw the cause of reform in Switzerland as being closely linked to the political welfare of the Swiss cities. Early in his career he served as a field chaplain with a Swiss army, and throughout his life he championed Swiss autonomy. Zurich was a formidable military power in his life, which was really the only reason that the reform movement was able to survive there. It wasn't enough to help Zwingli himself survive: he died in a battle against Swiss Catholics in 1531. But while he lived, he was relentless in arguing for policies that would maintain Zurich's strength, in particular by criticizing the practice of hiring out soldiers as mercenaries—perhaps the only point of agreement between Zwingli and his older contemporary Machiavelli, apart from disdain for the papacy.

In Switzerland there seemed to be a chance to forge national unity between the various city states, which would have been inconceivable in Machiavelli's Italy. Zwingli knew that the long-term viability of his movement would require cooperation between the city states of

Switzerland, something partially secured in 1528 when Berne agreed to follow the lead of Zurich by embracing evangelical Christianity. So it's been aptly remarked that for Zwingli "patriotism and true religion had become synonymous."[8] This was another example of his humanist leanings. You may recall Erasmus' sense of connection to the Low Countries, and in Germany humanists like Jakob Wimpfeling demonstrated their own patriotism by producing histories of the German people. The "Zurich Bible," a version by Zwingli based partially on Luther's translation and printed by the sausage-loving printer Froschauer, epitomizes the cultural moment. Between two covers, it brought together three central themes: humanist scholarship, the accessibility of Scripture to all Christians in a vernacular language, and the national feeling bound up with that language.

For the Catholics, though, Zwingli's Evangelism was not a distinctively Swiss phenomenon. They perceived it as the same heresy as Lutheranism, albeit in a different dialect of German. And you can see why. When Catholic apologists like Jerome Emser and Johannes Eck tried to meet Zwingli with arguments, they found themselves stymied by the principle that matters of religion should be settled by recourse to nothing but clear statements of Scripture, the same rule always imposed by Luther. When a disputation in Zurich in 1522 laid this down as a ground rule for debate, it effectively predetermined victory for the reformers in advance. (A 1528 disputation in Berne was just as much a foregone conclusion, but in favor of the Catholics.) Yet Zwingli stoutly rejected the label of "Lutheran." While expressing great respect for his fellow reformer—he said, "I value Luther as highly as anyone alive"—he also claimed, "I have read little of his teaching," and took pride in following no contemporary teacher, only Christ.[9]

Zwingli was so optimistic about resolving religious matters by consulting the Bible that he wrote a whole treatise on the topic. He certainly admitted that God's revealed message could be misunderstood. Indeed, on some topics he thought that the whole church tradition had been in error for many centuries. But "truth is not necessarily with the majority" (87), and given the abundant clarity of the holy text, misconstrual of its meaning is always the fault of the interpreter. Most often, says Zwingli, this happens because readers bring preconceived notions to their reading. The paradigmatic example would be the scholastic theologians, who were corrupted by having studied so much philosophy (89). This training led

them to build their interpretations on Aristotelian distinctions and concepts, seeking a perfect marriage of pagan discoveries and revealed truth, as figures like Aquinas had done. For Zwingli this is completely wrong-headed. If you want to understand God's message, just pray to Him for guidance and then read the text with open eyes.

Given the long and torturous history of debates over Scriptural hermeneutics, this attitude looks naive, even cavalier. Zwingli's position is a bit more nuanced than it sounds, though, because he admits—indeed insists—that many passages need to be read figuratively, for instance when God is described in the Bible as if He had a body (60). We should appeal to Scripture itself for guidance, not to any human authority: one passage may tell us how to understand another. And Zwingli had one more card to play here, namely his skill in Greek and Hebrew. This was a rare enough attainment that he could, as it were, pull scholarly rank in the middle of any dispute, by laying down on his own authority what the original version of the text actually said. The reformers knew that this sort of humanist training was a valuable weapon in religious debate, which is why Zwingli's immediate successor in Zurich, Theodore Bibliander, promoted the study of Hebrew along the lines so enthusiastically proposed in Italy by Pico della Mirandola.[10]

But as Zwingli was to discover, unanimity could not be established just by pointing at the Bible and bragging about your Greek. Upholders of the "Scripture alone" interpretative approach could still disagree with one another. One such disagreement was bred within the ranks of Zwingli's own followers. The troublemakers who rejected tithes and pushed for more radical iconoclasm came to think that Christians should be baptized only once they were old enough to embrace faith in God. Confronted with these "Anabaptists," Zwingli was in a difficult position, because like Luther, he admitted that outer works could be efficacious only when they stem from inner faith (269). Anabaptism was premised on principles he himself endorsed. But for precisely this reason, he was fiercely opposed to them. As he frankly commented, "there are still some who ascribe their heresies to us. For that reason we are their most bitter enemies" (276). On Zwingli's analysis the Anabaptists were in fact giving too *much* power to outer works: being baptized cannot cleanse us of sin but is only a "sign" that a person is pledged to the Christian faith. This, he insisted, is the meaning of the word "sacrament": a sign or symbol, and nothing more (131, 188).[11]

The same idea lies at the core of a still more momentous disagreement, namely the dispute between Zwingli and Luther over the sacrament of the Eucharist. This crucial ceremony of Christian practice, in which bread and wine are designated as Christ's body and blood, had long been an occasion for applying philosophical ideas to theology.[12] Notwithstanding their own protestations to the contrary, this holds true of the debate between Zwingli and Luther. They agreed in rejecting the Catholic account of the Eucharist, which had been upheld by Aquinas: the bread and wine are literally changed in their substance to become flesh and blood, hence the term "transubstantiation." The communion wafer still looks and tastes like bread, but that's because the accidental properties of the bread have remained while the substance is transformed. By now you should already be able to guess on what grounds the Protestants disagreed with this analysis: there was no basis for it in Scripture.[13]

Instead, Luther taught the doctrine called "consubstantiation," meaning that there is *both* the substance of bread *and* the substance of Christ's body in the Eucharistic host. To Zwingli this seemed a ridiculous and, worse, unscriptural explanation. He took a radically different position, according to which there is no substantial or real change in the bread at all. Rather, when Christ said to his disciples at the last supper, "take this bread and eat it, for it is my body," he just meant that the bread *symbolized* his body. It was a simple metaphor, the kind of thing we see all the time in Scripture, including in similar statements of Christ himself, as when he said that he was a vine, meaning that Christian religion branches off from him (190, 223). Here then we have a dramatic illustration of the problem with the reformers' appeal to the "clear meaning" of Scripture. Luther and Zwingli look at the same simple phrase, namely "this is my body," and they cannot agree what it means. Luther even said, "I cannot regard Zwingli and all his teaching as Christian at all…he is seven times more dangerous than when he was a Papist."[14] As Zwingli's biographer G.R. Potter has rightly remarked, "the word of the Bible was indeed authoritative, but authoritative only when properly understood."[15]

But why exactly did the two disagree so strongly about the proper understanding of the Eucharist? Well, it had a lot to do with their philosophical presuppositions. Remember, Luther was trained by nominalist scholastics who were committed to voluntarism and taught that God can do

anything that is not actually contradictory. So for him, when Christ says "this bread is my body," this should be taken literally unless it is shown to be impossible. But there is no reason God can't make Christ's body co-present with bread. Indeed, He can make the body co-present with many bits of bread simultaneously, and in different locations, just as the soul is simultaneously present in all the parts of the body or as speech can simultaneously persuade many hearers.[16] Luther complains that the Zwinglians adopt the wrong standard of proof. They want to be given a rational explanation of why something so miraculous should be believed. But that is not how religion works. Rather, we should believe whatever we are told, unless it is utterly absurd. In his inimitable fashion, he puts it like this: "this is what they say: what need is there for me to believe in a baked God? Wait and see, He will bake them when the time comes, so that their hides will sizzle."

Zwingli, by contrast, was trained at Vienna by realists, and was thus comfortable with the idea that verbal expressions are mere signs that refer to some reality out in the world. For him this is just how language works, and must work. Otherwise, as he puts it, I could give someone a monkey just by writing the word "monkey" on a piece of paper and handing it to them (248). Like baptism, the Eucharistic host is a mere sign that "denominates" some other reality, in this case Christ's body.[17] To make this plausible, Zwingli shows off the historical sense he has acquired through his humanist training. As Jews, Christ's disciples would have been familiar with the rituals of circumcision and the sacrificial lamb, both of which involve actual, physical blood. They understood instinctively that Christ was transforming these rituals into something purely symbolic, which is why they didn't express bewilderment at the last supper, as you would do if you thought someone had just literally turned some bread into his own body (227).

As this line of argument shows, there was a further philosophical issue lurking behind the disagreement over the Eucharist, namely the role of the body. Like Erasmus, Zwingli was a thoroughgoing spiritualist, who thought that religion is about the internal state of the soul. Since the soul cannot be affected by anything physical, the Eucharist cannot be about the nature of the body that is being eaten. Rather, the physical act of eating must represent something at the spiritual level, namely faith (198). Hence the Zwinglian motto "to eat is to believe." (It sounds better in Latin: *edere est*

*credere*.) Luther saw things differently. With the Incarnation of God as man at the center of his religious imagination, he embraced the idea that the same thing could be both spiritual and physical. Hence the tone he took in dismissing Zwingli's position: "Our fanatics are full of fraud and humbug. They think nothing spiritual can be present where there is anything material and physical, and assert that the flesh is of no avail. Actually the opposite is true. The Spirit cannot be with us except in material and physical things such as the Word, water, and Christ's body and in his saints on earth."[18]

Zwingli would surely not appreciate my suggestion that his teaching on the Eucharist, or any other theological matter, was informed by philosophical ideas. In one treatise on the question he even starts by promising not to do any "philosophizing" unless absolutely necessary (186). But philosophy did play a role in the Zwinglian movement. And the reverse was also true: the reformers had a huge impact on the history of philosophy. In fact this might be a good moment to step back and consider the longer-term relevance of the early Reformation for our subject. I'm guessing that while reading this and the last few chapters, you have been struck, if not annoyed, by how much theology I'm discussing. Worries about grace, predestination, and now even baptism and the Eucharist have been on the menu along with the sausages. This is obviously justified insofar as the debates involve standard philosophical issues, like the problem of free will. In other cases the philosophical significance is less easy to spot, but no less profound.

Let's just think about the way that under Zwingli's leadership, Zurich effectively seceded from Christendom as it had been for many centuries. In retrospect we know that much of Europe eventually became Protestant. But at the time this was a breathtaking assertion of the right of a single community to determine its own religious affairs. The emergence of Anabaptism shows that Zwingli himself could not accept what he had unleashed. He excoriated the Anabaptists for separating themselves and refusing to accept others as true Christians (158). In a sense this was a principled complaint. Zwingli believed that a Christian community would be a mix of the faithful and the faithless, and saw no prospect of making religious purity a criterion for membership, as he accused the Anabaptists of doing. After all, only God knows who the righteous are. But in another sense Zwingli was, ironically enough, echoing the charge made by Catholics against the Zwinglians. Here was a lawless, anti-social rebellion

launched in the name of a spurious piety. Having set itself up as a kind of mini-Rome, the city of Zurich had to decide whether to persecute its own heretics.

Zwingli wrestled with this problem, as when he was by turns strict and lenient when it came to enforcing unity of liturgy among all parishes. On the not so distant horizon was religious fragmentation and, with it, political fragmentation. Once the authority of the papacy was removed and the "priesthood of all believers" declared, it became possible, even plausible, that every community would choose its own religious convictions. This was clear from the very beginning of the Reformation, and founders like Luther, Melanchthon, and Zwingli had already fought against it. But using hindsight again, we can see that the proliferation of confessions within Protestantism was likely, if not inevitable. Closely related to this was the burgeoning idea of faith as a private, individual matter, which is really just an extreme version of religious fragmentation, where the fragments are the size of just one person at a time. We saw Luther saying that rulers cannot coerce people in matters of faith, and Zwingli allowing private citizens to retrieve religious art from churches before the art was destroyed. That looks like toleration for veneration of images at home, so long as iconoclasm could prevail in public. Such pragmatic compromises are going to open the door for an unprecedented divide between private and public spheres. We take this divide for granted now, but it has a history, which traces back to the early sixteenth century.

Alongside these tendencies within the Reformation as a whole, we have a contribution that is more distinctively Zwinglian. He insisted that priests are not conduits for everyday miracles, like the transformation of bread into Christ's body. What happens in churches is significant, but only because of what it signifies, namely spiritual ideas and beliefs. This was a step toward what is sometimes called "demystification" or "secularization,"[19] a trend we can also see in the reformers' abolition of the saints, their miracles, and their relics. Increasingly the world is going to be seen as the creation of an infinitely transcendent, and thus infinitely distant, God, who remains aloof from what He has made. Zwingli's way of thinking unwittingly makes space for an autonomous, secular approach to a world deprived of miracles and comprehensible through reason. At the same time, the foundations of Aristotelian science were being removed. We've already seen another early reformer, Melanchthon, exploring the possibilities of a non-Aristotelian

natural philosophy. In this generation of reformers, then, we can see suggestions of a future in which the world is approached in a way that is neither overtly religious, nor based on the ideas of classical antiquity. Of course we're still not seeing anything quite like the science that will emerge a few generations further down the line—that will come later in this book. But as they (almost) sing in the *Sound of Music*, we are in the sixteenth century, going on seventeenth.

# 13

# WE ARE NOT OUR OWN

## *John Calvin*

Modern-day analytic philosophers do not, by and large, take inspiration from the sixteenth-century founders of the Reformation. But there is a notable exception in the work of Alvin Plantinga, a leading philosopher of religion. He explicitly refers to John Calvin in setting out one of his most famous ideas, a so-called "reformed epistemology" that proposes a new way of defending the rationality of religious belief. Usually, religious philosophers argue that belief in Christianity or the existence of God can be proven, or at least shown to be rational, by appealing to premises that an atheist might accept. Thus in the "natural theology" tradition one might point to features of the universe that suggest it is well designed, features everyone should recognize. On this basis one can infer that the universe has a designer, namely God. Plantinga suggests a different approach. For him, it could be rational simply to believe that God exists without any argument. This could be, as Plantinga puts it, "properly basic," a fitting entry in the beliefs we accept without further justification.[1]

How could it be rational to believe in something that is so controversial without offering reasons for the belief? Well, Plantinga says, you might be aware of God's presence immediately, in the way that we are aware of sensory experiences or memories. It would be just like when you rationally believe that a giraffe is standing in front of you because you can see it; there's no need to argue or prove that the giraffe is there, it's just obvious.

Theists may just "find themselves" having a belief like that, but about God. To illustrate how this could work he refers to an idea set forth in Calvin's major theological treatise, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.[2] This was a central work of the Reformation, first published in 1536 in Basel, and then appearing in numerous expanded editions, to the point that the final version of 1560 is five times as long as the first. Early on in the *Institutes* Calvin refers to an "awareness of divinity (*divinitatis sensus*)" that all of us have, an inborn tendency to believe in God (1.3.1). Plantinga says, "Calvin's claim is that one who accedes to this tendency and in these circumstances accepts the belief that God has created the world…is entirely within his epistemic rights in doing so…His belief need not be based on any other propositions at all; under these conditions he is perfectly rational in accepting belief in God in the utter absence of any argument."[3]

Now, Plantinga is himself a Calvinist so I can hardly object to his taking inspiration from John Calvin, who as Plantinga remarks is "as good a Calvinist as any." But I would gently correct his interpretation. Calvin's stance might *imply* that it is rational to believe in God without argument, but this is not what Calvin was trying to say. The question of whether religious belief is *rational* was not on the table in the sixteenth century, for the good reason that no one at that time would ever have thought to deny it. Calvin's point is rather that, as he says, people who do not worship the single Christian God are "without excuse" because they have been born with a sense of His presence. God bestows it upon all humans, not to ensure that belief in Him is rational or fundamental, but to ensure that the irreligious cannot complain that they were never aware of Him in the first place.[4] If you ask Calvin on what basis we should believe in God, he will not necessarily refer to the inborn sense, but will offer the standard proof based on the design of the universe. He's especially impressed by the heavenly bodies, which are powerful evidence of a powerful Creator (1.5.2). You can give rational arguments in favor of the veracity of Scripture too (1.6.4). But Calvin thinks that in our fallen, sinful state even this is not enough. Ultimately, certainty lies only in faith, faith in God and in the revelation He has sent to humankind (1.8.2).

Calvin's whole line of thought here is similar to one he presents later on in the *Institutes*, concerning morality. He says that we are all born with a conscience, a sense of good and evil that the tradition called awareness of the "natural law." Calvin accepts this and says that "the purpose of natural

law is to make humans to be without excuse" (2.2.22). So again his focus is on the idea that the disbelievers and the wicked are justly condemned. Indeed, when Calvin invokes the natural law it is usually to blame someone, like the Anabaptists, for failing to observe it.[5] In any case, it is not enough to embrace natural law. Calvin distinguishes between two "kingdoms," an earthly or temporal one and a heavenly or spiritual one (3.19.15, cf. 2.2.13).[6] Within the temporal realm, natural law is a reliable guide, and it can be used to lay down laws within secular society, whose aim is to protect public observance of religion and to keep the peace (4.20.2). For Calvin these laws have absolute validity. He says that subjects should submit to the rulers they find placed over them. God appointed these men to hold authority, so they "cannot be resisted without God being resisted at the same time" (4.20.23). Even the worst tyrants have been sent as divine punishment and must simply be endured with patience (4.20.25). Fortunately, worldly life and its laws have no effect on the far more important concern, which is eternal salvation. You don't get saved by obeying any earthly ruler, or by following the natural law; you get saved when God decides to save you.

Of course we've already seen all these same ideas in Luther. But it's still striking to see Calvin endorsing such a passive attitude toward secular authority, given that he was a refugee dissident whose adopted city of Geneva became a magnet for other, like-minded dissidents.[7] He fled his native France in 1535, after being educated as a lawyer and humanist (his writing career actually began with a commentary on a work by Seneca).[8] Thereafter he lived in several cities where Protestantism was on the rise, notably Strasbourg, at the invitation of another leading reformer named Martin Bucer. Together with Bucer and Melanchthon, he engaged in debates with representatives of the Catholic Church including Johannes Eck, whom I've mentioned in passing as a critic of both Luther and Zwingli.[9] Eventually Calvin wound up in Geneva, where he was the leading religious figure, helped to draft the city's constitution, and tried to ensure its precarious survival as a Protestant city state. Politically and militarily, Geneva provided a kind of buffer between Catholic France and the cities of the Swiss Confederacy, like Bern and Zurich.

We saw that in the judgment of the Scottish reformer John Knox, Calvin's Geneva was "the most perfect school of Christ." It banned

unlicensed books, and introduced social restrictions on everything from dancing to indecent songs, gambling, and immodest hairstyles and dress for women.[10] Notoriously, in 1553 the city executed Michael Servetus as a heretic because of his deviant views on the Trinity and other religious matters.[11] Even as Calvin and the other Protestants insisted on their own religious freedom, they were far from willing to extend freedom to others. Modern scholars are apparently more inclined than Calvin and his God to find excuses for wicked deeds. So they have pointed out that Servetus' radical views would have gotten him executed pretty much anywhere in Europe at that time; that failing to deal with him would have been a political scandal that could have weakened Geneva's position; and that Calvin at least pled that the execution should be by decapitation and not burning, which is far more excruciating. But Servetus was burnt anyway, and Calvin expressed no regret over it.

Calvin's political views put him in a difficult position when it came to Protestant sympathizers in France, who would come to be called the Huguenots. As one scholar of Calvin's thought has remarked, "the whole enterprise of reformation in France was at the very best a skating on the thin ice on the margins of legality, and, more usually, was blatantly illegal."[12] How could this be reconciled with the advice to obey authorities, however objectionable they may seem? Well, like Luther, Calvin made an exception in cases where rulers direct their subjects to break the commandments of Scripture. We should always obey the prince, unless it means disobeying God (4.20.32). Still, Calvin's advice to his fellow Protestants was to do what he had done: declare their faith and leave France, or failing that, simply not attend the Catholic Mass, or failing even that, attend the Mass but beg God for forgiveness the whole while.[13] Not exactly revolutionary.

Aside from his respect for political stability, Calvin had another reason to advise patience. He believed that whatever was happening was part of the divine plan. The world is governed, down to the smallest detail, by God's power, wisdom, and justice, so that even apparent evils, like tyranny or the oppression of faithful Christians, must serve some purpose. We rarely if ever know what that purpose is. But trust in providence can still provide comfort in the face of adversity: "when the light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free…from every care" (1.17.11; see also 1.17.8). Things are always for the best even if we

cannot see why. This is a familiar approach to theodicy, that is, the question why God allows evil. It does not mean denying that some things are in fact evil. Rather, evils are anticipated and made a part of the providential order. "So great and boundless is His wisdom," says Calvin, "that He knows right well how to use evil instruments to do good" (1.17.5). All this had been said by the Stoics in antiquity, as Calvin is well aware; remember, he started out his career writing on the Stoic Seneca. He does, however, distance himself from the Stoics, insofar as he makes God's providence the direct cause of all events, rather than having God work through chains of natural causation, or even identifying nature with God (1.16.8).[14]

So Calvin is a thoroughgoing determinist, who thinks that God foreknows and decrees everything we do (3.21.5; 3.23.6), indeed everything that happens, no matter how trivial (2.4.6). He does, however, accept that there are genuinely efficacious causes other than God. That's precisely why he speaks of created things as God's "instruments" (1.16.2). If God wants something to be burned He may use fire to do it, and in that case the fire really does burn the thing, albeit at God's command. Similarly, if God wants to punish a people for their sins, He may use a wicked tyrant to do it. The two cases differ, though, in that the tyrant does evil willingly, whereas the fire does not burn things willingly. Thus Calvin stresses that humans are not like "rocks or tree stumps" (2.5.7). We perform our actions voluntarily, but as God has decreed we will do.[15]

So if you pose to Calvin the question at the center of the debate between Luther and Erasmus, as to whether humans have free will, he will tell you that it depends what you mean. If you are asking whether humans can act independently of God, and whether there are alternative paths genuinely open to us, the answer is no. As Calvin says, "we are not our own, but the Lord's" (3.7.1), and He uses humans like "rods, in whatever way He pleases, to guide their plans, to direct their efforts…everything depends on His providence, and not on the caprice of wicked humankind."[16] But if you are asking whether our will actually causes our actions, the answer is yes. The same action is willed both by God and the human agent, though in different ways (2.4.2). Clearly God's will cannot be resisted by a mere human, so we will do whatever He wants us to. But we are still at fault when we do evil, because we want to do it; our sinful will is just as real as fire's ability to burn, and exercises just as much causal influence. All this is despite the fact that, of course, God would much rather that humans were

not sinful. Thus Calvin says, in a treatise specifically devoted to the topic of providence, "what was done contrary to His will was yet not done without His will, because it would not have been done at all unless He had allowed. So He permitted it not unwillingly but willingly. Thus in sinning, they did what God did not will in order that God through their evil will might do what He willed. If anyone object that this is beyond his comprehension, I confess it. But what wonder if the immense and incomprehensible majesty of God exceed the limits of our intellect?"[17]

Among the numerous questions one might pose here—and we'll get to more of them shortly—would be how we are meant to earn salvation, if it is God who decrees who will sin and who will be righteous. The answer of course is that we cannot "earn" salvation. On this point Calvin is in full agreement with Luther. Salvation is not merited through good works, or even by wishing to be good. Instead, God decides before we are even born (or strictly speaking, in timeless eternity: 3.21.5) who will be among the "elect" and who will be "reprobate," that is, who is saved and who is not. This is Calvin's notorious doctrine of double providence,[18] which troubled even Luther, even though it arguably just spells out more clearly what Luther's doctrine must amount to.[19] If God selects those who will receive grace, then He is surely selecting those who will not. It is meaningless to say that God doesn't choose the reprobate but merely omits to give them grace, since He is obviously choosing that omission.

It is to Calvin's credit that he lays out so clearly the implications of the doctrine that we are saved through faith and not works. As C.S. Lewis put it, "Calvin goes on from the original Protestant experience to build a system, to extrapolate, to raise all the dark questions and give without flinching the dark answers."[20] But as that quotation also suggests, plenty of people find Calvin's conclusions repellent. If this is where Luther's path leads, better not to follow it in the first place! Calvin seems to be describing the ultimate unfree and unfair election, in which humans are condemned to infinite suffering in a completely random fashion. Why in the world would Calvin, or indeed anyone, want to believe in this? By way of an answer, we should firstly remember that the sorting of humans into the saved and the damned is not in fact "random," but part of a perfectly providential order. It's just that we mere humans cannot hope to understand that order. As Calvin puts it, people are damned "because God has so willed it. Why He

so willed, it is not for our reason to inquire, for we cannot comprehend it" (3.23.5).

Furthermore, even if God did arrange things randomly, we would be in no position to condemn Him for this. Calvin is a particularly clear example of what has come to be called a "divine command theorist," that is, someone who believes that whatever God does is good *because* He does it, and not the other way around. Thus Calvin writes, "whatever God wills, by the very fact that He wills it, must be considered righteous" (3.23.2). Besides, even on our own limited understanding, it would be perfectly just if *everyone* were damned, because we all deserve it. This is not an idiosyncratic view of Calvin's, but standard Christian teaching since Augustine. Due to original sin, we are all born wicked and worthy of punishment. For any one of us to be saved is already an act of undeserved grace. So whether God offers this to only a few, to many, or to everyone, He is doing more than we have any right to expect. And it makes sense that God should choose some for grace and others for punishment, because this is the only way He can display both mercy and justice (3.23.11). In fact, given that none of us deserves to be among those who get mercy, the selection actually has to be arbitrary. Another way to appreciate this point is to remember that many humans were born before the coming of Christ, so they are all barred from receiving grace (3.24.12). This looks pretty arbitrary too. Why should you be damned just for being born too early? But it's something that pretty well all Christians accepted; the only alternative was to say that God retroactively saves those who lived before Christ if they deserved it. As we'll see later in this book, contact with the peoples of the Americas around this very time would make this problem more pressing. They were not born in the wrong time to know about Christ, but in the wrong place.

These reflections show that Calvin's apparently radical teaching is actually deeply rooted in older Christian theology. In fact we find others flirting with such ideas much earlier in history, notably John Scotus Eriugena way back in the ninth century.[21] As Eriugena pointed out, double predestination seems to be an obvious, though usually unacknowledged, implication of Augustine's theory of grace, a theory that had defined orthodoxy for about a millennium before Calvin came along. Arguably, then, the question is not why Calvin says these things, but why it has taken us so long to get to a thinker who says them so boldly and forthrightly. Here

I think the answer is obvious: Calvin's position looks, at first glance, extremely unappealing, and is easily avoided. We need only say that humans do contribute something, however small, to their own salvation, perhaps in cooperation with God. We've seen how theologians like Gabriel Biel tried to do just that.

To accept Calvin's doctrine, by contrast, we need firstly to wrap our minds around the "compatibilist" notion that humans can be responsible for willing actions that have been timelessly decreed by God. We then need to accept that we and our loved ones may be sentenced to eternal torture as the result of something that from our own, admittedly limited, perspective might as well be a coin flip. And then, as if that weren't bad enough, when we express even slight hesitation about accepting these things, Calvin rages at us for having the temerity to doubt God's infinite and inscrutable justice and wisdom. One of his favorite themes is the wickedness of undue "curiosity." He charges the scholastics, in particular, with "measuring God by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity…thus out of curiosity they fly off into empty speculations" (1.4.1). Anyone who seeks really to understand God's providential design, and especially the part of that design that involves predestination, is being impious and arrogant. Calvin can wax downright poetic on this topic, as when he writes, "You seek reason? I tremble at the depth. You reason, I will marvel. You dispute, I will believe. I see the depth; I do not reach the bottom" (3.23.5). But these nicely turned phrases ultimately come down to him saying: how *dare* you refuse to believe something that looks unbelievable?

Yet many people did believe it. Calvinism spread like wildfire across Europe, taking root in Britain among other places. So it's worth asking one more time, why? Though his theology is indeed relentlessly consistent, and philosophers prize consistency, I think that the explanation does not lie in its philosophical power. Nor do I think Calvin wanted it to. As we've seen, he polemicized against scholastic and classical philosophers alike, and was more than happy to admit that his theology demands assent to something we cannot understand. One might even go so far as to say that Calvinism is theologically persuasive in part because it is so philosophically *un*persuasive. Here we have a version of Christianity that you really can only believe by faith. Faith, for Calvin, consists precisely in confident assurance in God's mercy, without needing to comprehend that mercy (3.2.14). His message is to stop trying to figure out how or why God will

save you, and just trust that He will indeed save you. So while double predestination may seem like a terrifying idea, Calvin thinks it is in fact deeply comforting. It asks you only to have faith, and in faith lies unshakable confidence and peace of mind, even if the faithful have occasional doubts (3.2.12, 3.2.18). Especially for people who faced acute suffering, for example at the hands of repressive Catholic authorities in France, it was surely a relief to think that everything they were experiencing was part of God's plan to bring them to an eternal reward (1.17.8). It was an idea with staying power, as we can see from the fact that nineteenth-century African Americans in the Protestant tradition said that slavery was an evil that would be "overruled" by God, that is, turned to good ends.[22]

As this also shows, despite Calvin's condemnation of rational "speculation," his impact on the history of philosophy was enormous. Here we come to yet another far-reaching and unintended effect of Reformation thought. Calvin insists that human reason is utterly incapable of grasping the core truths of Christian religion, which are indeed repellent to rational reflection. Instead he tells us to turn to the Bible, applying the typical Protestant method of using "Scripture alone." He thus drives a wedge between religion and philosophy, in a way that few medieval thinkers had done. Across the history of philosophy before the sixteenth century, you see a wide range of views about the relation of reason and religion. But hardly anyone had proposed that reason is utterly useless, or even actively misleading, when applied to anything in the neighborhood of faith. Ironically enough, when modern-day atheists casually assume that there is an antithesis between religion and philosophy, that faith and reason are mutually exclusive, they are unwittingly echoing the ideas of John Calvin. Calvin, as much as anyone, is responsible for the fact that many people think religion is avowedly, and intentionally, non-rational. In this sense, he did after all help to create the problem that Plantinga tried to solve.[23]

# 14

# I TOO CAN ASK QUESTIONS

## *Protestant Scholasticism*

Calvin was no scholastic philosopher. Unlike Luther he studied law, not theology, and his *Institutes* contains in its many pages a scant ten references to Aristotle.[1] And like Luther, he was tireless in carping at the time-wasting pedantries of the scholastics. So the prospects for a Calvinist or Reformation version of scholasticism look dim. Indeed, the scholar Richard A. Miller has spoken of "an unpleasant theological oxymoron: to be Protestant and scholastic at the same time was to be a living contradiction."[2] Yet as Miller and others have shown, there were plenty of Protestants who deployed the intellectual tools of Aristotle's logic, took inspiration from his ethics and natural philosophy, and even drew on Catholic authorities like Thomas Aquinas. Believe it or not, one of them was a close collaborator of Calvin.

His name was Theodore Beza, and he was the first rector of the Academy at Geneva.[3] Beza may be credited with supplying a rational defense of Calvinism, of the sort that Calvin himself failed to provide—or as I suggested in the last chapter, deliberately chose not to provide. Beza outlived Calvin by more than four decades, dying only in 1605. His longevity and position as an educator gave him ample opportunity to put his stamp on the intellectual life of Geneva and the Calvinist movement more generally. A Catholic critic went so far as to say that Beza was "like a Pope to the Calvinists": not meant as a compliment and not likely to be received

as one, but still a testimony to his importance.[4] Beza was open in his use of scholastic methods. He said for instance that he would not be importing the new-fangled ideas of the Paris thinker Peter Ramus when they swept across Europe, but would instead stick religiously (if you'll pardon the expression) to Aristotle (*ab Aristotelis sententiam ne nantillum quidem deflectere*).[5] As a Calvinist he placed limits on the capacity of fallen human *reason*, but he still believed that *reasoning* was of great importance for Protestant thought. One should study dialectic to learn how to test one's own ideas for consistency and for the sake of refuting one's opponents.

It's sometimes said that for Protestant intellectuals scholasticism offered a set of useful methods, while its doctrines were to be rejected.[6] And Beza might well have said this himself. Like other reformers, and the humanists, he often used the word "scholastics" as a term of abuse when criticizing the teachings of the schoolmen. Yet we can find him using their ideas at the heart of his own Calvinist teaching, on the topic of faith and salvation. He held that human reason had held mastery over the will before the fall from grace through original sin. But now in our fallen state, the will often undermines or overwhelms our reason. So in the terms we apply to medieval scholastics like Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Scotus, Beza is a "rationalist" when it comes to the state of humans before the fall, and a "voluntarist" when it comes to our situation once corrupted by sin.[7] As a result it is not enough to be rationally convinced about topics like God's providence. The will must also be reformed through the gift of grace, just as Calvin had been saying, albeit now phrased in more "philosophical" language.

This nicely exemplifies the way school distinctions could be reformed for use by Protestants. At the same time, the schools themselves were being reformed. Throughout the sixteenth century, we see fairly dramatic changes in the universities of central and eastern Europe, both in terms of personnel and curriculum. As territories and their rulers adopted one or another Protestant confession, faculty members had to follow suit. Nowadays academia is often a precarious environment to pursue a career, but at least we don't have to worry about the sort of thing that happened in Heidelberg in 1576, when eleven out of sixteen professors left voluntarily or were fired after Elector Ludwig VI adopted Lutheranism. Only seven years later, Calvinism became the new order of the day, leading to further changes in

staffing.[8] As for the curriculum, the Protestants' reorganization of these institutions showed their allegiance to humanist values.[9] Chairs in Hebrew and Greek came in, alongside empirical topics like history, geography, and anatomy. Meanwhile the more abstract study of metaphysics was on the wane, and Aristotelian natural philosophy was not a high priority either.

These upheavals were necessarily accompanied by a change in the reading list. Textbooks and encyclopedias were churned out by the printing presses, with Philip Melanchthon's works in particular being assigned to many students. There was a general trend toward studying disciplines individually rather than seeing them as forming a united structure, as the medieval scholastics had envisioned.[10] Teachers were now more likely to be specialists, focusing on only one or two disciplines instead of lecturing in rotation across the whole curriculum. If students saw any common link between the different courses they were offered, it came more in the form of method and terminology. This was a legacy of the continuing stress on Aristotelian logic as the introductory topic that needed to be mastered by all young scholars. But again, it was not *only* method that was retained from the Aristotelian tradition. An outline of the curriculum taught in Freiburg in 1593 stated that the Peripatetic philosophers should be "taught, defended, and expounded whenever they teach rightly."[11]

If this all sounds rather unsystematic to you, then you aren't alone. The scholastic Bartholomew Keckermann tried to impose a greater degree of order on the school and university curricula around the turn of the seventeenth century.[12] He was a Calvinist who hailed from Gdansk in modern-day Poland, and taught in Heidelberg before returning home in 1602 to teach at the Gdansk Gymnasium; he died in 1609. He produced a series of textbooks on philosophy toward the end of his life, for which he used the word "system (*systema*)," and which he intended as a complement for the reading of primary literature. This was a revolution in form, not content. Keckermann once wrote that it is "better to teach methodologically ordered traditional positions, even if erroneous or questionable, than as yet unmethodized new theories, even if true."[13] His goal was, accordingly, to move education away from the rather unstructured approach he saw in the humanist movement. Here he would have had in mind the presentation of individual "commonplaces" for each discipline that had been promoted by Erasmus and Melanchthon.

Keckermann was firmly convinced that such a well-structured presentation of the rational sciences could be of support to true religion. He wrote that "philosophy is of the highest utility and greatest necessity to the study of theology," both for establishing Protestant doctrine and for defending that doctrine against critics.[14] He also had to fend off critics of philosophy, like Daniel Hoffmann, who argued that a genuinely Christian university would have no place for it.[15] Against Hoffmann and other anti-rationalists, Keckermann insisted that philosophy is a form of wisdom bestowed upon humankind as a gift from God. It is impossible that philosophical truth and religious truth come into conflict, something that Keckermann characteristically proved using syllogistic arguments, like this one: "what is one and simple is not multiplied; truth is one and simple; therefore truth is not multiplied, and divided" into rival truths of theology and philosophy.[16] So apparent conflicts between philosophy and faith are just that, only apparent. Admittedly, it might take some subtlety to resolve such conflicts, as when Keckermann said that Aristotelian natural philosophy is right to say that nothing can be *generated* from nothing, even though it is possible for God to *create* from nothing.[17]

Rather surprisingly, Protestant schoolmen were ready to adopt the same friendly attitude toward Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which they might have found deeply problematic. In this work, Aristotle clearly teaches that humans can achieve happiness through their natural capacity for practical virtue and wisdom. How could Protestants possibly make use of this text, when they believed that good works stem from faith and that only faith secures a happy afterlife? For an answer we can turn to Protestant commentaries on the *Ethics* in the sixteenth century and beyond.[18] A recent study of these counts twenty-seven such commentaries by Lutherans alone. As this shows, Aristotle was still taken as an authoritative writer for ethics. In part, we can explain this by reminding ourselves that Luther and the other leading reformers believed that good behavior and political order should be encouraged across society, even among the sinful majority. Or rather, especially among the sinful, since the faithful would naturally perform good works. But some exegetes went further than that. A commentary written by the Calvinist thinker Peter Martyr Vermigli summarizes Aristotle's doctrines in syllogistic form and shows the harmony between these arguments and the teaching of Scripture.[19]

Not content to be the living contradiction that is a Protestant scholastic, Vermigli went so far as to be a Calvinist follower of Thomas Aquinas! Along with his Italian colleague Giromalo Zanchi, Vermigli has been taken to represent "Calvinist Thomism,"[20] which sounds not so much oxymoronic as plain old moronic. How could any serious scholar simultaneously follow Calvin and value the teachings of this central theologian of the Catholic tradition? Actually, that was part of the attraction. Zanchi delighted in refuting the Catholic doctrine of grace with premises taken from Aquinas' writings, which made for an effective dialectical weapon. Both Vermigli and Zanchi were trained in the ways of scholasticism in Italy, in Vermigli's case in the center of Aristotelianism that was Padua. Once they converted to Calvinism, the Inquisition made it impossible for them to stay there. Even if your name is Peter Martyr Vermigli, you might not actually want to be a martyr. So he made his way to the safe haven of Strasbourg together with Zanchi; they taught there together in the 1550s. Zanchi would later teach in Heidelberg, where he produced his main writings.

Like Keckermann, these two Calvinists believed that philosophy and faith could have a close and productive working relationship. In theory Protestants settled all questions by consulting Scripture, but we've seen how well that worked out in cases like the disagreement over the Eucharist between Zwingli and Luther. Philosophical tools could be used, with caution, to settle such disputes among the reformers as well as to refute the Catholics. Aristotle in particular was a vital resource in this endeavor. Zanchi considered him "the best of all authors after God,"[21] and prepared an edition of Aristotle's *Physics* at the behest of the Protestant printer Johann Sturm. In his introduction, Zanchi endorses the study of natural philosophy in forthright terms: "it is of the utmost utility in the study of all liberal arts; in the furtherance of moral philosophy; in the recognition and worship of God; in the proper understanding of Holy Scripture; in the confirmation of many Christian doctrines and the refutation of heresies; and finally in the promotion of piety."[22]

Vermigli and Zanchi thus left ample room for what is sometimes called "natural theology," that is, the use of normal human reason to prove the existence of God and learn about His nature. As we saw, even Calvin had allowed some scope for natural theology, but really only so that he could convict the irreligious of having no excuse for their unbelief. For these later Calvinists, natural theology has a more positive function. Using our inborn

capacities, we can get quite far in understanding the divine, and then go on to supplement this knowledge using revelation.[23] This is exactly how Aquinas thought about the relation between natural reason and revealed truth. Vermigli further agrees with him that the resulting, combined body of theological knowledge has the structure of an Aristotelian science, with principles that generate demonstrated conclusions.[24]

None of this was distinctively Calvinist, of course. But like Theodore Beza, our two Italians also applied Aristotelian ideas to the more characteristic topic of predestination. Thus Vermigli invoked a premise from one of Aristotle's logical works, that whatever happens is necessary once it has happened (*On Interpretation* 19a). Given that God's knowledge of the future has already been accomplished eternally, this means that the future is necessary, just as Calvin taught.[25] And both men also used scholastic methods when it came to defusing the disturbing implications of that determinism. Vermigli's school training allowed him to make some subtle, but crucial, distinctions in this area: strictly speaking the damned are not "predestined" to hell, because God has not selected them out for their fate, as He did with the elect. Rather, He simply allows them to damn themselves through sin.[26] Furthermore, since faith generates good works, someone who does good can observe their own behavior and conclude that they are indeed among the elect. Zanchi may have been the first to present this reassuring thought as a syllogism, along the following lines: "these are the signs of the predestined, but I have these signs; therefore I am predestined."[27]

By this point, you should hopefully be getting the sense that Protestant scholasticism was not only a very real phenomenon, but a phenomenon found across central Europe. I've already discussed thinkers active in modern-day Poland, Germany, Switzerland, and France. And here's a location you almost certainly didn't expect: Croatia. It has to be included, though, if only because of the activity of one Matthias Flacius Illyricus.[28] As the last part of his name indicates, he came from Istria, a peninsula on the western coast of Croatia. Flacius studied in Basel, Tübingen, and Wittenberg, where he was taught by none other than Melanchthon; later he himself taught at Jena and elsewhere, including Frankfurt, where he died in 1575. He is remembered especially for his treatise *The Key to Sacred Scripture*, published in 1567. It has been hailed as a pioneering work by

twentieth-century philosophers interested in hermeneutics, like Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

This is because Flacius tried to develop explicit rules for the interpretation of texts. As the title of his treatise indicates, he is especially interested in exegesis of the Bible. But his rules are of more general application, and in fact echo to some extent guidelines already used in antiquity to comment on Aristotle. The most important thing for the interpreter to decide is the purpose or overall intent of a work, which Flacius, following Melanchthon, calls its "scope (*scopus*)." Having determined this, all parts and aspects of the work can be read in light of their support of this central goal. Thus Flacius compares the scope to the face of a body, and the parts of the text to its limbs. Particularly intriguing here is his idea that we first propose a possible scope as a kind of hypothesis, which we then test by reading the work, like trying a certain key in a lock, to borrow the metaphor of his title. Flacius deploys his knowledge of ancient philosophy to explain this procedure, saying that the hypothetical interpretation has only the status of what Plato called belief (*doxa*), whereas once confirmed it becomes knowledge (*episteme*). As a motto for the good interpreter, he cites Plato's adage that we must seek the one in the many and the many in the one.

Plato would no doubt have been pleased by this, and might have been even happier to learn that some progress was being made on another cause he supported (at least, in his *Republic*): the empowerment of women. We saw that Luther had fairly traditional notions about gender roles, and he was hardly alone in that. But just as he unwittingly planted the seeds of political revolt, he opened the door, if only slightly, to the possibility that women might become spiritual leaders. After all, Luther taught the priesthood of all believers, and women can believe just as well as men. More or less this very point was made by Marie Dentière, a remarkable woman who preached the cause of reform in Strasbourg and Switzerland.[29] She argued that the new Christian communities should be even-handed in their treatment of men and women, asking, "do we have two gospels, one for men, the other for women? One for the wise, the other for fools?"[30] She accepted, in line with an injunction laid down by St. Paul, that women should not preach openly in the church, but argued that this left open the course of writing and "admonishing" other Christians. Which Dentière duly did, especially in a letter addressed to the queen Marguerite de Navarre,

which was full of attacks on the Catholic Church (for more on Marguerite, see Chapter 24). Protestant printers were happy to disseminate such material, though they did not do so without risk: the man who printed Dentière's letter was arrested for his trouble.

But the point is confirmed by the equally sensational case of Argula von Grumbach, who tried to intervene directly in the scholastic world we have been discussing.[31] She was incensed at the treatment of a man named Arcasius Seehofer, who was put on trial for his reformist beliefs. So in 1523, she wrote a letter to the university of Ingolstadt, remonstrating with the theologians for persecuting Seehofer. She sarcastically told them that "a disputation is easily won when one argues with force, not scripture. As far as I can see that means that the hangman is accounted the most learned." In all, Argula's campaign involved writing seven letters to schoolmen and princes, which were collected and printed as a pamphlet that was put out in no fewer than seventeen editions. We know that she also wrote to leading reformers like Luther and Melanchthon, though these letters are lost. She anticipated that some might object to the idea of a woman involving herself in such matters. In response, she delivered a line that might be invoked by any Protestant explaining why they are delving into the affairs of the universities: "by the grace of God I, too, can ask questions and hear answers."

# 15

# PERHAPS NOT WRONG

## *Cornelius Agrippa*

When Marie Dentière and Argula von Grumbach were inspired by the spirit of the Reformation to speak out on religious matters, it would have disconcerted the leading reformers. As we saw, Luther himself taught that women are best off staying home and keeping their mouths shut. But at this same time, some men were arguing in favor of women's emancipation. One of them was Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim. Early in the sixteenth century, he made his contribution to the long-running dispute over the virtues of women, often called by its French title the *querelle des femmes*. Agrippa delivered a speech in 1509 at the University of Dôle, dedicated to the titular president of the university, Margaret of Austria.[1] Though this "declamation" did not secure him patronage from Margaret or the faculty position he coveted at Dôle, it was a huge success by other measures. Just in the sixteenth century, the Latin original would be translated into French no fewer than five times, alongside two versions in each of three other languages, German, Italian, and English.[2]

Its eager reception was not thanks to its originality. Like other contributors to this genre, Agrippa is indebted to the Italian poet Boccaccio, who wrote in praise of women back in the fourteenth century. He also makes extensive use of the *Triumph of Women*, a treatise composed in about 1440 by Juan Rodríguez del Padrón. And one of the most striking passages in Agrippa's declamation is closely parallel to remarks made several years

earlier in Mario Equicola's *On Women*. Agrippa repeats his complaint that women are subjected to the tyranny of their husbands, legally disenfranchised, and kept out of public life, with nothing to occupy them but needle and thread (95). Indeed, one of the more interesting points made by Agrippa concerns the legal status of women. He points out that Roman law was more generous in its dealings with women than the law of his own time: in antiquity they could pass on their names to their children, had control over their dowry, and owned property, including slaves (92). This shows Agrippa's awareness of the way that customs and attitudes change over time.[3] He thinks they should change again, now in favor of women. He argues for this philosophically, as when he says that the virtue of the soul is unaffected by sexual difference (43) and invokes Galen and Avicenna for the important role of female seed in reproduction (56), and Plato's *Republic* and its support for including women in the military (94).

But more central to his case is Scriptural evidence, to the point that the work has been called an exercise in "applied theology."[4] Agrippa of course realizes that Biblical texts can be used to justify oppression of women, as with St. Paul's notorious instructions that women are to be subject to their husbands and silent in the church. These would have guided such attitudes as those expressed by Luther. But Agrippa discounts them, on the grounds that "God has a preference for no one" (96). Actually, if God has a preference for anyone it must be women. He saved Eve for His final creation, after all, and as the philosophers say, "the first thing intended is the last done" (48). Furthermore, it was really Adam who was at fault for the first sin, and who propagated sin to all his descendants (62, 70). Elsewhere Agrippa argues that the first sin was the original act of sexual congress between Adam and Eve, which seems to apportion blame more equally. On the other hand he also writes a treatise *On the Sacrament of Marriage* which recommends that everyone should marry, and for love, not financial or political convenience.

With Agrippa, as we'll be discovering, there is always an "on the other hand." In the present case, it comes in the form of interpretations which take this whole declamation to be satirical. It must be said that some of his arguments are so ridiculous that it's hard to believe they are meant seriously, as when he says that when women fall down they always fall on their back, so as to look up at the exalted heavens (56). And given my own appearance, I certainly hope he is kidding when he says that baldness makes

men grotesque, while beards are so ugly that men look like beasts (55). Sometimes, Agrippa's feminist arguments even look like thinly veiled attacks on women: he demonstrates women's cleverness and resourcefulness by listing all the men they managed to deceive, like Adam, Samson, and Solomon (65). In this case though, he anticipates the obvious objection and defends treacherous women for realizing that they have to come out on top when competing with men. He here cites the example of Pope Innocent III, who once told someone, "if only one of us loses, I'd rather it was you" (67).

This question of Agrippa's sincerity hangs over his most important writings, if not his whole corpus. The central dilemma has been phrased by one scholar as follows: "how could the same man have written an enthusiastic and uncritical summa of Renaissance magic, and also an aggressively skeptical fideistic attack on all human knowledge, which presents the Bible as the only source of truth?"[5] The enthusiastic *summa*, or compendium, of magic is called *On Occult Philosophy*, while the skeptical attack on knowledge bears the frank title *On the Vanity and Uncertainty of the Sciences*.[6] His authorship of these dramatically different treatises allows us to compare him to contemporaries who explored Neoplatonism, Kabbalah, and demonology, like Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, or alternatively to critics of human rationality and upholders of faith in God and Scripture, like Luther. During and after his lifetime, observers complained about both versions of Agrippa. He was blamed for everything from supporting the cause of Protestantism to being a sinister mage wielding dark powers. The English playwright Christopher Marlowe explicitly compared his dramatic creation Doctor Faustus to Agrippa, "whose shadows made all Europe honor him,"[7] while a famous legend about Agrippa traveling with the devil in the form of a black dog is a source for Goethe's much later play about Faust.

Agrippa's *On Occult Philosophy* is in a sense two different books, because its original 1510 version was extensively revised and expanded, to about double length, in a second 1533 printed edition. The first version was sent to Agrippa's colleague Johannes Trithemius, who shared both his fascination with magic and his conviction that the practice of this art could be made consistent with Christian piety. Thus Trithemius said, "there lies nothing within me beyond the limits of nature, save for Christian faith,

which grace, not nature, has given."[8] But nature is already capable of achieving quite a lot, according to Trithemius. This is why pagans have been capable of performing astounding feats, despite their lack of faith in the true God.[9] The notion of "natural magic" was a common one in the Renaissance, also explored down in Italy by Ficino and Pico.[10] Agrippa quotes Pico to the effect that this sort of magic is the "highest perfection (*consummatio*) of natural philosophy."[11] In *On the Uncertainty of the Sciences* (ch. 42), he illustrates it with the example of speeding up natural processes, for example by making flowers bloom already in March (a feat that we nowadays manage unnaturally, by causing climate change). Alchemy would also be an art for isolating elemental natures and recombining them to make new substances, notably precious metals.

But for Agrippa such manipulation of the elemental natural world is only the first of three kinds of magic. There is also astrology, which is the science that deals with the higher world of the heavens; and then religion, which deals with the still higher world of divinity. Thus Agrippa integrates theology into the occult sciences, portraying it as a science that deals with God and angels as we might expect, but also demons, rituals, and powerful words and signs.[12] All forms of magic function by exploiting the similarities and dissimilarities between things in the three worlds, elemental, celestial, and "intellectual" or divine. As Agrippa puts it, magic "teaches us how things differ from one another and how they agree (*quomodo res inter se differunt et quomodo conveniunt nos instruit*)."[13] Thus Agrippa explains the use of the "magic square," a grid-shaped array of letters which will produce magical effects when one traces the pattern made by the letters in the name of a celestial body.[14] He also evokes old ideas from the Pythagorean and Platonist tradition by saying that the magician can take advantage of the harmony and proportion between things, because "all things that are, and are made, subsist by, and receive their power from, number."

That looks like pure Pythagoreanism. Certainly classical sources are important for Agrippa, to the point that *On Occult Philosophy* has been called "a prime example of the revival of ancient paganism."[15] But he also draws, especially in the revised 1533 edition, on the Hebrew mystical tradition called Kabbalah. This is the reason he did not get that teaching position at the University of Dôle: he was accused of heresy over his

interest in Kabbalah, this just one year before the Reuchlin affair, which as you'll remember involved attacks on humanist specialism in Hebrew studies. Apparently heedless of such opposition, Agrippa continued his inquiries into Kabbalah and remained convinced of its magical efficacy and its compatibility with Christian religion. Or did he? In his treatise on the uncertainty of the sciences, he devotes a whole chapter to Kabbalah (ch. 47), explaining correctly that the term means the "tradition" of knowledge passed down through the generations. Supposedly Moses himself used this secret knowledge to work miracles like the parting of the Red Sea. But now Agrippa says that it is mere "superstition," used to perform tricks that should certainly not be compared to real miracles.

This fits with the overall tone of the work, which the Agrippa scholar Paola Zambelli has called an "anti-encyclopedia."[16] It begins by stating that, so far from allowing humans to transcend their natural limits, the arts and sciences are in fact highly damaging to us (ch. 1). By the end of the lengthy work Agrippa has not changed his mind. He says that all the branches of learning are actually just human customs, which fall short of true demonstration and simply prevent people from devoting themselves to Christianity. Indeed, "nothing is so much opposed to Christian faith and religion as science, no two things are more incompatible with each other" (ch. 101).[17] This sentence was one of those quoted by the theologians of the university of Louvain when they condemned Agrippa, here following the example of their colleagues at the Sorbonne. And you can see why. Sandwiched between these general denunciations of the sciences at the beginning and end of Agrippa's book, we have a series of scandalous criticisms of every kind of human learning, from grammar to medicine to theology, with discussions of such topics as prostitution and dice-playing thrown in for good measure.

The resulting treatise is, in the opinion of Agrippa's biographer Charles Nauert, thanks to its "pungent invective…the one work of Agrippa which can still be read with enjoyment."[18] But we are forced to ask the same question that we posed about his defense of women: is he being serious? There are reasons to doubt it. Elsewhere, Agrippa expresses the typical early sixteenth-century disdain for the scholastics by suggesting that they are effectively skeptics, remarking that they are "even worse than prostitutes" (he does not tell us how they compare to dice-players).[19] He

also wrote a favorable commentary on one of the most ambitious theories of scientific method produced in the medieval era, that of Ramon Llull, though he does say that Llull's combinatorial "art" would at best secure us knowledge of divine attributes and not God's true nature.[20] But that's hardly a radically skeptical position, of course.

Given that Agrippa was so devoted to the occult sciences of magic, alchemy, and astrology, we can also ask more specifically whether he became skeptical about these arts by the time of writing *On the Uncertainty of the Sciences*. As you might expect by now, there is conflicting evidence about this. The occult sciences are targeted along with the other disciplines in *On Uncertainty*. Furthermore, in his revised 1533 edition of the treatise *On Occult Philosophy*, he advises readers that they should "neither read, nor understand, nor remember" the earlier version of the treatise, "for it is harmful, it is poisonous." He then adds, "I desire by this retraction to be recanted: for formerly I spent a great deal of time and expense in these vanities."[21] But why spend more than two decades researching occult sciences and then massively expand your treatise on the topic, if you reject the whole business?

Also worth mentioning here is a fascinating bit of biography. Agrippa really got around: he was born in Cologne but traveled widely, to London, various places in France and Germany, and also Italy. At one point he was staying in Metz and involved himself in the trial of a woman who had been accused of witchcraft.[22] He assailed the inquisitor in the case, a Dominican named Nicolas Savin, arguing that the accusations made no sense in rational or theological terms. His intervention was successful, as the woman was freed. This sounds like the action of a skeptic, and a pretty heroic one at that, to which we can add that his student Jan Wier was a prominent critic of witch trials. But now comes the inevitable phrase "on the other hand": on the other hand, a close look at the documents from Metz shows that Agrippa did not question the sheer possibility of witchcraft or the conjuration of demons. He just thought the accused woman was innocent. In his *On Occult Philosophy* he has plenty to say about such summonings, though he is careful not to spell out the procedure in such detail that we could all try it at home. He even comments that evil women are apt to consort with demons. He levels the ultimate sixteenth-century insult at such women, by comparing them to heretical churchmen.

How then to resolve the tension between Agrippa the mage and Agrippa the skeptic? The aforementioned Charles Nauert offers an explanation that combines chronology with caveats. As his career progressed, Agrippa became less confident about the efficacy of magic and the resources of human reason more generally. But he still thought that occult sciences worked a lot of the time, even if they did not provide certainty. As Nauert puts it, "despite [Agrippa's] denunciation of astrology, he still felt that there might be something to it and that if one were to practice it, one must follow its rules faithfully."[23] Then he wrote *On Uncertainty*, which despite its brash rhetoric leaves open the possibility that magic is at least sometimes efficacious. He rails against practitioners of natural magic but doesn't claim that they are always charlatans. Agrippa also refers to the possibility of an alchemist's making a philosopher's stone, which has a balance of the elemental properties, but keeps his description vague so that only adepts of the alchemical art will know what he is talking about (ch. 90).[24] This is not so far from what we find in *On Occult Philosophy*, where he says in a similar vein that he has seen precious metals produced alchemically, but not in enough quantities to make the technique profitable.[25]

A very different reading has been offered by Marc van der Poel, who focuses on the genre chosen by Agrippa for both his defense of women and his attack on the sciences. This is the "declamation," a genre which, in Agrippa's own words, "says some things for sport and other things for serious…it voices some true things, some false things, and some doubtful things."[26] While declaiming one might even intentionally bring forth unpersuasive arguments, so as to provoke others into defending the truth. In a context like this, it would be perfectly acceptable for Agrippa to be merely provocative or satirical—the suspicion that has been raised regarding his defense of women—or simply to try out ideas to which he is less than fully committed. As he said in a daring work on original sin, "I will bring forward a new and different opinion, entirely my own, which is at the very least debatable and perhaps not wrong."[27]

The most philosophically intriguing interpretation, though, would have Agrippa being skeptical about the rational sciences (including magic), in order to be anything but skeptical when it comes to religious faith. When he says in *On Uncertainty* that the learned are less likely to come to God, it is because they have mistakenly elevated reason above revelation.[28] Only

faith can unite us to God, and to ultimate truth. Many of Agrippa's remarks about magic fit with this idea. Remember his claim that pagan and Jewish magicians can do what amount to parlor tricks, whereas the truly miraculous or supernatural deed is worked only with the assistance of God. Agrippa consistently presents "good" magic as a thoroughly Christian enterprise, and opposes it to merely natural sorcery. Thus he writes in *On Occult Philosophy* that magical words of power have their effects only because of the "divine powers working by them in the minds of those who by faith adhere to them."[29] And in a letter, he states that "whatever astrologers, soothsayers, magicians, marvel-workers, or alchemists, envious emulators of nature, or wicked necromancers, worse than demons, may dare promise—this interior artificer is able to understand it and bring it about; and this can be done without committing sin, without offending God, and without outraging religious faith."[30]

If this is the right way to understand Agrippa then it turns out, rather against expectation, that he fits remarkably well into the story we've been telling. He can sometimes sound just like Erasmus or even Luther, complaining about monks, relics, the cult of saints, and the papacy, and telling the scholastics that they should be relying on faith and not taking prideful recourse to their sophistries. Toward the end of *On Uncertainty* he even says that we have certainty only through faith (*sola fide*) and that only God is truthful, whereas all humans are liars (ch. 100).[31] No wonder that a contemporary observed, "these things, which Luther sees now, Agrippa had seen a long time ago."[32] But you most definitely wouldn't find Luther saying that we can use magical techniques to render ourselves divine, as Agrippa does in his more confident moods. And when he comments explicitly on the Reformation, it's pretty clear he doesn't see himself as a character in that story after all. In *On Uncertainty* he grumbles that thanks to Luther, "nearly every city has its own particular heresy" (ch. 6).[33] He was trying to write a story of his own, in which the failings of European culture being challenged openly by Luther and the other reformers would be solved through more secret means.

# 16

# JUST ADD SALT

## *Paracelsus and Chemistry*

Premodern science does not have the best of reputations. The mere mention of the topic calls to mind the use of leeches and the belief that the sun goes around the earth. So historians of science have had to find ways to explain why we shouldn't just ignore everything that happened before, say, the seventeenth century. Specialists in premodern medicine might tell you of amazing breakthroughs made long ago: the discovery of the nervous system in Alexandria in the second century BC, or successful eye surgery being done in the Islamic world. They might even suggest that we still have something to learn from long-dead scientists. The modern doctor would do well to heed Galen's advice to treat patients holistically, taking into account their personal history, diet and exercise regime, mental state, and individual constitution. While these moves might be persuasive in the case of medicine, they seem less promising when it comes to the disciplines known by the disparaging name "pseudo-sciences," applied to such disciplines as astrology and alchemy. Most people assume that both enterprises were a fanciful waste of time, and experts in their history have to work hard to convince even academic colleagues that they are worthy of study.

Often, they do so by pointing out that we still take astronomy and chemistry seriously, and that these two sciences were intimately bound up with their "pseudo-scientific" counterparts. When it comes to astrology, it suffices to mention Ptolemy, a near contemporary of Galen's who was the greatest ancient authority on both astral observation and astrological

predictions. As for alchemy, it's surprising to learn how recently it was first distinguished from chemistry.[1] We can find skepticism about the claims of alchemists going as far back as the history of those claims—specifically, as to whether they could really turn base metal into silver and gold. But it was only in the middle of the seventeenth century that these critics drew a contrast between a spurious art called "alchemy" and a genuine science called "chemistry." In fact, they are really the same word. The *al-* at the beginning of "alchemy" is just the Arabic definite article at the front of *al-kīmiyāʾ*, which was in turn borrowed from the Greek word *chemeia*. Early modern scholars engaged in some pseudo-science of their own here, offering bogus etymologies, including one deriving the syllable "al-" from the Greek word *hals*, meaning "salt."

As it happens salt is going to be a main ingredient of the story I tell in this chapter. But before we get to that, we should go beyond etymology to consider that there was good reason for premodern scientists to believe in alchemy.[2] While alchemists couldn't actually make gold or silver, they could do a lot of other things. They identified many minerals and chemicals, mastered techniques like distillation, which enabled them to extract pure alcohol, and developed processes for separating metals from one another. That included the isolation of precious from base metals, which could easily be confused with actually producing the precious metal. The same impression could be given by inducing a "tincture" in a non-precious metal, to make it look like gold or silver.

Then, too, the possibility of alchemy was well founded in more general theories of nature. For Aristotle and his many followers, all bodily substances were ultimately made from the four elements: air, earth, fire, and water. Aristotle explicitly said that these elements can turn into one another, as when water evaporates to become air. It seems to follow that it should be possible to break down any physical substance, lead for instance, into its elemental constituents, and to use these as the basis for making another substance, like gold. Here it's telling that when the Muslim Aristotelian al-Fārābī wrote a short work that is critical of alchemy, he conceded that, in principle, anything can be turned into anything.[3] The claims of alchemists are still false, but only because it is *in practice* impossible to carry out the transformations they describe. Somewhat earlier than al-Fārābī lived Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, whose name came to be attached to a large corpus of

alchemical writings that would become influential in Latin translation.[4] These writings drew on the ideas of Aristotelian physics, including the four-element theory. But Islamic alchemy could also be based on alternative ideas about material constitution. In a book on the doctor, philosopher, and alchemist Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, I've suggested that he grounded alchemy in an atomic theory of matter.[5] New substances could be produced by dissolving composite bodies and recombining their particles. Supposedly, al-Rāzī used this technique to produce an "elixir" for transforming metals. He once outdid a rival alchemist who turned metal into silver, by using such an elixir to turn that silver into gold.

As this story reveals, the goal of alchemy was not necessarily to start with one substance and melt, dissolve, or fuse it to make it into something else. Rather, alchemists often spoke of producing a chemical substance, the famous "philosopher's stone," which could then be applied to suitably prepared metals to transform them as desired. We just saw that Cornelius Agrippa talked about the philosopher's stone as perfectly "balanced." This echoed long-standing alchemical theories. According to one idea, the stone was a mixture of pure elemental fire and water, which were in this context called "sulfur and mercury" (or designated by nicknames, like "Mars and Vulcan," to avoid revealing trade secrets).[6] Often, an analogy was drawn to medicine: the philosopher's stone was like a drug being used to "treat" metal by eliminating impurities or releasing their inner "spirit." Like many premodern doctors, going as far back as Galen, alchemists paid attention to the influence of the stars on their procedures. In both medicine and alchemy, the same technique that works on one day may fail on another due to a different astral configuration.[7]

This brings us to the most famous figure of Renaissance alchemy, Paracelsus, whose central achievement was to adapt chemical ideas for use in medicine.[8] Fittingly enough "Paracelsus" is itself a nickname, and rather unnecessarily so, since he already sported the magnificent appellation Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim. "Bombastus" looks like it must be a literary conceit, but it really was his family name. Still, it fits nicely, because Paracelsus was quite a bombastic individual. He was a widely traveled man who wore a sword while sleeping and could defeat peasants in drinking contests. His enormous body of writings is full of invective against rivals and critics, and against traditional authorities in philosophy and

medicine. Born originally in the Swiss town of Einsiedeln, Paracelsus plied his trade in many cities, including Bern, where in 1527 he outraged the university masters with his unorthodox ideas and insistence on teaching in German from his own writings, instead of lecturing in Latin from a standard curriculum. Perhaps no quotation sums him up better than this one: "my shoelaces know more than you and all your schoolmasters, Galen and Avicenna, and all your institutions of higher learning."[9]

The reason Paracelsus attacked Galen and Avicenna is that these were the two central medical authorities of his day. Supposedly he even publicly burnt a copy of Avicenna's medical treatise, the *Canon*. As this begins to suggest, he was centrally interested in medicine. Scholars have even sometimes suggested that he had no interest at all in the practical transformation of metals. But this seems to be false. He refers in several texts to his own success in increasing the weight of gold in a mixture while separating it from other metals, and he plausibly describes how he turned iron into copper: he would have been able to produce a "replacement reaction" whereby iron replaces the copper in copper sulfate, allowing him to get pure copper as a by-product.[10] Still, he mostly presented himself as an expert in the use of alchemical procedures to treat the human body. His works launched a movement of "Paracelsan medicine" that swept across Europe, helped along by stories of apparently miraculous cures performed by him, or achieved by using his methods.[11]

This constituted a novel approach to medicine. In the Galenic tradition, to which Avicenna belonged, treatments were based around the idea that the body is made up of four "humors" that need to be kept in, or restored to, proper balance. The humors—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile—shared their properties with the four Aristotelian elements. So this kind of medicine was, like medieval alchemy, based on a physical theory that was standard orthodoxy among Aristotelian schoolmen at the universities. Paracelsus saw things very differently. While he accepted the reality of earth, air, fire and water, for him these were not fundamental principles. Instead, he spoke of "three firsts (*tria prima*; *drei ersten*)," namely sulfur, mercury, and salt. Here salt has been added to the pair familiar from earlier alchemical writings, sulfur and mercury. They are powerfully influenced by the stars, and in turn give rise to diseases, an explanation that Paracelsus finds far more plausible than those offered by Galenic medicine. How, for example, can we explain the outbreak of a plague? Surely it isn't that many

of the people in a given city suddenly have the same humoral imbalance. Instead, an astral configuration is causing a buildup or "tartar" of mercury in their bodies, yielding such symptoms as boils on the skin.[12] In general, "diseases grow in the human as grass and shrubs do from the earth."[13]

It isn't only the human body whose properties are determined by the three firsts. They are the ultimate constituents of all bodies, hidden under the outer form or aspect of things (*unter einer gestalt*). They are the real "prime matter" spoken of, but not properly understood, by Aristotelians. We can see them at work in such everyday processes as the burning of wood, which yields flame, smoke, and ash—the manifestations of sulfur, mercury, and salt, respectively. Strictly speaking, each kind of substance has its own version of sulfur, mercury, and salt. They are not just universally present material stuffs. Rather, they are understood in functional terms. It is salt that gives bodies their solidity, sulfur their combustibility, and mercury their fluidity.

Paracelsus compares the three principles to seeds jumbled in a sack, whose "fruits" emerge through natural and artificial processes of material transformation. His natural philosophy thus applies an organic metaphor even to supposedly dead matter. Minerals grow out of elemental water as the "seeds" of salt, sulfur, and mercury cause it to form into a viscous fluid that sprouts through the earth, like roots in soil.[14] Likewise, earth is an elemental "mother" full of seeds, which blossom forth as vegetation and animals. God placed the seeds of all things in the elements from the beginning of creation, with different "fruits" coming forth at different moments, which are predestined for them, as most clearly illustrated by the seasons.[15] As he nicely puts it, "everything has its own harvest, its own autumn, at its own time (*also das alle ding zu seiner zeit sein ernt und herbst haben*)." Paracelsus calls this process "natural alchemy."

As for human alchemists, they must of course take their cue from this bold physical theory. Paracelsus is scornful of previous scientists who in his opinion made discoveries by happenstance, depending on more or less random "experiences" rather than theory.[16] (Ironically, this is a critique that his favorite target Galen had leveled at some of his own predecessors, especially those in the "Empiricist" school.) With the theory of seeds in hand, the doctor might treat an illness like dropsy as follows. First, recognize its cause, namely a buildup of salt in the body. Then fight this by

applying mercury, which Paracelsus rather alarmingly sees as a very useful drug. Though he admits that it sometimes causes harm, this happens only when it is administered at the wrong time, that is, under the wrong astral influence. One might also use mercury to cure a mercury-based disease, purifying or rectifying its influence in the body: an early example of the homeopathic principle in medicine.

Paracelsus thus transposes to the medical context an idea that was fundamental in the history of alchemy, namely that the adept of this art should "perfect nature."[17] Showing again his penchant for homely comparisons, he says that the alchemist's work is really no different from that of the baker or winemaker. Where an Aristotelian or Galenic scientist would assume that "perfecting nature" means establishing a correct balance between the constituents of a body, Paracelsus' idea is the reverse. Thinking alchemically means *separating out* the fundamental bodily principles and making them as pure as possible. He draws an analogy with the stomach, in which digestion removes what is "poisonous" and excretes it, while the pure nutriment is retained. Likewise the alchemist is trying to isolate, and then use, whatever is most fundamental to a substance, for example to produce a drug. Across his career Paracelsus uses varying terminology for this underlying principle. It is the "predestined element," the "hidden power (*arcanum*)," the "soul" or "spirit" in the bodily mixture.

It may not have escaped you that these ideas have obvious echoes with Christian religion. The trinity of chemical principles mirrors the three divine persons; in fact, before Paracelsus, an early fifteenth-century treatise called *Book of the Holy Trinity* had proposed adding salt to mercury and sulfur to get three physical principles. The "spirit" hidden within the bodily substance, an immaterial essence placed within it by God, may also remind us of the Incarnation. More explicitly, Paracelsus says that all natural things are signs of God. Can we go further here, and link his reformation of alchemy and medicine to the religious Reformation going on around him? After all, he was putting forth unorthodox ideas just as Luther was doing the same, especially in the 1520s.[18] Furthermore, his attacks on medical authority and claims of independence—once he bragged that he had not read a book for ten years—recall Luther's scornful rejection of scholasticism. Paracelsus' opponents in Basel even called him the "Luther of medicine," intended as a term of abuse but repeated by later Paracelsans with pride. So it makes sense that, though he did not himself leave the

Catholic faith, his ideas flourished especially among Protestants. Adam of Bodenstein, who adopted Paracelsus' methods after they cured him from an illness, went on to publish many of the master's works and promote his teachings in Basel. And who was Adam of Bodenstein's father? None other than Andreas von Karlstadt, the reformer who was too radical to stay in Luther's Wittenberg.

At the very least, these connections show that Paracelsus' science was a product of its age. But he can be more directly compared to figures like Agrippa and Trithemius, who as we saw helped to inspire Agrippa's interest in magic, and may also have had a hand in the formation of the young Paracelsus.[19] We should certainly not conflate or confuse alchemy with magic, but the two arts share a number of things. Both magicians and alchemists tended to cloak their teachings, as with the aforementioned use of codenames or simple refusal to spell out procedures fully, lest the uninitiated become acquainted with them. We can find that in Paracelsus, too, who once refused to explain openly how to make precious metals, saying "it is better to remain silent and let the poor stay poor."[20] More fundamentally, the two arts both drew on a pool of common inspirations. We've already talked about the importance of astrology, and can add to this the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah.[21] Paracelsus once said, "if you do not understand the use of the Kabbalists and of the old astronomers, you are not…created to open your mouth about the alchemical art."

This aspect of his writings has not always enthused modern-day scholars. One of them comments that "Paracelsus as a philosopher and alchemist may sometimes resemble a cabbalistic scholar more than a laboratory researcher or natural scientist in the modern sense."[22] But at the time it was, like salt, very much to some people's taste. A leading example here would be Heinrich Khunrath, who used kabbalistic techniques like numerology and the analysis of words to expound Paracelsan alchemy. Take, for instance, the central word "elixir," here spelled *elixeir*: according to Khunrath, the first two letters *el-* represent the Hebrew word for "strong," the following *i* and *x* are the Roman numerals one and ten, and the last three letters *-eir* are the Greek word for "air." While this may seem pretty far from the concerns of Luther and Calvin, Peter Forshaw has pointed out that Kabbalah was supposed to go back to Moses and the

foundations of Jewish religion. So it could be seen as more fitting for Christian scientists than the work of pagans like Aristotle and Galen.[23]

Khunrath was only one of many scholars who worked within the new, Paracelsan paradigm. Another was Peter Severinus, who was physician to Frederick II in Denmark and wrote a synthesis of Paracelsan medicine.[24] Severinus was faithful to Paracelsus' irreverent attitude as well as his medical theories. "We do not," he said, "owe the Greeks nor Arabs any respectful consideration. We are the servants of the sick." There was considerable support for Paracelsan philosophy in France, where it was especially the Protestant Huguenots who adopted it. Over in England the alchemist John Dee was acquainted with the Paracelsan movement. And believe it or not, a work written in Aleppo in about 1640 by Ṣāliḥ ibn Sallūm showed knowledge of Paracelsus' ideas, meaning that his influence was even felt in the Ottoman empire.[25]

Yet these ideas left many others with a bitter taste in their mouths. In Basel, opposition to Paracelsan theories remained strong. Here a student named Thomas Moffet was forced to remove all trace of them from his writings before he could be granted a degree. One of the staunchest opponents was Andreas Libavius, who believed that one could produce gold alchemically, but using the old-fashioned methods of medieval alchemy. Libavius thus polemicized against the Paracelsans and in favor of the natural philosophy of Aristotle and the medical treatments recommended by Galen.[26] Another critic was Thomas Erastus, a professor of medicine at Heidelberg. In a set of *Disputations* from 1572, he rejected the idea that one could chemically transform one type of substance into another, and then back again. Such cyclical change is possible only between the four fundamental elements, air, earth, fire, and water. He worried that Paracelsus' chemistry saw ordinary substances like plants, animals, and humans as mere aggregates or mixtures of more basic ingredients. This would undermine science itself, since science is the study of the unifying essences of those very substances.[27] Love him or hate him, then, Paracelsus was like many of the chemicals he devoted his life to understanding: bound to provoke a strong reaction.

# 17

# THE ACID TEST

## *Theories of Matter*

Is a human body more like a cake, or more like fruit salad? You might say like a cake, because its arrival means that it's somebody's birthday. But what I mean is something else. I'm asking about the human's material composition. If your body is like a cake, then the stuff that was used to make you has been replaced with a new substance. Just as there are no actual eggs in the finished cake, the initial ingredients of your body are no longer actually present in your body. This was the view of Thomas Aquinas, who held that each substance has only one form. For him, a human body is made ultimately of the four elements, and even they have a material substrate, namely formless prime matter. But the elements and higher-level ingredients like blood or bone have been taken up into the compound of form and matter that is the body. All this stuff has literally been trans-*formed*, rendered from earth or blood into something new by receiving the form of humanity.

If by contrast the human body is like a fruit salad, then it consists of parts that remain the same as they were before they were combined to make the body, parts that will also retain their natures once the body is destroyed. You can also take parts out of the body without necessarily destroying it, as by drawing blood or pulling a tooth. This is like removing the bits of banana that someone unaccountably thought would be nice to include in the fruit salad, forgetting that they always get mushy. If this is your view, then you think that the substances we see being generated and destroyed, as

when people are born and die, are made up of "corpuscles," meaning "small bodies." And in the unlikely event that you live in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, if you believe in corpuscles then you are probably an atomist, meaning that for you the human body and indeed every physical object is an aggregate of *indivisible* particles. But you don't actually need to believe that the parts are literally "atoms," that is, "uncuttables" (which is what the Greek *atoma* means). Maybe the corpuscles are in principle divisible, maybe they aren't.[1] Sometimes scientists of this period casually referred to things as "atoms" just to mean that they couldn't be divided through any known laboratory technique. They might even be visible, as in a vapor cloud that is made of tiny droplets, or metal that has been turned into a pile of "atomic" powder. The real point is that they are actually present in the substance, all jumbled together to constitute, in the case of the human, blood, bone, and ultimately the whole body.

To find out whether a substance is like cake or like fruit salad, a good test would be whether the substance can be decomposed into the same ingredients you used to make it in the first place. As the scholastics liked to say, *in quae dissolvi possunt composita, ex iisdem coaluerunt*: "the things into which composites can be dissolved are the things out of which they are made."[2] You can turn eggs, butter, and flour into cake, but you can't get the eggs, butter, and flour back out of the cake, whereas you could carefully separate the fruit salad back into separated chunks of apple, grapes, and melon (yes, we have no bananas). That contrast might suggest that some substances contain actual corpuscles, and some not, in which case we will have to answer our question on a case-by-case basis. But someone like Aquinas would say that any *genuine* substance is unified by its form and has no actually present ingredients in it. Of course he would not think fruit salad is such a substance. His preferred examples would be organic bodies: plants, animals, and humans. A corpuscularian by contrast would say that even organic bodies are made of other, far smaller bodies. Every significantly sized body around us is nothing but a mixture or aggregate of parts. Even cake! It is like fruit salad after all: it's just that its tiny parts, which persist through the process of making the cake or digesting it, must be sought at the chemical level, not at the level of eggs and butter.

It was in fact chemistry that provided some of the strongest empirical evidence in favor of corpuscularianism, around the turn of the seventeenth century.[3] At about this time powerful acids were discovered, like sulfuric,

hydrochloric, and nitric acid. This made it possible to dissolve substances much more quickly and thoroughly than before. Scholars interested in chemistry or alchemy—remember, at this time these were still effectively a single scientific discipline—noticed that they could dissolve a metal like silver in acid. Then, using alkalis, they could get the silver to precipitate back out of the fluid in the form of particles, like a powder. This literal "acid test" seemed to provide dramatic proof of corpuscles. The dissolved silver is not visible in the fluid, yet must still be present: how else would it be possible to get it back? It must therefore be in the fluid as particles that are too small to see.

The philosopher Daniel Sennert described this experiment in a work called *On Chemicals*. On the basis of this and similar evidence, he concluded that the ancient atomists had been right, and Aristotle and his followers (like Aquinas) wrong. The generation of a substance is not the acquiring of a "substantial form" by a material substrate that has a potential for that form. It is just an appropriate combining of atomic parts. Likewise, destruction is nothing but the separation of those parts. The atoms themselves endure through the whole process, something he illustrated with the example of a goat eating a medicinal plant, a nursemaid drinking the goat's milk, and passing on the plant's beneficial effects to the infant she is nursing.[4] Those effects are thanks to the corpuscles that were in the plant, still present in the goat's milk, and then passed on to the maid's breast milk.

Now, this discussion from Sennert comes from 1619, a bit later than the span covered in this book. But his atomic theory is a natural outgrowth of the ideas we just found in Paracelsus. For him, the fundamental constituents of things were sulfur, mercury, and salt, which are actually present in more complex bodies, as we can see from the fact that they can cause diseases in those bodies. This is why one of his critics, Thomas Erastus, tried to refute him by saying that on the Paracelsian view it should be just as possible to turn vinegar into wine as it is to let wine turn to vinegar, and that there must already be worms present in fresh cheese and meat, since worms appear in these foods when they rot.[5] (Maybe we should stick to cake and fruit salad.) This was already in 1572, showing that the corpuscularian theory of matter was worming its way into philosophical debates well before the seventeenth century, when it would be prominently adopted by such famous thinkers as Descartes.

Now, I should admit that in fact these two positions, which I have presented as being diametrically opposed, could share something in common. To keep things simple I contrasted corpuscularianism to the view of someone like Aquinas, for whom there is just one form in each genuine substance. But actually that "single form" view was already a minority one when he put it forth back in the thirteenth century.[6] And it is not what Erastus was trying to defend. Rather, Erastus accepted what is sometimes called "form pluralism," according to which there may be several substantial forms actually present in a single substance. In addition to my human form, for example, I have the form of body—not the human body, that is, but just the form that belongs to whatever is extended in three-dimensional space. When I die, the form of humanity will be lost, but the form of body will not be, since my corpse will still be an extended body. Nonetheless, Erastus' view is *hylomorphic*, meaning that each substance (whether body, human, cake, or silver) is a composite of matter and form, with matter providing the potentiality, and form the actual determination of that potential. As for Sennert, while he rejected the analysis of substance into matter and form, he also thought in terms of multiple levels of physical composition. A bar of gold is made of gold corpuscles, but gold is not a fundamental element. Rather, its parts are made of even more basic particles.[7] Like Paracelsus, Sennert assumed that the ultimate chemical constituents are sulfur, mercury, and salt, which come together to form more complex materials that derive from them.

Furthermore, neither Sennert nor Paracelsus tried to explain the observable properties of things by appealing to the physical properties of atoms. This is a significant difference from ancient atomism. Democritus said the soul must be made of very smooth, round atoms that can flow around the human body, while Plato in his *Timaeus* proposed that fire destroys things because it is made of tiny particles that are sharp, because they have the shape of pyramids.[8] Instead, late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century corpuscularianism generally ascribed certain powers and properties to each atomic aggregate, like the healing effect of a drug or the corrosive effect of acid, without reducing these features to the mere physical shapes of the corpuscles. For this reason the sort of atomism we see in Sennert and others has been seen as a kind of compromise between the true physical account of classical atomism and a form- or property-based physics like that of Aristotle. In his book on the chemistry of this period, William R.

Newman even says that Sennert's view was a "fusion between Aristotelianism and alchemy."[9] But Sennert himself was something of an expert on fusion, and he would have disagreed. He saw himself as being in agreement with Democritus and indeed a general tendency in ancient philosophy, one that had been interrupted by Aristotle's idiosyncratic, though ultimately more influential physics. Atomism had been the view "of virtually all the ancients before Aristotle…and even many after Aristotle."[10]

And there was another ancient idea taking renewed root at this time: the theory of seeds. We saw how Paracelsus believed that natural things emerge from basic elemental ingredients because God placed the "seeds" of things in those ingredients at the first creation. This sounds a good deal like the Stoic theory that nature implants the rational principles (*logoi*) of things in matter as "seeds." It's an idea that would have been known to Renaissance readers, thanks to Augustine and also Cicero's presentations of Stoic doctrine in the Latin language.[11] During the sixteenth century, one proponent of the seed theory was Jacob Schegk, who studied in Tübingen and was appointed as a lecturer in philosophy there following the reform of the teaching curriculum by Melanchthon.[12] This reform notwithstanding, the curriculum at Tübingen was still based on Aristotle, with lectures sometimes commenting on the texts of this ancient authority line by line. Schegk realized this might not be pedagogically ideal, but told his students to just put up with it: "I couldn't leave this bit out, although you can't really understand it yet. But still, if you pay attention to my commentary, you will understand it. I can't pour it all in with a funnel!"[13] One issue in Aristotle that attracted Schegk's interest was the formation of animal embryos. In a treatise written in 1580, he argued that when plants, animals, and humans are generated, this occurs thanks to a "formative or plastic power (*facultas formatrix et plastica*)" seeded within matter.[14] Like Paracelsus' seeds, Schegk's active power within matter has been put there by God. Once the plastic power has done its work in forming the fetus, the organism's soul replaces it and fully animates the body.

These ideas too were inspirational for Sennert, who used them to explain the supposed phenomenon of spontaneous generation. Those worms crawling out of the moldy bread and cheese come from something "analogous to seeds" within matter.[15] And even metals, as Paracelsus had claimed, emerge thanks to the power seeded within matter. The species of

gold, silver, or copper are propagated by such a power, much like an animal species. Sennert did modify Schegk's account to some extent, though. Seeking to give the soul a greater role in both natural and spontaneous reproduction, he proposed that the soul must "lie hidden" within the corpuscles that come together to form the organic body.[16] So again, Sennert's atomism or corpuscularianism is not mechanistic. The particles of matter have powers and properties that are reminiscent of Aristotelian forms, and Sennert believes that soul is latent or dormant in them, expressing itself when the time and circumstance is right.

Schegk had a connection to another early proponent of the fruit salad theory of bodies: Nicolaus Taurellus.[17] He was a student of Schegk, and along with him defended the view that substances are aggregates of parts, with higher-level "forms" emerging from lower ones. Taurellus also invoked the rule of composition that motivated so many corpuscularian views: "if things were born through the conjunction of parts, they decay through the separation of the same parts." Like other atomists he denies the reality of prime matter, the featureless substrate that was supposed to underlie the four basic elements. More surprisingly, he talks as if the atoms of his own theory do not count as "matter" at all. "Matter," he says, "plainly does not exist, and nothing but forms can be and can enter composition." "Mixture or composition," meanwhile, is "a mere conjunction of forms that in no way changes them."

Against the notion that we need some kind of matter to explain why bodies are extended in space, he proposes a breathtaking thought experiment. Imagine a universe with only one element, like a whole cosmos made of earth. In that universe, it seems obvious that spatial extension would simply be a property of earth. In our more diverse universe, then, it can belong to all bodies or at least all fundamental bodies, by virtue of their "forms." Here, then, we have a version of form pluralism, but without any commitment to matter supporting the forms. Higher-level forms, like the form of humanity, supervene on lower-level ones, like the form of blood and bone, which in turn belong to forms like those of the elements. And blood and bone, or earth and water, are explained atomistically: the particles touch without merging into an undivided continuum. So much as Sennert would later do, Taurellus combines something like a Democritean physical theory with something like an Aristotelian theory of natures and properties.

Taking our story forward to the early seventeenth century again, there is one more philosopher we should consider: David Gorlaeus.[18] Honored as the "Dutch Galileo" for his innovative physical theories, Gorlaeus lived to be only twenty-one years old, dying in 1612. Fortunately, he was precocious. Two works of his, both published posthumously, follow Taurellus in holding that even the human being is a single substance "by aggregation, not by essence (*per aggregationem, non per essentiam*)." The soul has been added to the body and penetrates through its atomic structure. This anticipates the ideas of Descartes and other seventeenth-century dualists. Since they thought that the soul and the body are different types of metaphysical entity, they were often more attracted by atomism than Aristotelianism. Better to say that the human body is a mere accumulation of corpuscles with a properly separate soul to rule over it, than Aristotle's idea that soul is the form of the body.[19] Indeed, Gorlaeus explicitly rejects the "hylomorphic" account of substances inherited from Aristotle. Bodies are only aggregates of particles, not matter actualized and organized by form. To illustrate Gorlaeus mentions the familiar examples of a cloud of water vapor or pile of stones; apparently fruit salad was not yet widely available in the Netherlands at this time, though you'd think it would have been popularized by William of Orange.

For Gorlaeus, the fundamental elements are not the chemical triad accepted by Paracelsus and Sennert, but water and earth. Fire is explained away as mere heat, generated by friction between particles, while air is a non-elemental fluid filling up the gaps between and inside atomic aggregates. Notice that Gorlaeus does not accept the reality of void, another departure from the classical atomists. For Democritus or Epicurus, matter consisted of atoms moving around in empty space, not in a fluid substance like air. So that is a point of agreement between Gorlaeus and the Aristotelians. Furthermore, like the other atomists we have been talking about, Gorlaeus thinks that properties (including heat and cold) can belong to an aggregate as a whole. So yet again, this is more like a property in scholastic philosophy than perceptible features in classical atomism, which are explained reductively by appealing to the shape, speed, location, and entangling of atoms. The Aristotelian worldview was dissolving, but not always with the sudden fury of a body thrust into pure sulfuric acid; scientists around the turn of the seventeenth century preferred to offer more moderate solutions.

# 18

# BORN TO BE CONTRARY

## *Toleration in the Netherlands*

We seem to be living in a time when people are not very good at disagreeing with one another. Or rather, we find it exceedingly easy to disagree; what we are not so good at is resolving disagreement. Social and political disputes lead to distrust between implacably opposed camps, instead of leading to attempts at resolution. Much ink has been spilled, and many hands wrung, over this contemporary situation and its causes. I'd like to suggest an unusual approach, namely that we might look back to an earlier period of intense dispute to see what lessons we might learn. I have in mind Europe in the late sixteenth century, which makes the early twenty-first century look like a sing-a-long hosted by Mr Rogers. In a time of violent disagreement, violent rhetoric, and plain old violence, the Netherlands were a scene of particularly intense conflict. Mr Rogers' gentle question, "Won't you be my neighbor?" would typically have been answered, "Sure, but only if you accept my highly specific interpretation of Christianity."

Most obviously there was the clash between Catholicism and Protestantism. The Catholics were represented by King Philip II, who claimed authority over the Low Countries and ruled them from distant Spain. Ranged against him were the Protestants, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, which adopted a broadly Calvinist theological outlook. Other groups too joined the fray. There were Lutherans, who argued with the Reformed, and there were Anabaptists, especially the followers of

Menno Simons or "Mennonites." They adopted a pacifist approach, so as to avoid being associated with the sort of upheaval seen when an earlier group of Anabaptists took over Munster. In general, there was a variety of subgroups among the Anabaptist movement, with no little friction between them. Then there were the Arminians, whom I'll introduce later in this chapter. In short, there was no lack of opportunity for disagreement, not least between those who mostly agreed with one another.

Unfortunately the disagreement spilled over into physical conflict. A wave of iconoclasm led to destruction of church images beginning in 1566, and war pitted Protestant sympathizer William of Orange and his followers against the Spanish.[1] In 1581, the States General of the Provinces in the Netherlands officially repudiated Philip II, making themselves a Protestant state. But then and still today, the Low Countries were divided between Catholicism and Protestantism. After the brutal Duke of Alva staged a reconquest of the south in the 1580s, many Protestants fled to the north. The town of Ghent was a Calvinist stronghold, sometimes called the "Geneva of Flanders"; now about half the population abandoned it and went into exile. Making matters more complex, rivalry between religious factions was overlaid atop competition within the political order. There was a long and healthy tradition of uprisings by Dutch towns against their overlords, going back to the late middle ages. The scholar Lodovico Guiccardini, nephew of the Italian historian Francesco Guiccardini, lived in Antwerp and praised its mixed constitution as a bulwark against this sort of instability. The city was under the princely rule of the Duke of Brabant, but enjoyed many freedoms or "privileges" that allowed the city to govern itself practically as an independent republic.[2]

So it was nothing new when the Dutch chafed under the monarch Philip II. One could even argue that the religious dimension of the debate masked a more fundamental conflict between decentralized and centralized political authority. In fact the Dutch States themselves made exactly this argument when they defied the Spanish crown: they were fighting for political liberty, not religious freedom.[3] In the latter half of the sixteenth century it became impossible to disentangle the two goals, as we see with Dutch opposition to the arrival of the Inquisition in their lands. They disliked the Inquisition in part because it infringed their freedom of conscience, in part because it struck them as an illegitimate transfer of coercive power from secular magistrates to the church. Still, it is worth realizing that the goal of religious

freedom was really an extension or corollary of the long-standing tradition of political freedom, whether for provinces, towns, or individuals. Since the fourteenth century each duke of Brabant had been sworn in with an excitingly named ceremony, the "Joyous Entry," during which he had to promise not to abuse anyone "in any manner." Once the Reformation came along, these words were somewhat tendentiously taken to imply that he must not exercise coercion in matters of faith.[4]

So a commitment to *political* independence predated, and paved the way for, ideas of *religious* liberty. Here we have the ultimate root of the tolerant, open-minded reputation that the Dutch still enjoy today. It was an attitude that was expressed in many Dutch political treatises of the time.[5] These invoked the "ancient liberties" of the cities and presented these liberties as a factor in the economic prosperity enjoyed by the Dutch. An advisor of William of Orange named Junius de Jonghe went so far as to say that a monarch like William wields power only at the pleasure of his subjects, and thus must rule in close cooperation with the States General, who represent popular opinion. Another treatise stated that humans "have been created free by God; they cannot become slaves by the will of him who has no power over them save that they themselves have granted and given to him." Aggaeus van Albada, a spokesman for the States, was the first Dutch thinker to suggest that the people are actually *above* the state, so that all legitimate political sovereignty is popular in nature. This was unusually bold, but it was quite common to suppose that rulers wield their power through a kind of contract with the people, or with their representatives in the form of city governments. And it was written right into such documents as the Joyous Entry that a ruler who turned tyrant could be rightly resisted by the people.

All this might lead us to expect the Low Countries, or at least the region under Protestant control, to be a paradise of individual liberty. In fact the situation was rather more complex. In an introduction to a book on religious toleration in the Netherlands, the editors say that "the central paradox of the Dutch Republic is this: the existence of a confessionally pluralistic society with an official intolerant Calvinist Church that discriminated against Catholics."[6] Actually this may not be quite so paradoxical. The Reformed were a minority in the Low Countries, even in the Protestant areas, and so they were forced to tolerate other points of view simply as a matter of

practical necessity.[7] Sometimes toleration was a more formal result of political settlement, as when a 1576 peace treaty called the Pacification of Ghent required the States General to allow freedom of worship to Catholics. And when it came to the relation between Protestant confessions, toleration was not merely a grudgingly accepted constraint. The Protestants liked to present themselves as defending freedom of conscience against Catholic tyranny. They took pride in combatting heresy not with fire and sword, but by "using their words," as parents like to tell their kids today. Magistrates were encouraged to stand against religious dissidents, but by means of debate and refutation, not execution or imprisonment.

Then again, parents also like to say, "Do as we say, not as we do." While the Reformed might tolerate other mainstream Protestants, and peacefully debate with them, they were not always so patient with groups like the Anabaptists who were thought to be beyond the pale. An interesting test case were the Arminians, also called "Remonstrants," whose ideas would ultimately be ruled out of bounds in the Synod of Dort in 1619. They were followers of Jacob Arminius, whose distinctive teaching involved that central question of the relation between the saving power of God's grace and human freedom.[8] Like many Protestant intellectuals in the Netherlands, Arminius was a student at Leiden, where a university was founded at the behest of William of Orange in 1575.[9] Also like many Dutch intellectuals, he then went to study in Geneva, where he came into contact with Theodore Beza. But he was no follower of Beza's. On the contrary, he developed an understanding of freedom that was dramatically opposed to that of Beza, or, at least, dramatically opposed within the spectrum of positions that could be defended by a Protestant.

Beza took Calvin's doctrine of predestination so seriously that he adopted what is called "supralapsarianism," which is a mouthful but expresses a pretty simple idea: God does not just choose which people will be "elected" or saved, and which will be "reprobate" or damned. He does this even *before* original sin has happened. The fall (the "lapse" in the word "supralapsarianism") was a foreordained event, always planned to be rectified by God's gift of grace. The story of redemption and damnation thus follows a script that has been written in advance, both in general and for each individual character in the story. If you're thinking that this sounds like it would leave no place for human freedom at all, then Arminius would agree. He argued that according to Beza, God punishes people who had no

opportunity to avoid being punished, which is unjust. Arminius thus proposed a different theory, one that also involves God's knowledge of future events. On this theory God does not predetermine those events. Instead, He decides in advance to give grace to those who He already knows will freely choose not to resist that grace.

Speaking of doing things one has decided to do in advance, I can now come back to David Gorlaeus. In the last chapter we looked at his innovative account of matter, but I deferred discussing the religious context of that account until now. In particular, sectarian debate is relevant to his description of the human as only "accidentally a being (*ens per accidens*)," that is, as an aggregate of atoms that has an accidental relationship to its soul. The modern scholar Christoph Lüthy has argued that this aspect of Gorlaeus' thought may relate to his Arminianism.[10] For Gorlaeus, the body is a purely material thing, rather than being substantially unified with the soul that animates it, as more Aristotelian philosophers held. This makes it possible for him to associate the blight of sin with the body, passed down from one generation to the next in a kind of "biological determinism." The soul, meanwhile, floats free of the atomic body and is able to make free choices, unimpeded by material influence. It must be said that Gorlaeus does not himself draw a connection between his natural philosophy and his theological affiliation, so Lüthy's interpretation remains somewhat speculative. But it would nicely explain why a partisan of Arminius' theology would have rejected the Aristotelian anthropology in favor of an atomist one.

As for Arminius' opponents, they accused him of taking up a position much like that of the Catholics. In fact they said it amounted to the idea put forward by Catholic schoolmen like Gabriel Biel and thunderously condemned by Luther, namely that God promises to, as it were, help those who help themselves. Christians must simply "do what is in them" by trying to be good, and God will give them grace as a reward. Arminius was aware of this problem, which is why he spoke about *not resisting* grace. The believers' contribution is negative, so they do not do anything to *earn* grace. Like other Protestants, Arminius accepted that salvation is worked through God's unconstrained generosity and cannot be merited through works. He offered a nice metaphor: if a rich man gives charity to a beggar, does it make this less of a freely given gift if the beggar stretches out his hand to take what is offered?[11] It's also important to Arminius that grace is

not, as he put it, an "irresistible force (*onwederstandelicjke cracht*)." If it were, then God would just be imposing a fate on His creatures, whether for good or for ill, which again would be unjust. Arminius went so far as to say that "God's rights (*ius Dei*) do not extend over them as far as this."[12]

Some of the philosophical issues here are familiar to us from the debate between Luther and Erasmus, but there are a couple that are more distinctive, and worth dwelling on. First, Arminius seems to be saying that God decides *in advance* to give grace to those who He *already* knows will not resist when the time comes. In other words, God is (so to speak) planning out His own actions by taking into account what people will freely do in the future. Does this make sense? Unlike God you'll have to wait to find out, since the most sophisticated attempt to answer the question comes with Molina's theory of "middle knowledge" which we'll discuss in Chapter 64. For now let's just observe that Arminius gave some thought to the logical implications of his theological position. In a letter to a friend written in 1598, he suggests that a freely chosen future action can be determined in the sense that it cannot fail to happen, which is why God can know about it already. The future is "open" only in being unknowable to finite minds like ours. This is rather surprising, since it turns out that the staunch upholder of free will Arminius was in a sense a determinist.[13] Once grace has been given to the believer, the "epistemic indeterminacy" falls away. In other words, the believer can be totally sure that they are among the elect.

This is a less famous, but for Arminius, totally crucial point. Like many other reformers, he wanted to reassure the faithful that they could be "certain (*verseeckert*)" of their own salvation and need not live their lives in terror of a foreordained punishment.[14] That was a form of reassurance also promised by his opponents, including Franciscus Gomarus, who became his leading critic. But it was easier for Arminius to make the point, since on his view, believers are actually involved in the bestowal of grace, having decided not to refuse that grace. So they are in a good position to know that they are indeed faithful. Hardline Reformed thinkers like Gomarus instead left absolutely everything up to God. So they could only advise their fellow Christians to trust in His mercy, while insisting that one can feel totally certain that God will grant entirely unmerited redemption. That sounds rather unconvincing, but it does fit well with the Calvinist understanding of faith as unshakable belief, without any need for justification or argument.

Though Arminius adopted what looks like a "moderate" position on freedom and grace, when it came to the question of toleration he was not that far away from the Reformed theologians who eventually got his teachings banned. He said that a hardline predestination theory like that of Beza "ought in no way to be allowed in the church."[15] Freedom to accept grace? Yes. But freedom to promulgate the contrary view? Not so much. In this he was unlike another Dutch thinker, the most interesting when it comes to the issue of tolerance: Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert. As far as his theology goes, he thought (much like Arminius) that a strict teaching on predestination would take away the believer's motivation to strive for goodness. But he ventured still further away from Calvinist teaching by stating that it lies within human resources to achieve that goodness. This is an easy and blissful process, itself a kind of "joyous entry," guided by reason and achieved through knowledge of oneself and of morality.[16] Which hardly sounds Protestant at all, right?

Well, exactly. Coornhert was not aligned with any of the established, or "visible," churches on offer in the Netherlands. This was more common than you'd think. It's been estimated that about half of the Dutch population were the equivalent of undecided voters when it came to the religious disputes tearing their country apart.[17] Whether they were waiting to see who would win, genuinely torn over which church to support, or just couldn't be bothered to engage with the fine points that university-trained theologians thought were so important, these people were not committed adherents of any one confession. They were on the fence and, along with Mr. Rogers, hoping that the fence would make for good neighbors. Coornhert was the Dutch intellectual who most fully articulated that hope. He argued that the Reformed Church, no less than the Catholics, ought to refrain from prosecuting heretics. They should let religious views be tested in the arena of public debate, rather than simply imposing one view and enforcing its adoption by the whole community. Coornhert was duly invited to participate in public disputations, still carried out in the style of medieval scholasticism but with the addition of techniques learned from the writings of rhetoricians like Agricola. The magistrates who organized the disputes were not thereby accepting his ideas about open debate. On the contrary, they wanted to "stop his mouth" by letting him be seen to lose the argument. The modern-day reader, though, is apt to think that he had the better of the disputes.

Coornhert was, then, a controversialist. It was once said of him that he was "born to be contrary." He was also a humanist who translated works by Cicero, Seneca, Homer, and Boethius into Dutch, and himself wrote in Dutch in an effort to carry the tradition of learned literature into this language. He was a true heir of Erasmus, using carefully crafted rhetoric in the cause of Christian peace.[18] A powerful work dedicated to that ideal is his *Synod on the Freedom of Conscience*, a dialogue which pits representatives of the Reformation, including fictionalized versions of Calvin and Beza, against a Catholic spokesman.[19] Their unedifying squabbles put into sharp relief the calm and temperate remarks of an imaginary character named Gamaliel. He is Coornhert's mouthpiece, whose name is taken from a figure mentioned in the New Testament who urges restraint in religious persecution, saying, "If this work is of men it will come to nothing, but if it is of God you cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:38–39).[20]

This Scriptural passage supports a deeply held conviction of Coornhert's, namely that human efforts to discover truth, even by sincerely faithful Christians, are inevitably liable to error (27, 42). He can sometimes sound like Agrippa at the end of *On Uncertainty*, saying that only God is truthful and all humans liars. Coornhert applies the skeptical point to the exegesis of Scripture. Reformers like Luther and Zwingli felt utterly convinced of their opposed views about, say, the meaning of Christ telling his disciples to eat his body. But as far as Coornhert is concerned, Scriptural interpretation is always just that, a matter of interpretation. In fact he wants ministers simply to preach directly from Scripture in church, rather than trying to explain what it might mean.[21] There is no "rule of faith (*regula fidei*)" to help us decide which teachings are true and which false. Mind you, he does not take this to mean that people should stop trying to find religious truth. He just thinks it is a process subject to error, and one that is not yet complete: his own time is a "night of unknowing."[22] Ideally, in the future all Christians or even all humans will converge on a single, shared doctrine. But for the moment, and in the Netherlands, Christians are far from having achieved that.

As Coornhert remarks, if you go before a group of people and ask all the Christians to stand up, they will all rise, despite their bitter disagreements. They are all sure they are right, yet clearly this can't be so, since their views

are mutually contradictory (69). What is needed, but sorely lacking, is an "impartial judge" who could adjudicate the rival claims of Catholics, Lutherans, Dutch Reformed, Anabaptists, and so on (71, 92, 129, 141). In the absence of such a judge, it is inevitably the group that has numerical or political superiority, however temporarily, that determines which views are acceptable and which heretical (188). Given this situation, it would behoove all parties to refrain from compulsion and coercion in matters of religion. The inquisitorial Catholics are obvious offenders against this principle, but so are the Protestants. Several times in the dialogue Coornhert alludes to Calvin's role in the execution of Servetus at Geneva (91, 114, 141, 210), and he constantly attacks Beza for having written in support of using violence against heretics. This position is hypocritical, given the Protestants' demands for religious liberty, and doesn't even make sense in light of Protestant theology. After all, Calvin and Beza are convinced that earthly rulers are typically deluded and sunk in sin. So they should appreciate that if such leaders are given the power to coerce religious thought, this is more likely to lead to the punishment of the righteous than to the killing of genuine heretics (116).

Philosophically speaking, the most interesting thing about Coornhert's arguments is that they are generalizable. Take any dispute you like, whether it is about morality, politics, or the relative merits of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Where there are firmly entrenched views, it is simply illegitimate to allow one camp to decide the issue, as when Catholics determined who counted as a heretic in Catholic lands, and the Reformed Church likewise in their own territory. This would be like allowing one party to a legal dispute to act also as the judge (103). Coornhert's flair for satire is on show when he says that you'd be better off letting non-Christians like the pagans, Jews, or Turks decide the issue (104). He also points out that when it comes to the use of coercive power, it is prudent to tread carefully: "it is hard to transgress by not condemning someone, but one who condemns may transgress greatly" (93, cf. 117). All this amounts to a powerful case for freedom of expression, which in true Dutch style Coornhert links to political as well as religious liberty. He has one of his characters say, "freedom has always consisted chiefly in the fact that one is allowed freely to speak one's mind. It has been only the mark of tyranny that one was not allowed to speak one's thoughts freely" (176).

Coornhert was not the first, and certainly not the last, to express such sentiments. In particular, he was following in the wake of French Protestant thinkers, notably Sebastian Castellio, who also argued that violence should not be used against heretics (see Chapter 30). Over the longer term their views have prevailed: religious toleration now enjoys widespread acceptance in Europe. Yet we still struggle with limits on freedom of speech. Where, if anywhere, should we draw the line? Coornhert himself addresses this question, reassuring his readers that he is still in favor of banning books that "incite to sedition," on the grounds that such views undermine the peace (177). While this remark is made only in passing, it is a telling one. It reminds us that Coornhert's main priority is not any abstract ideal of free thought, but the keeping of the peace and avoidance of wrongful persecution. In fact, his ideal world would not be a pluralist one, with many religious views coexisting in harmony. His plea for tolerance was intended more as a temporary solution to what he hoped would be a limited period of fractious disagreement.[23]

It was entirely possible to share the goal of peace without sharing Coornhert's views on toleration. For all their disputes, intellectuals of all parties agreed that civic harmony was vital. Drawing on their humanist education, they would quote authors like Cicero and Seneca for the idea that whereas "concord makes small commonwealths great, discord disrupts the greatest ones."[24] And in this period, no Dutch humanist was more outstanding than Justus Lipsius. He fell out with Cornheert over theology and politics.[25] The tension between the two men first arose because Coornhert wanted to translate Lipsius' Stoic-inspired work *On Constancy*. There was one passage in it he didn't much like, though, where Lipsius insisted that humans cannot avoid sin without divine assistance. Here Lipsius was true to mainstream Protestant thought, comparing the human agent to a musical instrument played by God, and in most cases, one that is out of tune. Given his perfectionist moral theory, Coornhert could not agree with this.

The two then came into dispute over political freedom, because of Lipsius' view that secular powers should indeed enforce religious orthodoxy. Again, Coornhert could not agree. In his own writings he had pointed out that this would make religion dependent on the whims of individual rulers: "what would be less sure than our faith?" (98). But for Lipsius, religion is such an important binding force within society that one

cannot imagine a harmonious state without religious unity. He did not take this to mean that rulers should themselves decide matters of religious doctrine. Instead, he advised them simply to enforce whatever religion they find dominant in their territories. That left an opening for Coornhert: wouldn't Lipsius' own theory mean that the hated Catholics had been right in trying to stamp out the Reformation when it first broke out? For that matter, couldn't pagan or Muslim rulers use the same rationale to persecute all Christians as heretics? Of course, Lipsius did not want to concede such embarrassing analogies, and applied his principle of peace only in cases of acceptably Protestant rulership. But you have to admit that Coornhert had a point.

# 19

# EVERYTHING IS MINE, AND NOTHING

## *Lipsius and the Revival of Stoicism*

You can tell a lot about a man by the title page of the seventeenth-century edition of his collected works. Especially if that title page was designed by the great artist Peter Paul Rubens. Rubens gave this treatment to the *opera omnia* of Justus Lipsius, published in 1637, thirty-one years after Lipsius' death. Tellingly, it shows the face of Lipsius flanked by two other busts, one of the Roman historian Tacitus, the other of the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca. Thereby Rubens captures something of Lipsius' humanist achievement. He gained renown as an editor and scholar of Tacitus and Seneca and was a central figure in the revival of Stoic thought around the turn of the seventeenth century, which had an impact upon Rubens himself and many other European intellectuals.[1] Lipsius was not the only figure of this period to engage with Stoicism, of course. Down in Italy, Stoic ethics were of interest to Italian scholars like Leonardo Bruni.[2] When we turn to Renaissance France we will meet figures like Guillaume Du Vair, who was powerfully influenced by Epictetus, much as Lipsius drew on Seneca. Still, it was arguably Lipsius who did the most to put the Stoics back on the map, facilitating the spread of their ideas to such famous early modern thinkers as Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranch, and Leibniz.[3]

Lipsius wrote several works that were central to this "neo-Stoic" movement, composing an introduction to the Stoic system that appeared in 1604, and even more consequentially, *On Constancy*, published back in

1584.[4] It would be translated into numerous languages and receive more than eighty editions. In this work Lipsius is drawing on the tradition of philosophical consolation, as we know it from such authors as Boethius and Seneca himself. But as Lipsius emphasizes in his preface, he is innovating within the consolatory genre, by focusing on the problem presented by what he calls "public evils." The reasons for his interest in that question are not far to seek. He was born near Louvain in 1547 and lived through the upheavals of the Low Countries during the wars of religion, which powerfully affected Lipsius' own life.[5] After studying in Louvain he traveled around Europe, with stints in Rome, Vienna, and Jena, before taking up a position as historian at the University of Leiden in 1579. Here he adopted the Calvinist confession, only to recant after departing from Holland in 1591. His return to the Catholic fold didn't stop his great treatise *On Politics* (*Politica*, published in 1589) from being placed on the Index of proscribed books, forcing him to make changes to the text.[6]

*On Constancy* takes the form of a dialogue between Lipsius and his friend Charles Languis, chatting during Lipsius' sojourn in Vienna. Actually "chatting" is not really the right word. It's more like Lipsius is expressing his anguish at the state of affairs back home, while Languis deploys all the weapons of Stoic philosophy to browbeat Lipsius into pulling himself together. He tells Lipsius that his travels abroad were never going to help him cope with the upheaval in his native land: "you carry war with you," and a change of physical circumstances has little effect on such turmoil in the soul (*Const*. 1.2–3). The solution is instead to take what we still call a "stoic" perspective on the political situation. Part of the problem is that Lipsius, presented here as a proud native of Flanders, is simply too caught up with the events there. It is irrational for Lipsius to be more upset by what happens in Flanders than in Ethiopia or India (1.8–9). True philosophers should instead consider the whole world to be their country, an idea ascribed here to Socrates, though it is reminiscent of Diogenes the Cynic's claim to be a "citizen of the universe." The character of Lipsius responds that it is only natural for him to value his homeland, which nurtured him from birth (and this actually does sound like Socrates, as he makes the same argument in Plato's *Crito*). But Languis dismisses this, arguing that a feeling of attachment to one's country is in fact just disguised self-interest, the outcome of a historical process by which communities came together for the sake of security (1.10–11).

So it turns out that distress motivated by patriotism is the result of mere "opinion," which in this dialogue means a false supposition about matters both human and divine (1.4). In contrast to opinion would be "right reason," which tells us that we should not let our peace of mind depend on having such things as wealth, honor, health, and political tranquility (1.7). If we can let go of our need for such things we can attain the "constancy" that gives this dialogue its name. Constancy is defined as "a right and immovable strength of the mind, neither lifted up nor pressed down with external or casual accidents" (1.4). Now, this is just standard Stoic doctrine: the so-called "external goods" are in fact "indifferent," meaning that they are not necessary for the happiness of the true sage. It may still be rational to *prefer* health to illness, or peace to warfare, which explains how it can be that in his treatise on politics Lipsius waxes enthusiastic about the benefits of peace and laments the destruction caused by civil wars (*Pol*. 5.20, 6.2). But according to official Stoic doctrine, even peace is something indifferent.[7]

Also classically Stoic, in every sense of that phrase, is the next main point made in the dialogue: all events are fated to occur by divine providence, so we should accept them with equanimity (*Const*. 1.13–14). Lipsius does update this point for his sixteenth-century context. For one thing, he shies away from a suggestion sometimes found in the Stoics, namely that God Himself is somehow subject to fate or necessity. Even Lipsius' beloved Seneca suggested this false doctrine at one point, when he wrote, "although the great creator and ruler of the universe himself wrote the decrees of Fate, yet he follows them. He obeys forever, he decreed but once." This Lipsius considers to be "said with too little elegance" (1.18). He also rejects the apparently Stoic idea that humans are "violently" coerced to act as they do, determined from the outside by God or the past history of the world. Instead, divine providence operates through secondary causes, and these causes include human choices. Nonetheless the choices we make are indeed foreordained and necessary. In the terms of the modern debate over free will, Lipsius is a "compatibilist," who would say that we are free so long as we do what we want to do, even if it is inevitable that we will do it. In the terms of the sixteenth-century debate over free will, Lipsius sounds not unlike the Protestant reformers when he says, "you sin necessarily, and yet of your own free will" (1.20).

In his later introduction to Stoic physics, Lipsius seems less inclined to criticize the Stoics for their account of fate, and some readers have thought

that he changed his mind about this. But it has been persuasively argued by John Sellars that throughout his career, Lipsius understood the Stoic theory of fate in the same way, namely as accepting the compatibility of free choice and necessity.[8] He does speak in *On Constancy* as if the Stoics abolish free will completely, and he makes clear that he disagrees. But this might just be a way to distance himself from a position that could be ascribed to the Stoics by less careful readers. Whatever the case, it's clear in all these writings that he wants to go as far as possible in the direction of approving Stoic doctrine, with the bounds of that possibility marked by another kind of compatibility, namely compatibility with Christianity. He once stated outright, "I wanted to adapt the ancient philosophy to Christian truth," and signs of this ambition are scattered throughout his works.[9] Thus he says that the Stoics place happiness "in nature," which can be accepted so long as we take this to mean "in God"; and that the Stoic belief that God pervades the universe like a soul in a body is mistaken, but at least monotheistic. It's a bit awkward that they make their God a fiery substance, but hey, even the Bible has God appearing in a burning bush!

Clearly, then, Lipsius' approach was not quite like that of the modern-day scholar of Stoicism. Though he offered an unprecedently complete and accurate overview of the school's doctrines, historical accuracy was not his real aim.[10] Instead, he wanted to present Stoicism as a coherent and attractive body of doctrines. To make them coherent, he blurred the distinctions we now more clearly perceive between early Greek Stoics like Chrysippus and later Roman ones like Seneca. To make them attractive, he harmonized them with Christianity. What kind of Christianity? Well, as I already mentioned Lipsius spent time on both sides of the Catholic-Protestant divide. Of course, he insisted after recanting his Calvinism that his lengthy flirtation with reform had masked inner Catholic devotion. But his biography gives the impression of a man who chose his confession more out of convenience than conviction. Perhaps his true belief was that these sectarian conflicts, the ones tearing his homeland apart, actually didn't matter so much. The main thing was to be Christian, not this or that kind of Christian.

This brings us to his treatise on politics, and in particular to the section of that treatise that provoked the ire of Dirck Coornhert, in which Lipsius argues that the ruler of a country should vigorously enforce adherence to just one form of religion. At one point he quotes Cicero to the effect that

religious dissidents who express their views publicly should be treated the way doctors deal with limbs that need to be amputated: "burn, cut in order that some member perishes rather than the whole body" (*Pol*. 4.3). But as Coornhert noted, Lipsius doesn't specify *which* religion should be so rigorously imposed. This feature of the text also vexed the Catholic Church, which naturally did not object to Lipsius' support of violence against the one state-approved religion, but was annoyed that he forgot to identify that one religion as Catholicism. Of course, Lipsius did not in fact forget. For him religion was the "sole creator of unity" within a society (4.2), and that unity was the main thing, not the theological doctrines. It is in this sense that Jan Wasinck, editor and translator of this treatise, could say that Lipsius wanted to "free politics from the influence of religion,"[11] despite his approval of such measures as jailing and executing heretics.

From what I have said so far about the work, you have probably gotten the wrong idea about the *Politica*. I have been talking about it as if it were just a typical treatise of political philosophy. Actually, though, it is a "commonplace" book, a patchwork of citations from classical sources. Wasinck counts no fewer than 2669 quotations drawn from 116 authors. We are apt to be staggered by the breadth of Lipsius' scholarship, yet underwhelmed by his lack of originality. But Lipsius anticipates this reaction, and in the prefatory material encourages his readers to take a more favorable view. For one thing, why shouldn't he quote the ancients, who surely have more "authority" than he does? For another thing, his selection, arrangement, and presentation of the sources does express his own views. As he nicely puts it, "everything is mine, and nothing (*omnia nostra esse, et nihil*)." It is thus entirely possible to speak of Lipsius' own political theory, even if he expresses that theory in the manner of a ventriloquist who uses Cicero, Seneca, Aristotle, and so on as sock puppets (he was surely a big hit at children's birthday parties).

Actually it might be more accurate to say that Lipsius has *two* political theories, which are set out in the first and second half of the treatise. This at least is how Wasinck reads it. He identifies the first three books as adopting a more conventional, "Ciceronian" worldview by promising good outcomes for those who do good. The latter three books adopt a more cynical attitude, gleaned from the historian Tacitus and the notorious Machiavelli, whom Lipsius dares to praise to some extent, saying that this "Italian reprobate" is a valuable author who suffers from an unfair reputation (*Pol*. 4.13). Like

Machiavelli in *The Prince*, Lipsius unapologetically writes for a monarchial political situation. Thus he dedicates the work to "emperors, kings, and princes," and tells us in the preface that this work is for the ruler whereas *On Constancy* was aimed at citizens more generally. He prefers monarchy as the type of regime that goes furthest back in human history, is most natural, and tends to be most unified in purpose. Again his priority is social cohesion, or as he puts it at one point, the avoidance of "chaos (*turba*)" (2.2). He goes so far as to say that the ruler stands above the law, though true kingship is in the first place conferred through a legal process and becomes mere tyranny if the ruler fails to work toward the good of his subjects (2.3, 2.6).

Given the lack of institutional constraint envisioned by Lipsius, it seems that good rule depends entirely on the personal wisdom and virtue of the ruler, a classic shortcoming of works in this genre of "mirrors for princes." In the first three, "Ciceronian" books, Lipsius duly piles up quotations that encourage the ruler to strive for more excellence. In particular he—or she, since Lipsius explicitly endorses the idea that women can rule (2.3)—should acquire that virtue which in Greek was called *phronesis* and is in Latin known as *prudentia* (1.7). The obvious English cognate would be "prudence," though a more accurate English equivalent might be "practical wisdom." It's only in the fourth book that we learn about the dark side of this wisdom, which Lipsius calls "mixed prudence" (4.13). He follows Machiavelli in observing that strict morality is naive in the face of human evils. He actively recommends misleading others about one's intentions, and tolerates deception and bribery, though he still condemns outright injustice (4.14). A Machiavellian note is also struck by Lipsius' pessimism about the general population, which he regards as fickle and ruled by emotion (4.5), and by his advice to cultivate fear and respect as well as love (4.8–9). Occasionally it is necessary to act against one's enemies, and when the time has come one should make sure to wipe them all out at the same time (4.11).

Now, Machiavelli had more to offer than mere cynicism.[12] He was also a historian, who had nuanced views about the way that the past can give us lessons for the present. Again, Lipsius agreed. So he wrote another work, which is explicitly presented as a partner or "confirmation (*assertatio*)" for his *Politica*, called *Admonitions and Examples on Politics* (*Monita et exempla politica*).[13] It proceeds on the assumption that rulers should look to

history, finding exemplars to imitate and failures to avoid. (If I may quote an authority of my own, namely my own grandfather, "everyone serves a purpose in life, even if only as a bad example.") In the *Politica*, Lipsius emphasizes the need for rulers to adapt their decisions to changing contexts (e.g. *Pol*. 4.1). Even the choice of republican government as opposed to monarchial rule might be reasonable in light of the needs of a given people (*Const*. 2.9). But in the *Admonitions* we get the sense that the political art is fairly universal, so that one can learn lessons from the histories of very different places and times. By the same token, Lipsius seems to be suggesting that the best rulers are not those who have principled rules of conduct to which they always adhere. They are those who have a refined judgment grounded in long experience, whether this was acquired personally or borrowed from the ancients with the help of Lipsius.

If we had to name the *least* Machiavellian feature of Lipsius' thought, it would be one already discussed: his acceptance of the Stoic doctrine of providential fate.[14] Machiavelli was mightily impressed by the apparently arbitrary workings of fortune, and admitted that even the craftiest ruler would be bound to reach the end of his luck eventually. Lipsius also emphasizes the twists of fortune that can confront a ruler (*Pol*. 4.6), but insists that prudence can prevail over them (1.7). More fundamentally, he doesn't believe in fortune at all, strictly speaking. Where Machiavelli was rather taken by the Epicurean worldview with its random scatterings and conjoinings of atoms, Lipsius is a partisan of the Stoics. So what seems to be mere fortune is, for him, the inscrutable but inevitable fulfillment of a divine plan. In the *Admonitions* he mentions the example of the Spanish ruler Philip II, who came to the throne because almost two dozen other people who would have been in the line of succession just happened to die.[15] It belongs to the ruler's virtue to realize that such "chance" events are in fact chosen by God and, as Seneca says, "endure what cannot be changed and follow God without complaint" (1.4).

This is advice that applies to us non-rulers too, something that could lead to a quietist position. That is, Lipsius might wind up advising us to be not only untroubled by political events, but also uninvolved with them. In *On Constancy*, he mentioned a significant caveat to his critique of patriotism, namely that you should serve your country's prince with a steadfast sense of duty. You should even be ready to die on his behalf, even if you wouldn't *weep* on his behalf, given that you will maintain an

unperturbed state of mind at all times (*Const*. 1.11). In *Politica*, however, he admits that it can be difficult to know whether to engage in warfare. In one of the many chapters that mount up authoritative quotations on both sides of a question, like a miniature philosophical dialogue, he gives us considerations for, and then against, fighting in a civil war (*Pol*. 6.6). At first glance this looks like a rather dry academic exercise, like a scholastic citing sources in a disputed question. But when we recall the political circumstances under which Lipsius wrote, we realize that we are reading an apparently dispassionate treatment of a genuinely agonizing question.

Indeed, Lipsius seems to have been torn between two kinds of life, both of which were modeled by the ancients. On the one hand there was the ideal of the engaged, virtuous man of affairs described in the *Politica*; not that Lipsius expected to sit on a throne, but he did clearly see himself as an advisor for rulers, a character also described at length in this work (*Pol*. 3.2–8). On the other hand there was the life of scholarship and philosophical contemplation.[16] In theory Lipsius preferred the latter, but his life tends to tell a different story, just as in theory he thought that political troubles should leave him untroubled, but his own *On Constancy* shows that he had great difficulty accepting his own advice. It's a tension as old as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which famously offers elaborate discussion of practical virtue before suddenly recommending a life of theoretical activity in its final book. And it's a tension well captured by that title page Rubens made for the works of Lipsius. At the top of the page, we see personifications of politics and philosophy. Very appropriately, Lipsius is positioned right between them.

# 20

# THE WORLD DOESN'T REVOLVE AROUND YOU

## *Copernicus*

We are used to the way scholars try to complicate, nuance, and correct popular conceptions of historical figures and events. We're not really sure about Luther nailing those theses to the door, and if he did it wasn't that unusual; the Holy Roman Empire was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire; and speaking of Rome, fiddles hadn't even been invented when Nero watched it burn. But I don't recall covering any figure in this book series where the expert and non-expert stories drift so far apart as they do in the case of Nicholas Copernicus. For the layperson, it's almost too good to be true that his great work on astronomy was called *On the Revolutions*. Because that's just what he was: a revolutionary, who set out quite literally to overturn the ancient and medieval worldview and replace it with something more scientific. He was a rebel against not just existing science but also the church, which bitterly opposed his discovery. He was, in short, a champion of reason against authority, and his breakthrough amounted to the most important harbinger of the Enlightenment.

In the scholarly literature on Copernicus, by contrast, we find a far less iconoclastic, and more historically plausible figure. Far from being a rebel against the church, he dedicated *On the Revolutions* to the Pope; soon after its appearance, Catholic bishops were involved in disseminating the book. Copernicus himself was a Catholic canon who maintained his confession

despite having close working relationships with Protestants. The papacy did not officially condemn Copernicanism until 1616, the better part of a century after Copernicus' death in 1543. Indeed, there was little reason to condemn it, in part because astronomy (unlike astrology) was as yet not a theologically provocative discipline, and in part because hardly anyone was convinced by it in the decades following its publication. As the Copernicus scholar André Goddu has commented, "his efforts to persuade Aristotelians have to be counted in the short term among the most miserable failures in the history of philosophy."[1] So if this was an explosive scientific revolution, it was one whose fuse took a long time to burn, requiring figures like Galileo and Kepler to fan the flames around the turn of the seventeenth century.

More importantly for understanding Copernicus' own project, a reading of *On the Revolutions* itself—never mind the scholarship devoted to it—makes it clear that this is not an irreverent attack on established authority.[2] On the contrary, the work situates itself within the tradition of the most important astronomical text of antiquity, the *Almagest* of Ptolemy. Copernicus praises his predecessor and presents himself as addressing problems and anomalies that he finds in the Ptolemaic system, not as replacing that system with something else that is radically new (8).[3] Admirers framed Copernicus' project in the same way. His student Georg Joachim Rheticus said that for his master, there was "nothing better or more important than walking in the footsteps of Ptolemy." This was perhaps laying it on a bit thick, but it's plausible when Rheticus goes on to say just afterwards that Copernicus did not reject the teachings of the ancients "in a lust for novelty," but only "for good reasons and when the facts themselves coerce him."[4] Another bright star in the firmament of the new science, Kepler, said that Copernicus basically believed in Ptolemy's ideas about astral motion and wanted to show how the observed phenomena could be made to fit.[5] Modern research has broadly confirmed this, showing that Copernicus put the Sun in the middle of the cosmos, and made the Earth one of the planets orbiting it, because he was trying to save features of classical astronomy that he thought were more fundamental than geocentrism.

Like Aristotle and Ptolemy, he believed that the universe should be a harmonious unity whose most outstanding parts are heavenly orbs, which

revolve in perfect, uniform circles.[6] When I say "orbs," I don't mean the visible planets. I mean transparent, rotating spheres on which the planets are seated, like shining diamonds embedded in spinning fishbowls. These spheres surround each other concentrically. Their perfect rotation carries the planets around, yielding the motions studied by astronomers. Copernicus also retained the Ptolemaic idea of an "epicycle," meaning a smaller rotating sphere within, and carried along by, the larger sphere. You can imagine that the rotating fishbowl has a spinning glass marble embedded in it at some point along its circumference, with a diamond in the marble. In other words, the planet is seated on the epicycle, which helps to explain why its observed motions are more complicated than they would be with one circular motion around the center of the universe.

And it is here, of course, that Copernicus departs from Ptolemy, who like almost all ancient and medieval theorists (we'll get back to the "almost") believed that the celestial spheres were rotating around an unmoving Earth. But Copernicus of course said that the Sun is at the center, or actually "near the center." Only the Moon orbits the Earth, while the Earth is a planet and like the other planets goes around the Sun. How did Copernicus arrive at this bold claim, which seems to be refuted by our everyday experience? As you might almost expect, there is disagreement over that question.[7] *On the Revolutions* itself is not the most obvious place to look for an answer, because it was published only at the end of Copernicus' life (quite literally: a famous anecdote has the freshly printed pages being shown to him on his deathbed). An earlier work, the *Small Commentary* (*Commentariolus*), was written at some point before 1514 but never printed; only three manuscripts survive. In this little treatise Copernicus simply sets out seven assumptions (*petitiones*), including the idea that the Earth is moving around the Sun once a year and revolving on its own axis once a day. Rather than broadcasting this dramatic thesis as widely as possible, Copernicus circulated it in the form of handwritten copies among friends and interested colleagues. Only in 1540 did Rheticus publish Copernicus' findings in a text called the *First Report* (*Narratio prima*), with *On the Revolutions* following three years later.

All of this means we need to work backwards to figure out the thought process that led Copernicus to his breakthrough. One factor seems to have been his rejection of the so-called "equant," a clever technical device invented by Ptolemy. The idea here is that the planetary spheres (the

fishbowls, in my analogy) revolve not around their own centers—where Ptolemy would locate the Earth—but around an off-center point in space. This, combined with epicycles, yielded a mathematical construction that could fit the heavenly motions, explaining why they seem from our point of view to speed up and slow down during their orbits. But as readers had been noticing for quite a long time, the mathematical model involving an equant seems in flagrant contradiction with the physical model of concentric spheres centered on the Earth, rotating serenely around that center. Another issue that may have motivated Copernicus was that, in the words of the earlier Renaissance astronomer Georg von Peurbach, all the planets "share something with the Sun in their motions."[8] In particular, astronomers had noted that the retrograde motions of Mercury and Venus, that is, the times where they seem to go backwards from our point of view, track the motions of the Sun. This is a lot easier to explain if you say that they are going around the Sun and not the Earth: it happens because the Earth is catching up with and then overtaking the inner planets relative to the Sun.

As Copernicus notes in *On the Revolutions*, since the time of Ptolemy himself there had been disagreement over where to put these two planets in the celestial order (18). Some thought they were between the Earth and the Sun, while others put the Sun closer to the Earth, followed by Mercury and Venus, then Mars. Here we come to another possible divergence from the popular conception of Copernicus. It's been argued, especially in a controversial book by Robert Westman, that Copernicus was especially worried about the order of the planets because this question is vital for astrology. Westman provides circumstantial evidence that, during his youthful student years in Italy, Copernicus fell into the orbit (if you'll pardon the expression) of the Bologna astrologer Domenico Maria Novara. He would have been one of the "prognosticators" working together with Novara, who were keen to rebut the attack on astrology mounted around this time by Pico della Mirandola.[9]

Unfortunately the evidence for his connections to Novara is pretty thin, and Copernicus never talks about astrology as a context for his ideas. This could be explained away, though. His ultimate inspiration was Ptolemy's *Almagest*, which was devoted to mathematical astronomy, not astrology. But Ptolemy was also an astrologer. He wrote an entire treatise on the topic, called the *Tetrabiblos*. So Copernicus' failure to discuss this art could simply be a matter of genre: he may have believed in astrology without

believing that *On the Revolutions* was the appropriate place to discuss it. Furthermore, his student Rheticus was definitely interested in astrology.[10] In short, there is no reason to suppose that Copernicus would have seen astrology as "unscientific," and some reason to suppose he was interested in it.

While this remains a matter of speculation, there is no doubt that establishing planetary order, and in particular giving a good *reason* for the planetary order, was a matter of central importance for Copernicus. He may have flirted for a time with a construction like the one later accepted by Tycho Brahe, according to which some planets revolve around the Sun while the Sun revolves around the Earth.[11] By the time of the *Little Commentary*, though, Copernicus is clear that the Sun is at the center of the universe while the Earth is a planet. Again, physical considerations may have been important here, because the compromise view could have led to celestial spheres competing for the same space. A mathematician wouldn't mind having overlapping circles in a diagram, but in natural philosophy we don't want overlapping cosmic fishbowls. Most compelling, though, must have been Copernicus' discovery that it would be possible to arrange all the planets, including Earth, at successive distances from the Sun, with their ordering correlated to the time of the period of the orbits of the planets (21). In other words, the closer a planet is to the Sun, the shorter the time it takes for the planet to make one trip around the Sun.

While that is a powerful argument in favor of heliocentrism, there were also a number of objections for Copernicus to face. The most obvious is this: why do we feel like the Earth is at rest, if it is in fact moving in two ways at all times, both around the Sun and around its own axis? (Actually, he also introduces a minimal third motion to keep the axis of the Earth pointing in the right way as it goes around the Sun, but we don't need to get into that.) In response Copernicus quotes a line from the ancient Roman poet Virgil, which talks of how the land "slips backwards" as a ship leaves port (16). To an observer in motion, what is at rest may seem to be moving, and what is in motion may seem to be at rest. Just as passengers on a ship feel as if the ship is standing still while the coastline moves away, the heavens seem to be turning over the Earth, but actually it is the Earth that is in motion. This point had already been made by fourteenth-century thinkers like Peter Aureol, even using the similar example of people traveling down

a river and seeming to see the trees move while their boat is at apparently at rest.[12]

So actually the answer to this apparently fundamental difficulty was quite easy to give. More difficult were certain technical issues of astronomy and natural philosophy. On the astronomical side, there was a problem that had to do with the outermost sphere housing the so-called "fixed stars" in it (that is, all the stars that are not planets). If it is at rest and the Earth is moving around the Sun, shouldn't we see them shifting in the night sky, even if only a little, because we are looking at them from a changing position? This phenomenon is called "parallax," and its absence was indeed a real mystery for Copernicus. He gave the correct answer, namely that the universe is a lot bigger than commonly thought in the previous scientific tradition. Since the fixed stars are so far from us, the change in angle of view is tiny, and there is no difference in their positions as observed with the naked eye (13). Speaking of which, don't forget that Copernicus does not have the benefit of a telescope for any of this. That comes in only with Galileo a couple of generations later.

As for natural philosophy, a major obstacle here had to do with something else we can see every day: things like stones falling to the ground. In Aristotelian physics heavy things that are dominated by earth and water move toward the center of the cosmos, while light things dominated by fire and air move away from it. Since the center of the cosmos is also the center of the Earth, this nicely explains why rocks fall straight down and flames flicker upwards. How can Copernicus offer a superior rival explanation? Basically the answer is that he can't. For that we'll need to wait for seventeenth-century physics. He does his best, though, proposing that God implants a natural desire in each element to move toward the place where the "whole" of that element gathers.[13] As Copernicus notes, the result will be that a falling rock actually moves in a far more complex way than we would suppose. It is moving "straight down" toward the ground but simultaneously also in a circle, being part of the planet Earth (16). More compelling, at least within the historical context, is his explanation of why the Earth is revolving in the first place (11, 17). He reminds his readers that for Aristotle, it is natural for spherical things to move in circles: this is after all why the celestial orbs are rotating. Wouldn't it make sense, then, that the Earth also moves in a circle, given that it is spherical? While it may seem a little disconcerting that the Earth

has more than one such motion, this is actually typical of planets, which as we saw are moving on large orbs and also on epicycles within those orbs (17).

These arguments give a flavor of Copernicus' attempt to show that heliocentrism could make sense within a broadly Aristotelian worldview. While this attempt was, as already noted, a "miserable failure," it does reinforce our sense that Copernicus wanted to revise the science of his day, not reject it wholesale. To which you might object that this could simply be a rhetorical ploy. He wouldn't be the only revolutionary in history to pose as a moderate reformer. I don't think this is right, if only because, as we've been seeing, he retained many features of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology and was apparently even motivated by the desire to show how those features could be maintained. But that doesn't mean there is no rhetoric in *On the Revolutions*. On the contrary, this is a text bearing marks of the humanist movement that was so dominant in his age. That quotation I mentioned from Virgil is only one of numerous allusions to classical sources. He also uses an analogy which scholars have connected to a passage from Horace's *Art of Poetry*, which compared bad literature to a monster made out of spare parts. This Frankenstein-like image is used by Copernicus to complain of the disorderly cosmos depicted by other astronomers (4).

Another striking case is a citation from Plutarch (5), who reported that for the ancient Pythagoreans, the Earth moves around a "central fire." This fire was apparently not meant to be the Sun but still it looks like a nice anticipation of Copernicanism, which is why I said earlier that "almost" all ancient and medieval cosmologists had been geocentrists. It's also been shown that Copernicus borrowed ideas about elemental motion from the Platonic tradition. John Philoponus had spoken of the elements moving in order to return "to their wholes."[14] A more proximate inspiration from the history of Platonism (or at least comparison, given the lack of any evidence of historical influence) would be another Nicholas, namely the one from Cusa. The Copernican true believer Giordano Bruno asserted that Copernicus was saying "more audaciously what Cusanus had already affirmed with a lower voice in the book *On Learned Ignorance*,"[15] and there is at least some truth to this. Cusanus had also argued that the world was possessed of enormous size (*immensitas*) beyond what was admitted by the scholastics, and as we saw he allowed for motion of the Earth. He even

made the point that we fail to notice this motion only because we are on the Earth and thus moving along with it. A further link to Platonism, whose significance has been greatly stressed by the aforementioned André Goddu, has to do with Plato himself. We have a copy of Plato's *Parmenides* with an annotation in Copernicus' own hand.[16] For Goddu this suggests that Copernicus took inspiration from Plato for his use of hypotheses in science.

Hypotheses are a major structural feature of Plato's *Parmenides*, but they would also have featured in Copernicus' education. As I mentioned, he studied in Italy as a youth. He had been at the University of Cracow but left without getting a degree, to study law at Bologna and then medicine at Padua. Ultimately he got his degree in church law from Ferrara, setting him up to work for the church as a canon at Varmia in modern-day Poland, beginning in 1503. In Varmia he encountered a number of humanists in the Erasmian mold, not least Tiedemann Giese, who supported Copernicus and would later encourage the publication of *On the Revolutions*. Copernicus resided in the bishop's castle at Lidzbark, acting as the bishop's personal physician, from 1503 to 1510, when he moved to the cathedral at Frombork. While he would remain active carrying out various duties as a canon, this date seems to mark the end of his prospects of becoming a bishop himself—the church's loss was science's gain. Given this formation, we can say that Copernicus had training in several of the chief university disciplines of his day as well as contact with humanist circles. Certainly he was first and foremost a mathematician. He said that *On the Revolutions* was written for other mathematicians like himself, and the title page of the printed text even features the slogan that was emblazoned outside the Platonic Academy: "let none ignorant of geometry enter." Still, he was a well-rounded sixteenth-century intellectual, and used the tools of rhetoric and dialectic in presenting his daring astronomical ideas.

Perhaps also in *discovering* those ideas. Goddu argues that Copernicus put to use methods of hypothetical reasoning which can be traced ultimately back to Plato, and which, I might add, were being discussed around this time by Zabarella and other Averroists at Padua.[17] This method is most clearly on show in the *Little Commentary* where, as I mentioned, Copernicus lays out seven principles or "assumptions" whose viability seems to be confirmed by the satisfying results that follow from them, notably the aforementioned correlation between the periods of the planets and their ordered distance from the Sun. We can take a similar conclusion

from the preface to *On the Revolutions* where, having made his accusation that the geocentric astronomers make the cosmos into a monstrous patchwork, he adds, "this would not have happened to them, had they followed sound principles. For if the hypotheses assumed by them were not false, everything which follows from their hypotheses would be confirmed beyond any doubt" (4).

On the face of it this is hardly an advanced insight: bad assumptions lead to bad conclusions. But on Goddu's telling, at least, Copernicus' methodology was quite a bit more sophisticated than that. It involved doing what Plato does in the *Parmenides*, namely setting up a series of hypotheses and testing each of them both negatively and positively. For instance, see what follows if the Earth is in the center of the cosmos; see what happens if it is not. If it is in the center of the cosmos, we get the disordered "monster" of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system. If it is moving around the Sun, we get nice outcomes including the avoidance of Ptolemy's clever but physically awkward device of the equant. For the sake of exposition, the favored hypotheses or "axioms" are presented at the beginning of the discussion. But they are not simply stipulated at the beginning, before doing any scientific inquiry. Rather, they have proven their worth by being tested for their results. Hypotheses are like Johnny Appleseed or slot machines: by their fruits you shall know them. Goddu puts it in somewhat less jocular terms, writing that Copernicus "arrived at the postulates initially by means of a dialectical exercise, identified conclusions, formulated the postulates that he needed to derive the conclusions, and then reorganized them."[18]

This is relevant to one of the most hotly debated questions concerning Copernicus' new astronomy: how seriously did he mean it? Or better: in what sense did he seriously mean it? In pre-Copernican cosmology, we often find proposals that seem to be purely mathematical constructions, with an unclear relationship to what is physically going on out in the heavens. Ptolemy's equant would be a prime example. It may seem obvious that Copernicus did not intend his system to be taken in that sense. He gets into natural philosophical questions like the motion of the elements, the worry about parallax, and so on. So obviously he did not just mean that the calculations work better if you imagine the Earth going around the Sun. He meant that the Earth really goes around the Sun. For initial readers, though, that impression was undermined by an unsigned address to the reader added to *On the Revolutions*. Written by Andreas Osiander, it suggests taking the

heliocentric system as *merely* hypothetical, rather than as a true account of the causes lying behind our astronomical observations.

The addition of this brief address has been outraging partisans of Copernicus since its initial publication. Rheticus crossed it out in his copies of the text. Subsequently it was made part of the cliched story that has rational science being opposed by the religious establishment. At the end of the nineteenth century, a work with the frank title *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* condemned Osiander in the following terms: "Osiander's courage failed him: he dared not launch the new thought boldly. He wrote a groveling preface, endeavoring to excuse Copernicus for his novel idea, and in this he inserted the apologetic lie that Copernicus had propounded the doctrine of the earth's movement not as a fact, but as a hypothesis." Thus "was the greatest and most ennobling, perhaps, of scientific truths…forced, in coming before the world, to sneak and crawl."[19]

Poor old Osiander has since found defenders, though.[20] While he was interested in astronomy, his real calling was Biblical humanism. He was a leading reformer at Nürnberg, whose decision to leave his name off the preface makes good sense given that this was a book by a Catholic dedicated to the Pope (albeit one printed by a Protestant publisher). When he suggested reading the theory as mere mathematical hypothesis, he was trying to help Copernicus win adherents, by offering a way that skeptics could find his work palatable and useful. Furthermore, there are some claims in *On the Revolutions* that should perhaps be taken in just the way that Osiander suggested. Copernicus points out that one can introduce "eccentric" spheres (that is, great orbs whose center is not at the midpoint of the cosmos) instead of epicycles and get the same mathematical and observational results. He admits that therefore, "it is not easy to decide which of them exists in the heavens" (156, cf. 51 for the idea that calculations may be equivalent on different hypotheses).[21] This is not to say that something as fundamental as his heliocentrism is being offered as a mere hypothesis. But it is to say that hypotheses play a role throughout his method. Some of them are effectively confirmed or disconfirmed by their consequences, this being the fate of heliocentrism and geocentrism respectively. Some, though, may remain merely likely, or useful.

The ultimate compliment to Osiander has been paid in modern times by the great historian and philosopher of science Pierre Duhem, who died in 1916. He emphasized the realist elements of *On the Revolutions* rather than the hypothetical ones, and said that this was in fact a weakness of the work. Scientists *should* think of their theories as provisional hypotheses that remain open to revision.[22] In a similar vein Osiander explicitly stated that scientific constructions may be intended as purely instrumental or heuristic devices. Thus he wrote that Copernicus' "hypotheses need not be true nor even probable. On the contrary, if they provide a calculus consistent with the observations, that alone is enough" (xvi). But of course the wider context here was very different from the one in which Duhem was working. Osiander's portrayal of astronomy had to do with his commitments as a fervent Protestant. Only revelation offers certain truth, and human reason must make do with making better guesses instead of worse ones. No wonder, then, that this scientific approach came to be associated with the reformers at Wittenberg. There, Philip Melanchthon urged his young students to engage in science, including astronomy, while remaining conscious of the limits of merely human knowledge. This was one of several developments that conditioned responses to Copernicus and ensured that his revolution remained, for now, a quiet one.[23]

# 21

# BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

## *Tycho Brahe*

Let's do an experiment! Extend your arm and look at your fingertip while closing one eye. Now look at it with the other eye. You should notice that the finger seems to shift its position very slightly. Now, do the same thing holding your finger much closer to your face: you'll see the same effect, but with a bigger shift. This is called the phenomenon of "parallax." I mentioned it already in passing, but wanted to explain it more fully, because it played such a major role in the sixteenth-century reactions to Copernicus.[1] As Copernicus was well aware, the parallax effect can be used to determine how far away things are. The calculation is based on the apparent difference in position of the same thing seen from two different places. These could be your left and right eyes but might also be much further apart, say, two different cities. Or the same city at two different times, as the relative position of the Earth and the heavenly bodies changes. If you're a Copernican it's the location of the city itself changing, as the Earth spins and orbits the Sun; if you're in the older system of Aristotle and Ptolemy, the city stands still on an unmoving Earth, while the heavens revolve above.

You might be thinking that the parallax effect should have yielded powerful arguments in favor of the Copernican system. After all, that system was broadly correct—the Earth is going around the Sun, not vice versa—so you'd think anything that would provide more accurate data

about the situation should have helped the case for heliocentrism. And as we'll see, parallax did help to undermine the ancient Ptolemaic cosmology. But parallax was also the basis of a powerful objection to Copernicus. One of those who articulated it was Tycho Brahe, the greatest astronomer between Copernicus and Johannes Kepler. He reasoned as follows. If the Earth is going around the Sun, then we should have a significant parallax effect as its position changes, moving all that way along its annual orbit. Yet we see no parallax at all for the fixed stars, which were assumed by most astronomers to be embedded in a single sphere at the edge of the visible universe. (It rotates once per day in the old theory, and stands still while the Earth spins once each day according to Copernicus.) This means that the sphere of fixed stars would have to be further away than supposed by earlier astronomers. Much, much further away. The distance between the last planet Saturn and this outermost sphere of fixed stars would, Brahe calculated, be at least seven hundred times greater than the distance between the Sun and Saturn.

Copernicus simply admitted this consequence of his theory, and he was right. There is parallax for the distant stars, it was just far too small to see with the instruments available at the time. The tiny effect would only be successfully measured in 1838, by Friedrich Bessel. In fact, the stars are vastly further away from Saturn than Saturn is from the Sun. Brahe's figure of seven hundred times isn't even close: Saturn is 9.5 astronomical units from the Sun, whereas the closest stars in Alpha Centauri are a whopping 268,000 astronomical units away. But even with his more modest figure, Brahe found the banishing of the fixed stars to such remote distances to be obviously absurd. It would mean that the cosmos is multiplied to many times its previously assumed volume—300 million times as large, says Brahe—and is mostly empty, with an unimaginably vast, yet utterly useless expanse between the planets and fixed stars. Hardly compatible with the idea that God wisely gives order to the universe!

That may not sound like a particularly "scientific" objection, but the idea that the heavens manifest divine order was taken for granted in this period. We saw that it motivated Copernicus, and we'll be seeing it motivate Kepler too. Indeed, a pious yearning to understand God's design was the usual rationale for doing astronomy at all. With all due respect to Copernicus, Brahe, and Kepler, the figure who did the most to promote this idea was our old friend Philipp Melanchthon. As part of his influential educational

reform, which spread from Wittenberg along with Lutheranism, Melanchthon exhorted students to learn the mathematical disciplines, which culminated in the study of the stars. The result was that Lutheran universities standardly had at least one chair of mathematics, held by a professor who was typically an astronomer. By contrast in England, where Melanchthon's ideas did not hold such sway, there was not a single university chair of mathematics across the whole of the sixteenth century.[2] It was an effect much more noticeable than parallax. According to one modern-day scholar, "around the middle of the sixteenth century only Melanchthon could have done the Copernican doctrine the service of providing it with a far-reaching success and establishment in the educational institutions."[3]

Unfortunately for the heliocentrist cause, this was a service Melanchthon was unwilling to provide. He was not so dismissive of Copernicus as Luther, who called him a "fool" who wanted "to overturn the whole art of astronomy," but Melanchthon did hold fast to geocentrism. In an introduction to physics aimed at students, he satirically commented, "some dare to say, either because of their love of novelties or in order to appear clever, that the Earth moves."[4] This passage was revised to be less critical in a second edition, a sign that Melanchthon did value what Copernicus had done. He and mathematicians in close contact with him approved the use of Copernicus' tables for the locations of the stars, which did not involve postulating the disturbing "equant" assumed by Ptolemy. In fact one of Melanchthon's colleagues at Wittenberg, Erasmus Reinhold, spent seven years reorganizing and recalculating these tables, and published the results in 1551. Melanchthon was also in close contact with other mathematicians like Georg Rheticus, Copernicus' student and the first to promulgate his new teaching: Melanchthon appointed him to a chair of mathematics at Wittenberg. Rheticus of course defended heliocentrism as an account of the real arrangement of the cosmos. But Melanchthon and many of those in touch with him adopted what has been called the "Wittenberg interpretation." This meant employing Copernicus' mathematical models without admitting that the Earth moves.[5]

Which brings us back to that opening address added by Osiander to Copernicus' *On the Revolutions*. As we saw, Osiander seemed to be saying that the diagrams and calculations of mathematical astronomy are to be

taken in a merely "instrumental" sense. They should be used as tools to do things like predicting the position of a planet on a given night, while keeping an open mind about what is really going on up there in terms of spheres, epicycles, motions, and so on. Melanchthon seems to have had a similar idea. He said to his students, "the listener should understand that the construction of so many orbs and an epicycle was thought out by geometers, to be able to show the laws of the [planets'] movements and periods, one way or another and not because the devices in the sky are this way, although it is agreed that there are such orbs."[6] And he cautioned them not to be confused by the use of various hypothetical constructions by astronomers: "the youth should know that they do not dare to affirm such theories."[7]

While such remarks would gladden the heart of Pierre Duhem, there are reasons to doubt whether Melanchthon, Osiander, and others were really instrumentalists like Duhem. Aside from the completely different motivation and cultural context, it should be borne in mind that we are only talking about astronomy here, and not all the sciences. A realist about, say, chemistry or the physics of sublunary bodies might still worry that our access to the stars is so indirect that we cannot do more than devise hypothetical constructions compatible with our observations. As Nicodemus Frischlin wrote in 1586, "God the Creator placed these bodies so far away from our senses that we are unable to produce principles of demonstration for them as we can in the sciences of other things."[8] In other words, we can only ever offer a fine-grained account of the phenomena to be explained, without being able to grasp the causes of those phenomena. Religion might have given the astronomers further reason to be modest in their claims. While the study of the stars does bring us closer to God, only revelation really unveils the mysteries of His providence.[9] A more technical reason would be that multiple, inconsistent models might all be compatible with what we observe. In such a case there would be no basis for choosing one model over another.

By the same token, though, you might be more confident in accepting just one model if you *could* eliminate the other possibilities. Which brings us back to parallax. Not in the work of Brahe—I promise, we'll get back to him soon—but in that of Michael Maestlin, a teacher of Kepler at Tübingen, where Maestlin took up the chair of mathematics in 1583. Along

the same lines as Melanchthon, he admitted that "no one is able to ascend into the aetherial region, where he would see everything in person," so that we lack causal explanations in astronomy.[10] Yet Maestlin thought he could use observations to show the falsity of Aristotelian cosmology. As luck would have it, this period saw a series of remarkable astronomical phenomena: a new star or "nova" visible in 1572, as well as comets that became visible in 1577 and 1580. These caused a lot of fuss. There are about one hundred works just on the 1577 comet still extant today.[11] Maestlin appealed to parallax measurements to argue that these striking new bodies were located above the sphere of the Moon.[12] In one fell swoop, he was able to dismiss the literally ancient idea that the realm of the stars was made of unchanging matter. He would still admit that mathematical astronomy cannot establish physical reality; but physics has at least to be consistent with astronomy. The two are independent disciplines, but that doesn't mean that they are allowed to contradict one another.[13]

Which brings us finally to the star of this chapter, Tycho Brahe, notable for both his achievements in astronomical mathematics and his innovative physical cosmology. He was a member of a noble family in Denmark, where Lutheranism and Melanchthon's educational ideas had both spread by the time of Tycho (by the way his Danish name was Tyge; "Tycho" is a Latinization).[14] He went to Germany for his studies, spending time in Leipzig and Wittenberg, and famously getting his nose cut off in a duel while at Rostock. He would henceforth wear a prosthetic made out of precious metal. Which, fortunately, Brahe had in abundance. He persuaded the Danish king Frederick II to lavish upon him a fiefdom on the island of Hven, as well as extravagant financial support equivalent to 1 percent of the annual revenue of the kingdom. Now, as a member of the Danish nobility Brahe was always in a position to receive funds from the state; in fact he could have lined his pockets more effectively by becoming a politician and courtier instead of an astronomer. But he was determined that he would use the silver spoon he had from birth to make a stir in science. He built a fabulous house on Hven with astronomical observatories and commissioned a series of instruments for measuring the heavens, quite literally the best that money could buy. In his tellingly named *Instruments for the Restoration of Astronomy* from 1580, he describes twenty-two of them, these being only the most impressive and important items in his collection.

We are still not talking about telescopes here, but about things like a brass-covered, spherical model of the heavens and more importantly, sighting tools for measuring the positions of celestial bodies at different times. He also made the same observation with multiple assistants and multiple instruments to ensure maximum exactness. The expense of these instruments was closely tied to their effectiveness: Brahe dismissed work done by others with cheaper "rulers of wood" because they were too imprecise.

His house, called Uraniborg, was thus a state-of-the-art scientific facility, and not just for astronomy. Brahe was also interested in medicine and alchemy, and was powerfully influenced by the Paracelsian movement. His basement contained a chemical laboratory with multiple furnaces, and by his own admission he spent as much time on the discipline of alchemy as he did on astronomy.[15] He saw the two disciplines as closely linked, with the same relations and structures appearing in the sky above and the elements here below. He thus referred to alchemy as "terrestrial astronomy." But it was astronomy of the celestial kind that made Brahe's name, both then and now. He was scornful of astronomers who looked at books and tables rather than making their own observations. "The restoration of astronomy," he remarked, "must derive not from the authority of men, but from reliable observations and demonstrations based on them."[16]

Good as his word, during Brahe's time on Hven he took measurements of the heavens an average of eighty-five nights a year.[17] This would mostly have been during the winter months when the nights were longer. When working on a specific problem his activity could be feverish, insofar as standing in the cold Danish night very carefully making sightings using expensively assembled instruments could be described as "feverish." For example, when trying to check Venus for parallax he took nearly a thousand observations over five days, in sessions lasting five to eight hours. He took on assistants to help with the work; he wrangled with fellow mathematicians in heated disputes (maybe that was to stay warm); and when he was troubled with paper shortages and printing problems, he simply set up his own paper mill and printing press. His aim was to produce a wealth of observations more accurate and ample than any that had yet been made. For this sake he applied methods that, while not entirely unique to him, were applied with unprecedented care. He would take multiple observations and use an average, to avoid errors in individual sightings; and

he measured the effects of the refraction of light by the atmosphere so that they could be eliminated from consideration.

If all Brahe had done was to amass this data, he would earn an important place in the history of science. Kepler joined him as an assistant at the end of Brahe's life and, after legal struggles with the Brahe family, got access to his papers after the great man's death. Kepler would benefit greatly from access to this information to produce his almost literally earth-shattering theory of elliptical orbits. But Brahe assumed that his legacy would revolve around his own cosmological theory, and not just the data that supported it. This was designed to be a cosmology that could avoid "both the mathematical absurdity of Ptolemy and the physical absurdity of Copernicus."[18] The absurdity he lamented in the Ptolemaic system was the same one that had bothered Copernicus: the postulation of equants, that is, a celestial sphere rotating around a point other than its own center. Furthermore, the epicycles required to make this system work seemed unfeasibly large. As for the Copernican system, he was a great admirer of its author. He called Copernicus a "second Ptolemy" and put a portrait of Copernicus on the wall at Uraniborg, a treatment reserved only for the true greats, including of course Brahe himself. But he couldn't bring himself to accept that the Earth moves. Apart from the problem of parallax and the incredibly distant fixed stars, he was unconvinced that bodies falling on a rotating Earth would move straight down. Such rotation also struck him as inappropriate to the very nature of the Earth: "it is likely that such a fast motion could not belong to the Earth, a body very heavy and dense and opaque, but rather belongs to the sky itself whose form and subtle and constant matter are better suited to a perpetual motion, however fast."[19]

As Brahe thought about how to avoid the pitfalls of these rival world systems, he also sought to preserve the advantages of each. While the ancient cosmology seemed to maintain physical common sense, Copernicus' could explain why the planets' motions seem to track the Sun in the way I mentioned in the last chapter. This led him to propose a new set of "hypotheses" which would offer the best of both worlds: the so-called "Tychonic system." It's similar to schemes proposed by other thinkers in this period but is usually associated above all with Tycho, which is just as Tycho would have wanted it. According to him, the Earth stands still while the Sun goes around it, as Aristotle and Ptolemy said. But all the other planets orbit the Sun, as Copernicus had said. The only exception is the

Moon, which all agree orbits the Earth. Thus we have a system that is geocentric overall, but heliocentric when it comes to Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Brahe was proud of this new theory yet hesitated before putting it forward, in part because he had not managed to avoid all the problems that afflicted the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system. In particular, his system implied overlapping spheres, which he himself deemed "ridiculous."[20]

The solution came to him thanks to the nova and the comets, which he like Maestlin recognized as celestial bodies that had suddenly appeared well above the level of the Moon. How could this be? Brahe's answer was that the heavens are not made up of impenetrable spherical bodies as had been supposed since antiquity. Instead, the matter there is fluid, and allows planets or comets to pass right through. "Heaven," he wrote to fellow astronomer Christoph Rothmann, "consists of a substance that is very clear, very thin and very fine. This makes the courses of the seven planets free so that they move without any slowing."[21] Again like Maestlin, Brahe considered the manifestation of the comets to have disproved the hypothesis of solid spheres, and he duly put forward his own "Tychonic" system as a better hypothesis that was consistent with all the observed phenomena, though not necessarily proved beyond doubt. He defended this "hypothetical" approach when he encountered the Parisian philosopher Peter Ramus in Augsburg. Ramus, whose own objections to classical Aristotelianism we'll be discussing below (see Chapter 28), pressed both Brahe and Rheticus to strive for an astronomy that makes no use of hypotheses, and instead demonstrates a system of the world through causes.

In Brahe's view this project was impossible, a position he held in common with Melanchthon and the Wittenberg school. Again, this needn't mean that Brahe was uncommitted as to whether the Sun was really going around the Earth. He thought of his own "hypotheses" as the best account of physical reality, but he didn't think that this account could be securely established by mathematics and observations, no matter how plentiful, careful, and consistent. Fortunately, there were other resources available. In that same epistolary exchange with Rothmann, Brahe argued that the Bible supported his own system and not that of Copernicus.[22] He gratefully seized on a recent translation of the Hebrew term *raqia* in the book of Genesis, normally rendered as "firmament" but now as "expanse" or even "liquid." Exactly Brahe's idea about the material nature of the heavens! Against such

arguments, Rothmann countered that Scripture is simply silent on the whole question. Revelation concerns itself with salvation and not science and is content to speak in accordance with common beliefs. Brahe conceded that the Bible does not contain scientific descriptions of nature, but warned, "let it be far from us to think of them as speaking in such a common manner that we do not believe them to be speaking truth."[23]

This exchange may suggest that Brahe was opportunistically latching onto Biblical evidence that supported him. But this would be to underestimate the fundamentally religious and even apocalyptic character of his thought. I've mentioned the possibility that Copernicus believed in astrology; his student Rheticus certainly did. This was a widely held attitude. Melanchthon himself annoyed Luther by adhering to astrological beliefs. Indeed, it was the prospect of astrological advances that motivated his steadfast encouragement of astronomy and the mathematical sciences more generally. Like most adherents of astrology in Christendom, Melanchthon hastened to deny that the science has any deterministic implications. The influence of the stars is real but not so powerful that it constrains divine or human will.[24]

Not for the first time, we see Brahe aligning himself with Melanchthon on this issue. He supplied annual astrological reports to his patron, King Frederick, and was available for drawing up horoscopes upon the occasion of a royal birth. Privately, he was fairly skeptical about the accuracy of such individual prognostication. At the global scale, though, things were different: he was confident that the nova of 1572, followed by those comets, were a "divine mystery" and "a sign of God, predetermined by Him at the beginning of time and now finally exhibited to the world, which is hastening towards its evening."[25] Along with a great planetary conjunction in 1583, these were portents of massive political disruption, with especially dire (and well-deserved) consequences for Catholics. Tycho Brahe was convinced he'd discovered the arrangement of the world, and only just in time, because it might be ending soon. Of course he was wrong, and not just about the apocalypse. Brahe would have been astonished, and I think probably devastated, to learn that the young mathematician who signed up as an assistant in Brahe's last years would go on to eclipse him in the history of astronomy. This was Johannes Kepler, who didn't even have good enough eyesight to do the sort of exacting observational work to which Brahe had devoted so many frigid evenings. But he kept his eyes and

his mind open, and realized that the Copernican hypotheses could be improved by dropping one more ancient assumption.

# 22

# MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

## *Johannes Kepler*

In the last two chapters I've tried to place two great astronomers of the sixteenth century within the context of their time. But rather ironically, it's only now that we come to a third great astronomer, who lived well into the seventeenth century, that the intellectual currents of the Renaissance become impossible to ignore. Johannes Kepler was born in 1571 and died only in 1630, meaning that his life overlapped with that of figures like René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes (but then Hobbes lived to be ninety-one years old, so overlapping with him was hard to avoid). Certainly some aspects of Kepler's thought seem at home in the seventeenth century. His repeated comparison of the cosmos to a clock fits with the mechanistic conception of nature we find in Descartes and other Enlightenment philosophers. But in most respects, Kepler comes across as a figure of the Renaissance and Reformation period. Like Lipsius his career was shaped by conflict between Protestants and Catholics; like Melanchthon he was a deeply pious Lutheran who saw astronomy and astrology as the ideal route to the knowledge of God; and speaking of "ideal" he was, like Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino, a Platonist. In one of his most important works, *The Harmony of the World*, Kepler credits Plato with the idea that God, "the actual fount of geometry, practices eternal geometry, and does not stray from His own archetype" (*HW* 407).[1] You could hardly do better as a statement of Kepler's own intellectual project.

We can begin his story by picking up where we just left off. At the end of his life, having lost favor with the Danish court, Tycho Brahe moved to live near Prague. Here he took on the young Kepler as an assistant. Kepler had already studied at Tübingen, where Melanchthon's ideas dominated the curriculum.[2] Despite curricular and religious reform, Aristotle was still a fundamental author there, and Kepler was very familiar with his works. He had sufficiently strong ancient Greek to evaluate translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and when he came to defend Copernican heliocentrism, he referred to Aristotle for evidence that this view had been anticipated by the Pythagoreans.[3] As this shows, Kepler was shaped by the humanistic values of Tübingen, which included the study of mathematics as a classical science that needed to be revived or "restored"; remember that this rhetoric was also used by Brahe. The most significant influence on him was probably that of his mathematics professor Michael Maestlin. As we saw, Maestlin defended a realist version of the new Copernican astronomy. He passed this conviction on to Kepler, along with the theological rationale for research on such topics. As Kepler put it in a 1595 letter to Maestlin, "even in astronomy my work worships God."[4]

Another thing Kepler took away from his student years was an enthusiasm for astrology. The intellectual culture created by Melanchthon obviously stands behind Kepler's remark, "I am a Lutheran astrologer, throwing away the nonsense and keeping the kernel."[5] He was, like Melanchthon and Brahe, dubious about the possibility of using astrological methods like horoscopes to predict the fate of individual people. Kepler gave himself as an example. While the stars may have influenced his natural dispositions in some ways, he had assets like relative wealth, an advantageous male gender, and good schooling that were not given to others born under the same configuration of stars (*HW* 376). But when it comes to larger-scale phenomena like the weather, it does make sense to seek explanation at the level of heavenly influence. He saw comets and the "new stars," that is, the two supernovas that became visible in 1572 and 1604, as portents sent by God: "whenever something new and extraordinary appears in the heavens, sublunar nature trembles in some way."[6] For him such manifestations were part of a providentially ordered system of the world, a conviction he illustrated with an anecdote about him and his wife: at dinner Kepler joked that if lettuce, oil, vinegar, and sliced eggs flew

around in the air for long enough, they would come together to make a salad like the one she had just served him. Yes, she said, but not so well arranged.[7] Following her lead, Kepler gave a severe dressing down to proponents of the Epicurean notion that the world comes together as a result of random interactions. The new star of 1604 was, he argued, no chance appearance of celestial matter, but a divine sign of momentous events and a puzzle sent by God to test our powers of ingenuity.

Whatever momentous event this supernova signified, it was not the meeting of Kepler and Brahe, because that pivotal event in the history of science had already occurred. By chance (or maybe not?) it came almost exactly at the dawn of the seventeenth century, early in the year 1600. The two men wanted different things out of their collaboration. Kepler wanted to make use of Brahe's meticulous and extensive record of celestial observations, which thanks to his instrumentation and careful methods were as much as fifty times more accurate than the values used by Copernicus. To give you some idea of the potential of this information, Kepler used it to predict a transit of Mercury across the face of the sun in 1631. It happened as he predicted, though he did not live to see it.[8] As for Tycho, what he wanted was to settle a score. He prevailed upon Kepler to write a refutation of Nicholas Reimer, known in Latin as Ursus. He was an imperial mathematician and a royal pain in Brahe's backside.

To make a long story short, Ursus and Brahe were involved in a dispute over priority for invention of the Tychonic system. The fact that we do indeed call this the "Tychonic" system shows that Brahe has gone down as the winner in history's books. But a book put out by Ursus in 1597, *On Astronomical Hypotheses*, portrayed Brahe in a far less favorable light. Alongside accusations of mathematical incompetence and scientific malfeasance, Ursus descended to the level of sexual innuendo aimed at Brahe's common-law wife.[9] Kepler had innocently strayed into this dispute by writing an admiring letter to Ursus, adopting the tone of respectful younger scholar. Ursus cynically exploited the letter by quoting it in his own book, so as to insinuate that Kepler was on his side. Now Brahe wanted Kepler to repudiate Ursus publicly, and Kepler, keen to establish a good working relationship with Brahe, was willing to oblige—though evidently not eager, given how long he took over the project. By the time the resulting work was done, Tycho was already dead, and it was not published in print.

As sordid as the whole situation was, and Kepler's reluctance notwithstanding, the treatise is well worth the attention of historians of philosophy and science. For one thing, the very fact that Ursus and Brahe were so concerned over issues of scientific priority was, like a comet or supernova, a sign of the times. I mentioned in the previous volume that in the middle of the sixteenth century, Girolamo Cardano was involved in a controversy over who could take credit for a certain mathematical discovery.[10] Here we have a similar dispute in northern Europe, and interestingly, one in which claims for priority were made on the basis of private correspondence and not only publication in print.[11] For another thing, the work that Kepler produced in response to Ursus turns out to be something of a philosophical tour de force. He took the opportunity to defend a realist approach to astronomy, against the instrumentalism adopted by Osiander and proponents of the "Wittenberg interpretation."

Actually it was really Ursus who raised the issue in his own treatise. There, he characterized astronomical hypotheses as convenient falsehoods or "fabrications," to be used only for purposes of calculation.[12] He portrayed the introduction of *physical* hypotheses—like the postulation of perfect, transparent celestial spheres as seats for the visible planets—as a corruption of the most ancient science. In his telling this unwise departure from purely mathematical astronomical constructions began around the time of Plato and Aristotle. Kepler was thus drawn into a dispute over the history of astronomy, as well as its proper method. As he wrote to his professor Maestlin, in *Against Ursus* "the principal concern is with antiquity and with the explication of the opinions of the ancients. So the treatise is to be hardly mathematical, but rather philological."[13] Fortunately Kepler's humanist training prepared him very well for that task, and he was able to cast doubt on Ursus' reading of Aristotle, the Pythagoreans, and the ancient astronomer Eudoxus. He was especially caustic when it came to Apollonius of Perga, who Ursus ridiculously claimed had already set forth the Tychonic system in antiquity, so that Brahe's supposed discovery had actually been anticipated about two thousand years earlier (*AU* 185). No, argues Kepler: Tycho Brahe really was the originator of his system (*AU* 190, 206). And this system was more than just a rearrangement of Copernicus'. For instance, Brahe realized what Copernicus did not, namely

that there are no solid orbs in the heavens, since this was disproven by the appearance of those comets (*AU* 206–207).

Now Kepler did not agree with the Tychonic system, being himself a convinced Copernican. But in this context, there was a more central point than the correctness of one system or another, namely that the scientific goal was a description of the real physical arrangement of the cosmos. In order to rebut Ursus' instrumentalism, Kepler offered a sophisticated discussion of the nature of scientific hypotheses. A "hypothesis" does begin as a mere assumption, but it is then confirmed as being true (really true, not just instrumentally useful) when its implications are found to match with our observations. The objection to this had always been that the same set of observations could be compatible with several inconsistent hypotheses. Kepler was obviously aware of this, and in fact would later give a nice analogy for the mathematical equivalence of the Tychonic and Copernican systems. It's like the fact that you can draw the same circle by moving a pen in a circle on a piece of paper, or by holding the pen still and moving the paper under it (*HW* 404). However, we can still be realists about whatever is shared by *all* the assumptions that yield the correct results. In this case, even if we aren't sure about which heavenly body is orbiting which other body, we can assert as a physical fact that a certain relative distance separates the two bodies at any given time (*AU* 142–43). Instrumentalists like Ursus and Osiander were extrapolating from *some* undecidable cases to suggest that *all* of astronomy is undecidable. But this is clearly wrong, as we can see in cases where there is no dispute, like the measurements of the diameters of celestial bodies (*UA* 147).

Kepler thought he could go further, though, and establish once and for all how the cosmos is arranged. Admittedly mere observations, even the painstaking ones made by Brahe, were only going to allow for calculation of relative distances. But other considerations would settle the issue between one set of hypotheses and another. For Kepler, these considerations would come from a rather surprising direction: Platonist metaphysics. In an early work from 1596 called the *Mysterium cosmographicum*, or *Cosmographic Secret*, Kepler set out to explain why there are exactly as many planets as there are (or were then thought to be). In answer, he unveiled what he took to be the hidden divine arrangement of the heavens. He had discovered that if, with Copernicus, we assume that the Earth and other planets are going around the Sun, then the orbits of those planets can

be fitted within spheres that contain the shapes of all five Platonic solids: the cube, the pyramid or tetrahedron, the octahedron, the icosahedron, and the dodecahedron. They had been used in Plato's *Timaeus* as an explanation for the construction of the elements and the heavens. Now Kepler pointed out that if you arrange the Platonic solids in the right order and inscribe them within circles, you will get (more or less) exactly the ratios of the orbits of the planets that were then known. The Earth will be in the middle of the sequence, further from the Sun than Mercury and Venus, closer than Saturn and Jupiter. When Kepler discovered this, he wept tears of joy, for he felt that he had finally made good on the ambition of his predecessors to discern God's cosmic plan. As a bonus, he could now explain the empty spaces between the planetary orbits in the Copernican system: they need to be that far apart, for the sake of mathematical proportion.

Furthermore, he thought that this discovery could banish all talk of equivalent hypotheses and instrumentalism. The number and arrangement of Platonic solids has a mathematical rationale behind it. Even without ever looking into the night sky, we could *expect* that God—Plato's "eternal geometer"—might construct the universe with just this perfect structure. Then, lo and behold, observations confirm that this is indeed the structure He has chosen! Now, this line of thought might evoke our skepticism. In a book on the Platonism underlying Kepler's science, Rhonda Martens admits, "where Kepler speaks as though he derived the archetypal theory by *a priori* reasoning and then tested for fit against empirical data, it is more accurate to say that he first had the empirical pattern and then tried to fit to it an archetypal account."[14] But Kepler was convinced that mathematics gives us independent insight, not based on observation, into the "causes" of the heavenly arrangement. In this period an a priori scientific account is one that uses causes to explain effects, rather than vice versa. In this sense, he took himself to have provided the a priori rationale confirming the hypothetical proposals of Copernicus.

Using the same method, he believed he could rule out even theories embraced by fellow Copernicans. Around the same time, Giordano Bruno was arguing that the universe is infinite and contains other worlds that we cannot observe.[15] But Kepler believed that the universe is limited in size. Having made ordered proportion quite literally central to his cosmology, he could hardly admit that the universe is unbounded and in fact has no center. He did admit, however, as a hypothesis that could not yet be decided by

observation, that some of the so-called "fixed" stars might be closer to us than others.[16] Kepler felt vindicated, rather than undermined, when the invention of the telescope facilitated the sighting of previously invisible stars. If the universe were infinite and full of stars in all directions, he argued, we should see a dome of solid brilliance above us at night, rather than scattered pinpricks of light. (This problem, now called Olbers' paradox or the "dark night sky paradox," was first posed by the English Copernican Thomas Digges, on whom see Chapter 50 below.)

Since the basis of Kepler's case was his philosophy of mathematics, we should say a bit more about it. He makes a number of illuminating remarks on the topic in *The Harmony of the World*, which came out in 1619, more than twenty years after the *Mysterium cosmographicum*. By this time he had made his famous discovery that the orbits of the planets around the Sun will match Brahe's exacting measurements if they are moving elliptically, not in perfect circles. But he remained convinced that geometrical perfection is the key to understanding astronomy as a discipline that fuses mathematics with physics. The arrangement in terms of Platonic solids has "the force of necessity," because the Platonic solids and their order are relations that partake of divine "archetypes." Plato was right to say in the *Meno* that the soul "recollects" truths of mathematics, that is, discovers them as knowledge that lies hidden within the soul (*HW* 297). Here Kepler was influenced by the late ancient Platonist Proclus, whose commentary on Euclid is quoted at length in Kepler's treatise (298–302). As both Plato and Proclus taught, when we undertake mathematical inquiry we begin by studying harmonies that can be grasped by sensation, and then understand them by discovering those same harmonies as innately present within our own souls.

While the observable motions of the heavens are one case of a harmony that is available to the senses, a more obvious case, and one that is nearer to hand, is music. Thus Kepler devotes *The Harmony of the World* to the Pythagorean theory of harmony, which can be applied to both astrology and astronomy. He even includes musical notation where individual notes written on a staff are labeled with the names of the planets (e.g. at *HW* 435) and says that different singing voices correlate to different heavenly bodies. If you are a tenor, for instance, then you have a Martian singing voice, since its place in the harmonic scale is like that of Mars relative to the other planets. Fans of the old Bugs Bunny cartoons can now enjoy a moment of

revelation, as they finally understand what Marvin the Martian's "Illudium PU-36 explosive space modulator" was supposed to modulate. Since Kepler was born before the advent of Warner Brothers, he thinks of a different cultural reference: the Pythagorean idea of the music of the spheres. Kepler does not think there is literally audible sound in the heavens. But there doesn't need to be. God has composed a cosmos that is musical in the deeper sense of possessing a perfect harmony, which is "entirely rational and entirely natural" (*HW* 158).

Given that Kepler is nowadays most famous for having proposed elliptical orbits, it's downright astonishing to see how little is said about this in his magnum opus on harmony. He does mention it briefly (*HW* 408) and talks at somewhat greater length about the physical theory that accounts for the form of the orbits. Kepler's own explosive space modulation was his proposal that each of the planets (including the Earth) moves along an elliptical path, with the Sun at one of the two focal points of the path. That is his first law of planetary motion. His second law is that the planet will move proportionately faster as it comes closer to the Sun and slow down when further away. Mathematically speaking, this means that a line drawn from the Sun to the planet will sweep over equal areas at equal times. You get a fatter wedge of the area of the ellipse when the planet is near the Sun, so that this line is shorter, a slimmer but longer wedge when the planet is further away; good news, since this proves that it is in principle possible to share out equal pieces of an elliptical birthday cake. Now an obvious question arises, apart from the question of why anyone would bake an elliptical birthday cake: what is causing the planets to accelerate upon approaching the Sun?

The answer, of course, is gravity. Kepler didn't know that, but he made a startlingly similar suggestion. He was aware of something we'll be discussing later on, namely William Gilbert's research into magnetism over in England. Kepler thought that this could be the explanation, or at least analogous to the explanation, for heavenly motion. This is the context for one of his "mechanical" descriptions of the celestial realm: "my goal," he wrote in a letter of 1605, "is to show that the heavenly machine is not a kind of divine living being but similar to a clockwork in so far as almost all the manifold motions are taken care of by one single absolutely simple magnetic bodily force, as in a clockwork all motion is taken care of by a simple weight."[17] Yet he certainly did not abandon earlier ideas about

cosmic bodies as being akin to organisms, as opposed to unliving machines. Like the ancient Platonists who so inspired him, he believed that there is a soul in the Earth, which interacts with the heavens so as to produce phenomena like the tides and weather patterns. This accounts for the aforementioned possibility of using astrology to predict the weather.

By offering such arguments, Kepler suggests that the earthly realm of our everyday experience operates according to the same rules as the astronomical realm. That's something that was excluded in Aristotelian science, which envisioned two interacting physical systems: our lower world of elements that move straight up and down, and the higher world of perfect, circular motion. But between the appearance of comets and novas further away from us than the Moon, the abolition of celestial orbs, and elliptical orbits instead of circles, this division of nature into two realms was increasingly embattled. Kepler's idea that magnetism could explain celestial attraction was a further attempt to apply earthly physics to heavenly things. And this was no tacit implication or unconsidered assumption on Kepler's part. On the contrary, he explicitly said that there is "a much closer relation between the heavens and earth" than had been admitted by Aristotle.[18] Indeed, according to the Copernican system the Earth is in the heavens, just as much as any other planet is.

In a related move, Kepler blurred the strict dividing line the Aristotelians drew to separate physics from pure mathematics. "Where there is matter," he said, "there is geometry," justifying his idea that one can use mathematical analysis to establish the nature of physical reality.[19] This is not to say that he fused them into a single science, though. In fact he can be found criticizing other authors, including Aristotle himself, for failing to observe the distinction between the methods of mathematical astronomy and natural philosophy (*AU* 177). Rather, his idea was that the structures and proportions studied by the mathematician are then discovered by empirical investigation, and in various physical contexts. Just as the attractive power of a magnet is stronger in proportion to its proximity to a chunk of metal, so the Sun's attractive power is stronger when the planet it is affecting is closer, which is why the planet speeds up.[20] This is not a coincidence, of course, but the result of one and the same archetype being used by God to create different phenomena, as He providentially designs an orderly universe. Kepler's awareness of the difference between mathematics and physics, and of the fact that the two can work together, is summed up

early in his treatise *The Harmony of the World*, when he says, "I am now playing the role not of a geometer in philosophy but of a philosopher in this part of geometry" (*HW* 14).[21]

# PART II

# FRANCE

# 23

# DO AS THE ROMANS DID

## *Early French Humanism*

A s Norman Tebbit once said to the unemployed of Britian, get on your bike! Because, having wrapped up our look at the Northern Renaissance and Reformation in central Europe and the Low Countries, we're now going on a tour of France. We'll be tackling French culture in the fifteenth and especially sixteenth centuries in fourteen stages, with significant milestones along the way, like Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre, Jean Bodin, Marie de Gournay, and Montaigne. They were among those caught up in the slipstream of a movement that began elsewhere in Europe, namely Renaissance humanism.[1] The French Renaissance is often traced to the impact of Petrarch, the fourteenth-century poet and humanist who inspired later Italians like Salutati and Bruni. Petrarch's poetry was imitated in French lyric verse and translated by Jean Merot in 1534. Merot also exemplified the way that French writers were engaging with classical literature in this period: he translated Ovid and Virgil from Latin into French. Yet medieval French literature still remained relevant in this period. In fact that is illustrated by Merot too, as he produced an updated version of the thirteenth-century poem *Romance of the Rose*. The poet Joachim du Bellay pronounced it the only thing worth reading from older French literature.

Du Bellay made this judgment in his *Defense of the French Language*, published in 1549.[2] By this point people had actually been writing fine

literature in French for quite some time, raising the question of why the practice would need to be defended.[3] Even leaving aside the *Romance of the Rose* and early fifteenth-century authors like Christine de Pizan (who had a far less positive view of the *Rose*),[4] we can mention the school of authors called the *rhétoriqueurs*, poets who worked around the end of the 1400s. The very titles of their works show that they were self-conscious about working in French rather than Latin. Jean Molinet, for instance, wrote a work called *The Art of Vernacular Rhetoric* (*Art de rhétorique vulgaire*). Even though Molinet anticipated du Bellay's attitude that vernacular poetry should follow as closely as possible the model of Latin verse,[5] du Bellay was dismissive of the earlier efforts of Molinet and the other *rhétoriqueurs*. Like so many Renaissance figures, whether in science, philosophy, or literature, he thought that it was only in his own time that the glories of antiquity were finally being revived and imitated with any degree of success.

Modern-day scholars don't entirely disagree with du Bellay about this. The French Renaissance is typically seen as a kind of delayed reaction to events in Italy, with a real humanistic flowering only in the sixteenth century (cycling afficionados in France might say that their compatriots were *à l'arrière du peloton*). When they did catch up, this was in part thanks to the presence of teachers of ancient Greek. As Italians had done earlier, French intellectuals benefited from the presence of émigrés from the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean. These included George Hieronymus from Sparta and John Laskaris from Constantinople. Both came first to Italy and then traveled on to France, living incarnations of the passage of humanist scholarship from east to west. They shared their knowledge of Greek with a young man who would become the leading figure of French humanism: Guillaume Budé. He was Paris's answer to Erasmus, to the extent that a visiting Italian humanist complained that in the eyes of the French, "none but Budé had a knowledge of literature."[6]

In fact Budé "answered" Erasmus quite literally, in a rather prickly exchange of letters, which touched sometimes on issues of genuine scholarship but more often on the interpersonal feuds that were such a mainstay of humanist culture.[7] Erasmus had misgivings about Budé's ponderous and obscure Latin style. In turn Budé—in a letter written half in Latin and half in ancient Greek!—lamented that Erasmus was wasting his

talents on "lighter" works, probably having in mind such texts as the *Praise of Folly*. No one was going to accuse Budé of any such frivolities. He produced, among other things, *De asse*. It is not about donkeys (or whatever else you may be thinking) but rather a punishingly well-documented exploration of Roman coins, one of which was called the *as*, hence Budé's title. A modern biographer of Budé has complained that "on the face of it, *De asse* is poorly composed, poorly written, and poorly edited."[8] But it does display Budé's impressive research into such topics as the cost of bread in antiquity, and is opinionated on such matters as the debasement of currency and the counterproductive use of tax money to hire mercenaries. Digressions scattered through the work touch on scarcely relevant topics like the relative merits of active and contemplative life, another typical concern of humanism, as we saw with Lipsius.

For Budé an "active" life meant one lived at court, especially the court of the French king Francis I. He was the monarch most central to the story of the French Renaissance. Scholars have long admired the blossoming of culture and art during his reign, which included Francis' support of numerous humanist scholars, like Budé.[9] Budé is credited with helping persuade Francis to establish the Collège de Lecteurs Royaux in 1530; later it would become the Collège de France. Its motto was "teach everything (*docet omnia*)," but the curriculum was oriented toward such core humanist disciplines as Hebrew, Greek, and mathematics. It was during the long reign of Francis, from 1515 to 1547, that the study of Greek really bedded down in France. As one modern-day scholar has put it, in the sort of phrasing that Budé might use if he were writing in English, "what had once been the esoteric learning of a few became the necessary appanage of every educated man."[10] Deep knowledge of Latin was also highly valued, with Cicero of course being the gold standard in this language. An amusing story has the humanist Marc-Antoine Muret laying a trap for his critics by deliberately using Latin words that were drawn from Cicero's works, but omitted from the standard lexicon of Cicero's Latin.[11] The idea was, of course, that the critics would accuse him of using un-Ciceronian Latin, only to be exposed for their own ignorance.

Budé drew on Cicero and other ancient sources for a work of political advice offered to King Francis, the *Institution du prince*. It shares the features of other "mirrors for princes" from this period. That is to say, Budé

is a steadfast defender of monarchy (a sensible position to take when you're writing for the King of France), and presupposes that the welfare of the state turns on the individual character of the ruler. Another modern scholar who can turn a nice phrase complains about this aspect of the work, saying, Budé is "full of high sentence, but, yes, a bit obtuse…The obviousness of [his] censures and injunctions is so soporific that the contradictions in them easily pass unnoticed."[12] But Budé does at least have an idea about how the prince should shape his moral outlook, an idea that could hardly be more humanistic: he should study history, to the point of making it his "great mistress." Thus the *Institution du prince* is full of examples taken from the lives of ancient rulers like Alexander the Great. Meditating on such examples, the ruler will develop practical wisdom or "prudence," the same virtue later celebrated by Lipsius in his comparable work, the *Politica*. As Budé writes, "prudence is acquired in this way by the man of good judgment in reading and reflecting about the past and present government of the world and how all kingdoms and great monarchies have met their end and by what shortcomings they have fallen into difficulty."[13]

If you asked Budé's contemporaries about his greatest achievement, they would probably mention his study of the legal tradition. In 1508 he published his *Annotations on the Digest of Justinian*, which, it has been said, "did for Roman law what Erasmus' New Testament was to do for Biblical studies."[14] Budé was unsparing in his criticism of the scholastic legal tradition; our imagined English-speaking version of Budé would have found the name of the leading scholastic jurist, Accursius, all too apt. He blamed Accursius and other university jurists for misunderstanding Latin vocabulary and, more subtly, for failing to appreciate the way that both the Latin language and Roman law had evolved over time. This was a significant caveat to the idea of a single, normative version of Latin enshrined above all in the writings of Cicero. Which is not to say that Budé was free of anachronisms of his own, as when he assimilated the medieval relationship of feudal lord and tenant to the relationship between the Roman patron and his clients. Still, this was a great leap forward for legal scholarship, and especially the application of philology to this field.

Budé inspired other scholars to follow his example, among them Louis Le Roy, professor of Greek at the newly founded Collège. He wrote a biography of Budé and took seriously the latter's injunction to steep himself in history, something that shows itself in Le Roy's translation of Plato's

*Phaedo*, which begins with an overview of the history of ancient philosophy. But in one respect Budé was not a model for what would come in the middle of the sixteenth century: he was a French scholar who barely ever wrote in French. He apologized for this in the *Institution du prince*, humble-bragging that his native tongue was the one he had "practiced the least." He was patriotically convinced that the torch of humanist studies was being passed from Italy to France, a process called in Latin the *translatio studii*. But he saw this as a phenomenon that should manifest itself in Latin letters, or when one really wanted to show off, in Greek. Others saw things differently. They believed that French could equal and ultimately even supplant Latin as the language of literature, becoming, if you will, a *lingua franca*.

A concern for the vernacular, alongside classical language, is clear in the work of Etienne Dolet. He wrote a guide to the Latin language in imitation of an introduction to Greek produced by Budé. But he also translated Cicero into French. To explain how he managed this sort of task so well, he put out a treatise called *How to Translate Well from One Language to Another*. Dolet's advice can be boiled down to five rules: understand the content of the work you are translating, learn perfectly the language it is written in, do not translate word for word but render the meaning of whole phrases and sentences, avoid neologisms and archaisms, and produce a text of your own that is pleasant to read in terms of rhythm and sound.[15] As someone who has to do a lot of translating between English and German, I must say that I find these rules *sehr überzeugend*. Dolet was furthermore involved in printing editions of French texts, including the writings of Rabelais and the Geneva Bible. More generally, printed books were tracking the arrival of humanism in France and its increasing tendency to span the divide between Latin and the vernacular.

Printing got a late start in France, due to a combination of factors: the availability of printed books coming from Germany, along with such problems as the Hundred Years' War and regular outbreaks of plague.[16] Once they got going, the two main centers were Paris, where a press was set up at the Sorbonne, and Lyon, a city that was an important intellectual crossroads because of its proximity to Italy. Aptly enough, the first effort of the Sorbonne press was a guide to writing letters; it doesn't get much more humanist than that! Under Guillaume Fichet, this press went on to publish classical Latin texts in history and philosophy as well as works by more

recent authors like Lorenzo Valla. By the turn of the sixteenth century printed texts would include humanist grammars and even medieval works. As of 1476, books were being printed in French, not only Latin.

Which brings us back to Joachim du Bellay and his defense of writing in the vernacular. He was a member of a group of poets we call the Pléiade, named for the constellation of stars (in English "Pleiades"). And rightfully so, as they played a starring role in the history of French literature and its use of ancient philosophy. In general the poetry of the Pléiade is studded with classical allusions, which are often unidentified so that the reader can have the satisfaction of spotting them. The poems of Pierre Ronsard were so rich in these tacit references that other French humanists, including the aforementioned Marc-Antoine Muret, took the trouble to write commentaries identifying all the sources. The verses of the Pléiade might be in French, but they were testaments to the enduring value of ancient Greek and Latin literature. So why write in French at all, instead of Latin? Du Bellay's *Defense* shows how a committed classicist would answer that question.

It begins by arguing that languages are all of equal merit (*Defense* 1.1), their diversity caused by the local needs and desires of different peoples. Du Bellay is aware that the ancients were deeply chauvinist about their own languages, as when the Greeks called all non-Greek speakers "barbarians," which evoked the nonsensical sounding words of these other peoples. Du Bellay quotes the ancient Scythian philosopher Anacharsis retorting, "the Scythians were barbarians among the Athenians, but so were the Athenians among the Scythians" (1.2). Du Bellay's relativistic or egalitarian attitude toward languages is tempered by his admission that French is only just starting to develop as a language. It will reach perfection only when its users carefully imitate classical models, just as Romans like Cicero imitated the Greeks. "The largest part of artfulness," says du Bellay, "is encompassed in imitation" (1.8). We should not fear that classical ideas can be phrased only in Greek or Latin, because any concept can be put forward in any language: "if the philosophy sown by Aristotle and Plato in the fertile Attic field were transplanted in our French plain, it would not be casting it among brambles and thorns where it would prove sterile, but it would be making it near rather than distant and, instead of a foreigner, a citizen of our own republic" (1.10).

Ultimately, du Bellay looks forward to a time when it will no longer be necessary to spend so much time mastering classical languages, and speculates that this arduous task has held back the scholars of his own day, which is why France boasts no "Platos and Aristotles." "For the future, one should be able to speak of all things throughout the world in every language" (1.10). For now, though, imitation is more than the sincerest form of flattery: it is flat out necessary for anyone who wants to write finely in the vernacular (2.9). Du Bellay had the chance to go straight to the source of eloquence, when in 1553 he went to the papal court in Rome as secretary to his relative, Cardinal Jean du Bellay. His disappointment with what he found there was recorded in his poems, collected in his *Regrets* and his *Antiquities of Rome*.[17] Having left his homeland hoping to learn mathematics, philosophy, law, and theology, he came back with herring rather than gold (*Lyrics* 215). Rome had been reduced to a shadow of its former glories, as all things in this world decay over time (185, 193). So it is now up to poets like du Bellay himself to restore the "soul" of Rome by recalling its ancient past (195).

This conclusion, that "Rome is no longer Rome,"[18] is one that du Bellay reached in part because his expectations were so high. For him Rome was not just a city or even an empire, but a universal power that united all the people of the Earth in a single cosmopolis: "the plan of Rome is the map of the world." It would be unrealistic to expect any nation of his own day to assume that mantel. As a modern study of du Bellay's *Antiquities of Rome* puts it, "there is no need to fight over the fallen crown of Rome, for it belongs both to everyone, and to no one."[19] With this, du Bellay distanced himself from the widespread conception of a *translatio imperii*, or "handing over of empire," the political analogue to the cultural idea of a *translatio studii*. Here at the height of the French "Renaissance," du Bellay was skeptical about the idea that the glories of ancient Rome could truly be "reborn," though the odd poet might manage to write something that could measure up to the ancient standards.

Du Bellay's colleague in the Pléiade, Pierre Ronsard, was the leading candidate to manage that feat. At first glance his poems are apt to remind us of medieval courtly love literature, full of agonized longing for an unattainable beloved. At second glance, they show that Ronsard was carrying out du Bellay's advice to base his verses on the classics. Especially relevant for us are his extensive borrowings from Plato and the Platonic

tradition. Sometimes these remain superficial, if charming, as when he asks Plato: if as you say there is no void within the cosmos, where will all my tears flow as I lament my grief at lost love?[20] But at a deeper level, his very understanding of love recalls the Platonist ideas of Marsilio Ficino and other figures of the Italian Renaissance. Like Ficino, Ronsard refers to Plato's *Symposium* for a contrast between a lower, bodily love and a higher, spiritual one,[21] and opposes the lower kind of love to the sober dictates of rationality (*Lyrics* 269). And like Leone Ebreo, Ronsard sets up a kind of dialogue between a male lover and a female beloved. In this case the love object Hélène tries to persuade Ronsard the lover to abandon erotic lust for the sake of pure love. Ronsard and other poets of the Pléiade use another idea from the *Symposium* when they describe pairs of lovers as halves of an original whole divided apart by the gods, now longing for literal reunion (*Lyrics* 307).[22] And at a more cosmic level, Ronsard draws on Plato's *Timaeus* as he conceives of love as a power that moves the heavens and governs the whole universe.[23]

Ronsard was not alone in his enthusiasm for the Platonic dialogues. Du Bellay, for example, works into his poetry the idea that the soul should return to its home on feathered wings, a clear allusion to Plato's *Phaedrus* (*Lyrics* 179).[24] In both du Bellay and Ronsard we find fairly frequent evocations of the Form of Beauty from the *Symposium*, sometimes in a rather un-Platonic fashion, as when du Bellay says that Beauty itself is outdone by the physical beauty of his love object (*Lyrics* 177). Ronsard goes even further, imagining that heaven quite literally "broke the mold" of Beauty when it made his beloved Hélène, and will have to look to her as a model for recreating it (*et quand il veut refaire une image du Beau, il te va retracer pour en faire une telle*).[25] These passages may seem more playful than truly philosophical, but Ronsard did also write a *Hymn to Philosophy*, which shows how a sixteenth-century French poet could pay due tribute to our favorite discipline:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Laquelle doit entre les bons espritz* | Among those of noble heart, |
| *Sur tous les ars avoir le premier prix* | It takes first prize above every art |
| *D'autant que c'est la science premiere* | As first of the sciences, it's only right |
| *De qui toute autre emprunte sa lumiere.* | That it should give all others its light.[26] |

# 24

# PEARLS OF WISDOM

## *Marguerite of Navarre*

I don't know about you, but when I was eleven years old, I spent very little time translating spiritual poetry from French. This is just one of several respects in which I differ from Queen Elizabeth I. At that tender age, in 1544, she produced an English version of a work called *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*. It was written by another queen, namely Marguerite of Navarre, also known as Marguerite d'Angoulême. In fact Marguerite was almost an *English* queen, like Elizabeth. When she was young, it was proposed that she be matched with the much older Henry VII. She angrily declared, in her first recorded words, "I will marry a man who is young, rich, and noble—without having to cross the Channel!"[1] The idea was indeed dropped and she spent her life in France and Navarre, which is in what we now think of as northern Spain. The King of Navarre, Henri d'Albret, was her second husband. She didn't have to cross the Channel to marry him. But as her youthful protest suggests, she didn't mind crossing people. Her relationship with her brother, the quintessential French Renaissance king Francis I, was mostly one of cordial alliance; yet she was willing to stand up even against him in the cause of church reform. Which made some other people cross, too, notably the schoolmen of the university of Paris.

Marguerite was at the center of the two great developments that marked France in the first half of the sixteenth century: humanism and reform. Like King Francis, she offered patronage to a range of poets and other humanists.

Particularly noteworthy for us was her project of getting scholars to translate Plato's dialogues into French, along with the commentaries of Marsilio Ficino. This undertaking may remind us of the Byzantine princess Anna Komnene and her circle of commentators on Aristotle back in the twelfth century. It involved such men as the poet Antoine Héroët, whose works the *Androgyne* and *The Perfect Friend* exemplify the use of Platonic themes in French literature of the time, especially themes drawn from Plato's "erotic" dialogues like the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. As we'll be seeing, this was a feature of Marguerite's own writings too. Other humanist poets who enjoyed her favor were Joachim du Bellay and Pierre Ronsard.[2]

As for Christian reform, this was at least as strong a part of Marguerite's agenda. From early on she campaigned to improve religious houses and supported and corresponded with such figures as John Calvin. She also appreciated the work of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, who controversially translated the Bible into the French vernacular. At first Marguerite had the backing of Francis in supporting the cause of reform, though it should be stressed that for them this meant reform *within* the Catholic Church, along the lines endorsed by Erasmus. This is exemplified by the case of Louis de Berquin, who translated Erasmus into French and wrote a defense of Luther. Encouraged by Marguerite, Francis protected him when he was charged with heresy, though in the end without success: he was put to death in 1529 by a decision of the Paris *parlement*. Then in 1533 (the year of Elizabeth I's birth, as it happens), Marguerite invited the reformist rector of the Sorbonne to deliver an important sermon. When his evangelical ideas caused outrage, he fled Paris along with Calvin, a key moment in the latter's career.

One year later came another key moment, for French religious life in general and the life of Marguerite in particular: the notorious "affair of the placards." Evangelical agitators put up posters around Paris attacking the church and the sacrament of the Mass, along the lines of the teaching of Zwingli. This must have horrified Marguerite, as she was devoutly committed to the Mass. But it didn't change her stance toward reform in general. By contrast, it was the straw that broke the back of Francis' sympathy. He increasingly became willing to persecute and even execute Evangelists. Now Marguerite's continued lobbying caused friction with the king, as did the suspicion that she put the interests of her adopted kingdom Navarre above that of the French crown. It's probably no coincidence that she waited until after Francis' death to publish a collection of her works,

since they included works of daring theological content like *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*. Though it appealed to her fellow queen Elizabeth, the theologians of Paris didn't care for it. They briefly had the *Mirror* placed on a list of proscribed books before royal pressure got this overturned.

Another poem of Marguerite's, the *Fable of False Pride*, illustrates the way that she slipped reformist philosophical and theological ideas into her literary productions.[3] It also illustrates the classicizing, humanist world of ideas in which she moved. The fable is superficially pagan in content, a retelling of an ancient myth about the goddess Diana. Her virgin handmaidens are sexually assaulted by a gang of satyrs, and she turns the women into willow trees to save them. Some of the Christian ideas tacitly woven into the fabric of the narrative are innocuous enough, for instance that the maidens' souls will remain immortal, even if their bodies have now been transformed (*SW* 269). But there is a distinctly Evangelical flavor to the treatment of Diana herself.[4] Speaking of the virgins, she is made to say, "They did not realize that their understanding, grace, and survival came about through their connection to me…Save for their union with me in love and faith, they were as nothing" (263). Those souls are not just immortal, but united eternally to Diana through grace.

Now, you might argue that one didn't have to be a Protestant sympathizer to thematize grace in this way. What distinguished the reformers was stress on faith in grace *as opposed to* good works. But for that, we may turn to another narrative poem by Marguerite, the *Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*, a late work written in 1548, one year before her death. This work is in the form of a dialogue, or perhaps better, play—we know that some of Marguerite's "comedies" were actually performed for the royal entourage by her aristocratic friends. In this one, three characters dominate the drama: a hedonistic "worldly woman," an ascetic "spiritual woman," and a "wise woman" who shows them the errors and limitations of their perspectives. Moral chastisement is unsurprisingly meted out to the worldly woman, and on Platonist grounds. She can only think of the interest and pleasure of her body, yet the body is merely a mask for the true self, which is the soul (*SW* 321). Then the spiritual woman is blamed for the opposite mistake, of thinking she can win salvation by mortifying the body. No, says the wise woman to her: "You will destroy your body before your soul is taught virtue," and it is against God's will to abuse the body (319). She advises, "Do not hope to gain anything by bathing your body in blood or by

roasting it over a fire. For if your heart is not joyous, charitable, and loving, then you do nothing but lie to God…if your heart is not clean of pride and is blemished with it, I say that your work is worth little (*je dis que peu vault vostre ouvraige*)" (331–33). This might very easily remind us of Erasmus, with his emphasis on internal spirituality, or even Luther, with his impatience for Christians who supposed they could persuade God to save them by good "works," including a life of abstemious, ostentatious piety.

Alternatively, we might be reminded of another author, one also named Marguerite. Marguerite Porete was likewise stern in her criticisms of asceticism, which she equated with worldly "virtue."[5] Because of such daring proposals that the pure religious soul can "leave virtue behind," she was burned at the stake in 1310 (the Parisian authorities really had it in for people named Marguerite). Porete's execution was brought on by her refusal to disown her book *Mirror of the Simple Soul*, and I can't help wondering whether the similarity of that title and Marguerite of Navarre's *Mirror of the Sinful Soul* is more than a coincidence, as the earlier *Mirror* would have been known at this time. In fact, Marguerite refers to an unnamed female author as an inspiration in another work called *The Prisons*, and it has been suggested that she may have had Porete in mind.[6] If so, maybe Marguerite was also thinking of her when she came to write the last section of her *Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*. Here, a fourth character comes along, a simple shepherdess who flummoxes even the wise woman by saying "I know nothing outside of love…I don't need any other knowledge."

This brings us to another theme of Marguerite of Navarre's writing, an intense and often eroticized longing for God, which is reminiscent of Porete and other female medieval mystics. It's an idea she explored in her extensive correspondence with the Bishop of Meaux, Guillaume Briçonnet, who was also a colleague of the aforementioned Lefèvre d'Étaples. We have 123 surviving letters between Marguerite and the bishop, which forms only a part of her voluminous body of epistolary exchanges.[7] Briçonnet shared and probably encouraged both Marguerite's reformist tendencies and her interest in Platonism. More important still was his commitment to a spiritualist, even mystical approach to religion. We find this frequently in Marguerite, too, not least in a text I just mentioned, *The Prisons*. Its main character, called simply "the lover (*l'amy*)," suffers from the same failing mentioned in the title of the *Fable of False Pride*. "Pride" here translates

*cuyder*, a kind of self-deception that separates the soul from God.[8] To escape pridefulness, the lover must free himself first from worldly love of his mistress, then from ambition, and finally from all forms of worldly knowledge. He achieves this through asceticism and prayer, but as in the *Comédie* this approach is shown to be limited: "the more sin resembles virtue and is clothed like it, the more dangerous are its lies."[9] Like Porete, the lover finds peace only through mystical union with God, and annihilation of the self.

Marguerite takes up these same motifs in the poem that attracted the attention of Elizabeth, and may be her most obviously philosophical poem, the *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*. As the title leads us to expect, the speaker of the poem begins by lamenting her sinfulness, which makes her "a slave to evil, pain, suffering and distress, a brief existence, an uncertain end" (*SW* 79). Self-abnegation here comes not in the form of ascetic discipline but as a realization that due to sin, she is nothing at all, or even "less than nothing" (79). This fits with the typically Platonist idea that evil is just the absence of being or goodness, which also appears in the *Fable of False Pride* (*SW* 237). It's a very traditional notion, one that goes all the way back to late antiquity. But Marguerite puts a distinctively sixteenth-century spin on it, by dwelling on the soul's sinfulness rather than the ontological disappearance of the inferior, finite soul in God's superior, infinite reality, which is more what we find in Porete.[10]

Similarly, Marguerite innovates by playing variations on the old theme of the soul and God as lovers. Medieval mystics had repurposed the emotional rhetoric of courtly love poetry to evoke the longing of the soul for God. Marguerite does that too, but expands the range of interpersonal relationships exploited in the metaphor: her soul is God's wife, but also His sister, His daughter, and paradoxically also His mother (85, 89). "In love," she writes, "I can boldly call you son, father, spouse, and brother. Father, brother, son, and husband" (123). Perhaps reflecting on her own experiences of frustrated attempts at motherhood (she experienced miscarriages and false pregnancies before finally having children), Marguerite describes sin as a "lifeless child" (99) and her bond with God as the truly fruitful union. In a final twist on these metaphors, Marguerite compares herself in the *Mirror* to a faithless wife. Whereas "you are more likely to turn the skies upside down" than to find a husband who will forgive an adulterous woman, God is willing to forgive the sinful soul.

In these lines Marguerite is recognizably the same author who produced a vastly longer, and at first glance very different, book: the *Heptameron*.[11] The title refers to the seven days over which the action of the work unfolds. A group of aristocrats, evenly divided between men and women, are staying at an abbey and agree to pass the time by telling a series of stories for mutual edification and enjoyment. The often naughty tone of the work is captured in the prologue, when one of the men says he can think of something else he'd rather be doing, only to be told by the central female character Parlemente, "let's leave aside pastimes that require only two participants." The name of this character suggests that she is a spokeswoman for Marguerite, because *marguerite* means "pearl," and *perle amante* means "loving pearl." (Of course there is also a political pun; perhaps it's a dig at the anti-reformist Parisian *parlement*?) She used the same pun, by the way, for the title of her collected works, *Marguerites de la marguerite des princesses*, meaning *Pearls from the Pearl of Princesses*.

The *Heptameron* is highly entertaining, not infrequently bawdy and even dirty (literally: one of the stories involves an unfortunate encounter with a latrine). It can be hard to believe that it was produced by the same woman who wrote the works of pious spirituality we've discussed so far. The most obvious point of continuity is the use of tropes from courtly love literature. In the *Heptameron*, heroic characters are typically those who remain devoted in the face of long separation from their love objects, or who are able to endure chastely in the face of temptation or threat. Threat is in fact all too frequent, as story after story depicts rapes and attempted rapes. Sometimes this is played for laughs, as when a clever woman escapes two rapist Franciscan monks by abandoning them on an island (§5). At other times the stories convey dismay and indignation, understandably so when you learn that at least one of the tales, the fourth one, probably fictionalizes an assault endured by Marguerite herself when she was in her twenties. The heroine of this tale manages to fend off her attacker, but is then advised not to tell anyone else about it, since no one will believe she was an innocent victim.

Though this passage remains depressingly relevant today, the *Heptameron* is often a backwards-looking text. In the prologue Marguerite has one of her characters refer to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which is clearly her primary model. The ninth story alludes to the *Romance of the Rose* and its allegorization of seduction, or rape, as the violent storming of a fortress

(§9). The male narrators are constantly lamenting the suffering inflicted upon men who are refused sexual favors. One of them sounds like today's "incels" when he says that women are only put on earth for the benefit of men, so in demanding sex they are only taking what is theirs by right (§9). Loftier talk of virtue and honor is also cynically admitted to be just a more subtle form of seduction (§12). This leaves the women to speak up for a genuinely "pure" love that is exalted over the pleasures of the flesh. It's especially Parlement who voices such ideals, to the point that she sounds like she has been making a careful study of Plato and Ficino. She describes how the soul graduates from unsatisfying physical beauty to the richer rewards of spiritual and divine beauty (§19). This is a clear allusion to the climactic speech of Plato's *Symposium*, which by the way is also delivered by a woman character, Diotima.

The contrast between the men and women in the *Heptameron* is of course no accident. The whole book has been taken as a contribution to the long-running *querelle des femmes*, or debate about the worth and virtue of women. We saw above how Cornelius Agrippa wrote on this topic (see Chapter 15), and it was an abiding concern of Italian humanists. The same was true in France, where for instance Symphorien Champier contributed to the genre with his *Ship of Virtuous Women*.[12] (We'll return to him in Chapter 27, in the context of talking about medicine in Renaissance France.) Marguerite puts this dispute front and center of the *Heptameron*. The very first story is told by a man and depicts a vicious woman, but it is immediately rebutted with a tale narrated by a female character, about virtuous resistance to male advances. This is coupled with the observation that the misdeeds of a single woman should in any case not be taken to undermine the honor of all women, as had been argued more than a century earlier in France by Christine de Pizan. That might seem beside the point, since the deeds and misdeeds of fictional characters should have little if any bearing on our assessment of actual women. But it is stressed at the outset of the work that these stories are based on true events, albeit with invented names. Sometimes the narrators even allude to the "queen of Navarre," explaining how Marguerite came to hear the story, and as just mentioned she may have drawn on her own experience of sexual assault for one or more of the tales.

Unlike Christine de Pizan, Marguerite does not have a widespread reputation as a proto-feminist icon. But she should. The *Heptameron* is a

playful and ironic dialogue, not a polemic like some "defenses of women" written in this period.[13] Yet it is all the more effective that the misogynist characters are allowed to damn themselves from their own mouths. Then too, Marguerite's attitude toward herself as a female writer is highly self-conscious. Premodern female authors often indulged in self-deprecation; even the forthrightly defiant Christine de Pizan had done so. Marguerite is no different, describing her writings as mere "women's work." But this was a typical strategy used by women to disarm their readership, before then claiming to have a profoundly valuable message.[14] A few lines of poetry from the preface of Marguerite's collected writings is a perfect example: "excuse the rhythm and style, seeing that it is the work of a woman who has neither learning nor knowledge, but only the desire to show to all the power that is the gift of God the creator when He wants to absolve a heart."[15] As a woman Marguerite could not attend the universities, or fight in wars, or engage straightforwardly in politics—even if she was unusually active in that sphere, as when she negotiated with the Holy Roman Emperor for the release of her brother Francis after he was captured in battle. But she could write, and write about the most important topics of all, like God and salvation.

She was encouraged to do just that by another woman: Marie Dentière. I have mentioned already in passing that she corresponded with Marguerite (Chapter 14). In one letter, Dentière argued forcefully that Marguerite should use her position and talent to write about theology, even if this was not expected for those of their gender: "if God has given graces to some good women…should they, for the sake of the defamers of the truth, refrain from writing down, speaking, or declaring it to each other?"[16] It was a challenge Marguerite was willing to take up, even if she did so rather indirectly, in the form of spiritual poetry and in the *Heptameron*. At least, this is how some have read the work. It may be a collection of sex comedies and romantic tragedies, but it is also yet another chance for her to present her distinctive ideas about Christian religion. Already Montaigne, just a few decades after her death, was complaining about the "mixed" nature of the resulting work, which in his view just goes to show that women shouldn't attempt to address such matters.

But Marguerite had good reason for doing so, beyond the encouragement offered by Marie Dentière. She may have been provoked by

John Calvin's attack on the sort of intensely spiritual Christianity she favored. He took aim at a group he called the "spiritual libertines," who he saw as being protected by the French court. These libertines, he said, took the view that there is no such thing as sin because God infuses all creation with His being. Calvin accused them of thinking as follows: "does an assassin murder an upright citizen? He has carried out, they say, God's plan. Has someone stolen, or committed adultery? Because he has done what was foreseen and ordained by the Lord, he is the minister of God's providence."[17] The leading reformers, never shy about polemic, became especially vexed when confronted with what might seem to be the logical conclusion of their own teachings. For Luther this was the anti-authoritarianism of the peasants' revolt. For Calvin it was the libertines' plausible inference that if God predestines everything, as he himself taught, then among the things God wills are wicked actions.

We know from letters sent by Calvin to Marguerite that he feared she would take offense at his diatribe. Her response seems to have come only in an indirect form: she would write works that defended the spiritual libertines by emphasizing the "spiritual" part. The narrators of the *Heptameron*, for all their eroticized banter, are also a group of pious contemplatives. They find sustenance in daily readings of Scripture and are more devoted to God than their hosts, Franciscan friars who do things like skipping prayers so they can eavesdrop on the storytelling. Marguerite no doubt anticipated that her readers would also hang on every word, hoping for salacious details. But she hoped that along the way, they would absorb the Platonic teaching that true love, true *eros*, is pursued through the soul and not the body. So it's apt that when Marguerite died, the poet Charles de Sainte-Marthe wrote an encomium for her, full of classical allusions, which poses the question: "if Plato were alive today, what do we think he would say of Marguerite?"[18]

# 25

# SERIOUSLY FUNNY

## *Rabelais*

As faithful readers of this book series will know, I am an admirer of the silent films of Buster Keaton. One reason they are so entertaining is Keaton's famous "stone face" demeanor, which he learned as a child on the vaudeville stage, in a time when people would pay good money to laugh at Keaton's father apparently beating him in public. Buster learned that the laughs would be louder if he simply didn't react, maintaining a sober facial expression rather than crying and howling. As the saying goes: treat light things seriously, and serious things lightly. In sixteenth-century France, the greatest exponent of this technique was François Rabelais, author of a tale spread over four parts (plus a probably mostly inauthentic fifth, additional part), following the adventures of two giants named Pantagruel and Gargantua.[1] Rabelais is himself a giant of literature in the French language, who has been called "the most difficult classical author of world religion" by one of his most famous twentieth-century interpreters, the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin.[2]

The difficulties are many. Rabelais used stunningly varied and creative language, with different registers of speech, slang and technical vocabulary, made up words, and puns that presuppose a readership at home in both Latin and the French vernacular of the time. When a third major character, Panurge, makes his appearance, he introduces himself in a whole series of languages (or rather, parodic versions of languages) including Greek and

English, before revealing that he is actually a native French speaker (2.9). The books are also full of pointed topical references and jokes about contemporary events, which will pass you by if you don't follow along using a learned commentary. Rabelais' sense of humor presents further obstacles to the modern reader. We can appreciate the irony of treating war and tyranny as a joke, or staging an apparently serious disquisition on the best way to wipe one's bottom. But it might not actually make us laugh.

And then there is the regular, extensive, extravagant vulgarity. Rabelais is rarely outright obscene, since he usually speaks about such matters as sex and excretion using metaphors. "Codpiece," for instance, is one of his favorite words; the prologue to *Pantagruel* even advertises another supposed work of his called *On the Dignity of Codpieces*. But his vivid imagery leaves mercilessly little to the imagination, whether he is proposing the idea of building a fortress out of women's genitals, because they are a challenge to conquer, and can be had so cheaply (2.15), or describing the flood that ensued when the giant Gargantua relieved himself in Paris. This is how the city got its name, because he decided to inundate the population with urine *par rys*: "for a laugh." Another major preoccupation of Rabelais is drinking and drunkenness. Pantagruel's name means "always thirsty," and Gargantua's first words directly after being born are to call for drink (1.6). It is this aspect of the work that Bakhtin especially had in mind when he described it as difficult. He saw the books as the late flowering of a tradition that has been lost in modern times: a style of folk humor, epitomized by the reversals and rule-breaking observed during the time of carnival. In this spirit, Rabelais takes license to laugh at everything and everyone. He plunges his reader into an unapologetically material world where basic bodily functions are exaggerated so as to become grotesque, while remaining grounded in recognizable physical reality. As Bakhtin put it, "Medieval laughter found its highest expression in Rabelais' novel. It became the form of a new free and critical historical consciousness."[3]

Even in Rabelais' own day, "high" literature was already departing from such squalid matters, as we can see from the lofty poetry of his contemporaries in the Pléiade. Yet those poets were still able to appreciate low comedy and even indulge in it themselves. Ronsard wrote humorous verses as an epitaph for Rabelais, which describe him spending every day drunk, "contented like a frog in mud"; after death, wine grapes grow from his buried corpse.[4] A bit later Montaigne classed the books of Rabelais as

"simply amusing." This was not necessarily a criticism since it was this kind of book Montaigne admitted to liking best.[5] But it was still an underestimation of Rabelais, a failure to heed the warning laid down in the prologue of *Pantagruel*. Alluding to a passage in Plato's *Symposium* in which Alcibiades speaks of the philosophical riches hidden within Socrates, Rabelais tells us to uncover the deeper meaning of the outrageous material that is to follow, like someone breaking a bone to suck out the marrow.

That reference to Plato might make you wonder, "Wait, is this Rabelais yet another French humanist, obsessed with ancient sources, dismissive of the scholastics, and proud of his attainments in Latin and Greek scholarship?" In a word: *oui*. His tale is packed with allusions to Plato and Neoplatonists like Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus; Peripatetics like Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias; and even thinkers of the Islamic world like Avicenna. Many of these allusions are invented jokes: Alexander is cited on the pivotal question of why lions are afraid of roosters (1.10). But Rabelais does genuinely draw on philosophical and scientific literature, in the latter department showing particular expertise in medicine, as when he provides exaggeratedly exact descriptions of horrific battle wounds, such as only an anatomist could do (1.44, 2.14).

In fact Rabelais was renowned for his expertise in the field of medicine. He studied this subject at Montpellier and was a doctor at the public hospital in Lyon.[6] He became physician to Jean du Bellay, Bishop of Paris, and then his brother Guillaume. In Guillaume's entourage Rabelais traveled to Italy, before coming into the service of a final patron, the Cardinal de Chastillon. Etienne Dolet refers to Rabelais giving learned commentary on an anatomical dissection, though it is not clear whether he himself was wielding the knife. Of course, in this period there was no tension between an interest in medicine and an interest in classical texts. On the contrary, mastery of this discipline presupposed familiarity with authors of antiquity like Galen and Hippocrates. We have copies of their works that were annotated by Rabelais personally, and the same goes for books by Plato and Plutarch. Perhaps nothing epitomizes his humanist credentials so well as a copy of Plato's dialogues in Greek, on which he wrote: "[this belongs] to Franciscus Rabelais, the excellent doctor, and his Christian friends." Speaking of his friends, he dedicated the third book of his novel to Marguerite de Navarre and corresponded in Latin with other humanists like Erasmus and Budé. To Budé he expresses the paradigmatically Renaissance

conviction that “all humanity, or nearly all, is regaining its ancient splendor.”[7]

The same idea appears in *Gargantua*, in a letter written from the title character to his son Pantagruel (2.8). Gargantua deplores the medieval period, when “all good literature was destroyed,” hails new advances like the printing press, and celebrates the spread of facility in Greek and Latin, as well as Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic. Pantagruel is encouraged to learn these languages, and to imitate Plato when writing Greek, and Cicero for Latin. Gargantua hopes that Pantagruel will become a “bottomless pit of knowledge.” By contrast, Rabelais would clearly like to consign some scholars of his time to a real bottomless pit. His books feature parodies of the scholastics, like a Parisian scholar who speaks in typically Rabelaisian gibberish (2.6). In the seventeenth-century English translation by Thomas Urquhart, often praised for capturing the feel of the French original, this passage reads in part: “I demigrate into one of these so well minsters, and there, irrorating myself with fair lustral water, I mumble off little parcels of some missic precation of our sacrificuls, and, submurmurating my horary precules, I elevate and absterge my anime from its nocturnal inquinations.”

Scholasticism is also sent up by using its technical language in inappropriate contexts, as when the urge to get drunk is explained on the grounds that *privatio praesupponit habitum*, with the added comment, “I am learned, you see” (1.5). There are also mock scholastic accounts of vulgar phenomena, like the marvelously “fresh and cool” nature of women’s thighs (1.39). A kind of elaborate disputed question, on whether it is wise to marry, dominates the *Third Book*—we’ll come back it below. Most entertaining may be the list of fictional books found in the “Library of St Victor,” which goes on for pages and includes such entries as *On Bacon and Peas, with Commentary*, and *Apology against Those Who Allege that the Pope’s Mule Eats Only at Set Times* (2.7). Pantagruel himself is trained as a scholastic philosopher and decides to post publicly a list of no fewer than 9764 propositions for debate. It’s an obvious parody of Pico della Mirandola, who in real life proposed to defend a list of 900 theses, which in all honesty is only slightly less ridiculous (2.10). Scholastic lawyers likewise come in for rough treatment. In the same chapter as the jibe at Pico, we find the complaint that the university jurists are ignorant of classical languages, have studied less philosophy than a mule, and know less about history than a toad has feathers. It’s hardly surprising that the

theologians of Paris at the Sorbonne put Rabelais on their list of "dangerous books" in 1542–53.[8]

What may be more surprising is that works like these should have come from a man of the church. He was at first a Franciscan friar, and then a Benedictine monk. Hard to square with the traditional picture of his writing as irreverent, even "atheistic." Fortunately, that interpretation was refuted by Lucien Febvre, who in 1942 made a persuasive case that religion was, for Rabelais, one of those serious matters that he chose to treat lightly. His books consistently adopt reformist positions, whether by attacking the laziness of monks (1.40), recommending private study of the Bible in the original (2.8), or warning that human desire leads inevitably to sin if not guided by grace (1.29). On this point, Febvre made much of a passage where Rabelais seems to follow the Lutheran teaching on good works: "help yourself, and God will break your neck."[9]

A famous passage in *Pantagruel* can be read as combining Rabelais' humanist and reformist tendencies. It is a description of an abbey called "Theleme," and is notable for *not* being particularly amusing (1.52). If read straight and not as parody, it sets out the author's ideas for a utopian community. (Utopia was an abiding interest of Rabelais, who elsewhere in the books refers to an island called Medamothi (4.2). This means "nowhere" in Greek, recalling the etymology of "utopia" and of course reminding the well-informed reader of Thomas More's work of that name.) The inscription on the gate of the abbey welcomes those who reflect upon Scripture, while banning corrupt lawyers, clerks, scribes, as well as the greedy, diseased, and vicious. The inhabitants of the abbey are noble folk of both sexes, who take vows of chastity and poverty, yet adopt as their motto, "do as you will (*fais ce que voudras*)." By itself that injunction could suggest moral laxity, or even relativism. In context, though, it is a deeply Christian idea, which recalls a famous sentence of Augustine: "love, and do what you will."[10] What Rabelais means is that, once we have accepted God's guidance and pledged ourselves to love Him and our fellow humans, whatever we do will inevitably be good. This explains why the residents of Theleme (which, by the way, means "will" in Greek), in doing whatever they want, all wind up behaving in exactly the same way, with no need for political rulership, law, or private property.[11]

So Rabelais was, despite his distinctive and often scandalous style as a writer, very much a man of his time. The intellectual currents of humanism and reform run below the chaotic surface of his tales. But did he contribute anything more distinctive that would interest the historian of philosophy, as opposed to the literary historian? For a start, we shouldn't be hasty in letting the literature people claim Rabelais' language for their own. Even if you can't read him in the original, you can see that he is doing some very interesting things with French. His wordplay, his lists, his habit of piling up dozens of synonyms, and what has been called his "penchant for gibberish"[12] all draw our attention to the artificiality of words and the relationships between words, within one language and across languages. Even the author's name is a bit of linguistic trickery: the books were published under the pen name Alcofribas Nasier, an anagram of François Rabelais. From its title page onward, the work demonstrates that language is a creation of humankind, one subject to our whims and our manipulations.

As if in confirmation of this, at one point Rabelais has Pantagruel explicitly assert a conventionalist theory of language (3.19), that is, has him argue that spoken sounds do not have their meanings in themselves, but through arbitrary fiat. This is proven by the fact that lip readers can understand language without even hearing the sounds. An evocative part of the *Fourth Book* imagines a place so cold that words freeze into jewel-like colored ice and then become audible when they thaw (4.55). To be honest I'm not sure what this is supposed to mean, but maybe it is intended to point out the disparity between living spoken language and recorded language, which for Rabelais (living before phonographs and podcasts) would have meant the written word. If that's right, then he may be suggesting that writing is inert, in a sense not language at all, until it is used, as by being read aloud so that its meaning is understood. On the other hand the first sounds to thaw are not words at all, merely noises. Still, that fits with the way Rabelais more generally blurs the line between language and non-language by using nonsense and onomatopoeia.

Two more philosophically rewarding passages are found in the *Third Book*. Early on in this installment, there is a pair of speeches given by Panurge and Pantagruel, first in favor of, and then against, the idea of being in debt (3.3–5). As we know, there was a fine tradition of writing encomia for things that are commonly despised, hence that joke about writing in

praise of the codpiece. Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* would be the most famous humanist example, though a closer comparison to this section in Rabelais would be Poggio Braccolini's dialogue about avarice.[13] As with Poggio's rhetorical set piece in favor of greed, Panurge's defense of debt can be read as parodic, as sincere, or probably better, as both. The initial points made are simply jokes, and pretty good ones at that: Panurge says you should always be in debt to someone, so that at least somebody is praying for you not to die. Furthermore, philosophers since antiquity have been wrong to say that nothing comes from nothing: "from having nothing, I make creditors!" But as his speech goes on, the notion of debt is broadened out to refer to all cases of exchange in the universe (here it may be relevant that the French *debtes* can mean both "debts" and "necessities").[14] Thus the elements are "paying a debt" when they transform into one another, and the heavens do the same by performing the motions they "owe." A lengthy part of the speech once again showcases Rabelais' medical knowledge, as he describes the exchanges that happen within the human body. Thus typical Renaissance themes of balance and harmony, and the human body as a microcosm, a smaller version of that well-ordered universe, are creatively brought into dialogue with questions of economics.

Intriguing though this is, most readers of the *Third Book* will come away from it remembering above all the central disputation about whether Panurge should get married. This was a standard topic for demonstrating rhetorical brilliance,[15] and it's another echo of Erasmus, who wrote a treatise praising marriage. Remember that this is another theme relevant to the Reformation: Luther waged a battle against the Catholic valorization of chastity. Predictably, Rabelais' approach to the topic is more satirical. His character Panurge is attracted by the thought that, if he takes a wife, he will be able to satisfy his sexual desires without sin. But he is beset by the fear that his wife will be unfaithful. He encounters a series of advisors, including a theologian, a lawyer, an occult scientist, and a doctor, who give him wildly varying advice; about the only thing these speeches have in common is that they are all useless.

Now, there are at least two ways to approach this part of the book, and as usual with Rabelais, they are probably both right. More obviously, he is contributing to the ongoing debate over the merits of women, the so-called

*querelle des femmes*.[16] Panurge's obsession with adulterous betrayal is fed by worries about the bad character of women, something emphasized by the medical advisor. This doctor says that given the weakness of the female sex, cuckoldry follows marriage like a shadow follows the body. He discourses on an idea found in Plato's *Timaeus*, that the womb is like an "animal" in its own right that can move around the female body, causing anatomical mayhem and erratic behavior. But of course we should not necessarily take the most misogynist speakers as representing Rabelais' own view. More likely, he is satirizing the whole debate and making fun of all sides: the women haters are mocked for their crass hostility and pseudo-science, even as the women lovers are accused of wanting an excuse to, well, love women. As one scholar has put it, he is "much more an amused spectator than a partisan participant of the battle between the sexes."[17]

A second, less obvious approach to the debate about marriage would be to read it as an indirect reflection on another controversial topic: divine predestination. The idea would be that Panurge's fear of having an unfaithful wife stands in for the fear of damnation.[18] While that may not apply to this whole part of the *Third Book*, it certainly seems to fit the discussion between Panurge and a theologian character called Hippodathée. He offers the advice that if Panurge does marry, then his wife will cheat on him if God wills it, but if not, then not (3.30). Panurge objects to this scholastic appeal to "conditional arguments." To be sure of his wife's faithfulness, he would have to attend God's "privy council." Here then Rabelais thematizes anxiety about the obscure workings of God's will. A serious matter indeed, presented in the comic form of a man who is caught between lust and fear of betrayal.

I mentioned in passing earlier that this part of Rabelais' four-part novel was dedicated to none other than Marguerite de Navarre. As far as I know we have no evidence what she thought of it, but given that her *Heptameron* likewise mixes the profane with the profound, I find it pretty easy to imagine her chuckling along while reading about the adventures of Pantagruel and friends. Actually these two authors have something else in common: they both include characters who are barely disguised versions of contemporaries. In Rabelais, one of the easiest to identify is the occult scientist Herr Trippa, who is obviously a stand-in for Agrippa von Nettesheim. A wicked king named Pirochole probably represents the emperor Charles V, and it's been speculated that the theologian

Hippodathée is meant to be a leading intellectual of the day.[19] In this book, indeed on the next page, I'm going to let him appear under his own name: Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples.

# 26

# WORD PERFECT

## *Logic and Language in Renaissance France*

The clash between humanism and scholasticism, which was set fair to be the defining battle of intellectual life in the sixteenth century until the Reformation came along, is often seen in institutional terms. The schoolmen worked at universities, the humanists outside them. This impression is supported by humanists complaining about the pettifoggery offered up as philosophical instruction at Paris and elsewhere. And it seems to be confirmed by the fact that scholastics accused humanists of lacking proper credentials. Thus we find Noël Beda, executive officer of the Theology Faculty at Paris and a determined defender of scholasticism and Catholicism, accusing Erasmus of lacking the proper expertise to interpret Scripture.[1] In fact, though, many of the humanists did study at the universities. As I mentioned when we looked at Erasmus, he studied theology at Paris for a time, though he dropped out. We also saw how the impact of Melanchthon transformed teaching at Wittenberg, Tübingen, and ultimately across Protestant Europe, precisely by modifying the traditional curriculum in light of humanist values.

In France, there was no better example of a humanist schoolman than Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. Beda complained about him too. In 1526 he attacked Lefèvre by name for his presumption in offering a new Latin version of the Psalms and New Testament, translating the Bible into French, and daring to comment on Scripture as if he were a properly trained

theologian. Though Lefèvre never officially broke with the church, Beda depicted him as being at least a Lutheran sympathizer. As a modern scholar has put it, "it was the heaviest stick with which to beat him, and the one that lay nearest to hand."[2] Beda himself put the point as follows: "since Lefèvre, Erasmus and certain others, have presumed in our day to discuss Holy Scripture itself and the writings of the early doctors on their own, without teachers, rejecting and neglecting scholastic theology—the same method that by its strength alone confuted and condemned the perverse teachings of the now famous heretics—is it any wonder that they have slipped recently into the same impieties of the aforementioned heretics, and have fallen into the same dangers as those whose example they have chosen to follow?"[3] The heretical forebears he had in mind included such familiar names as Abelard, Marsilius of Padua, John Wyclif, and Jan Hus.

But while Beda was right that Lefèvre was not a professor of theology, neither was he an outsider to the world of the schoolmen. He taught at Paris himself for almost two decades spanning the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He composed influential textbooks on Aristotelian philosophy, for instance his 1496 introduction to logic, which became a bestseller. He was eclectic and creative in his use of pedagogical techniques, such as tables offering an overview of the treatise that he would then go on to summarize, catechistic dialogues to help the student remember the main points, and more traditional full commentaries. It's been remarked that "this range of epitomizing formats or genres defined a Renaissance philosophical style, which Lefèvre's works remodeled for northern universities."[4] His methods were inspired by Italian humanist scholars, whom Lefèvre contacted during several trips across the Alps. In Italy he met, among others, Ficino, Poliziano, and Pico.

The humanist Johannes Reuchlin thus said, "Marsilio Ficino gave Plato to Italy; Lefèvre restored Aristotle to France"; elsewhere he was lauded as "the one glory of all France."[5] A group of like-minded scholars gathered around him, including the philologian Beatus Rhenanus and the philosopher Charles de Bovelles.[6] Lefèvre's student Josse Clichtove wrote commentaries on his epitomes, suggesting that these had effectively replaced Aristotle as the works that students must consult. The group had interests ranging across the Aristotelian curriculum but focused particularly on two disciplines that had been central for arts masters back in the

fourteenth century: mathematics and logic. He and his group applied mathematics to physics in a way reminiscent of the "Oxford calculators" who flourished in that period.[7] But in logic, Lefèvre distanced himself from the concerns of the late medievals, commenting that scholastic discussions were full of "novelties" and "lifeless matters, like so much hay."[8] By this he meant treatises and debates about sophisms and dialectical games like the practice of "obligations." Nowadays historians of philosophy find this to be one of the most exciting and fruitful areas of medieval work on logic. For Lefèvre, though, it was at best a harmless bit of entertainment.

This didn't stop his student Clichtove from offering a solution to the most famous sophism, the liar paradox.[9] The problem is raised by sentences like "this statement is false," which is false if true, and true if false. Clichtove's solution departs from the observation that asserting a proposition implicitly involves asserting the truth of that very proposition. So if I assert "giraffes are tall," I am obviously saying something about giraffes; but I am also simultaneously asserting that this very sentence is true. Thus we can take the liar sentence to be a concealed conjunction. It means "this statement is false, *and* this statement is true." But that is a straightforward contradiction, so it turns out that there is no paradox. It's just a contradictory assertion, like "this giraffe is tall, and not tall," and contradictions are always false.

Pretty smart, but as I say, Lefèvre wouldn't really care. For him the value of logic is to be found not in this sort of game-playing, but in the part of Aristotle that deals with statements and arguments that are productive of knowledge, and explains how language hooks up to reality. This means that he did need to take seriously at least one long-standing controversy from scholastic logic: the problem of universals.[10] In his notes on Aristotle's *Categories*, Lefèvre adopted what might be called a "moderate realist" position on this issue. While there is nothing outside the mind that is genuinely universal, neither are universals simply conventional or arbitrary fictions that we devise to categorize things. Rather, there are genuine similarities between things out in the world. When we notice the similarities between, say, giraffes, our minds take the properties common to all the giraffes and add the notion of universality to them, to form a general idea of giraffes.

As these examples show, Lefèvre was himself something of a contradiction: both a humanist and a scholastic. Until he wasn't. Increasingly Lefèvre got interested in applying his philological skills to the Bible, and to texts that enriched his diet of Aristotle with Platonist and mystical ideas from authors like the Pseudo-Dionysius and Nicholas of Cusa. Again this may show the influence of Italian humanists like Pico della Mirandola. In an early work on "natural magic," Lefèvre was already exploring a method inspired by the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, which had so fascinated Pico: deriving meaning from the numerical values of the names of God.[11] He retained this idea when he turned to the project of writing about Scripture, saying in a work on the Psalms that God's names are full of "mysteries useful to our religion and worth knowing." In 1499, we find him commenting on the works of the Pseudo-Dionysius, and thrilling to the negative theology he finds there.

These two ideas—the rejection of the application of language to God, and the search for the secret meanings of divine names—may seem to be yet another contradiction. (What would Clichtove say?) But in fact they are two sides of the same coin. Lefèvre is moving toward the idea that God cannot be grasped through normal language or normal reasoning. He contrasts "rational" and "intellectual" philosophy, and says that whereas reason can go astray, pure intellection is unerring.[12] That's what we're after, and to help us along Lefèvre helpfully supplies a reading list that will lift students gradually to the heights of true contemplation. It does include Aristotle, but then moves on to the church fathers, before culminating with Cusanus and Dionysius. Cusanus is the only "modern" author listed. With that notable exception the truths of religion and philosophy are, for Lefèvre, to be sought in antiquity. This is in stark contrast to the view of a man like Beda, for whom the medieval scholastics were valued authorities, not to be disdained just for their lack of literary flair. As Beda wrote in a letter to Erasmus, the scholastics' crude style had been inspired by God Himself, and their teachings had been "truly needed by the church at a period when it was in decline." Erasmus, ever the master of tasteful and refined rhetoric, responded by calling Beda "the most stupid of bipeds."[13]

Here we come back to that other defining clash of his times, the one between reform and the church. You can see why Beda thought that Lefèvre was effectively a Lutheran.[14] Here was a man who was translating the Bible

into French and encouraging people to read it without guidance from trained theologians, thus implicitly rejecting the principle that "it is the Church that understands and interprets Scripture."[15] It was an attitude exemplified by his refusal to accept the traditional teaching that three women mentioned in the Bible were all one and the same person named Mary Magdalene: the Mary who anointed Christ's feet, the sister of Lazarus, and the first to see Christ upon his resurrection.[16] Beda wrote a refutation of Lefèvre on this score. The two also clashed over the number of husbands that had been married to St. Ann, the mother of the Virgin Mary. These debates are not of obvious philosophical relevance, but they do epitomize the contrasting worldviews that shaped philosophy in this period. To put it bluntly, Lefèvre depended on philology, Beda on religious authority. When they disagreed about the meaning of terms, Lefèvre would apply his classical humanist training, whereas Beda's "criterion for usage [was] the Latin idiom of contemporary Paris clerks."[17]

On theological issues of greater moment, Lefèvre was not implausibly accused of reformist beliefs. He deemphasized the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and rejected the worship of saints. He developed these views in the 1520s, after Beda and the Sorbonne started trying to stamp out Lutheranism in Paris. Lefèvre moved to the town of Meaux to join the circle of Bishop Guillaume Briçonnet, whom we already met as a confident and correspondent of Marguerite de Navarre. Under increasing pressure for his reformist sympathies, Lefèvre moved on to Strasbourg in 1525, and then wound up at the court of Marguerite herself, where he served her as chaplain until his death in 1536. By which time Beda had graduated from agent of oppression to victim of oppression: he was imprisoned by King Francis in 1534. As we can see from the role played by Marguerite and Francis here, the larger battle over reformist ideas included skirmishes between secular, royal authority and religious figures who dared to speak truth (or what they considered truth) to power. That will continue to be a theme of sixteenth-century French history, except that soon it will be Protestants defying the crown.

It bears repeating that Lefèvre never went so far as to embrace Lutheranism. Like Marguerite, he presented himself as a promoter of reform from within Catholicism, and adopted what he no doubt understood to be moderate positions on the theological controversies of the day. For example, he argued that humans are saved through a combination of faith

*and* good works, not faith alone; and when the peasants' revolt broke out, he went out of his way to assure his readers that good Christians always remain subject to their "temporal masters."[18] Just as he had one foot in the scholastic world and another in the world of humanism, so he at least tried to push forward the reform agenda with one hand, while using the other to hold fast to the church. A man like Beda was never going to admire this sort of doctrinal gymnastics, but it was far from unique. Similar flexibility was shown by his younger contemporary Julius Caesar Scaliger. One of the most famous humanists of the first half of the sixteenth century, Scaliger never broke with the church either. But he did have Protestant sympathies, as would be emphasized by his son Joseph, a convinced Calvinist. The elder Scaliger may even have been involved in efforts to have Andrew Melanchthon, nephew of Philip Melanchthon, freed after he was jailed for his attempts to spread Lutheranism in France.[19]

Scaliger actually wasn't from France, though his scholarly career was mostly spent at the small French town of Agen, where he lived for the last thirty years of his life up to his death in 1558. He hailed from Italy and claimed to come from a noble family of Verona. This turns out to have a been a fib, or actually, an outrageous lie. His real name was Giulio Bordoni, and his father was a miniature painter from Padua. As this begins to suggest, Scaliger was a master of self-promotion, one who sought out intellectual battles with luminaries of the time, like Girolamo Cardano, Rabelais, and even Erasmus. These were daunting opponents, but Scaliger was unfazed, having spent his early career engaged in more literal warfare as a soldier in the imperial army. After almost being killed in battle, he retired from military life to devote himself to fight with the pen rather than the sword.

He clashed quills with the greatest humanist of all, attacking Erasmus after the latter wrote his work mocking the "Ciceronians," slavish imitators of the great Roman author. Erasmus satirically described how these pedants refused to use any Latin not found in Cicero. It would take them six nights to write six lines of Latin, since they had to double check that every word they used was genuinely Ciceronian. Even if Cicero used a certain verb, they would avoid using any conjugations of that verb not found in his writings. And all this out of fanatical devotion to a pagan! Scaliger was outraged by this attack, or at least, pretended to be. He composed a furious reply, which Beda helped to get published as part of his own vendetta

against Erasmus. Scaliger framed the dispute as an attack on his own Italian culture by a "German" (though Erasmus was of course Dutch), and defended the more usual humanist idea of deploying Ciceronian rhetoric in the cause of Christian religion. Unwittingly confirming that "Ciceronians" like him did indeed tend toward pedantry, he corrected Erasmus on minor points and then triumphantly told him that he should be ashamed to be bested by a mere soldier like himself.[20]

Scaliger's pugnacity and fascination with language stayed with him. He wrote a brief defense of poetry, which responds to the parts of Plato's *Republic* where poets are exiled from the ideal city. He points out the apparent hypocrisy of this, given the literary nature of Plato's own dialogues, and then takes a swipe at the work's notorious proposal to insititute collective sexual relations: "we'd rather live outside your republic with our modest wives and children." A work from 1540, addressed to his son, is tellingly entitled *On the Causes of the Latin Language*. I say "tellingly" because the work's purpose is to present Latin grammar as a proper science, and it is a fundamental tenet of Aristotelian epistemology that proper sciences must inquire into causes. With typical immodesty, Scaliger declares that until he came along, grammar was "far from being a true science, lacking rules and precepts."[21] One striking feature of his approach is that he thinks of Latin as a written phenomenon, no less than a spoken one. Thus he denies that the subject of grammar is the audible utterance (*vox*). Rather, it is just any articulate expression of thoughts in the mind, so that the material cause of grammar is "letters," the elements of words whether written or spoken.[22] In this respect, Scaliger's grammatical theory fits a culture in which Latin was less a living language than a legacy of antiquity being rediscovered in books.

That ancient legacy is confronted directly in yet another work on language, devoted to poetics. It is a late work, published only posthumously in 1561. Here Scaliger dared to challenge an authority even greater than Erasmus: Aristotle himself.[23] Aristotle's *Poetics* was of course standard reading on the subject, but Scaliger argues that it got things wrong on as basic a question of what poetry is for. Where Aristotle said that the aim of the poet is imitation (*mimesis*), Scaliger has a moralizing conception of literature. Its goal is in fact "delightful instruction by which the habits of human minds are brought to right reason, so that through them the human

may achieve perfect action, which is called beatitude." Indeed, poetics is subordinated to politics, because its function is to bring people to a good and happy life. Here we might notice another point of continuity with his earlier diatribe against Erasmus. Scaliger is assimilating the function of poetics to that of rhetoric, since he sees it as a form of moral exhortation.

If Cicero was Scaliger's paradigm for rhetoric, another Roman author was for him the greatest of poets. Namely Virgil, whom Scaliger places above Homer in the pantheon of classical literature, on the grounds that Homer was merely inspired, whereas Virgil combined inspiration with a conscious grasp of art. For Scaliger, to compose literature artfully is above all to show good taste. He thinks that Virgil's perfection is shown especially by his selectivity. Where Homer simply gives the reader all that comes to him thanks to his literary gift, Virgil crafts his poetry by eliminating anything even slightly discordant. The result is word perfect: "only fools would want to add anything, only insolent men to change anything."[24] Like the poets of the Pléiade, Scaliger encourages modern authors to learn from their classical forebears. He would have agreed with du Bellay that artfulness is in large part imitation. Scaliger was in fact close to Ronsard, to whom he dedicated one of his books, and it has been argued that Ronsard saw himself as trying to carry out the agenda outlined by Scaliger. He would be inspired like Homer, and disciplined like Virgil.[25]

Another constant of Scaliger's career was his taste for polemic, whose most extravagant issue was aimed at a fellow Italian, Cardano. Scaliger composed a sprawling work in refutation of his *On Subtlety*, called *Exoteric Exercises*, in 365 sections—one for each day of the year.[26] It attacks Cardano from every conceivable angle, from his theory of the mind to his lapses in Latin grammar ("how am I supposed to understand if you write incorrectly?!"). In general, and despite his own critiques of Aristotle elsewhere, as on the topic of poetry, Scaliger mounts a defense of Aristotelianism against Cardano's innovative scientific ideas. In fact one contemporary complained about people who would simply cite Scaliger as the authority on Aristotle's thought, as if his remarks were "oracular answers coming from the Lyceum." Scaliger is at pains to make Aristotelianism compatible with Christianity, as when he draws on late ancient Platonists to argue that Aristotle's god is an efficient cause of the universe (though he does admit that Aristotle wrongly endorsed the eternity of the universe).

An interesting part of Scaliger's *Exercises*, which brings us in a roundabout way back to logical concerns, asks whether the universe could be better than it is. He describes the natural arrangement of the cosmos in scholastic terms as the "ordained" dictate of God. The regularities that are described so well in Aristotle's natural philosophy are set down through an act of voluntary will by God. His "absolute" power could have produced a different world, but God chose to make this one. Scaliger, however, rejects the notion that God could have made a *better* world. Of course the universe is not infinitely good, like God is, but it is as good as it can be given the limitations of finite being. The variety we see in nature shows how God was seeking to realize every possible form of goodness. Even such humble creatures as insects are part of the grand, divine plan.

So to spell this out in more technical terms, the features of the universe are in themselves merely possible or contingent; they could have been otherwise. But given God's providential decision to create the universe in its maximal perfection, at least its general features become necessary. This, by the way, makes for a nice contrast to Aquinas' position on the same question. From the same premise that the universe can be only finitely perfect, he argued that it makes no sense to say this is the best of all possible worlds. A finite thing can always be improved, indefinitely. For Scaliger, we can instead say that this universe is the best that any universe could be, despite the inevitable limitation of its goodness. He cites another classical text to support his claim, namely Hippocrates' *On the Nature of the Human*, which states, "if one thing were absent, everything would slide and collapse."

It's telling that Scaliger would appeal to a medical authority here. As a young man he studied medicine at Bologna, and once in France he kept up his interest in the field and disciplines adjacent to medicine, like botany. Medicine was apparently the reason for yet another feud, in this case with Rabelais, whom he considered to be insufficiently deferential to the two greatest ancient doctors, Hippocrates and Galen. References to medicine, illness, and health are pervasive in French literature of the time: Beda compared Lutheranism to a plague, while Scaliger likened those who defame poetry to medical charlatans. Less metaphorically, Rabelais and Scaliger were only two of the many intellectuals in Renaissance France who devoted themselves seriously to the study of medicine while also pursuing wider interests, including philosophy.

# 27

# LIFE IS NOT ENOUGH

## *Medicine in Renaissance France*

There is a scene in *The Imaginary Invalid*, by the seventeenth-century playwright Molière, that is famous among philosophers. It depicts an examination for entry to study medicine at Paris. The candidate is asked to explain why opium causes sleep, and answers that it is because opium has a "dormative power (*virtus dormativa*)," that is, the power to put people to sleep. This vacuous triviality is, of course, exactly what his foolish scholastic examiners are looking for, and the candidate gets full marks for it. Which is all good fun, but let's face it: it's not as if Molière had a better answer to give. In fact you could make a good case that ascribing a "dormative power" to opium is not vacuous after all.[1] Ascribing a *power* to the opium is a meaningful scientific proposal, which differs from, say, asserting that the more rudimentary material ingredients of opium cause sleep, perhaps by cooling down the body. Instead, the "dormative power" ascribes to the nature of opium a disposition for affecting the world, one that cannot be reduced to other natures, and one that cannot be explained in terms of the perceptible properties of opium. I'm not saying that the "dormative power" is a good explanation, mind you. But I am saying that it is meaningful, and that it may have been about as good an explanation as anyone at the time could have offered.

As it happens, people back in the sixteenth century, when mockery of scholastics was a more novel enterprise, devoted serious thought to the

effects of opium. A study of doctors at the university of Leiden has shown how physicians there wrestled precisely with the problem that the sensible properties of opium don't seem to match its effects.[2] Apparently, it tastes "hot" (don't try this at home), yet it has this soporific effect, which we'd expect to relate to cooling since the body is cooler during sleep. Some of the Leiden doctors inferred that the powers of drugs cannot be investigated using sensation, or at least not always. One of them, Gilbert Jacchaeus, said that we need to draw a distinction between the evident and hidden or "occult" powers of natural substances. With this he echoed a real-life doctor of Paris: Jean Fernel, the author of a long treatise whose very title was *On the Hidden Causes of Things*.[3]

It was published in 1548 with a dedication to the king, Henry II; later on during his reign, Fernel would become royal physician. In the preface he speaks of his desire to uncover what is "divine" within the art of medicine, with what follows being the fruits of his labor (117). It takes the form of a dialogue between three scholars, the two main protagonists being Brutus and Eudoxus. The names are none too subtly chosen, since Brutus is rather brutish in his manners, a fact that may be linked to his favored theories. He believes that the natures, powers, and dispositions of substances can indeed be explained in terms of their brute, material ingredients. The forms of things emerge from the bottom up, out of mixtures of these ingredients (143). By contrast, Eudoxus, whose name means "correct belief," is a top-down kind of guy. He thinks that medicine needs to be grounded in sound principles of natural philosophy, principles that he defends in the first half of the work. In the second half, the principles are then applied to classify diseases and remedies, with some of these operative at the level of what Fernel calls the "whole substance (*tota substantia*)."[4] It's as a whole substance that opium would cause sleepiness.

Where do these powerful forms come from, if not from the material elements of the substance? Well, that's where the "divine" comes in. The forms are received from the heavens, which are the instrument of God. Fernel has his spokesman Eudoxus refute all of Brutus' attempts to explain forms in any other way. One tactic is to invoke religious considerations. If the forms of living things come from bodily mixture, then our souls should expire upon the death of the body, meaning that we cannot look forward to an afterlife (169). But for the most part Eudoxus' arguments draw on philosophical assumptions and plain old common sense. As we know from

Aristotle, forms are simple, so it makes no sense to see them as combinations of lower-level qualities like heat and cold (159). In fact, according to Eudoxus, the constituents of the body don't retain their forms at all. There is just one overall form, whose presence "blots out" the forms of the bodily parts like a bright light drowning out dimmer ones (199). The parts are merely potentially present until the total form departs, as on the death of an animal, when it turns into a mere heap or aggregation of materials.

With this, Fernel signals his allegiance to the "form unitarian" position we discussed above (Chapter 17). It was an unpopular view when Aquinas first put it forward, because other scholastics thought that various phenomena could be more easily explained by invoking a multiplicity of forms, in a human for instance. It's by your human form that you can grow, see, hear, think, and so on, but it's the earthy elements of your body that make you fall downwards, like when you jump off a bench or have just had too much opium. Of course Fernel has to admit that humans and other natural substances have many powers and perform many activities. But this is not because there are many forms present, it's because the form is being received in a complex bodily substrate (201). During life the soul is "bonded" to the body and needs the states of the body to remain sound in order to perform its full range of functions.[5] If the states are disrupted sufficiently, the soul departs, which is a nice way of saying that the person dies. The material ingredients are also important because they have to be made ready to receive the total form from heaven. In a way, Fernel makes all natural generation to be like spontaneous generation, the process whereby flies, worms, and the like emerge from rotting matter (259). For him the emergence of higher organisms works more or less the same way, only with better ingredients and better mixtures to prepare the way for better forms.

In developing this theory and applying it to drugs and illnesses, Fernel takes a nuanced stance toward the medical tradition, and especially Galenism. He implies that Galen really wanted to have a view like that of the character Brutus, in which all natural phenomena would be explained in materialist terms. Thus drugs would have their effects through manipulations of the four humors and their basic qualities of heat, cold, dryness, and moisture. Health and disease would be explained in the same way, as the result of balance or imbalance in the humoral mixture. Yet

Fernel thinks that Galen grudgingly had to admit the "hidden causes" that operate at a higher level (421, 677). While some medical phenomena can be explained in crude material terms, many cannot. As with the case of opium, we could never tell just by examining the basic physical properties of a poison that it is lethal. So poison operates in virtue of its "total substance," not by any quality manifest to the senses (571). Similarly, we can hardly explain plagues and epidemics just by talking about things like hot weather. True, some diseases do spike in summer, but then we might have a sweltering summer where no one gets sick (567). Fernel also concedes that the individual temperament of a person's body may have something to do with their health, and admits that medicines can target the bodily mixture (531). But many diseases are evidently spread through air or physical contact, so are not the result of the body's temperament (555). They must be coming from what Fernel calls "seeds of plague" (551, 567), which induce illness much as a scorpion bite or poisoned weapon causes death.

Not so vacuous after all, then. Especially when you consider that around this same time, the alchemist and doctor Paracelsus was proposing exactly the kind of bottom-up theory that Fernel wanted to refute, one far more unorthodox than voiced by Brutus in Fernel's dialogue. As we saw, Paracelsus rejected the standard medical authorities, including Galen, in favor of a theory that reduced all bodies to three principal constituents, sulfur, mercury, and salt. He actually leveled some of the same criticisms at Galenic medicine that we find in Fernel, notably the impossibility of explaining plagues using this classical theory. But Fernel was no Paracelsan. On the contrary, where Fernel urged his readers to consider the powers and dispositions of "whole substances," Paracelsus had been an anti-holist, who sought to explain the properties of things in terms of chemical composition.

Other contemporaries in France were more ready to accept the novel ideas coming from Germany. Often they combined Paracelsus with Galen. We see this with Johannes Guinter of Andernach, who got his medical degree in Paris. As Allen Debus says in his book on Paracelsism in France, for Guinter "it was not a case of using the old medicine or the new, but of using both in concert."[6] Even a more committed follower of Paracelsus, the Calvinist physician Joseph Duchesne (in Latin Quercentanus), was still willing to use Hippocrates and Galen. His work *The Great Mirror of the World*, published in 1587, explored the central Paracelsan theme of the

human as a microcosm, that is, a smaller image of the universe. Duchesne even suggested that blood circulates in the body, in a partial anticipation of the ideas of Harvey, on the grounds that fluids also circulate in the meteorological exchange of rain and evaporation. As we would expect, he also deployed Paracelsan principles with reference to concrete examples, such as the question why people sometimes get poisoned after being shot by lead bullets. Surely not because lead is dangerous, says Duchesne—this metal is actually good for us!—but because lead contains a lot of mercury, which makes it absorb other, pernicious substances.

Fernel is looking better and better, I have to say, if only by comparison. If you still aren't convinced, how about another Paracelsan named Alexandre de la Tourette? He encouraged people to drink liquid gold, because it is the purest and most balanced fusion of the three fundamental substances. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, he doesn't suggest a way of making gold liquid while still cool enough to drink. Or take the debate between Loys de Launay and Jacques Grévin about antimony. De Launay had endorsed the use of this metal as a purgative, following Paracelsus. This alarmed Grévin, who rightly warned that this substance might be poisonous. Grévin also made the astute point that the Paracelsans had not collected enough empirical evidence to say whether or not antimony was safe to consume. In fact this was a weakness in both the Paracelsans' approach and in that of Fernel's. He explicitly asked whether we should perform tests to confirm the efficacy of various drugs on various types of people. But then he distanced himself from this empiricist method, on the grounds that there would be just too many variables to consider, too many ways that patients differ from one another (725).

Something else Fernel had in common with the Paracelsans is that they were challenging the orthodoxy that reigned at university medical faculties, especially in Paris. As we saw, Fernel became a royal physician, and at the end of the sixteenth century the same post was given to a Paracelsan, a Protestant named Jean Ribit. All the while the medical faculty fought against the creeping influence of the new theories. Notably, another royal doctor named Roch de Baillif was prevented from practicing in Paris and then ejected from the city in 1579, thanks to the influence of the faculty. This may evoke an image of the Paris university doctors as hidebound conservatives, unwilling to budge from the Galenic tradition as it had come down to them through the medieval period. But the truth is more like what

we see with the Sorbonne, where theologians were willing to accept limited reform and exploit the resources of humanism to some extent, so long as it didn't rock the boat of their authority too violently.

A good illustration would be Jacques Dubois, who lectured as a member of the Paris medical faculty from 1536 to 1555.[7] He was one of the many Renaissance thinkers who believed that the best way to make progress was to look backward, all the way to antiquity. In a work on compound drugs, he said that anything valuable in his own book was to be credited to Galen. Unlike some classicizing doctors of this period he was willing to accept the authority of doctors from the Islamic world, especially al-Rāzī (in Latin Rhazes) and Avicenna. But he was scornful of more recent physicians who based themselves primarily on these sources. Dubois preferred Greek authors, as when he produced a catalogue of diseases that drew on Galen and Hippocrates rather than the so-called "Arabs" (al-Rāzī and Avicenna did write in Arabic, but they were Persian, not Arab). More genuinely innovative was Dubois' admirable project of writing on diseases of the poor, a welcome correction of the tendency of Galenic physicians since Galen himself to attend upon the rich and powerful, who could pay for the bespoke treatment they offered. Yet even here Dubois showed his Galenic sympathies, tracing the parlous health conditions of the destitute to their humoral balances rather than, say, economic oppression. Even more extreme in his classicism was Guillaume de Baillou, who lived into the second decade of the seventeenth century. His work on epidemic diseases was so closely based on Hippocrates that he sprinkled the latter's original vocabulary into the text, "as if he were getting as near as he dared to actually writing in Hippocrates' Greek."[8]

Speaking of derivative writings about medicine, let's conclude this chapter by looking at a somewhat earlier author, Symphorien Champier, who was distinguished by his "undeviating unoriginality."[9] Nonetheless Champier does give us something interestingly new in French medicine, because his main inspiration was neither Galen nor Paracelsus, but Italian Platonism. This interest is one he acquired as a young man, when he studied at Paris and fell under the influence of Lefèvre d'Étaples, whose own thought was so powerfully marked by his time in Italy. Actually Champier's very first work was an introduction to Aristotle based on the writings of Lefèvre. He went on to study at Montpellier, where he got his doctorate in medicine in 1504. Champier then devoted the rest of his life to ministering

to the poor and indigent of France. Just kidding! Of course he actually went into the service a nobleman, in this case the Duke of Lorraine.

Champier is actually most famous for something other than his medical writings: he composed the *Ship of Virtuous Ladies*, another contribution to the debate over the moral qualities of the female sex. But since we've talked about that topic quite a bit, I thought it would be more interesting to discuss Champier as a medical author. Like the Parisian masters, he brought a humanist agenda to this discipline, ignoring medieval sources. He was willing to use translations of Arabic medicine, but had rather mixed feelings about it, decrying doctors who had "never read Galen and Avicenna" while also complaining that Avicenna was unduly under the sway of Islam, which he considered "criminal and most filthy," and referring to Averroes as an "impious apostate."[10] What differentiated him from university masters, then, was not his approach to the medical tradition, but his extensive use of Platonism, and especially Ficino.

Ficino wrote a work called *De triplici vita* (*Three Books on Life*), on using medicine and magic to prolong longevity.[11] Not to be outdone, Champier wrote *De quadriplice vita*, in which he investigates life at four levels: daily health, longevity, heavenly life, and super-celestial salvation. His motivation for integrating medicine into this more cosmic perspective is clear from the motto he gives in his introduction: *non sat est vivere*, meaning "it is not enough [just] to live." His attitude reminds me of something a philosopher colleague of mine once said in the context of a dispute over distributing resources between the medical faculty and the school of humanities. Doctors only keep us alive, she argued, whereas in the humanities we study what makes life *worth* living. Champier would have wholeheartedly agreed. He argued that medicine must be joined to philosophy and even theology, just as the body is joined to the soul, and connects the good state of the body to ethical virtue. Much of his advice was drawn directly from Ficino, to the extent that critics charged him with plagiarism. His response was that he was openly stealing from the best: he had always acknowledged Ficino as his "teacher and model."

In this chapter, we've seen various ways to approach medicine and integrate it with philosophy. What they all had in common was a return to ancient sources, especially Galen but also Hippocrates; this was the Renaissance after all. In other respects they diverged widely. Where Fernel advanced a holistic theory of substance and understood medicine

accordingly, the Paracelsans applied the analytic tools of chemistry. They drew parallels between the physical system of the body and that of the cosmos, whereas Champier saw the physical side of humans as their least important aspect, and connected medicine to the metaphysical speculations of Florentine Platonism. If you asked me who was most on the right track, I'd probably say the followers of Paracelsus, their concrete proposals (like drinking gold) notwithstanding. Their idea that we should use chemical analysis to understand how drugs work has stood the test of time, in a way that "dormative powers" and other such postulates have not. Which isn't to say that I'd like to be treated for an illness by any doctor from this period. In the wise words of Montaigne, "they say that some newcomer called Paracelsus is changing or reversing the entire order of the old rules, maintaining that, up to the present, medicine has merely served to kill people. He will be able to prove that easily enough I believe. But it would not be very wise for me, I think, to test his new empiricism at the cost of my life."[12]

# 28

# MAKE IT SIMPLE

## *Peter Ramus*

Most historians of philosophy admire the figures they work on. The Aristotle and Kant scholars might not agree with everything these famous thinkers said, but they believe it is all worth taking seriously. Why else devote your career to understanding the writings of a long dead philosopher? This goes hand in hand with the seemingly indispensable "principle of charity," which dictates that when interpreting texts we should do our best to show how they made sense, seeking internal coherence, resources for answering possible objections, and so on. But there are exceptions. I just read a book which adopts what you might call a "principle of uncharity": Walter Ong's 1958 study of Peter Ramus. It remains a very informative and useful study, but it is relentlessly critical, even dismissive, of Ramus. Ong calls him "curiously amateurish," speaks of his "demonstrated incompetence," and at one point says that a certain doctrine held by Ramus is "close to the view of a madman."[1] As if that wasn't bad enough, just two years later Neal Gilbert's study of method in the Renaissance said of Ramus, "he stood alone, proud and defiant, with a doctrine that seems the very acme of banality to us, but which struck his contemporaries as original and indeed revolutionary."[2] With intellectual historians like these, who needs enemies?

Certainly not Ramus, who already had plenty of enemies in his own lifetime. They would have been delighted to know that in five hundred

years, people would still be calling Ramus an idiot. These critics thought the Ramist program was misconceived and oversimplistic, and that it was itself uncharitable. Ramus could give as good as he got, though, both to his contemporaries and to long-dead authorities. He issued shocking attacks on Aristotle, still seen as the greatest of philosophers, and on the leading Latin rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian. This was a new and more radical version of what other humanists had been doing for quite some time. Not content to mock the scholastic Aristotelians, Ramus identified flaws in Aristotle himself; not content to echo Erasmus' parody of Renaissance "Ciceronians," Ramus aimed sarcastic invective at Cicero. Already at his master's examination in 1536 he offered to defend a proposition usually translated as "everything Aristotle said was lies." Ong argues that the word rendered "lies" here, *commentitia*, means something more like scattered remarks that do not cohere into a system.[3] But still!

Ramus' detractors also liked to accuse him of inconsistency, and not without reason. Even though he was open about his irreverent project of attacking Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian in turn,[4] he could also be quite complimentary about these very authors. He planned an ambitious set of commentaries devoted to Cicero, who he admitted was the most eloquent man who has ever lived. And he presented himself as the only true Aristotelian, who was finally recovering what was useful in a body of work that had been corrupted by ancient compilers and ignorant scholastics. When Jacob Schegk attacked Ramus for his failures in logic, Ramus responded with a *Defense of Aristotle*. Which, of course, presented a version of Aristotle in line with Ramus' own ideas.

Eventually Ramus' enemies caught up with him. In 1572 he was killed in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, a spasm of violence in Paris directed against Protestants.[5] Ramus had converted in 1561, applying to religion the same instinct for reform that he brought to philosophy. In doing so he turned his back on an important patron, the Cardinal of Guise, who had been a schoolmate of Ramus and offered support during his meteoric rise to the position of Regius Professor of Eloquence and Philosophy at the University of Paris. After converting he had an eventful final decade of life, joining the Collège de France but then having to flee to Switzerland and Germany, before making a fateful return to Paris in time to be killed. That tragic event is memorialized in Christopher Marlowe's play about the massacre, which shows the wicked Duke of Guise calling Ramus a "flat

dichotomist" before ordering his death. Ramus is allowed some final words which capture his ambiguous attitude toward Aristotle: "I knew the *Organon* to be confusde, and I reduc'd it into better forme. And this for Aristotle will I say, that he that despiseth him, can ne'er be good in Logick or Philosophy."[6]

Which is actually not a bad introduction to Ramus' intellectual project. If you know anything about Ramism, it is probably that it did indeed involve "dichotomies," conceptual divisions that were presented as branching diagrams. But this was only part of Ramus' effort to recast Aristotle's logical corpus, the *Organon*, in better form. His vaunted method was simultaneously an epistemological theory and a proposal for how to teach the linguistic and philosophical arts. At the center of the undertaking were three laws inspired by Aristotle (see *Posterior Analytics* 1.4).[7] The first, called "the law of truth," states that scientific statements should hold true universally and necessarily of all the subjects named in the statement. Which seems fair enough. For example you shouldn't say that *all* giraffes are on the savannah, if some of them are at the zoo. The second, "the law of justice," ensures the "homogeneity" of the truths included in a science. They must all fall under that science, and serve its special ends. The third, the "law of wisdom," tells us to check that the subject and predicate of a scientific truth match in terms of generality. For instance, you shouldn't say that isoceles triangles have internal angles of 180 degrees, because this is true of *all* triangles.

These laws introduce us to Ramus' preoccupations with philosophical method. In light of the law of justice, we realize that each art must be pursued by itself, without bringing in material from other disciplines. This is because a given art is always looking at the essential features of the subject matter of that art, a subject matter that is investigated in this art and in no other. So Ramus complained about, say, bringing geometrical proofs to bear on arithmetic, or vice versa. He applied the same point to separate the domains of philosophy and theology. Another methodological point is connected to the third law and its attention to generality. From this law Ramus infers that we must begin at the most general level and proceed by stages, without skipping anything, to the more specific. Ramus offers a giraffe-free, but still vivid example. Suppose someone wrote down the rules of Latin grammar on slips of paper and put them all in a jar. If you started pulling out bits of paper one after another in random order, you wouldn't

have the exposition of an art but just a bewildering sequence of injunctions. But then someone who is skilled in logic and grammar—someone like Ramus!—could take these same bits of paper and arrange them in a way that made sense, such that you could work through them in that arrangement and learn Latin grammar.

His recommendation for how to do this was simple. You should start with the most general rules and work toward the more specific. Thus, to change his example, if you are explaining the rules of soccer you should start not by saying that an attacking player cannot be offside from a throw in, but by saying that this is a team sport involving a ball, where the players aren't allowed to use their arms and hands. Now we can already see why "dichotomies" would be a relevant way to proceed. You might sit your student down and say that among sports, some are individual and some involve teams. You can then divide the team sports into ball sports and non-ball sports. And so on. Unfortunately, the fundamental texts of university arts education did not conform to this teaching method. Either because of problems with the textual transmission or due to Aristotle's own failings, or more likely for both reasons, the logical treatises of the *Organon* do not go from the more general to the more specific. This makes them exceedingly difficult to follow. Another problem was that even great authors like Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian neglected to offer reliable definitions, which are a crucial step in the process just described. If the student doesn't know what a "sport" is then they will already be lost when you make that initial division into team and individual sports. Ramus explained that when he himself was a student, he was forced to endure teaching that was just as unsystematic as these classical authors, if not more so. Eventually he discovered the humanist Agricola and was then led back to ancient writers who were more attentive to proper method (though not always perfect in their application of it), especially Plato and Galen. At this point, Ramus recalled, he "began to think that Aristotle's authority was a deception."[8]

While all this sounds pretty reasonable, Ramus outraged his colleagues in Paris by suggesting that it is the *entirety* of what it means to be reasonable. There is only one method for the arts, and thanks to Ramus I was just able to describe it to you in about a page. One of his most bitter opponents was Jacques Charpentier, a professor at Paris who was appalled by Ramus' "one size fits all" approach. It is not even the case that one and the same method is always used within a single art, never mind for all of

them.[9] You might need to use definition and division, sure, but you might also need to find causal explanations, or analyze complex terms in light of their parts, or perform induction, and so on. In fact the very first step in this method was more like pulling a rabbit out of a hat than pulling papers out of a jar. Charpentier asked where the initial definition comes from, and accused Ramus of having no answer apart from an appeal to intuition.

Whether or not this was entirely fair, Charpentier was putting his finger on a genuine and important feature of Ramus' approach to logic or "dialectic," namely his optimistic assessment of our capacities as untrained reasoners. He (of course) offered a division of dialectic, which for him has three stages. The first is called "natural dialectic." This means the tacit use of reasoning principles, which all of us do every day when we are arguing or explaining things. Ramus equates it with reason itself. It belongs to natural dialectic to go from the more general to the more specific. That's just an obvious way to make yourself clear, and people will do it instinctively without any training. Only at a second stage does dialectic make these rules explicit and investigate them. This is what is taught in logic classes at the university. In a crucial third stage, students must put into practice what they have learned as abstract rules. Ramus proposed dividing even the day's teaching accordingly, with rules explained in the morning followed by practice in the afternoon. Thus you might study logic from textbooks until lunch, and then after lunch read passages in classical works, trying to identify the logical structure in a process Ramus called "unweaving." A real example mentioned by Ramus is a speech by Penelope found in Ovid, in which she is lamenting the absence of her husband Ulysses. "From these twenty-eight verses," reckoned Ramus, "flow four propositions, sixteen assumptions, and eight conclusions."[10] That may not sound like fun. But at the time the Ramist focus on "practice" was unusual in its attention to the needs of students.

As that illustration also shows, Ramus applied the techniques of dialectic to literary texts. This seems to go against one of the strictures we mentioned above, namely that one should pursue each art in its own right without mixing in material from other arts. Shouldn't Ovid be handled by rhetoric, not by the logical art of dialectic? The contradiction is only apparent, though. Ramus did advise studying arts one at a time and as self-contained disciplines. But he also thought that they built on each other. He recommended a seven-year curriculum, with three years of grammar (in

other words, three years to learn good Latin), followed by one year each for rhetoric, dialectic, mathematics, and natural philosophy. By contrast, the humanist Juan Luis Vives recommended eight years just to learn Latin and Greek, with a further ten for the arts. Ramus' plan of offering a full curriculum in such a brief time has plausibly been traced to his humble origins, as an orphan from the peasant class who had to work as a servant for a wealthier student to afford his studies at Paris.[11] His plan would make it easier for clever boys of modest means, like Ramus himself as a youth, to complete their studies quickly and seek advancement. From this perspective, contemporary critiques of the superficiality of Ramism have a whiff of aristocratic gate-keeping about them.

Notice that in his program of study dialectic comes *after* rhetoric, which again may seem strange. Don't you need to learn to argue logically before you try to master the ornamentation and artful presentation of arguments in the form of rhetorical speech? Not necessarily. Remember, all people have a good grasp of dialectic at a "natural" level.[12] So you can learn about rhetoric first, acquiring the skills to present with "eloquence" the intuitively plausible reasoning that comes naturally. Rhetoric has (again, of course) two parts, delivery (*pronuntatio*) and expression (*elocutio*). In the end, someone who has mastered both arts could combine them to come to a fully rounded appreciation of, say, a speech by Cicero, or produce a speech of their own which is excellent in delivery and expression, but also has logical rigor.

At the next stage of the curriculum, we have two more arts that are inextricably intertwined, namely mathematics and natural philosophy. Even Ramus' modern defenders admit that he was not a brilliant mathematician, but he did devote a good deal of time to the discipline and wrote about its history. His efforts were inspired by an underestimated factor in generating intellectual innovation: petty academic infighting.[13] When his enemy Charpentier was given a chair of mathematics in Paris, Ramus protested on the grounds that Charpentier was completely ignorant of this topic. Charpentier argued that the professorship was not necessarily tied to any one subject, and got permission to teach both philosophy and mathematics. But then he didn't get around to teaching any math. The case came before the Paris Parlement, which made the determination that pretty well anyone can teach mathematics since it is so easy, and thus found in favor of Charpentier. This gave Ramus plenty of reason to inflate the difficulty and

importance of the discipline. He latched on to the figure of Pythagoras, imagining him as a kind of proto-Ramist who set out the truths of mathematics as principles for natural philosophy. A true physics, he said, should be "founded on mathematical reasoning."

While Ramus only sketched this project at a methodological level and did not really carry it out, we might still give him credit for anticipating the mathematical approach to physics that would emerge a few generations later in the seventeenth century. Likewise his more student-friendly innovations in pedagogy prefigure educational reformers of the Enlightenment, such as the Czech theorist Jan Comenius. Like Comenius, Ramus gave serious thought to the perspective of his students. Bear in mind, we're talking about boys in their teenage years, more like today's junior high and high school students than today's university students. Latin was not their native language, and they were being asked to learn by rote memorization from texts by Aristotle that, to this day, frequently puzzle career specialists in his thought. Ramus' methods were tailored to make the acquisition of the liberal arts more feasible. This was bound to strike fellow academics as a kind of "dumbing down" of the curriculum, and the acerbic comments he has still attracted in our own day show that this accusation has not gone away.

Yet Ramism had significant advantages. His more streamlined curriculum, one discipline per year for seven years, would usher students through the university at a brisk pace and not ask them to do too much at once. Students were still asked to do a lot of memorization, but the structured presentation of the material—clear definitions, diagrams branching across the page—made that a far more manageable task. Furthermore, we should not leap to the conclusion that Ramus' strict divisions and classifications allowed for no nuance. In rhetoric, for instance, one should learn how some audiences are friendly, others unfriendly, with different tactics appropriate for the two kinds. In real life, we know that things are more complicated. A given crowd might be on the fence, or made up of both friends and opponents, or be friendly to one part of your case and unfriendly to another. But learning the basic opposition draws the student's attention to this important consideration.[14] It is at the stage of actual practice, which Ramus emphasized so much, that the student will learn to apply the point to real cases, in all their diversity and complexity.

Speaking of applying method to real cases, I can't leave Ramus without returning to a famous episode in his life: his intervention in the debate over Copernican astronomy.[15] As I mentioned, Ramus encountered Tycho Brahe during his travels in Germany and pressed him to discover an astronomy "without hypotheses." He also wrote to Georg Rheticus urging him to pursue the same goal. In the mathematical work that grew out of his confrontation with Charpentier, Ramus elaborated on this by saying, "would that Copernicus had rather set his mind on the establishment of such an astronomy without hypotheses! For it would have been easier by far for him to describe an astronomy corresponding to the truth of its stars, than as if with the labor of a giant to move the earth, so that in consequence of the motion of the earth we might observe the stars at rest." The passage concludes by offering a regius professorship to anyone who manages the feat. In 1597 Kepler would, in a letter of his own to his teacher Michael Maestlin, jestingly lay claim to that chair.

Joking aside, we must ask what this has to do with Ramus' theories of scientific method more generally. To some extent the answer is clear. Just as he traced pure method in mathematics and dialectic to deep antiquity, so he thought that the most ancient of the ancients had pursued astronomy without hypotheses. So the modern exponents of the art should do the same. We might also note that the positing of hypotheses, which might then be indirectly confirmed by empirical evidence, plays no part in the single method recognized by Ramus. A Ramist astronomy would, like the rest of Ramist natural philosophy, simply apply mathematical truths in a physical context. The fact that it's hard to spell out in fuller detail what this might mean, and that Ramus was unable to see the potential power of a hypothetical method in natural philosophy, shows that his critics from Schegk and Charpentier to Ong and Gilbert did have a point. The strength of Ramus was his insight into good educational practice. His weakness was to assume that real scientific method should track that practice, as if scientific research and the learning of what scientists have already discovered were the same endeavor.

# 29

# DIVIDE AND CONQUER

## *The Spread of Ramism*

*Ramus* means "branch" in Latin. So it's almost too good to be true that Ramism, the movement inspired by his ideas, is renowned for its use of branching diagrams that lay out conceptual divisions. There are many, many examples, but a nice one would be the division of philosophy itself presented by Johann Freige in 1576.[1] It divides our favorite discipline into "parts" and "instruments," with the "parts" further divided into the study of natures and the study of ethical issues. The study of natures again has two subdivisions, since we can study quantities or qualities, the former being mathematics, the latter physical sciences.[2] Finally mathematics is divided into arithmetic and geometry. Of course, reading a description of the diagram is much less clear than seeing it on the page, with branching lines showing the relationships, like in a family tree set on its side. And clarity was the point. As the medieval jurist Azo had pointed out centuries earlier, "division stimulates the mind of the reader, provides sense to the intellect, and cleverly molds the memory."[3] The practice of division goes back way further than that. The technique is already found in the dialogues of Plato, especially the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, which helped to inspire Ramus. Plato mostly worked with dichotomies, but occasionally allowed divisions into more than two. Likewise the Ramists. For instance, that diagram by Freige is mostly dichotomous but lists six disciplines under the physical sciences. Ramus may also have been influenced by more recent divisions, like those

that became increasingly common in medical literature around the 1530s. But by the turn of the seventeenth century, the branch diagrams had become a hallmark of Ramism.

They captured visually everything this movement represented, good and bad. Diagrams are clear and easy to understand, but they can easily be suspected of sacrificing nuance for the sake of that clarity. Living in a post-Ramist world, we take for granted the way that tables and charts present information in a highly abstract manner, and we understand that the abstraction is a two-sided coin. With power to instruct comes power to mislead, as when a chart highlights one kind of information while suppressing others. You're also more liable to remember information presented in tabular form, a fact that made Ramism quietly revolutionary. It proposed a change to something as fundamental as the way people remember. Mnemonic techniques were at least as old as philosophy itself; already Aristotle talks about them in his short treatise *On Memory*. But they had often used concrete imagery, like remembering ten things by imagining them sitting in front of ten different houses on a familiar street. By contrast, as Frances Yates wrote, "the Ramist man must smash the image both within and without, must substitute for the old idolatrous art the new image-less way of remembering through abstract dialectical rules."[4]

The branch diagrams put those rules to work on the page, a perfect encapsulation of the purpose of dialectic, which in Ramus' words is "like some mirror representing the universal and general likenesses of all things."[5] One might even go so far as to say that the blank page becomes that mirror, reflecting a logical or conceptual space that is then "marked out in unbroken lines (*perpetuis lineamentis adumbrata*)," as Ramus put it.[6] The method was facilitated by the new technology of printing, which allowed diagrams to be reproduced in the textbooks that came to be used all over Europe. Tellingly, the diagrams became more and not less regimented as the decades passed. They are more a feature of later Ramist works than of Ramus' original publications, and become increasingly constricted by the rule that each concept should be divided exactly in two.

The heyday of Ramism was between 1570 and 1630, and its region of greatest influence was in central Europe. One might expect this to be the result of Ramus' own travels, when he was temporarily forced to flee Paris after converting to Protestantism. But actually Ramism began to spread

earlier than that in northwestern Germany, and remained a stronger force there than in the cities Ramus actually visited.[7] It didn't hurt that Ramus' main publisher, André Wechel, relocated to Frankfurt shortly after Ramus' death, churning out hundreds of editions. Aside from the works of Ramus himself, the textbook on rhetoric by his close collaborator Omer Talon also became important in the movement. That movement was taken up not so much in the universities, about which we've talked so much, as in what Americans like me would call "high schools": what in Germany were then and still are known as *Gymnasien*. These were an ideal context for Ramus' user-friendly methods. From France and Germany the methods were exported all over Europe and beyond, as far north as Scandinavia, as far east as Transylvania and Hungary, as far west as Ireland, and, later on, even to Harvard University in my hometown of Boston.

Proponents of Ramism constantly emphasized the "usefulness" of their approach, a result of its abbreviated curriculum, its efficient teaching methods, and its emphasis on "practice." Ramism would not train men to become great scholars like Erasmus, but it was perfectly suited to prepare young men to work as, say, merchants, by making them competent in mathematics and Latin but not overly well-read in the classics. Speaking of the flourishing Ramist program at the city of Herborn, one observer said bluntly that "students educated here quickly find suitable employment."[8] The modern scholar Neal Gilbert, whom we saw calling Ramus' project "the very acme of banality," also commented that "Europe was deluged with small, convenient school manuals in which the life of traditional subjects was systematically and methodically eradicated and reduced to rules so simple that any child, literally, could learn them."[9] Here, you can feel free to imagine the highly trained theologians of the Sorbonne, or indeed Erasmus, rolling their eyes at this lowering of standards.

Actually you don't need to imagine it, because plenty of people were carping about it at the time.[10] In Paris one of Ramus' own colleagues compared the students' enthusiasm for his teaching to their enjoyment of *Pantagruel*, "as a game and for amusement," and for good measure added that everything Ramus was saying had been lifted from better scholars like Valla, Agricola, Vives, Melanchthon, and Agrippa. In 1593 the English theologian Richard Hooker, of whom more later (see Chapter 42), called Ramism "an art which teacheth the way of speedy discourse, and restraineth

the mind of man that it may not wax over wise." A few years later a professor at Helmstedt said, "do not think that philosophy, such a divine good, consists of childish trivia. And who appeals to children more than Ramus?" In the seventeenth century Roger Bacon was still at it. He called Ramism a "method of imposture" by which "men may speedily come to make a show of learning who have it not." The works of the Ramists are, he said, "much like a fripper's or broker's shop, that hath ends of everything, but nothing of worth."

Some impression of the bitterness, and longevity, of these disputes over Ramism is conveyed by the fact that there was a controversy over it in Sweden, at the University of Uppsala, in 1638.[11] When a Ramist professor there was attacked for his methods, he pleaded in his own defense that the works of Ramus were a perfect introduction for beginners, who could then move on to Aristotle. There was more at stake here than pedagogy. The Swedish crown liked the idea of freeing the curriculum from the time-consuming methods of the scholastics, both for the sake of efficiency and as a way of undermining the power of the church. Speaking of which, religious concerns were also important in spreading the ideas of Ramus. He had, after all, died as a Protestant martyr, specifically a Calvinist one, though this did not preclude his being used at Lutheran institutions. An admirer at Leiden wrote breathlessly: "Ramus, ornament of the wise, while you were shaping the noble arts by laws and method, and your own life by piety, a pack of sophists took you down with their teeth, and blind fanaticism by the sword: however, you are strong like the high rising palm tree."[12] Not long after his murder he was honored in an ode written in England, comparing him to St. Stephen.

In Britain, Ramism would often be connected to the rigorous reform of the Puritans. It was a match made in heaven, as they might have said themselves. In the eyes of critics, what drew the Puritans to Ramism was a shared penchant for simplistic dogmatism, and of course the irreverent disregard for long-standing tradition that was epitomized by Ramus' polemics against Aristotle. It was indeed Aristotelianism that was the main rival to Ramism in this period, albeit that in central Europe this was a version of Aristotelianism that had itself grown out of the Reformation. We know all about it already: the humanist approach to Aristotle attached above all to the name of Philipp Melanchthon. Melanchthon was himself not overly impressed by Ramus. In 1543 he said of the latter's work on

dialectic, “it is a good effort, but contains many foolish statements,” and added that it was rather long-winded, “in the French manner.”[13] He would no doubt have been stunned to learn that this long-winded Frenchman would be his main competitor for impressionable hearts and minds in the decades to come.

What, then, would be the fundamental differences between Ramist and Philippist methods? (Understandably people usually say “Philippist” and not “Melanchthonist.”) As we know, Ramus did not entirely reject the value of Aristotle, but he was celebrated and scorned in equal measure for his famous attacks on this leading philosophical authority. Thus we have such documents as a textbook from 1586 in which every reference to Ramus is underlined, enabling the reader to extract just the attacks on Aristotle.[14] You can imagine the delight such impudence would have given teenage students: this was not their parents’ logic! These kids could also be grateful that they weren’t being asked to slog line by line through Aristotle, perhaps even in the original. That certainly made things easier on them, though we should pause for a moment to pay tribute to the students at Leiden who, in 1582, protested that they *wanted* to study Aristotle in Greek and not be taught from facile Ramist textbooks. It was in the context of the ensuing debate that Justus Lipsius made his famous remark, “no one will be great for whom Ramus is great.”

That Parisian critic of Ramus was right to say that his ideas were inspired by humanists like Valla, Agricola, and so on. But in his program there was no time for the deeply learned classical scholarship that made Melanchthon such an admired figure. Ramus himself lacked an advanced mastery of Greek. As Howard Hotson says in his excellent book on German Ramism, “humanism, it appears, had spawned something which now jeopardized humanism itself.”[15] In another book on education in this period, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have suggested that Ramism was key in what they call a shift from “humanism” to the “humanities.” Such classical learning as was imparted to young students was subordinated to the pragmatic goals of Ramism, in which “the aim of classical education was to produce effective writers and active participants in civic life, rather than original scholars and philosopher kings.”[16] Thus you might find the greats of Latin literature simply mined for quotations to illustrate dialectical and rhetorical techniques. The point was not to prepare the young for a lifetime

of close engagement with Cicero or Virgil. It was to give them the ability to write a competent letter, or give a persuasive speech, themselves.

Aside from the rather elitist worry that the Ramists were making things too easy on their students, the Philippists had philosophical objections. The most important has to do with those branch diagrams. We saw Ramus comparing dialectic to a mirror held up to all things: his definitions and dichotomous divisions were supposed to be a reflection and representation of reality. Here the Aristotelians objected that there is often a difference between our conceptions and things as they are in themselves. Classificatory concepts in the mind, or on the printed page, do not really correspond straightforwardly to the world. For instance, in logic we deal with genera like animal, as well as species like human or giraffe, and individuals like Buster Keaton and Hiawatha. But in reality there are only individuals. There is no such thing outside the mind as *just* animal or *just* giraffe. Furthermore, the neat divisions of the Ramists could be entirely *too* neat. Applying their methods to the medical art, Ramists might say that bodies are either healthy or sick, and then further divide sicknesses into types.[17] But is every body really just healthy, or just sick? You might have a psychological illness but be physically fit, or you might have respiratory problems but fantastic skin. The Aristotelians summed up this whole line of criticism by saying that Ramists had wrongly absorbed the function of metaphysics into "dialectic," that is, logic.[18] Metaphysics is a study of being, whereas logic is a study of the concepts we use to discourse and argue about being. It was fatal to confuse the two.

Such critical reactions notwithstanding, it was also possible to combine the two educational programs. Take Johannes Piscator at Herborn. He integrated Melanchthon's approach with Ramism, and applied the latter even in theology. Even when he taught the more introductory arts, he made clear the applicability of these arts to religion, by offering Scriptural passages to exemplify points in Omer Talon's rhetoric.[19] Other German Ramists who made use of more traditionally Aristotelian material were Andreas Cramer, Friedrich Beurhaus, and Rudolph Goclenius, all of whom wrote works comparing the two systems. The general attitude was captured by Johann Alsted, who modified Lipsius' dismissive remark: "no one will be great for whom Ramus *alone* is great." The same eclectic approach would be seen elsewhere in Europe. A survey of book collections in England shows that there, Ramist works often shared shelf space with

Aristotelian ones.[20] Up in Scotland, Andrew Melville developed a curriculum in Glasgow that also combined the two traditions.[21] His use of Ramism was less ideological than pragmatic, as it helped him cover a number of disciplines quickly, a godsend given that he was the only instructor.

As we already saw with the case of Uppsala, one way to exploit the advantages of Ramism was simply to use it for younger students, who could then graduate to more advanced material. This was the recommendation of the aforementioned Johann Alsted. It especially made sense in a university setting, since Ramus' own works had dealt with the liberal arts of language and mathematics, not the higher disciplines of law, theology, and medicine. But as we just saw with Piscator, some Ramists were determined to impose their methods even at the higher level. We duly see the telltale diagrams presenting the whole content of jurisprudence, and find scholars insisting that the study of law and the other advanced sciences must bear in mind the criterion of utility (*usus*), always the watchword of the Ramists.

Ultimately, though, it was a stretch to extend these methods to such demanding fields. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, the new "encyclopedist" approach of Bartholomew Keckermann and others, which we touched on above (see Chapter 14), arose as a new rival. Keckermann appreciated Ramus' contribution to logic but was one of those who criticized his conflation of logic with metaphysics. Instead, logic was put back in its place as an introductory art, with metaphysics as the highest of sciences. The Aristotelian curriculum was used as the basis for comprehensive works that emphasized the idea of a "system" and went well beyond the limited goals of the Ramists.[22] The upshot was that in a 1626 textbook on dialectic, the Dutch scholar Franco Burgersdijk identified three main schools in logic: Ramism, Aristotelianism, and the encyclopedic approach of Keckermann. Ramism was never the only game in town, but it had an impressively long afterlife, to the point that it has been credited with helping to shape the mind of Descartes.[23]

Not bad for a method that unleashed opposition and mockery wherever it went, the kind of treatment never meted out to the teachings of Melanchthon. For a crude but rather amusing example, we can conclude this chapter with an anonymous English play about academic life from 1598, called *Pilgrimage to Parnassus*.[24] It features a character named

“Stupido,” who represents Ramists at the University of Cambridge. Poor Stupido, who is described as “a moving piece of clay, a speaking ass, a walking image and a senseless stone,” provides the author with a chance to make in-jokes about the battles over logic at Cambridge, which in at least one case led to actual fisticuffs. In the end a traditionally Aristotelian textbook by John Seton managed to fend off competition from the methods of Peter Ramus. This would have been much regretted by Stupido, who is made to admit, “surely in my mind and simple opinion Mr Peter maketh all things very plain and easy. As for Seton’s Logic, truly I never look on it but it makes my head ache.”

# 30

# BELIEVE AT YOUR OWN RISK

## *Toleration in France*

"Let's agree to disagree." Superficially, it seems like a friendly thing to say. But it usually comes with a less friendly implication: I've given you extremely good reasons to agree with me, but you are stubbornly refusing to accept them, so I'm just going to give up on convincing you. For now. It's the argumentative equivalent of breaking up with someone using the insincere excuse, "the problem isn't you, it's me." Presumably French people have their own equivalents of such phrases. At least, back in the sixteenth century, when people in France grudgingly agreed to disagree about the religious disputes that tore their society apart, that offer was almost always coupled with an unspoken (or spoken) caveat. The problem isn't us, it's you.

Even the highpoints of religious toleration in the second half of the 1500s were arrived at grudgingly. They were hedged with caveats and time limits; the fervent hope was that the tolerance would not be necessary for long. Civil war between Catholics and the French Protestants, or Huguenots, broke out in 1562 after a rapid proliferation of Protestant churches starting around 1555.[1] (If you're wondering why they were called the "Huguenots," join the club. No one knows for sure, but it may be derived from the German *Eidgenossen*, meaning "confederates."[2]) The Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici, announced an edict of toleration for Protestantism at the beginning of 1562, which was explicitly labeled as a

temporary measure. But this did not succeed in calming the situation. By 1585, the French crown would be announcing a very different policy: that all Frenchmen must be Catholic, with a six-month period allowed for conversion.

Across the two intervening decades there was open warfare between the Huguenots and their Catholic enemies, whose cause was led by the powerful Guise family. There were also public executions. Already in 1546 fourteen Protestants were burned alive in Meaux, where Bishop Briçonnet had gathered an early circle of reform-minded intellectuals (including, as we saw, Lefèvre d'Étaples). And then there were the popular conflicts that erupted when, say, Protestants smashed up a church out of iconoclast zeal, leading to violent battle with local Catholics. A temporary end to the conflict came near the end of the century, with the 1598 Edict of Nantes.[3] This new proclamation of tolerance for Protestants remained in force until it was revoked in 1685.

At no stage, during all this bloodshed, did it occur to either of the warring parties that the problem might be them. Attempts at reconciliation, like the 1561 Colloquy of Poissy, were intended not so much to bury the hatchet as use it to cut off the heretical growth within Christianity. The Catholics spoke of "conquering and leading back the brothers who have strayed," while the Huguenots boasted, "we shall make them admit before this holy assembly that it is we and not they who follow the true Church."[4] Even the word "tolerance," which to our ears has peaceful and generous connotations, had a more negative meaning in this context. The French verb *tolérer* conveyed the idea of suffering through something, not the idea of genuinely agreeing to disagree.[5] For the Catholics, offering "toleration" was a pragmatic concession, a last resort after persuasion and military action had failed. And when the Huguenots asked to be "tolerated" by the state, they were just playing for time. Minimally, enough time to build up military strength for the next round of warfare, but ideally, enough time to convert so many of their countrymen that France would become intolerant of Catholics instead.

A turning point for both sides was the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. Peter Ramus was just one of thousands of victims, in Paris and in the provinces.[6] Protestants blamed the government, with only partial accuracy, for organizing this mass murder. It was no coincidence, in their

eyes, that Catherine de Medici was the daughter of the man to whom Machiavelli's famously cynical work of political advice, *The Prince*, was dedicated. They alleged that she taught her children from its pages, and that it "might be described as her Bible." As for the Catholics, the fact that even this paroxysm of violence failed to stamp out Protestantism convinced them that the Huguenots might be here to stay. Even before the massacre Michel de L'Hôpital, who was chancellor under Catherine de Medici, argued that peace with the Huguenots would be preferable to the warfare that he saw coming. Other reluctant pragmatists included Étienne Pasquier, Louis Le Roy, and Étienne de la Boétie, all of whom reckoned that the way to bring the Protestants back to the fold was not force, but a spiritual renewal of the church.[7] Similarly, the more "tolerant" leaders at the Estates General of 1576—those who unsuccessfully argued for a settlement with the Huguenots—did so while assuring their more militant colleagues that toleration was only a stopgap measure "until God can bless us with only one religion."[8]

Hardly anyone, then, was envisioning a situation of indefinite peaceful coexistence between Protestants and Catholics. The peacemakers on the Catholic side wanted concord and Christian unity, not a pluralistic society. If they counted as "tolerant" it was because they continued to hope that concord could be reached through peaceful means. In this respect, men like Pasquier, Le Roy, and La Boétie were true heirs of Erasmus (and it's not a coincidence that they were humanists, like him). As we saw, Erasmus argued tirelessly for peace, and stayed on the fence when the Reformation began in part because he hoped that the rift between Luther and the church could be healed. Yet he would not have welcomed official state sanction of two alternative confessions, nor was he committed to the value of freedom of religion as an end in itself.[9]

Was anyone adopting a more genuinely liberal, pluralist vision at this point in history? Yes indeed. His name was Sebastian Castellio. He was a Frenchman, born near Lyon, but he moved to Strasbourg and then Geneva to work with Calvin after converting. He became principal of the College at Geneva but then went on to Basel, where he became a professor of Greek. This makes him sound like yet another Protestant humanist, like Melanchthon or indeed Calvin himself. Some of his projects do fit that pattern: translating the Bible into Latin and French, and even rendering the story of Jonah into Homeric Greek. But he is best known for his expression

of outrage after Calvin supported the execution of the Spaniard Michael Servetus in 1533. As with Jonah and the whale, Castellio found this event hard to swallow. He decried it as an indefensible act of tyranny, which he attacked in a work called *On Heretics*, printed in both Latin and a French translation in 1554.[10]

This work is reminiscent of others we've discussed, in that it is largely a patchwork of quotations from earlier sources. Less than half of it is by Castellio himself, and even these parts include material ascribed to fictional pseudonyms (169–75); the book as a whole was prudently published anonymously. Among the sources cited are Luther and (with heavy irony) Calvin himself, using well-chosen passages to make it sound like they were in support of tolerance. There is at least some rationale for this in the case of Luther. He was known for his teaching, echoed by Thomas More, that each of us "believes at his own risk,"[11] and that conscience cannot be compelled. But Castellio has to quote him very selectively.[12] You won't find him, for example, mentioning Luther's remark on the importance of maintaining doctrinal correctness in his church: "the children may be dirty, but the bath at least must be pure."[13] Castellio is even more tendentious in the case of Calvin, of whom Roland Bainton, the modern translator of Castellio, remarks, "if Calvin ever wrote anything in favor of liberty it was a typographical error."[14] Calvin was himself a victim of censorship and persecution. He fled to Switzerland to get away from the French state, and from 1542 his books were placed on the index of proscribed books by the Sorbonne. But he would have said that the theologians and politicians of Paris were not wrong simply because they persecuted. They were wrong because they were persecuting the wrong people, people who taught the truth, people like himself.

Castellio framed his polemic by saying, "I shall not defend the doctrine of Servetus, but condemn the doctrine of Calvin."[15] He admitted, "I hate heretics" (126), but still objected to persecuting them violently. For starters, there were pragmatic considerations of the sort others were invoking at the time, though Castellio explores these in greater depth. Unsuccessful attempts to suppress the Anabaptists had already shown that oppression simply leads to a cycle of tit-for-tat violence (218). Calvin's policy, if adopted by everyone, would simply guarantee that people of different religious persuasions would try to kill each other indefinitely (281).

Furthermore, even if you can get someone to disclaim their supposedly heretical views under duress, this will just be hypocrisy (216, 243). Castellio aptly notes the example of England, where vast swathes of the population claimed to be Protestant under King Edward VI when in fact they maintained Catholic beliefs (245). Finally, using force against heresy is counterproductive, since people tend to admire martyrs (263), and the fuss caused by trials and executions helps publicize the heretics' ideas (266). Indeed, Castellio points out that the only reason most people even know the name of Servetus was that Calvin had him put to death.

These are persuasive arguments, but two other considerations involve more philosophical depth. Castellio lays them out in brief just after saying that he hates heretics, and develops them throughout the whole work. First, even if we assume that heretics are in error, it is not appropriate to punish them with violence. Physical force should be used only in response to physical crimes (236). For spiritual missteps we should offer a spiritual remedy, in the form of debate and pastoral care. This will give heretics both reason and chance to change their views, as violent retribution would not (242). As Castellio nicely puts it, "to kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man" (271). He also points out the obvious irony of murdering people in the name of Christ, asking the reader to imagine Jesus returning to Earth and watching men burn to death while calling out his name. Calvin's Christ, who would thoroughly approve of this, would be hard to tell apart from Satan (133–34)—a remark that particularly outraged Calvin, as you can imagine. Castellio unabashedly encourages us to sympathize with Servetus. A man like this might be pious and even good, despite his erroneous theological views (283–84).

Which brings us to a second reason for genuine toleration, namely that for all we know, in persecuting a heretic we might be suppressing views that are true! As Castellio says, the working definition of "heretic" seems to be "anyone we disagree with" (129), and of course he is well aware that the Catholics are calling him and other reformers heretics. This calls to mind a sentiment already expressed by a Lutheran author cited by Castellio in *On Heretics*, named Sebastian Franck: "Socrates was right, that we know only that we do not know. We may be heretics quite as much as our opponents."[16] It's not just that we should play it safe, and not take the risk of executing an innocent man. Castellio does make that point, remarking that it would be "better to let a hundred, or even a thousand, heretics live

than to kill one upright man" (139). But in addition, Castellio is skeptical that we are in any position to be sure about such topics as God's Trinitarian nature, which had been scandalously denied by Servetus. Scripture is very difficult to interpret (268), which is why theologians are constantly at odds with each other about correct doctrine (295). Castellio does hasten to assure us that he is not a *global* skeptic (289). For example, he is confident that we can know that God exists (more on that in a moment). But when it comes to the fine points of theology, we cannot be sure that our preferred version of Christianity is the right one. How, he asks rhetorically, can Calvin "prove that he alone knows?" (282).

In this respect, Castellio does seem to be echoing the stance of Erasmus, and more generally the humanist tendency to prize simple spirituality over the fine-grained doctrinal distinctions of the theologians. It's been well remarked that Castellio "belonged to the university-trained men who celebrated commoners."[17] He would have sympathized with untutored Christians instructed to accept formulas of belief handed down by this or that church, which they were in no position to assess. Around this time one man, confronted by such a statement of orthodoxy, said "this is over my head and I am reluctant to bind my conscience to it."[18] For Castellio, technicalities about the Incarnation, grace, or the Trinity were far too abstruse to be used as litmus tests for acceptable belief (122, 303). The only thing we can really demand is that people believe in a single, good, omnipotent God, who is worthy of worship. We can know this much through our natural powers, without wading into the controversies of Scriptural exegesis. Here we reach the limits of Castellio's tolerance. He would have no patience with anyone who denies Abrahamic monotheism. Those who deny it "should be punished not because of their religion, for they do not have any, but because of their irreligion."[19]

So Castellio is not saying that literally anything goes. But for him the range of tolerable belief is wide enough to accommodate even Jews and Muslims (132). Indeed, this was the basis for one of his attacks on Calvin. In an early edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin had expressed a relatively benign attitude toward Jews and "Turks," in other words Muslims. But this remark was then removed in later printings, which for Castellio was a clear sign of Calvin's drift toward intolerance and persecution.[20] Castellio also attacked Calvin's doctrine of predestination.[21] He saw this as yet another needless

indulgence in scholastic theological controversy, but also showed he could play that game if necessary. True to form, his account of sin and redemption allowed more liberty to humans. We do need divine grace to be saved, but God offers that to everyone. It's just that some people freely accept it, while others freely refuse. Calvin's murderous Christ, who gleefully watches pious, well-meaning Christians burn in the name of doctrinal exactitude, is matched by Calvin's unjust God, who sends people to eternal damnation after giving them no chance to save themselves.

Something else you might predict is that Calvin and his allies would respond furiously to this attack from Castellio. Which is exactly what happened. There was an exchange of refutation and counter-refutation between Calvin himself and Castellio. Calvin's faithful associate Theodore Beza, who once said it was "diabolical" to teach unconstrained religious freedom,[22] also wrote in defense of executing heretics. Beza presumably wouldn't have minded seeing Castellio himself burn. He complained that Castellio was no better than an ancient skeptic, accused him of undermining belief in the Trinity by expressing sympathy for Servetus, and for good measure judged Castellio to be "of all men that have ever lived the most wicked and blasphemous."[23] But others were more favorable. We already know that Dirck Coornhert took up the cause for genuine toleration later on in the Netherlands, and he was powerfully influenced by Castellio. In fact Coornhert even translated some of Castellio's writings. Fausto Sozzini, founder of the Socinian movement, edited works by Castellio and saw himself as his successor. The reformist writer Katharina Zell, in Strasbourg, also took inspiration from him, writing, "let the magistrate punish the evildoer, but not constrain faith, which belongs to the heart and conscience and not to the outward man."[24] Castellio's star has faded since then. He is not a household name, yet he deserves to be remembered as a pioneer in the cause of freedom of conscience. If people had listened to him in the 1550s, then Huguenots and Catholics alike could have avoided killing each other by the thousands in the 1560s. Sadly, the message of tolerance has always been hard for some people to hear. An early modern study of his thought was published by Stefan Zweig in 1936, with the intention of persuading people not to support the Nazis.[25] This time the audience was German, not French or Swiss. And Castellio was ignored again.

# 31

# CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTIONS

## *The Huguenots*

Political life is full of clichés that are so familiar as to escape our notice, but would benefit from closer inspection. We already touched on "let's agree to disagree." Another phrase, "the body politic," is now basically a dead metaphor but was originally intended to convey that a political community is an organic whole, with different parts or "organs" playing various roles. Or take the phrase "public servant," which we routinely apply to our politicians and which they hasten to apply to themselves. If you think about it, that phrase has deep implications. It suggests that the leader serves at the pleasure of the people, and ultimately has to do what they say, rather than vice versa. Indeed, if the people are the master, and the political leader the servant, then the people should be able to get rid of the leader if they are minded to.

The sixteenth century may have been the first time that anyone in European intellectual history started to take this idea seriously. Certainly, the notion that the ruler should look to the good of the ruled was a very old one. In the first book of his *Republic*, Plato said that a ruler is like a shepherd who needs to tend to the welfare of his flock, and that analogy was repeated many times thereafter.[1] But for the most part, this was advice given to autocratic rulers, who might choose to take the advice or not. If you want to be a *good* ruler, you should be looking after our advantage and not your own. So be a good ruler…please? There were few institutions, and

few political theories, that would actually force or require the ruler to do so, or threaten him (it was usually a him) with dire consequences if he failed. Medieval and Renaissance political thought was dominated by that metaphor of the body politic. The ruler is the head of the body, its best part and the one that steers the rest from above. As for why one man should occupy that privileged place, the usual explanation was one that was hard to argue with: God put him there.

Of course if this book series has taught us anything, it's that such sweeping historical claims are at best only partially true. So here, too, one can think of exceptions, like the Magna Carta in England, or Marsilius of Padua, who argued in the fourteenth century that rulers acquire their authority through popular consent.[2] Marsilius was a man ahead of his time, and that time would turn out to be the sixteenth century. The concept of popular sovereignty was embraced above all by Protestant thinkers, especially the Huguenots in France, though as we'll find out later on, their position was taken in a still more radical direction by Protestants in the British Isles. Of course the Protestants were a minority in France, and their political theory was a minority opinion. But it started to gain traction and, ironically enough, would be used by Catholics once the political tide turned.

Even before the Huguenots got going, there was a debate in France between more absolutist and more constitutionalist political theories. This debate especially concerned the question whether kings are subject to the law or above the law. A relatively constitutionalist position was taken in *The Monarchy of France*,[3] published in 1519 by Claude de Seyssel, who was a legal scholar and royal courtier and thus far from interested in weakening the monarch's hold on power. On the contrary, he argued that unchallenged, single, personal rule was needed to restrain dissension amongst the people. He used a metaphor for this that also appears in Machiavelli.[4] The different factions or classes in the community are like the four humors recognized by medical theory, and need to be held in balance if the "body politic" is to be healthy. So the monarch must have "all power and authority to command and do what he wishes."[5] Yet he is bound by what Seyssel calls three "bridles": the ruler must obey religion, natural justice, and most interestingly what Seyssel calls *police*. He doesn't mean the cops—no one is coming to arrest his supreme sovereign—but the traditional laws and customs of the nation. Still, this is all presented more as

advice on how to be a good and admired king. It's a ruling suggestion, not a serving suggestion.

As timid as Seyssel was from the viewpoint of a genuine constitutionalist, he was far from the most absolutist of theorists. In fact French political ideas evolved in a more autocratic direction toward the middle of the century. The organic metaphor of the single body whose parts play different roles was phased out, in favor of a simpler story: the king is on top, everyone else on the bottom.[6] Even the requirement for the king to seek advice was deemphasized. We can observe this tendency toward the end of the reign of Francis I and under his successor Henry II, who reigned from 1547 to 1559. Around this time Charles Du Moulin was pushing to its limits the long-standing idea that the king is a "living law." "Throughout every part of this kingdom," proclaimed Du Moulin, "the king is the source of all justice, holding all jurisdictions and enjoying full authority (*imperium*)." It would be downright incoherent to suppose that any lower authority can stand in judgment over the king. They are merely extensions of his power, so he would in effect be judging himself.

No less absolutist was an author already known to us, Guillaume Budé. We've met him as the jewel in the crown of French humanism, but he also argued on behalf of the real French crown. In his mirror for princes, he positively discouraged the ruler from sharing power with anyone, stating that kings are "not subject to the laws and ordinances of their kingdom as others are."[7] Now, as you might recall, Budé benefited from the support of King Francis. A man in that position had every reason to grant far-reaching authority to the monarch. If you like the king and what he is doing, and if you even have reason to think you might have the king's ear, absolutism looks pretty good. Conversely, if you see yourself and your religious beliefs as being under threat by the monarch, then you might seek to put limits on his power. So if robust constitutionalism was going to come from anywhere in sixteenth-century France, it would more likely be from Protestants.

But that didn't mean that it was especially likely. Remember, the leading reformers were determined not to associate their movement with social unrest, with Luther's response to the Peasants' Revolt being the paradigmatic example. More directly relevant was the position of Calvin, since he was originally from France and many French Protestants were his followers. For the most part, as we saw, his recommendation was to obey even an oppressive prince. Faced with religious persecution, one could

always go into exile, or of course die nobly as a martyr. Slowly but steadily, though, more militant voices started to make themselves heard among the Protestants. In particular, we see the suggestion that an unjust or tyrannical ruler could be rightfully unseated by lower magistrates, that is, men holding official government posts below the rank of the king. An early example would be the *Confession* written by the Lutherans of Magdeburg in Saxony, which stated that "if the high authority does not desist from eradicating true doctrine and true worship of God, then the lower magistracy is required by God's divine command to attempt to stand up to such superiors as far as possible."[8]

What arguments could be used to support this more confrontational position? Well, this was the Renaissance, so a natural strategy was to look to the past for ideas worth reviving. This was the method of a book called *Francogallia*, written by the jurist and humanist François Hotman while he was enjoying the protection of the Huguenot leader Louis de Condé in the 1560s. The work was printed in 1573 and appeared in new, expanded editions in 1576 and 1586.[9] The application of history to present concerns was typical of humanism, of course. A few names that leap to mind here might be Bruni and Machiavelli in Italy, or Lipsius in the Low Countries.[10] But what has been called Hotman's "antiquarian gusto"[11] was unusual in that his historical argument mostly concerned the medieval period and drew extensively on medieval historical documents. He focused on the peoples who lived in the French territories in former times, namely the Franks and the Gauls, hence the title of his treatise, *Francogallia*. His aim was to show that as far back as the Gauls of antiquity, these peoples "abhorred kingly rule" (153). They were so concerned to avoid falling under tyranny that they tightly constrained the powers of the king.

Toward this end, two policies were especially key, and on Hotman's telling both were consistently followed in Franco-Gallic history. First, the throne was not simply passed on to the king's family by inheritance. Rather, kings were elected by the people (*populus*), who could also depose kings who abused their power (235). Second, the kings were advised by a council representing the interests of the people. Actually, more than "advised." The kings were actually *bound* to seek the approval of the council when it came to such important matters as warfare and legislation (333). Hotman cites Julius Caesar to show that the council already existed in his day (149), and

stresses the longevity of the institution through the Merovingian, Carolingian, and Capetian dynasties. Even Charlemagne, whose name literally means "Charles the Great," was not so great that he could operate independently of the council. He was, claims Hotman, "unable to deprive the Franks of their pristine right and liberty, nor did he ever undertake any matter of importance without first obtaining the view of the people and the authority of the nobility (*sine populi iudicio et optimatum auctoritate*)" (393–95).

Notice here that, like Machiavelli, Hotman takes account of the complexity of the body politic, dividing it into the general population and the nobles. Actually his usual analysis, which will remain standard right up to the time of the French Revolution, recognizes three orders or "estates" (231). The nobility are at the top, the farmers and tradesmen at the bottom, and in between there is a middle class of lawyers, merchants, and the like, though this middle group is sometimes identified as the clergy. Hotman follows ancient political theorists, including Aristotle, by arguing that the best constitution allows all three estates to have input into decision-making, in a kind of compromise between monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy (295). He paints a harmonious picture of the resulting polity: "a multitude of men ought not to be governed by one of their own number, who sees less than others do when taken together, but rather by proven men of excellence, selected with the consent of all, who act by combined advice as if they possessed one mind composed from many" (299). That pious hope that rulers should be like good shepherds, looking to benefit their subjects rather than themselves, would actually be enforced in Hotman's ideal state. He never tires of quoting the motto *salus populi suprema lex esto*, meaning "let the welfare of the people be the supreme law."

Hotman's approach was, as I say, that of a historian. Indeed, he remarked of his own work, "it is a historical book, the history of a fact."[12] And he was at pains to show himself to be a fair-minded and critical researcher. After presenting evidence for something that would be quite convenient for his thesis, namely that some early French kings were rather reluctant to use their power, he admits that this could be a fiction perpetrated by their successors, to make the kings in question look weak (355). But of course such displays of scrupulous scholarship are intended to make his argument all the more convincing. As a modern scholar has remarked, "what gave the *Francogallia* its potency was its very antiquarian

nature."[13] Many were not convinced, though. Quentin Skinner has remarked that the *Francogallia* displays "more than a touch of tendentious scholarship,"[14] meaning that critics of Hotman like Antoine Matharel could point to distortions and omissions in his presentation of the historical record.

Still, the treatise was meant to be just that: a presentation of the historical record. Its clear message remained implicit, namely that the ills of sixteenth-century France resulted from breaking with Franco-Gallic tradition, a culture in which the conventions had always been constitutional. Apart from the excesses of autocratic rule, Hotman is critical of allowing women to wield political power (269, 479), hardly an innocent point to make during the time of Catherine de Medici. As for where such corruptions come from, the answer is, and had always been, Rome. In antiquity the Gauls suffered tyranny under the Roman empire (179). In more recent days the plague of lawyers manipulating the crown had been imported from the papal curia in Rome (497). Which is not to say that law in general is unwelcome from his point of view. He could hardly say that, being a jurist himself and having written texts fulminating against slavish devotion to ancient Roman legal custom. Rather, in place of a strong king, or still worse a strong queen, Hotman wants a monarch who is truly fettered by the "bridles" that were only loosely draped around absolute rule by authors like Claude de Seyssel.

The grounding of this argument in French history was a strength, in that it was a tactic calculated to appeal to a wide and learned audience. But it was also a weakness. Even if you believed Hotman's rather partial and tendentious version of history, you might respond as did the aptly named absolutist Louis le Roy: why would we need, or indeed want, to imitate the early medieval barbarians of the Merovingian and Carolingian times?[15] A more principled rationale was needed, and for it the Huguenots turned to a rather ironic source: the medieval theory of natural law developed by such stalwart Catholic authorities as Thomas Aquinas (see Chapter 66). This has led the aforementioned Quentin Skinner to observe that, even if most constitutionalists in this period were Calvinist, they were not using originally Calvinist arguments.[16] Instead, they could borrow the idea that humans were born into a natural state of freedom, and enter voluntarily into an agreement to obey a ruler who will look after their common interests. If

a legally appointed ruler fails to do this and becomes a tyrant instead, the people no longer have to obey him.

This account of political authority became more appealing to the Huguenots in the wake of the St. Bartholmew's Massacre. Hotman apparently wrote his *Francogallia* before that event, though it was published afterward. This explains its rather detached, primarily historical approach. It was a contribution to a debate between constitutionalists and absolutists, not a broadside in a literally life and death struggle.[17] A more urgent tone would be struck after the massacre by Theodore Beza in his *On the Rights of Magistrates over Their Subjects*, published without his name in 1574. The title is ironic: he really intends to address the *duties* of magistrates, and the rights of *subjects*.[18] Those rights are also explored in the most famous Huguenot political treatise, *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos*.[19] The title is hard to translate. The second part obviously means "against tyrants," but *vindicatio* is a legal term with a more complicated sense, along the lines of a decree concerning someone's freedom. It was written in 1579, and again published anonymously. Obviously, such tracts appeared at considerable risk to their authors. In this case the author is generally agreed to be Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, and I will refer to him as Mornay even though the attribution is not absolutely certain.

Both Beza and Mornay are influenced by Hotman, and repeat his arguments about the traditions of France. But as I've just explained, they defend constitutionalism on more abstract grounds. There is no king without a people, but the reverse is not true (*VCT* 73, *RM* 104). Rather, the people had to come together to appoint their ruler. And they must have had mighty good reasons for doing so, since as Mornay notes, "humans are free by nature, impatient of servitude, and are born more to command than to obey" (*VCT* 92). The only possible explanation is that they expected to reap significant benefits from the contract with their ruler, notably protection of their persons and property, and the maintenance of justice in general. Thus the ruler needs explicit consent to take property away from subjects, as when imposing taxes. In fact nothing *belongs* to the king, except the personal wealth he owns like any private citizen. Whatever is held by the crown is only given to it for safekeeping (*VCT* 110–11).

Now, Beza observes that if one party to a contract breaks its terms, the other party is no longer obligated to observe the agreement (*RM* 111).

Mornay goes further: the subjects are only conditionally bound to the ruler, whereas the ruler is bound unconditionally to them because his office exists only for their benefit (*VCT* 158). The king is truly a public servant. To quote Skinner once more, Mornay "sees the status of a lawful king as more like that of a salaried official than a sovereign magistrate."[20] And salaried officials can, of course, be removed by their superiors. In direct contravention of the absolutist tradition, Beza and Mornay see the people as being in this sense the superiors of the king, even if they owe him their obedience so long as the contract between both sides is still in force. The representatives of the people swore an oath of allegiance to the king when installing him, and on behalf of the people they should depose him if he fails to provide the expected benefits. Nor is this *because* the king was installed by the taking of oaths or an election (*VCT* 139). In contrast to what we saw in Hotman, it is natural law and plain common sense that the people would never have agreed to shackle themselves to the will of a tyrant. So just by the logic of the political commonwealth and its origin, it surely cannot be required that they submit to tyranny, whatever social conventions or traditions are in force, whatever oaths or promises have explicitly been made.

The question now becomes: what should actually happen when the contract is broken? Here our two authors pull back from the most radical possible conclusion, which would be that any member of the population can remove a tyrannical ruler, by killing them if necessary. Actually Beza says that an outright usurper can be rightly dispatched by anyone, since they have no real standing at all (*RM* 105). But in the case of a legally installed king who becomes tyrannical, one should explore all other remedies before using force (*VCT* 155), and when force does becomes necessary, it should not be exercised by private individuals (*RM* 110). As Calvin said, these people should just endure with patience. Mornay makes the same point by adapting the age-old metaphor of the "ship of state," something else that goes back to Plato's *Republic*. The crew of a ship should clearly not stand by if the captain gets drunk and steers them toward the rocks. But not just any deckhand is allowed to throw the captain overboard: the officers have to take matters in hand (*VCT* 164–68).

Just so, private individuals should look to government officers, who are the representatives of the people's will. In other words, it is the role of magistrates lower than the king to remove the king who has become a

tyrant. The officials have not just the *right* to do this but even the *duty* to do it. This is not to say that the magistrates can rise up against a king as soon as he deviates from ideal justice. On the contrary, Mornay says with bracing realism that "we should not wish to have only perfect princes, but rather we should consider ourselves extremely well served even if we shall have got mediocre ones" (*VCT* 154). Revolution and tyrannicide are reserved for extreme cases. But of course this was an extreme time, when the French throne was at least indirectly responsible for the murder of thousands of Protestants. One could hardly imagine a more flagrant failure to preserve the life and property of the subjects. So the upshot of the arguments presented by Beza and Mornay was that the noble leaders of the Huguenot cause were entirely justified in resisting oppression.

A moment's reflection will show that these arguments could be used just as well by Catholics, or indeed anyone who thinks they are being subjected to tyranny. And in fact, they *were* used by Catholics. In 1588 King Henry III turned against those staunch supporters of Catholicism, the Guise family, and had two of them executed. French Catholics reached for the same theories of popular sovereignty to argue that Henry was a tyrant. The theologians at the Sorbonne declared him no longer a rightful monarch,[21] and a pamphlet published in support of the Catholic cause faithfully repeated Huguenot reasoning: "the people made the kings and submitted itself voluntarily to their power; when the kings abuse their power, the people can pull them down as easily as they created them." Again, it seems that sympathy for absolutism lasted only as long as agreement with the policies of the supposedly absolute monarch. (For similar ideas in Spanish Scholasticism, motivated in part by animosity to Protestant kings elsewhere in Europe, see Chapter 67.)

The ecumenical appeal of popular sovereignty might help to explain why the most radical French political treatise of the era was penned by someone who never left the church: Étienne de La Boétie. He died young in 1563, at the age of only thirty-two. He was then memorialized in the writings of his close friend Montaigne, who emphasized that La Boétie was a good citizen and good Catholic. Montaigne was moved to these apologetic remarks by an extraordinary work that La Boétie had written when he was barely an adult. It was called *On Voluntary Servitude*, and its paradoxical title already reveals quite a lot about its contents.[22] La Boétie was deeply puzzled by the fact that people do the very thing that was

emphasized by constitutionalists like Hotman, Beza, and Mornay: they *willingly* place themselves under the authority of another man. Why in the world would they do this, and then submit to the autocratic whims of that man, when they could so easily kill him? Actually they don't even need to kill him. They can just ignore him! A mere lack of consent to his rule would make him entirely impotent (40, 44).

Again, ideas about natural law are important to the argument. La Boétie observes that even animals seek liberty, a point also mentioned by Mornay (*VCT* 149). We humans too yearn for freedom, yet it "is the only joy upon which men do not seem to insist; for surely if they really wanted it they would receive it" (45). La Boétie sets out to understand this perverse state of affairs. He notes that people forget their freedom once they have been subjected to servitude. They just get used to being oppressed, like someone who has gradually accustomed themselves to drink a poison without dying from it (54–55). Consider the Romans, says La Boétie, who were so bamboozled by bread and circuses that "the most intelligent and understanding amongst them would not have quit his soup bowl to recover the liberty of the republic of Plato" (64). Moreover, rulers use a kind of pyramid scheme to dominate the whole society. Directly below the monarch are perhaps six direct advisors, powerful men who each have six hundred clients, and those clients may have yet further underlings (72). Thus the lower magistrates, so far from being the check on the tyrant's rule as the Huguenot theorists imagined, are the instrument of tyranny.

Unlike the works of Beza and Mornay, it's not easy to say what the direct practical application of La Boétie's treatise was supposed to be. Maybe none at all. It's been suggested that the treatise is not as radical as it may seem, but in fact elitist and conservative, because its author cannot imagine any real resistance to tyranny. If we did manage to kill our tyrant, another would just replace him.[23] Perhaps, but La Boétie's lack of concrete revolutionary zeal comes along with some genuinely revolutionary political ideas. The reader of *On Voluntary Servitude* comes away wondering not so much under what circumstances people may resort to the extreme step of deposing their monarch, as whether monarchy could ever be more than an illegitimate trick in the first place. Behind the pomp and circumstance of the French court, there is just "one single little man," as La Boétie puts it (42). If you submit to that man, it's your own fault.

# 32

# ONE TO RULE THEM ALL

## *Jean Bodin*

When I was growing up, we it had drummed into us in civics class that the key to the American political system is the separation of powers. The executive, legislative, and judiciary branches have different spheres of competence and can also check the power of the other spheres, as when the president nominates Supreme Court justices and Congress gets to approve or reject these nominations. Back in high school, this was presented to us as a perfectly balanced and calibrated scheme. There was no talk of, say, Franklin Roosevelt threatening to pack the Supreme Court to get it to stop thwarting his New Deal agenda. Nor did we learn that Congress might just decline to consider Supreme Court nominations from a president, with little more justification than "you can't make us, so there." This would happen later in my lifetime, when Republicans refused to consider a nomination made by Barack Obama. A pretty shocking abuse of power, but not an unprecedented one, as a similarly dubious procedure was also used back in the mid-nineteenth century. American history has always shown how difficult it is to maintain a stable separation of powers, as each branch constantly works to tip the balance in its own favor.

Jean Bodin would have said that it is more than difficult in practical terms: it's conceptually impossible. Sovereignty cannot be divided, because there must be an answer to the question whose commands are final. As he says in his pioneering work of political theory, the *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, a situation in which power is genuinely divided would be

one in which disagreements could be resolved only by force (§2.1).[1] Power can be delegated by the sovereign authority, but it remains vested in that authority and is exercised in the sovereign's name (§1.8). This "sovereign" doesn't necessarily need to be a single person. It could be the people as a whole, as in a democracy, or the class of the nobility, as in an aristocracy. Bodin acknowledges the possibility of these forms of constitution, but argues that the best form is a monarchy, in which the single power of the sovereign is held by a single man (§6.4). And it should indeed be a *man*. Bodin approves of the French "Salic law" that excludes women from the line of succession, and thinks that this along with a rule of hereditary inheritance of the throne will best serve the goal of political stability (§6.5).

Of course Bodin lived under a monarchy, and as a trained lawyer was steeped in the political and legal thought of the middle ages and early Renaissance, which typically endorsed royalist forms of government. But it's not like he was unaware of other options. He was also a historian, who knew that aristocracy and democracy were not just theoretical possibilities but states that had existed in other places and times. Furthermore, he understood that his own concept of unified and absolute sovereignty was a controversial one. At this very time, as we just saw, Calvinist political treatises were pushing the idea that the ruler serves at the pleasure of the citizens who elected him, while less radical thinkers like Seyssel had placed constraints on the authority of the king. Unlike all these authors the Bodin of the *Six Books of the Commonwealth* was, if I may yet again quote Quentin Skinner, "a virtually unyielding defender of absolutism" who saw "a strong monarchy as the only means for restoring political unity and peace."[2]

I refer to the Bodin of the *Six Books* in particular, because in an earlier treatise called *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, from 1566, Bodin had adopted a less absolutist position.[3] This work, which has been described as "a handbook of advice to students on how to read historians with profit,"[4] envisioned the best constitution as a monarchy with checks on its power, along the lines proposed by Seyssel. It also rooted the ruler's sovereignty in an exchange of oaths, the mechanism emphasized by Huguenot authors like Hotman. There are two, complementary ways to explain why Bodin moved toward a more absolutist position in his *Six Books*. The first is straightforward: it was published in 1576, just a few

years after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and thus in the midst of a particularly chaotic time of religious and military conflict in France. Hence Skinner's remark that Bodin was motivated by the goal of restoring unity and peace.

The second explanation is rooted ultimately in Bodin's humanism.[5] After being educated in the Carmelite order as a youngster, Bodin was sent to Paris where he gained facility in both scholastic and humanist intellectual methods. His first contribution as a scholar was an edition and translation of a fairly obscure Greek work on hunting, a good choice to show off his mastery of classical languages and a topic that would appeal to readers among the nobility.[6] He then focused on legal and historical studies, which gave him a basis for both his *Method of History* and the *Six Books*. Like other humanists of the era, he came to appreciate the wide variation in law and politics across times and cultures. And like Hotman in particular, he rejected the idea that Roman law would still be suitable for the needs of sixteenth-century France. Yet Bodin continued to hold out hope that a man of broad reading and great insight could devise a truly universal theory of politics, one that transcends the particularities of each place and time. The *Six Books* is Bodin's attempt to show that he is that man.

His approach in this work (and also the *Method of History*) may show the influence of Peter Ramus, whose ideas Bodin would presumably have encountered in Paris.[7] As typical for Ramism, he begins from the general and moves to the specific. In the case of history, one should start with the history of the whole world, then move on to narratives of certain peoples, and finally home in on the deeds of great individuals. Similarly, with politics, he starts with a general definition of the commonwealth or *republique*, namely an ordered government of families under a sovereign (§1.1). Size doesn't matter: even three families can become a commonwealth if they are united under one power and owe obedience to that power (§1.2). The head of a family—the father and householder—is a kind of image of the sovereign, but he does not exercise properly political sovereignty over the members of the house. His wife and children are, as we would put it, his dependents and not his subjects.

In the next few chapters (§1.2–5) Bodin moves on to explore what it means to be a political subject, again in a rather Ramist fashion by distinguishing subjecthood from other kinds of subordinate relation.[8]

Notably, subjecthood should not be confused with slavery. Bodin thinks that in certain regimes, like the Ottoman sultanate, all the people are slaves to the ruler and all property in principle belongs to him. But this is not really a state or commonwealth, it is just despotism. And the state of slavery is, in Bodin's view, unnatural.[9] Its frequency in human history is simply a demonstration of the human propensity toward sin. Besides, enslaved people are bound to revolt against their oppressors, whereas what Bodin is looking for is a recipe for stable political life. There is a deeper point here, though, which is that slaves occupy their role simply as a result of violence, or the threat of it. When the master tells the slave what to do, this is no more legitimate than, say, pointing a gun at someone and telling them to give you their money. Violence, or the threat of it, might produce cooperation but it can never produce *obligation*.[10] Far different are the commands issued by a sovereign. A rightful sovereign's commands *ought* to be obeyed by their subjects, not because of what he might do to them if they refuse, but just because they are his subjects.

At first glance, Bodin seems to depict the authority of the sovereign as being absolutely unfettered and uncontestable. He defines sovereignty as the "absolute and perpetual power of a commonwealth (*souveraineté est la puissance absolue et perpetuelle d'une republique*)" (§1.8). Later on in the work, he says that the officers or magistrates must obey even commands they take to be unjust. Bodin does not even allow them to resign as an act of conscience, rather than carry out their orders (§3.4–5). These are clearly not the king-making and king-breaking magistrates envisioned by the Huguenot political theorists Hotman and Beza. Bodin's contrary view is not just a matter of devotion to the crown, or of pragmatic calculation. He has a principled reason for thinking the sovereign should be unchallenged, namely that he is the source of all law. In a sense, this is his only power and indeed the only political power that exists, because all other powers—the appointment of officials, levying of taxation, waging of war, and so on—stem from this authority to make laws (§1.10).

This helps to explain why Bodin rejected the idea of a separation of powers. It is the power to make law that is definitive of sovereignty, and this power cannot be vested in multiple, potentially opposing sources. If it were, then they could issue contrary commands or countermand each other's edicts, leading to anarchy. In fact, the sovereign cannot even challenge *himself*, in that he cannot issue edicts binding his own future

decisions. Laws and institutions must adapt to fit changing circumstances (§5.1). Just as Roman law is not likely to be right for sixteenth-century Frenchmen, the right laws for France in 1570 might be different from the right laws in 1571. Bodin does caution against rapid change in the laws, since this tends to undermine the legitimacy of the whole regime (§4.3). In many cases, even an unjust law should be altered only gradually. But this is merely a pragmatic point. In principle the sovereign may overturn and change laws as he sees fit, with no constraint and (with an exception I'll discuss below) no need for consent from the subjects.

Because the unity and supremacy of sovereignty is emphasized so strongly by Bodin, and because it yields such a sharp contrast between him and some other authors of the time, it tends to be the main idea that is associated with him as a political thinker. But a closer look shows that he is far from endorsing an "anything goes" autocracy. For starters, he sees law in normative terms, meaning that lawmaking has a purpose, namely justice.[11] By his theory imperfect sovereigns must be obeyed; indeed, this will be the norm, since Bodin admits that good rulers are rare (§4.1). But the ideal on which the theory is modeled is a wise and just king dispensing laws that adapt and react to circumstances. This brings us to another important caveat to the idea that Bodin was an unrestrained absolutist. Though he did define sovereignty in terms of "absolute power," he did not mean by this phrase what we would naturally understand by it.[12] The sovereign's lawmaking power is "absolute" simply because it allows him to change existing laws, to release subjects from obligations imposed on them, or to impose new ones. Again, nothing can "entrench" an existing law to put it beyond the sovereign's right to revise it, not even an earlier decree of the same sovereign. It is conceptually impossible for the sovereign to bind his own power, just as it is conceptually impossible for anyone else to thwart that power.

Since "absolute power" has this fairly narrow meaning, it is entirely compatible with something else Bodin says, which would otherwise seem to be in conflict with his theory, namely that the sovereign is supreme only in the realm of civic law. Like anyone else, he is subject to the natural and divine law. Suppose a sovereign behaves tyrannically, for instance by knowingly jailing or executing innocent people. He would not be overstepping his bounds as a political ruler, and his subjects would not be entitled to overthrow him (§2.4–5). But that doesn't mean he'd be off the

hook. He would be violating another set of commands, those handed down by natural reason and by God Himself. Now, this might look like a rather weak caveat. Bodin seems to be saying that no one is empowered to stop a ruler from being tyrannical, apart from God. And God famously moves in mysterious ways, which include literally letting people get away with murder, at least in this life. So what sanction can be brought to bear on a tyrant? Apparently none.

But remember, this is a political theory of obligations and rights, not a theory about actually getting people to do what they ought to. Think again of the contrast between the sovereign and the armed robber. As a purely practical matter, you can more easily ignore the sovereign's commands than those of the robber who is presently shoving a gun in your face. But that doesn't mean that the robber has any standing to tell you what to do. Similarly, the sovereign ruler is obligated to follow the natural law, regardless whether he actually does so. In this respect, Bodin is actually putting greater restraints on his sovereign than some political thinkers would. Notoriously, Machiavelli held that for "reasons of state" a ruler might need to do all sorts of immoral things in order to be effective, and if so, then he should go right ahead. Bodin forcefully rejects this.[13] His sovereign is the highest power in political terms, but subject to higher powers in matters of morality and religion.

Any lingering suspicion that these constraints are empty ones should be banished by turning to Bodin's discussion of taxation. We would probably think of this as a paradigm case of a purely political issue, well within the realm of civic law, where whatever the sovereign says goes. But Bodin sees the sanctity of private property as part of the *natural* law. That means that the sovereign has an obligation to respect the property of his subjects (§6.2), and even that the consent of the subjects needs to be secured to impose taxes upon them, or to confiscate wealth in any other way.[14] Bodin stood up for this principle at a meeting of the Estates General held in Blois in 1576, arguing that the king had no right to "alienate" property belonging to the nation by selling it off to raise money. This soured his relation with the sitting monarch, an ironic outcome for this famous proponent of absolute monarchy. But at least it allowed him to respond to criticisms that he was allowing unrestrained authority to the sovereign. When an edition of his *Six Books* appeared in Geneva, adding a list of complaints about his

teachings, he was able to point to his stand at the Estates General as proof that his absolutism was not quite so absolute as it seemed.[15]

The natural law imposes another important constraint on the sovereign, which is that he must abide by any contracts he makes with his subjects. This is a tricky point, since Bodin has been telling us repeatedly that everything is subject to the sovereign's will and that not even he can bind his future commands by making promises in the here and now. But again, there is no contradiction; we just need to bear in mind the difference between a law and a contract. A law is binding in only one direction: the sovereign commands, and the subject has the obligation to obey. A contract, by contrast, is binding in both directions. So agreements made with a sovereign are legally enforceable in the court system. This sounds like a somewhat technical point, but it is important for a couple of reasons. First, it underscores the substantive role of the natural law in Bodin's theory, since natural law is the source of the obligation to honor contracts. Second, it gets us to the heart of his disagreement with the Huguenot political theorists. Hotman and Beza saw the relationship between the ruler and subject as obligating on both sides. The subjects put the ruler in charge with a view to achieving safety, peace, and so on, and obey him as their part of this deal. If the ruler fails to live up to his side of the bargain, they (or rather, the appropriate magistrates) can get rid of him. For Bodin, this is an amateurish mistake. These writers have confused laws with contracts.[16] Lawmaking sovereign authority is a one-way street, as it involves no obligations on the sovereign's side.

Bodin is not, then, a "social contract" theorist. Though he does think that sovereignty can be established when a people consents to hand power to a single authority, he also thinks it can happen the good old-fashioned way, through force, as by a violent conquest (§4.1). In particular, he thinks that the monarchy of France was established through force, not consent. So that's another point of disagreement with Huguenot authors like Hotman. But there was at least one thing they did agree on: religious tolerance. Bodin's own religious convictions are a matter of controversy. Never mind Protestantism and Catholicism, he was suspected of harboring sympathy for Judaism. But he was in favor of France's remaining Catholic. The main goal, in his view, was yet again stability. Avoiding factionalism was the main priority, so long as everyone was at least willing to embrace monotheistic religion. A unified state religion that commands the allegiance

of the whole people is the ideal, but if this is practically attainable, pluralism would be preferable to open dissent and conflict.

Thus Bodin argues that the sovereign should allow freedom in private worship and avoid coercion in matters of religion (§4.7). Indeed, the sovereign should seek to remain neutral, above the fray of religious disputation. As one scholar has put it, "by not demanding control over religious beliefs, the sovereign demonstrates a commitment to all simultaneously."[17] Bodin even wrote a work that dramatizes the possibility of unity across religious divides, a *Colloquium* consisting of a dialogue between seven speakers of different faiths.[18] (Actually one of them is not a religious figure but a natural philosopher.) Since they can all agree on the precepts of the natural law and on a kind of generic monotheism, they find that there is far more harmony than discord between them.

While these ideas about religious tolerance are by now pretty familiar to us, Bodin's general theory of sovereignty is genuinely groundbreaking. This is not to say that he was right, of course. There is a seductive appeal to his idea that sovereignty must in the end rest with a single authority: the buck has to stop somewhere. But as the political structure of the United States and many other countries shows, the power to make and remake laws is not the only power wielded by states. You can separate the function of making laws from the function of enforcing them, for example. Also, in a representative democracy it is possible for the people to be both sovereign and subjects, which Bodin thought to be absurd. Still, by raising this issue in such stark terms Bodin lay the seeds for the development of just such ideas.

Another important achievement was that, for the first time, he defined citizenship in terms of being *subject* to a certain political authority. We would now find this natural. But before Bodin, and going all the way back to Aristotle, citizens had been understood to be those who are *actively participating* in political life.[19] This meant that disenfranchized people like slaves, women, and children were by definition not citizens, whereas on Bodin's account anyone living under a regime and owing it allegiance could be considered a citizen. It was actually Bodin's absolutist approach to sovereignty that allowed him to make this breakthrough. For him, all authority lies ultimately with the sovereign, which means that everyone else

is on a par in being a subject, whether they are noble or common, free or slave, male or female, adult or child.

While the full implications of Bodin's ideas would not be clear for quite some time, he did have a great impact on his contemporaries and immediate successors. His ideas about the unity of sovereignty were widely accepted, and by a diverse range of thinkers, like the Ramist political theorist Johannes Althusius and the encyclopedist Bartholomaeus Keckermann.[20] A witness said that at Cambridge University, students would often be found in their rooms poring over the pages of Bodin's *Six Books on the Republic*.[21] All of which is even more impressive when you consider that political theory was only one of Bodin's many interests. He was a classic example of the humanist polymath, who as we've seen wrote on law and history, and also on natural philosophy and economics.

His ideas on the latter topic were formulated in response to Jehan Malestroit, who had pointed to a couple of apparent "paradoxes" concerning the phenomenon of inflation.[22] This was a phenomenon that became increasingly evident across the sixteenth century, as prices went up fourfold in Spain and tripled in France. Malestroit argued, however, that people were really paying the same even as goods seemed to cost more. If you looked at the actual amount of raw gold and silver being handed over for a given commodity, this always remained stable. Prices were increasing only because of the debasement of coins by the state, which meant that coins were worth less all the time. A cow that cost one silver coin in 1500 might cost two silver coins in 1550, but that's just because the 1550 coin had half as much precious metal in it. So actually, argued Malestroit, prices remain constant. This preserved the intuitive idea that the cow is really worth a certain weight of silver, and retains that same value over time.

Bodin denied this intuition. He agreed that debasement of coinage is a cause of inflation, and in fact, the only cause that a government can actually control. But it isn't the only, or even the chief, cause of rising prices. He observed that monopolies drive up prices, as do scarcity of goods and runaway spending on luxuries by the rich—in other words, changes in supply and demand. But for him the most important factor was the *amount* of gold and silver in supply. The more precious metal is in circulation, the less it is worth, because it too is subject to the law of supply and demand. More supply means lower value, whether we're talking about the supply of

cows or gold. Remarkably, Bodin made this observation without yet having appreciated the impact of the influx of gold and silver from Spain's conquests in the Americas. In later writings, though, he did mention this as a driver of inflation. The implication of Bodin's argument is that, unlike sovereignty, economic worth is never absolute. Neither money nor the things you can buy with it have a stable, unchanging value. Rather, everything is subject to market forces. (For similar conclusions among Spanish scholastics, see Chapter 66.)

Bodin's independence of mind is shown yet again in a massive treatise he wrote on natural philosophy, called the *Theater of All Nature*, published in 1596, a full thirty years after his first major work, the aforementioned *Method of History*. As has been shown in a detailed study by Ann Blair, Bodin approached both projects in the same way.[23] He followed the advice of Erasmus by keeping "commonplace books" of citations and passages that struck him as he pursued a lifetime of voracious reading. This material would then be wrestled into shape for the purposes of his own writings. Or at least, more or less into shape. A recent biographer of Bodin has remarked that he "was congenitally argumentative, able to leave few avenues unexplored, few authorities unchallenged, few examples unpresented from his vast store of learning."[24] For our purposes, it's the challenging of authorities that is of particular interest. In the *Theater of All Nature* Bodin follows the lead of Ramus by constantly questioning the views of Aristotle. He disagrees with him on topics great and small, denying for instance that substances should be analyzed in terms of matter and form, and that all birds have two feet. He's particularly concerned in his discussions of nature to emphasize the wise providence of God. For example, he complains that Aristotle failed to give a single, unified account of saltiness in different natural fluids, from seawater to the sweat of animals. As a Christian, Bodin is able to produce triumphantly the true explanation: God puts salt in everything to preserve it.

Bodin liked to appeal to "experience" to support his own theories, though as Blair says, what he meant by this was "an undifferentiated, medieval mix of hearsay, bookish learning, and actual experience."[25] He was no empiricist, and in fact was again critical of Aristotle for basing all science on sense perception. Some phenomena are supernatural in character, and we need to know about them, whether we are talking about divine providence or the malevolent influence of demons. Yes, demons! Bodin

wrote a whole work about them, which appeared in 1580. It talks about how witches call on demons to work their magic, provides accounts of witch trials conducted in France during his lifetime, and encourages the use of torture against suspected witches, even recommending specific torments as particularly agonizing and hence particularly effective. It may seem disconcerting, even incredible, that the author of a sophisticated and enduringly important work like the *Six Books on the Republic* would go in for such cruel and superstitious nonsense. But as we'll be seeing (Chapter 47), belief in witchcraft was widespread in this era and integrated with philosophical and scientific theories in surprising ways. Then, too, in one respect the Bodin of the *Demonology* is evidently the same man as the Bodin of the *Six Books*. He feared that witches would undermine the order and cohesion of the community, the very results that a well-running state should be aiming to establish.[26]

# 33

# PEN PALS

## *Later French Humanism*

As an American living in Germany, I obviously have regular opportunities to regret that I am not a native German speaker. But I also have regular opportunities to be glad that my mother tongue is English. This is especially so in academic settings. When there is an international meeting of scholars from, say, France, Finland, Italy, Germany, and Greece, their common language is bound to be English. I'm often the only native speaker in a group like that, which is sort of like showing up to a tennis tournament with a state-of-the art graphite and carbon fiber racquet while everyone else is using wooden ones. Most academic publishing is in English too, which suits me just fine. Of the European nations, it is really only France that has maintained its own language as the chief vehicle for writing about philosophy. The French, of course, have a long and proud history of refusing to learn English. But in an earlier period of that history, they did switch into another foreign tongue in academic contexts: Latin.

This is illustrated by the correspondence of Joseph Scaliger, the son of Julius Caesar Scaliger. In a letter written in 1608, the younger Scaliger relates with some chagrin how he fell into an awkward conversation with an Englishman in the Dutch city of Leiden.[1] This visitor, admitted Scaliger, might as well have been speaking Turkish; and unfortunately "even the most learned Englishmen pronounce Latin very badly." (Sneering at the English for their lack of linguistic achievement: another long-standing

French custom.) Scaliger's letter was written in Latin, not in French, which was not unusual. His voluminous surviving correspondence runs to 1653 letters, more than a thousand of which are in Latin. Scaliger regularly corresponded with other Frenchmen not in their shared tongue, but in Latin, especially when discussing scholarly matters. This may seem surprising, but I've often seen something similar: Germans choosing to give papers in English in front of German-speaking audiences, on the grounds that they are not used to talking about philosophy in their native language.

The correspondent to whom Scaliger sent the most surviving letters was the humanist Isaac Casaubon, of whom Scaliger said that he was "the greatest Greek scholar that we have: he is my superior."[2] The many messages they sent to one another exemplify a phenomenon that we have seen before, as with the surviving correspondence of Erasmus and the stylish letters written by Italian humanists. Here we have the beginnings of the so-called "republic of letters," in which learned men, and occasionally women, around Europe pursued scientific and philosophical questions by writing to one another, usually in Latin. By the turn of the seventeenth century, this republic was well on its way to being founded. Scaliger, for instance, wrote to, among many others, Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler, Theodore Beza, Justus Lipsius, Philippe du Mornay, and for good measure the kings of France and Scotland.[3]

But it makes sense that Casaubon was Scaliger's favorite pen pal, because they had so much in common. Both were Huguenots, and both passed through the unofficial capital of the Calvinist world, Geneva. Casaubon studied there as a young man, while Scaliger became a professor of philosophy there after fleeing France following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Both would spend their final years living abroad, Scaliger in the Netherlands until his death in 1609, Casaubon in England, where he would die in 1614. As leading humanists, both men of course excelled in Latin and in Greek. Particularly celebrated is Scaliger's story of teaching himself ancient Greek, after having received instruction in Latin thanks to his famous father. According to this story, as a young man Scaliger shut himself in his room and undertook a self-imposed crash course in the language. He read Homer with the help of a translation and mastered this archaic version of Greek within only three weeks. Clearly Joseph inherited his dad's flair for self-promotion and exaggeration, because in fact he learned Greek from several teachers in Paris.[4]

There Scaliger also met Guillaume Postel, a scholar of Jewish Kabbalah. This got him interested in studying Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. Scaliger in turn helped inspire his friend Casaubon to study these Near Eastern languages.[5] They of course discuss this project (in Latin) in their letters to one another, with Scaliger advising Casaubon to learn Arabic directly from the Koran, and Casaubon writing to say that he was reading Avicenna's medical treatise the *Canon* in the original. This was not unprecedented, as Avicenna's preeminent standing in medicine motivated quite a few Renaissance doctors to learn Arabic.[6] But to combine a deep philological interest in Greek and Latin with a similar interest in semitic languages, as Scaliger and Casaubon did, was more unusual. Joseph Scaliger—again, according to his own not exactly modest account—claimed that he was able to dispute with Jewish rabbis in Rome *in Hebrew*.[7] As for Casaubon, his study of Hebrew was ambitious enough to be the subject of a whole book by modern-day scholars Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg.[8] They discuss Casaubon's ability to consult texts in the Hebrew original on a wide range of topics, from religion to mathematics. As an exercise he liked to translate Hebrew into ancient Greek.

An author of particular interest to him was Maimonides, whom he saw as an "authoritative interpreter of the Bible"; we still have notes he made on a translation of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*. By contrast he had little respect for Kabbalistic writings, a judgment shared by Scaliger. Referring to the theory of the alphanumeric *sefirot*, Casaubon remarked, "the Hebrew masters not only waste their time, but actually make fools of themselves as they seek out the mysteries of holy letters."[9] One reason Casaubon was interested in Hebrew is that he assumed it to be the most ancient known language. You'll remember the flood recorded in the book of Genesis, the one that lasted forty days and forty nights, which is about twice as long as it took Scaliger to learn Homeric Greek. After this cataclysm, Casaubon supposed, the only remaining language was Hebrew, meaning that all existing languages on Earth must be derived from it. To support this spurious notion, he proposed fanciful etymologies that purported to show the derivation of Greek words from Hebrew ones.

Not one of Casaubon's better ideas. But in another case he was right on the money. In the process of attacking a Catholic apologist named Cesare Baronio, Casaubon turned his attention to one of Baronio's sources, the

Platonizing writings ascribed to the Greek-Egyptian religious figure "thrice-great Hermes," or Hermes Trismegistus.[10] This body of texts had been significant for the history of philosophy since late antiquity. Hermes was used by Greek Neoplatonists, known to philosophers of the Islamic world, and celebrated as a source of great wisdom and antiquity by earlier Renaissance humanists like Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno. But Casaubon noticed that these writings could not possibly be an early Greek translation of an even earlier Egyptian source, as was claimed. He observed, for example, that the text indulged in wordplay that would make sense only if it was originally written in Greek, as when the word *kosmos* is linked to the Greek verb *kosmein*, meaning to "adorn" or "decorate." More generally he saw that the vocabulary, style, and thought of the Hermetic writings belonged to late antiquity. "There are many words here," he argued, "that do not belong to any Greek earlier than that of the time of Christ's birth."[11]

As we can see from this example, the French humanists were developing a more nuanced sense of the history of philosophy. The same goes for plain old history. Scaliger is especially important here, because of his contributions to the field of historical chronology.[12] Of particular interest in his own time was, of course, Biblical history. But Scaliger did not hesitate to use pagan historical records too, as he undertook nothing less than a reconstruction of all antiquity, a kind of map in time instead of space. He used a similar metaphor himself, saying that his system for time measurement would offer a guide "to the chronologer who journeys through all the world, and roams like a wandering stranger back through all ancient times and origins, so that when he reads the acts, annals, and calendars of the ancients, he may sometimes know where he is, and need not always be a stranger." Using his periodization, it would be possible to determine when Biblical events happened relative to events recorded in the writings of the pagan Greeks and Romans. Scaliger even made an attempt to sort out the dates of ancient Egyptian dynasties, and admitted that there was good evidence to show that Egyptian culture existed before the supposed date of the world's creation suggested by the Hebrew Bible.

This may seem to be the ultimate antiquarian project, and in a sense it was. Scaliger was undertaking a study of ancientness itself, in a pioneering attempt to create a universal timeline on which all events could be located. This meant more than editing and translating particular texts, and rejecting them as forgeries when appropriate, though it certainly meant these things

too. Scaliger was envisioning a unification of all the ancient cultures known to the humanists—Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern—within a single chronological framework, something he was well placed to do, having learned nearly all the relevant languages. Yet neither Scaliger nor Casaubon thought that old things are valuable just because they are old. On the contrary, both men believed in scientific and scholarly progress. Casaubon once said, "great things take a long time to develop, and one age is not enough to work through them systematically. Hence they have certain rude beginnings, and are not passed on to us in their final state. That is why those who come later always devise new things to add to the discoveries of their ancestors."[13] And Scaliger was scornful of followers of Peter Ramus who fetishized the pioneering mathematicians of antiquity. As far as he was concerned, the fact that these figures came earlier didn't mean that they were better at math.[14] Being more traditional humanists in the mold of Erasmus, Budé, the elder Scaliger, and so on, these later French scholars were not apt to be impressed by the user-friendly, disruptive methods of Ramus. Casaubon lamented that Ramism was an "unfruitful tree" which unfortunately had spread its branches "through virtually all the universities of the Christian world."[15]

So around the turn of the seventeenth century, some humanists were distancing themselves from, or debunking, the Neoplatonic, Neopythagorean approach to ancient thought that had still been accepted by scholars like Ficino and Pico. And, of course, humanists had long defined themselves in opposition to Aristotelian scholasticism, even before the simplifications of Ramus came along. That left an opening for influence from other ancient philosophical traditions, especially Stoicism and Skepticism. We already looked at the greatest exponent of Stoic thought in the late Renaissance, Justus Lipsius. But it would be worth touching on a French exponent of Neo-Stoicism, who was a contemporary of Casaubon and the somewhat older Scaliger. His name was Guillaume Du Vair.[16] Where Lipsius' Stoicism was inspired especially by Seneca, for Du Vair the most important ancient author of the school was Epictetus. He wrote a work called *The Moral Philosophy of the Stoics*, which was published as a commentary to his own French translation of Epictetus' *Enchirideon*. Then he wrote a dialogue with the title *On Constancy*. That may sound familiar, since Lipsius did exactly the same thing, and for similar reasons. Both of

them were responding to the upheaval of the wars of religion, the immediate event provoking Du Vair's treatise being a Huguenot siege of Paris in 1590.

Though Du Vair was heavily under the influence of Lipsius, he did bring something distinctive to the late sixteenth-century revival of Stoicism. It has been said that he was "the Christian and nationalist among the Neo-Stoics."[17] He counts as a "nationalist" because of the political context and content of his work, and because he was deeply engaged with French politics. He was, among other things, a member of the Paris Parlement, and the president of the Parlement of Aix-en-Provence. In this period of constitutionalist challenges to the monarchy, Du Vair may be counted among the conservative monarchists. He wanted the nobility, to which he belonged, to work closely with the king to keep the lower classes in line. This despite the fact that he shows clear sympathy for the poor in his dialogue *On Constancy*. He sees it as a challenge for Stoic philosophy that there is so much misery in the France of his day, as illustrated by horrifying stories of hunger among the people as a result of the constant warfare. There have even been rumors of children being eaten.

But as Du Vair says, "no evil is so great that reason and philosophical conversation cannot overcome it."[18] Part of his response is to compare our life on Earth to a battle. God's providence is compatible with the evils and suffering we see around us, because He wants us to rise to this challenge. Yet, in something of a twist on classical Stoicism (and certainly a departure from Du Vair's favorite source, Epictetus, who focused especially on the individual's will and virtue), Du Vair emphasizes the need to come together as a political community, rather than looking to self-interest. After all, as one of his characters says, there's no point saving your house if the whole country falls.[19] Still, to Du Vair's mind true consolation in the face of evils cannot be found in anything that is done, or achieved, in this world. This brings us to the distinctively Christian aspect of his thought. In his work on the Stoics' moral philosophy, Du Vair presents a rather un-Stoic vision of our ultimate good, namely beatitude in the afterlife, through contemplation of God.[20] In this life, we should work to embrace, alongside the standard virtues recognized by the ancients, also the distinctively Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

More faithfully Stoic is Du Vair's relentless emphasis on the importance of avoiding false belief, which he places under the pejorative heading of mere "opinion." People are miserable not so much because of the things that happen to them, but because of the false beliefs they have about these things, for example that so-called external goods are truly valuable, or that the world is governed by chance rather than divine providence. When reason judges aright, "constancy" in the face of misfortunes is close at hand. The reason I say that this sounds faithful to Stoicism is that the ancient Stoics likewise stressed the importance of seeing the world aright, and argued that misery derives from false belief. The perfect sage who makes no mistakes would be guaranteed to enjoy happiness. But even here, Du Vair departs from what he would find in Epictetus or earlier Stoics. He incorporates into his moral theory Plato's analysis of the soul, according to which there are lower parts—spirit and desire—which can undermine reason by leading it away from the correct values and beliefs. Du Vair suggests using philosophical "medicine" to cure the soul of such misconceptions, medicine like the Epictetan teaching that we should value only what is up to us.

Another remedy can be found in the anecdotes and sayings, usually drawn from antiquity, that the humanists called *exempla*. Du Vair's inspiration Lipsius was an avid purveyor of such material. But neither of them was the most famous author of the period to make extensive use of *exempla*. That honor would go to another Frenchman who wrote toward the end of the sixteenth century, and who was more oriented toward another Hellenistic school, namely Skepticism. This was Michel de Montaigne, whose famous collection of *Essays* is absolutely chock-full of quotations from ancient authors, good stories drawn from classical history, and passages praising heroes of antiquity, especially Socrates. Occasionally ideas do come in from the Stoic tradition. But Montaigne found such a rigorous ethical teaching too demanding, and also too certain of itself. He was a man of moderation, who allowed himself to enjoy pleasure, commented extensively and with humorous irony on his own failings, and also allowed that he was uncertain of many things—but then uncertainty and irony were also good humanist traditions.

# 34

# NOT MATTER, BUT ME

## *Michel de Montaigne*

Montaigne is among the most quotable authors in the whole history of philosophy, so there's a strong temptation simply to reel off a list of his most memorable and pithy remarks. And as the equally quotable Oscar Wilde said, "I can resist anything except temptation." So here is a selection of my favorite Montaigne moments: "It is fear that I am most afraid of" (1.18). "The true mirror of our discourse is the course of our lives" (1.26). "There is as much difference between us and ourselves as there is between us and other people" (2.1). "Virtue rejects ease as a companion" (2.11). "Reason is a two-handled pot: you can grab it from the right or the left" (2.12). "On any topic I like starting with my conclusions" (2.17). "There are folk on whom fine clothes sit down and cry" (3.6). "I am rarely summoned, and I just as seldom volunteer" (3.9). "I do not judge opinions by their age" (3.11). "It is far easier to talk like Aristotle and to live like Caesar than to both talk and live like Socrates" (3.12). And finally, the unimprovable "when I play with my cat, how do I know she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?" (2.12).

These and many other remarks to savor can be found in Montaigne's *Essays*, first published in 1580, expanded for a new edition in 1588, and published again posthumously under the editorship of Marie de Gournay in 1595.[1] Taken together the *Essays* make for an immensely long, endlessly entertaining, and willfully digressive work, which Montaigne himself

compared to a monstrous grotesque fused together from mismatching limbs (1.28) and a patchwork of quilted fabrics (2.25). They are a monument to Montaigne's favorite subject, namely Montaigne himself.[2] The style of his writing eloquently expresses a restless search for self-understanding. Explaining the disordered appearance of the *Essays* he says, "I let myself go along as I find myself to be" (2.10). To account for his habit of adding material and never subtracting it, he admits, "I never correct my first thoughts by second ones…I want to show my humors as they develop, revealing each element as it is born" (2.37). We may have to look as far back as Augustine's *Confessions* for such a sustained and intimate reflection on the workings of an individual mind.

Yet Montaigne's method, such as it is, may be traceable not so much to the confessional mode of Augustine as to the inward turn proposed by Erasmus. Montaigne's *Essays* are a natural, though certainly not predictable, outcome of Erasmian humanism. Many of the quotable sayings that appear in Montaigne are, in fact, already being quoted from other sources (as he admits at 3.12). Like Bodin (whom Montaigne criticizes, 2.32) or Lipsius (whom Montaigne praises, 2.12), Montaigne was evidently a great exponent of Erasmus' "commonplace book" method. The *Essays* are stuffed with anecdotes and sayings from his vast reading, mostly from classical antiquity. "A useful saying or a pithy remark is always welcome wherever it is put," he says. "If it is not good in context, it is good in itself" (1.26). Inspired by classical authors who were themselves adept at using so-called *exempla*, like Plutarch, Montaigne likes the way that such material can lightly touch on themes that would need long discussion if developed properly. The quotations "often bear the seeds of a richer, bolder subject-matter" (1.40). At the same time, he's characteristically relaxed about whether his audience gets the same thing out of this material that Montaigne does. "If my *exempla* do not fit," he instructs the reader, "supply your own for me" (1.21).

Montaigne was predestined for humanism. At the age of six, he was sent to the Collège de Guyenne, where he had teachers, including Nicolas de Grouchy, who placed emphasis on moral instruction. This by the way after being taught Latin from infancy, an immersive technique once recommended by Erasmus. As a result, Montaigne claimed, French remained a foreign language for him until later in childhood (1.26). Though Montaigne said that he never "delved deeply" into scholastic topics, "biting

my nails over the study of Aristotle" (1.26), he was familiar enough with this tradition to reject it. For him as for Erasmus, the schoolmen were preoccupied with trivial matters, when they should be trying to learn how to live. We should imitate the ancient philosophers in this, since they were "great in learning, greater still in activities" (1.25). The schoolmen, and many humanist teachers too, took up bits of wisdom like birds carrying food in their beaks without swallowing. Their students might learn to quote Cicero and Plato, but not to ask, "what have *we* got to say? What judgments do *we* make? What are *we* doing?" (1.25). Montaigne's approach was different. He was, he said, "only seeking to become more wise, not more learned or more eloquent" (2.10).

Yet I can't help feeling that if Erasmus had been able to read the *Essays*, he would have said, "this isn't what I had in mind!" Montaigne took the private spirituality of Erasmus and mostly dropped the spiritual part, focusing relentlessly on himself as an individual and reporting on everything from his struggles to be virtuous to his sex life, food preferences, and bathroom habits. This was very much by design. Montaigne made a point of dealing with both trivial and deep issues, since his goal was to develop his capacity for judgment and apply it to absolutely anything (1.50); he could, he said, write about even a fly (3.5). In another contrast to Erasmus, he was a humanist without being a philologist. Unlike his rough contemporaries Scaliger or the younger Casaubon, Montaigne devoted his efforts to improving himself, not improving the text of ancient books, explaining, "I would rather be an expert on me than on Cicero" (3.13). Or, contrasting this project to that of the scholastics, "I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics, that is my physics" (3.13).

It's been said that "Montaigne brought the private self out of hiding,"[3] and for good reason. He was convinced that it would be worthwhile to record his own subjective perspective on the world, despite the fact that his perspective was changing all the time: "my aim is to reveal my own self, which may well be different tomorrow" (1.26). The point of this is not even, as we might expect, to discern universal verities by studying closely one particular person. Montaigne's ambition is, rather, limited to the understanding and improvement of his own self. He says that his business and his art are to live his life, so that talking about his life is like when an architect talks about buildings (2.6). Because he is so frank about recording

his every thought—"about myself nothing is wanting, and there is nothing to guess" (3.9)—there is in the end no difference between himself and his book, the *Essays*. "Touch one, and you touch the other" (3.2).

One might wonder why anyone else should be interested in reading such a determinedly self-obsessed work, unless they happen to be intimates of Montaigne who want to know him better, or strangers who are just leafing through out of idle curiosity. Montaigne resolutely resists the idea that talking about himself is an indirect way to talk about some other topic: "I am striving to make known not matter, but me" (2.10). But he still thinks that people can read his *Essays* with profit, even if he is modest enough to say that they are aimed at a "middling" group of readers, since the vulgar will find them incomprehensible and the outstanding will find them too easy (1.54). If I may follow Montaigne's example by telling you what I myself happen to think, it seems to me that Montaigne is modeling an approach to life which readers can imitate by inspecting their own lives as intensely as he does. "Each man," he says, "is an excellent instruction unto himself provided he has the capacity to spy on himself from close quarters" (2.6).

There's a cliché that Montaigne achieved this by withdrawing from society and remaining in solitude, reading and writing in his famous tower. Where, by the way, some of his favorite quotations were put up as inscriptions, most famously "I am a human, so I consider nothing human to be foreign to me (*homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*)," taken from the classical playwright Terence. This picture of a detached life is encouraged by Montaigne himself. In an essay on solitude (1.39), he recommends "bringing the soul back to itself," and making one's happiness depend on oneself and not on friends and family. If you can keep yourself company, and "in lonely places be a crowd all by yourself" then you will be self-sufficient and less subject to the winds of fortune, whose inconstancy and unpredictability is a running theme throughout the *Essays*. In the terms of the standard humanist dilemma whether to pursue an active life of civic engagement or a secluded one of scholarly contemplation, it sounds like Montaigne has decided for the latter, albeit that what he contemplates is not, say, metaphysics, but Montaigne.

Yet the *Essays* themselves also tell a different story, especially when we supplement them with more information about Montaigne's life.[4] This is the story of a man who was engaged with the world outside his tower, capable

of passionate friendship and quietly courageous political action. Some of the most fervent passages in the *Essays* concern Montaigne's friendship with Etienne La Boétie, whom we met as the young author of the daring political treatise *On Voluntary Servitude*. Montaigne, never afraid of exaggerating for effect, once called La Boétie the "greatest man of our century." Given his early death this encomium may have been based more on La Boétie's prodigious talents than his actual achievements, especially since, as we saw, Montaigne sought to downplay *On Voluntary Servitude* as a youthful excess (1.28). But that may have been a disingenuous remark, intended to support his claim that "there was never a better citizen" than his young friend. A bit earlier in the *Essays*, Montaigne illustrates Plutarch's aforementioned use of brevity and anecdote by referring with approval to La Boétie's treatise. This work, he says, extracts the meaning only implied in Plutarch's remark, "the inhabitants of Asia were slaves of one tyrant because they were incapable of pronouncing one syllable: no" (1.26). So he may have thought more highly of its message than he wanted to admit.

At any rate, Montaigne was plunged into grief by the loss of La Boétie. He describes their bond as a perfect friendship, so perfect indeed that it was "indivisible," meaning that it could leave room for no other, similar relationship (1.28). The demise of La Boétie, and the prospect of his own demise, led Montaigne to reflect on death and its meaning for the living. Indeed, he named this as the one philosophical topic that concerned him most (1.20). He found some consolation in philosophy, despite his observation that "there are so many arguments persuading men to despise death and to endure pain; why do we never find a single one which applies to ourselves?" (1.14). In more serious moods he treats death as the ultimate proof of our convictions. Until we face it, "all those fine philosophical arguments may be only a pose" (1.19). So he embraces the classical idea of philosophy as being not just a way of life, but practice for the end of life, and recommends, "let us wait for death everywhere. To practice death is to practice freedom" (1.20).

As for politics, Montaigne's efforts in this sphere are often ignored. But some hint is given by the fact that he first met La Boétie while serving in the Bordeaux Parlement in the late 1550s. This was only one of many political appointments he held: he was a courtier under Charles IX, who knighted him in 1571, and he was one of the so called *politiques* who worked to find a pragmatic peace between Protestants and Catholics. This

led more to personal misfortune than public success, as he was imprisoned in 1588 after he chose to accompany King Henry III in flight from Paris. Understandably Montaigne had, at best, mixed feelings about his various practical entanglements. One of the most amusing passages in the *Essays* relates his approach to the mayorship of Bordeaux, which was thrust upon him in 1581: "as soon as I arrived, I spelled out my character faithfully and truly: no memory, no concentration, no experience, no drive; no hatred either, no ambition, no covetousness, no ferocity—so that they should know what to expect from my service" (3.10).

So Montaigne was not exactly an eager politician. Yet it is worth touching on this aspect of his life, since the upheavals of France form an important part of the background for his *Essays*.[5] In a way they are as much a response to the wars of religion as were more explicit reactions like the Huguenot political treatises or the works on consolation by Du Vair and Lipsius. When Montaigne does allude to current events, it is sometimes to maintain the pose that they do not touch him: "I assay to steal this corner from the public storms, as I do for another corner in my soul. Our war can change its patterns, multiply and diversify into new factions, but to no avail: as for me, I do not budge" (2.15). But he makes no secret about having opinions about the religious uproar, which he sees in part as the result of cynical political exploitation. "All are alike in using religion for their violent and ambitious schemes" (2.12), he says, mentioning in particular the Huguenot idea that it might be all right to defy a sitting monarch on religious grounds. Not unlike Sebastian Castellio (who gets a namecheck at 1.35), albeit with a more ironic tone, he punctures the overconfidence of persecutors: "it is to put a very high value on your surmises to roast a man alive for them" (3.11).

Montaigne was thus disposed to be in the party of peace, especially since he was able to find something to admire in men on both sides of the conflict (3.10). But he did have a preference for the Catholic cause, in part because he just wasn't convinced of the Protestant point of view. The idea that theological disputes could be resolved by taking recourse to Scripture alone, as the reformers insisted, was one he couldn't even take seriously (3.13). But his main reason for supporting the established religion was simply that it was indeed *established*. He saw the disasters of his time as being caused by "novelties," which were introduced by zealous reformers who did not think to "count the cost" (1.23, 3.9, 3.10). While he was open

to constant change and variability in his own opinions and in the world as a whole, when it came to politics and religion he prized stability above all else: “all roads which wander from the norm displease me” (2.12).

Despite the radicalism of his philosophical and literary project, then, Montaigne can fairly be described as a social conservative. This may have been a matter of temperament, as well as being a conclusion he drew from the chaos of his times. When we look at his views on ethics and virtue, a topic he mentions much more often than the wars of religion, we again see him endorsing moderation. This is why, unlike Du Vair and Lipsius, he held back from embracing Stoicism. He thought it was unrealistic to teach that pleasure is not worth pursuing and that pain is a matter of indifference. If this is not just playing with words (1.14), then it is a doctrine so demanding that no one could live by it (3.9), which of course would be of little interest to Montaigne, whose ambition was precisely to learn how he should live. In a striking thought experiment, which recalls one devised centuries before by Avicenna, Montaigne imagines a supposedly imperturbable philosopher being at the top of the cathedral of Notre Dame: this philosopher would surely be afraid of the height (2.12). Rather than regretting such natural reactions, we should be suspicious of extremes in the life of the mind, as in the life of the state. “Taken in moderation philosophy is pleasant and useful, but it can eventually lead to a man’s becoming vicious and savage, contemptuous of religion and of the accepted laws…an enemy of our human pleasures” (1.30). At the very end of the *Essays*, he leaves us with the thought that the best arguments are those that are “most human, most ours” (3.13).

Montaigne enjoyed a nice irony, so perhaps he appreciated the fact that this same difficulty arose with his preferred Hellenistic school, which was not Stoicism but Skepticism. He lived at a moment when this tradition was better accessible than it had been previously, since writings of the Pyrrhonist skeptic Sextus Empiricus had recently been printed, in 1562. As the name of this school indicates, it traced its lineage back to the early skeptic Pyrrho, famed for supposedly needing people to pull him back from walking off cliffs or into oncoming traffic because he refused to believe anything, even his own eyes. Referring to these reports, Montaigne says, consistently with his response to Stoicism, that “it is one thing to bring your soul to accept such ideas, and quite another to combine theory and practice” (2.29). But Montaigne was more persuaded, if we can use that term in this

context, by the skeptical approach adopted by Sextus, according to which one simply follows appearances while remaining profoundly aware of the limitations of one's own knowledge.[6] This may have been another reason for his political conservatism, in fact. Sticking with established custom is exactly how this sort of skeptic negotiates their way through the world, without endorsing potentially controversial doctrines. And as we just saw, Montaigne was scornful of people who were so impressed with their own beliefs that they were willing to kill others who disagreed.

The longest entry in the *Essays* is in large part a meditation on the topic of skepticism. This is book 2, essay 12, in which Montaigne answers detractors who criticized a work he had translated into French as a young man at the behest of his father, the *Book of Creatures* by Raymond Sebond.[7] Sebond was a Spaniard who taught at Toulouse back in the 1430s, when he wrote this work of natural theology, intended to support Christian belief using rational argument. In the essay, entitled "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," Montaigne answers two lines of critique. First, that reason cannot be used to support religion; second, that Sebond's rational arguments are weak. To the first Montaigne argues that rational theology is a perfectly respectable project, though he piously reminds us that faith is a gift that ultimately comes from God alone. More surprising, and in considerable tension with Sebond's original project, is his answer to the second criticism. He admits that the arguments in the book may not be perfectly convincing. But that's hardly surprising, because philosophical arguments are never perfectly convincing, especially when it comes to theology: "Human reason goes astray everywhere, but especially when she concerns herself with matters divine." Realizing this, we should strive for a form of ignorance that is at least aware of itself, curing ourselves of pretensions to have more certainty than we do. "This," says Montaigne, "is doubt taken to its limits; it shakes its own foundations." His rather strange line of defense for Raymond Sebond, and other remarks scattered throughout the *Essays*, have earned Montaigne a central place in the history of early modern skepticism. He constantly reminded himself to be modest about his knowledge, as with one of the inscriptions he put up in the famous tower: "what do I know?" Which, I've just realized, would make for a pretty good chapter title.

# 35

# WHAT DO I KNOW?

## *French Skepticism*

As we've been seeing, the Reformation led to results that were unexpected at the time, and ironic to boot. Luther was neither a tolerant nor a secular man, but in the long run, what he started led to the emergence of more secular and religiously tolerant societies. In the shorter run, the Reformation led to a reawakening of philosophical skepticism. Which may seem, if anything, even more astounding. Sixteenth-century intellectuals seem to have been mighty sure of themselves. Luther was convinced that the Pope was the Antichrist, while Catholics felt equally certain of the authority of the church. It was, indeed, an age when people were quite literally ready to kill anyone who disagreed with them about their most deeply held convictions, hence Montaigne's remark about roasting people on the grounds of your own "surmises."

In a well-known book on the history of early modern skepticism, Richard Popkin tried to understand the skeptical leanings of Montaigne and other figures who wrote in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[1] For Popkin, one major factor was the impact of the greatest ancient skeptic, Sextus Empiricus.[2] His writings had been known to some extent even in the medieval era, but in the 1560s Latin translations of his writings appeared. Since humanists also knew about the earlier, "Academic" form of skepticism through Cicero, this Hellenistic tradition of thought could now take its place alongside Stoicism as a powerful

influence. But Popkin also pointed to the Reformation as an important part of the story. His idea was that the conflict between Protestants and Catholics brought attention to what he calls the "problem of the criterion." This is a problem about how to resolve disagreement. If you claim to be taller than me, and I deny this (though to be honest it's not unlikely), then there is a criterion we can use to settle the matter: a literal yardstick. But there was no yardstick available when it came to the religious disputes that erupted in the wake of Luther. Catholics pointed to the authoritative standing of church tradition and the papacy, whereas Lutherans rejected this out of hand. With no shared standard by which the argument could be settled, the rival parties instead deployed abusive rhetoric and violent force.

Popkin was right to point out that this problem was anticipated in the works of Sextus and other ancient skeptics. A standard technique of this school was to point to disagreements on philosophical issues, and then to suggest that there was no way to decide these issues without assuming some further, equally controversial premises. Cultural variation was also invoked to motivate skepticism. Sextus accumulated examples of unfamiliar beliefs and practices in other societies, so as to suggest that the beliefs and practices of our own society are parochial and arbitrary. We find Montaigne doing exactly the same thing. Still, there's a problem with Popkin's account. It doesn't really explain why Montaigne, or anyone else, would have found skepticism *attractive*. On the contrary, Popkin himself quotes numerous authors for whom skepticism was a potentially disastrous consequence of the quandary introduced by the Reformation. Scholars like Jacopo Sadoleto and Guy de Brués wrote treatises in refutation of skepticism, and Guillaume Budé warned that anyone who follows the "method of the Academy" would "take nothing for certain, not even what Revelation teaches us concerning the inhabitants of heaven and hell."[3] As Popkin also notes, it was common for both Protestants and Catholics to claim that the rival camp's theological stance would lead to uncertainty in matters of religious belief.

To understand Montaigne's fondness for skeptical argumentation, we need to delve more deeply into this aspect of his thought. Popkin remarks that "Montaigne manages to introduce most of the major epistemological arguments of the ancient Pyrrhonists, albeit in a rather unsystematic fashion."[4] His favorite was probably the aforementioned technique of setting up opposing, apparently irresolvable views. This is a technique he would have learned in his youth, in an educational system designed to

impart the skill of arguing on both sides of any question.[5] In his maturity, he would duly quote in his *Essays* the following line from Homer: "there is every possibility of speaking for and against anything" (1.47).

The *Essays* also make evident Montaigne's delight in recounting the strange customs of nations removed in both space and time from the France of his own day. Elsewhere people might greet one other by turning their backs (1.23), or go without clothing (1.36). From ancient times Montaigne cites reports of the quaint and bizarre habits of the Romans (1.49): would you believe that they used to eat between meals, and bathe *every day*? Having presented all this information, he concludes, "by keeping in mind the continual changes in human affairs, our judgments on them may be more firm and more enlightened." As we'll discuss below (Chapter 46), he was also fascinated by reports of the people in the recently contacted America. He was remarkably open to the thought that those people might have an admirable, yet very different, way of life. Furthermore, Montaigne applied this strategy at the level of the individual, claiming that "it is impossible to find two opinions which are exactly alike, not only in different men but in the same man at different times" (3.13).

For Montaigne, the upshot of all this disagreement was that we should be less sure of our own convictions. He admired people who took a vow of ignorance, rather than chastity or poverty (3.12). Alluding to the supposed religious certainties being thrown around by his contemporaries, he modestly allowed, "I am offering my own human thoughts as human thoughts to be considered on their own, not as things established by God's ordinance, incapable of being doubted or challenged. They are matters of opinion, not matters of faith" (1.56). Indeed, he professed to be bewildered by the fact that other people seemed so sure of themselves, since "there is virtually nothing that I *know* that I know and which I would dare to guarantee to be able to perform" (2.17). These expressions of modesty are typical of him, and at first glance could be read in the same spirit as his self-effacing remarks about having a bad memory or poor powers of concentration. But it's clear from the aforementioned *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (2.12) that his uncertainty was a principled one. Here he called it a "plague upon humankind" that people have the "opinion that they know something." He explicitly invoked the skeptical arguments of the Pyrrhonist school on the way to excusing Sebond for failing to provide ironclad,

demonstrative arguments. It was unreasonable to expect anything more, since such arguments simply cannot be given.

Yet this same essay shows that Montaigne was no convinced Pyrrhonist, and not just because this would be a contradiction in terms. It's not so clear whether he appreciated the difference between Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics. To make a long story short, the Academics argued against the Stoics that knowledge is impossible. You might be able to find some beliefs that are more plausible than others, but you can never get absolute certainty. By contrast, Sextus' Pyrrhonian skepticism suspends judgment on all matters, even about whether knowledge is possible after all. This allowed Sextus to avoid the paradox of claiming to know that knowledge is unattainable. Montaigne, though, seems to have thought that all skeptics are subject to this paradox. Thus he said of Pyrrhonism that it is "doubt taken to its limits; it shakes its own foundations," and that "it is rashness indeed to undo another by undoing yourself" (2.12). What he apparently valued most in Pyrrhonism was the idea of "following appearances." You might be aware that other peoples behave very differently, but that's no reason to start walking around naked or, God forbid, wash daily. Confronted with the diversity and uncertainty of human belief, and the fact that, as Montaine puts it, "there is nothing that custom may not do and cannot do," one should simply adopt the customs of one's own society (1.23).

But in the same essay where he makes that last remark, Montaigne says that a wise person is one who "withdraws from the crowd" and makes judgments of their own. He often framed the *Essays*, or rather the lifetime of reflection that led to the *Essays*, as a sustained effort to improve and refine his own judgments. Some decades after Montaigne's death, he was defended against charges of skepticism by an admirer, precisely on these grounds. A skeptic is someone who does *not* make judgments, whereas Montaigne took great care to make the *right* judgments, albeit with a keen awareness of his own limitations.[6] Taking all this into account, we might conclude that Montaigne was what is nowadays called a "fallibilist." In other words, he did not suspend judgment, like a Pyrrhonist would do, but instead came to conclusions, even firm ones, while remaining open to correction.[7] This fits well with his frequent emphasis on his own changing opinions. It also fits with his commitment to moderation. Just as one should be neither an unrestrained hedonist nor a self-punishing ascetic, one should

not abstain from all belief, but neither should one take oneself to be absolutely certain.[8]

We may be able to shed still more light on Montaigne's skepticism by turning to the way it was taken up by his friend Pierre Charron. According to legend, he was considered as an adoptive son by Montaigne, who bequeathed to him the right to use Montaigne's family arms. This has been put in doubt by modern scholarship, since our main source for the story probably exaggerates the extent of Charron's relationship to Montaigne.[9] It's telling that it was not this "adoptive son" Charron, but Montaigne's "adoptive daughter" Marie de Gournay who was entrusted with the task of producing a posthumous edition of the *Essays*. But more on that in the next chapter. What matters for now is that Charron most definitely drew on Montaigne extensively in his own writings, especially a work called *On Wisdom*.[10] In this treatise he takes recourse to Montaigne's various skeptical arguments, while also drawing on other authors like Bodin, Lipsius, and Du Vair.

As a result, Charron has a reputation for being a rather unoriginal author. But he does modify his sources, rather than quoting them directly.[11] Moreover, he puts skeptical ideas within a larger body of work that one can only describe as thoroughly *non*-skeptical. Charron was a preacher and theologian, whose 1593 work *Three Truths* polemicized against the Protestant reformers, especially Duplessis-Mornay, whom we met as the probable author of the political treatise *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos*.[12] The first two truths of Charron's title, which would also have been acceptable to Protestants, were that God exists and that He has sent Christ as a savior. But the third truth states that the church founded by Christ is to be identified with the Catholic one. As soon as one doubts the authority of this church, argues Charron, disorder and heresy are bound to ensue. European history in the later sixteenth century was proof enough of this, and the dissension amongst the various Protestant groups was a further indication that the Reformation was deeply misguided.

Now, this doesn't sound particularly "skeptical." The puzzle comes when we note that Charron published another work of passionately convinced Catholic theology in 1601, the very year that saw the appearance of *On Wisdom*, which is packed with skeptical argumentation. What is going on here? Well, that's a matter of some scholarly controversy. One

suggestion has been that the skeptical arguments drawn from Montaigne in Charron's *On Wisdom* are simply designed to clear away *false* beliefs. This procedure would make it possible for the "innate seeds of knowledge and virtue" in our souls to blossom fully.[13] That sounds more Stoic than skeptical, and indeed the same treatise *On Wisdom* contains ethical material indebted to Stoicism, which is where the influence of Lipsius and Du Vair comes in. Yet there are also grounds for thinking that Charron was quite serious about his skepticism. He went further than Montaigne, who inscribed the saying "what do I know?" in his tower: Charron put the words "I do *not* know (*je ne sçay*)" on the front of his house. It also appears on the frontispiece of *On Wisdom*. Then in the preface of that work he says that all his proposals are presented only "problematically and academically," adding, "whatever I propose, I obligate no one to accept; I simply present things and set them out. I will not be annoyed if anyone does not believe me, as pedants do."[14] So we do need to ask how his uncompromising theological commitments could be made compatible with a skeptical or fallibilist epistemology.

The key is already supplied by something we saw Montaigne saying: that his views were only "human thoughts" as opposed to "God's ordinance." This point becomes central in Charron, who systematically contrasts merely human "wisdom" with the wisdom divulged in God's revelation and the providentially guided teachings of the church. When Charron insists upon the variation between beliefs and the lack of any decisive criterion to decide the resulting disagreements, he is only impugning the certainty of human wisdom. Drawing on our own *natural* resources, we would never be able to go beyond uncertain opinion. This clears the way for an embrace of the *supernatural* resources supplied by God. Thus Charron has been labeled a "fideist," in other words, someone who thinks that true knowledge is attained through faith rather than natural reasoning.[15]

We can now return to our starting point by asking again, why would men like Montaigne and Charron be positively disposed toward skepticism, where it had appeared more as a threat or accusation in earlier authors? The answer, I think, is twofold. First, skepticism was useful for Catholic authors, because it allowed them to create space, even a need, for faith guided by authority. Since we don't know anything for sure, we'd better let God tell us the right answers! And He does that through the church. This

motivation is particularly clear in Charron, who was a Catholic theologian and polemicist. But Montaigne, too, who was neither of these things, used skepticism as a rationale for conservatism in religion. Second, these authors saw skepticism as a way to end violent conflict. By undermining people's feelings of self-righteous certainty, they hoped to persuade them to stop rioting and fighting wars on the basis of those feelings. I've already mentioned Montaigne's line about roasting people twice, so here is another quotation to the same effect: "there is a great deal of self-love and arrogance in judging so highly of your opinions that you are obliged to disturb the public peace in order to establish them" (1.23). When he mocks dogmatists, telling them for instance, "you boast that you are the one who has found the lucky bean in your festive pudding" (2.12), the rhetoric is intended to puncture the sort of confidence that led to the schismatic and disruptive teachings of the Reformation.

A third figure is often grouped together with Montaigne and Charron as belonging to a skeptical moment around the turn of the seventeenth century. But this philosopher, Francisco Sanches, seems to me to have arrived at his skeptical conclusions via a different path. This despite the fact that he studied at the College du Guyenne in Bordeaux, the same institution where Montaigne studied. Sanches' life began in Braga, near the border between Spain and Portugal, but he moved to Bordeaux with his family as a child and his education and career unfolded in France and Italy. Trained in philosophy and medicine, he held professorial chairs in both fields at the University of Toulouse. So what caused him to lose his confidence in the possibility of attaining knowledge? For an answer we must turn to his remarkable treatise *Quod nihil scitur*, meaning *That Nothing Is Known*.[16]

As its title suggests, the treatise is almost entirely destructive in intent, and presents a searching critique of scholastic theories of knowledge. In wave after wave of argument, Sanches charges the schoolmen with being doubly ignorant, because (in contrast to Socrates) they do not even understand that they lack understanding (184). Unlike Montaigne, whose skeptical arguments have a sweeping generality borrowed from Pyrrhonism, Sanches—who doesn't seem to have made use of Sextus at all—focuses on demolishing the specifically Aristotelian conceptions of knowledge that he knew so well thanks to his own education. Definitions are the foundation of Aristotelian science, so Sanches tries to undermine the whole project by denying that any term can be defined with full adequacy. This is because

any definition will itself consist of terms that stand in need of further definition, a regress that will never end (175). As a result, language itself lies beyond our certain grasp, meaning that the audience of Sanches' very book cannot be sure that they understand what they are reading (240). In a nice move, he adds that the term "knowledge" itself cannot be satisfactorily defined (178), which by itself will undermine any claim to know anything. How can you be sure you have knowledge, if you aren't even sure what knowledge is?

The same style of refutation is also applied to Aristotelian theories of proof. Any syllogism will consist of premises that would need to be justified by further premises, and again, we will never reach a starting point that is just obvious (181). Likewise, Aristotelians think we understand natural phenomena in light of their causes, but when we follow the chain of causes we will never get to anything that isn't itself caused, unless this is God. It is, however, agreed that God is unknowable, so we can't end the explanatory regress that way either (195–96, 206, 239). Not infrequently, Sanches adopts a sarcastic tone, as when he demands of the scholastics who always appeal to indubitable first principles, "well, send them to me!" (212).

While Sanches' treatise is remarkable for the power and cogency of its arguments, it is not unprecedented in the period we've been studying. Humanists like Valla and Vives had unleashed similar torrents of invective and refutation against the scholastics. But Sanches seems to be working toward something other than a rhetoric-based, humanist methodology. This becomes clear at the end of the treatise, where he merely gestures at a more positive approach to epistemology. Earlier in the work, he has claimed that "all understanding is derived from the senses, and beyond this kind of understanding, all is confusion, doubt, perplexity, guesswork, nothing is certain" (236). This could be a step toward a general skeptical conclusion, given that, as Sanches also mentions, sense experience is subject to illusions and misperceptions, like the famous straight stick that looks bent in water (247–48). Furthermore, it seems that he does not think sensation could be used to attain perfectly certain knowledge, the ambition so fondly pursued by the scholastics.

But as he concludes his book, Sanches alludes to an ambition of his own. He would like to "establish a kind of scientific knowledge that is both sound and as easy as possible to attain" (290). It would be based not on the

chimeras and fictions of Aristotelian science, but on things as they really are (*non vero chimaeris et fictionibus a rei veritate alienis*). Unfortunately, having gone on for more than a hundred pages about the scholastics' failed epistemology, Sanches does not see fit to say anything more about this epistemology that he thinks *would* work. He simply says he will devote a further treatise to it, and there is no sign he ever made good on that promise. But given his earlier words about sense experience, we can assume his new science would be grounded in empirical inquiry. If so, he may well have taken this idea from his medical training, even from the antique "Empiricist" school of medicine that he would have known through descriptions found in Galen.[17] Sanches' science would surely be modest in its pretensions. It would not pretend to be an irrefutable body of conclusions tracable to indubitable first principles, but present a cautious account of things as they seem to be, always open to improvement.

So it turns out that none of our three skeptics was really a skeptic, in the sense of suspending judgment about everything. They were willing to make judgments in the ethical and scientific realms, while bearing in mind that they might need to revise these judgments later. Indeed, Montaigne seems to have downright expected to revise his judgments and feel conflicted about them. Hence one of the quotable remarks I mentioned at the beginning of the last chapter: "there is as much difference between us and ourselves as there is between us and other people" (2.1). But for Charron, at least, an embrace of one's own fallibility could be compatible with accepting the infallibility of the Pope. In the time of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, even skepticism was weaponized to fight for dogmatism.

# 36

# THE TENTH MUSE

## *Marie le Jars de Gournay*

Philosophers nowadays talk about "epistemic injustice," which occurs when people are unfairly taken to lack authority as sources of knowledge. Miranda Fricker, who wrote the book that introduced the term, gives the example of women in corporate settings whose ideas and suggestions are seen as less credible, simply because they are women. Fricker tells of one executive who, "when she is at a meeting and wants to make a suggestion about policy, actually writes down the suggestion on a little piece of paper, surreptitiously passes it to a sympathetic male colleague, has him make the suggestion, watches it be well received, and then joins in the discussion from there."[1] Women living before the age of the multinational corporation were already well aware of the phenomenon, even if they didn't have a name for it. One of the earliest clear statements of epistemic injustice I know is found in the work of Marie le Jars de Gournay. She notes that even a woman with the "wit of Carneades"—a leading skeptical philosopher of antiquity—will be ignored in conversation with a man. "With merely a smile or some slight shaking of his head, his mute eloquence pronounces, 'it's a woman speaking.'"[2]

This passage actually occurs in two works by Gournay. It may be found in *The Ladies' Complaint*, which along with her *Equality of Men and Women* and *Apology for the Woman Writing*—all published in the 1641 edition of her collected works—established Gournay as a pioneering

feminist. But its appearance there is a bit of recycling on her part, because the remark was first made in the lengthy preface to her 1595 edition of Montaigne's *Essays*.[3] With the blessing of Montaigne's widow, Gournay included additional material beyond that found in earlier editions. Her expanded version was the standard one used until 1802, when scholars began to prefer the earlier, 1588 edition augmented by Montaigne's handwritten notes.[4] Arguably, this downgrading of Gournay's edition was itself a case of epistemic injustice, since she knew Montaigne well and might reasonably be taken to be an authoritative source of knowledge on his thought and on the text of the *Essays*.

This same aspect of Gournay's literary career makes her pioneering in another sense. She should certainly not be reduced to a mere follower and literary executor of Montaigne; her collected works are more than a thousand pages long, and range widely in terms of topic and genre.[5] But she does give us our first example of a type that will become increasingly familiar as we move forward in history, the female philosopher whose renown is secured primarily by being linked to a famous male philosopher. Later examples will include Elisabeth of Bohemia and Queen Sophie Charlotte of Hanover, best known to historians of philosophy for their correspondence with Descartes and Leibniz, respectively. This is something we haven't really seen before, unless you count family relations like Macrina, the sister of Gregory of Nyssa. We did find women humanists of the Italian Renaissance deliberately seeking to associate themselves with prominent male humanists, with mixed success. In one case, Isotta Nogarola was upset when Guarino Guarini ignored a letter she sent him, and when she complained, had to put up with Guarini chastizing her for taking the snub so badly instead of displaying a "manly soul."[6]

Gournay was considerably more successful in getting people to think of her when they thought of Montaigne. Their friendship began after her reading of the *Essays* in 1582, when she was not yet twenty years old. Looking back, she said that the book sent her "into ecstasy" (*Pref*. 27). It affected her so deeply that her mother offered her a sedative! Determined to meet the author of this magnificent work, Gournay made contact with Montaigne and visited him in Paris, later hosting him for several months in Picardy. She became his adoptive daughter, something she underscores in the *Preface*, constantly referring to him as "her father." She is keen for the

reader to understand that their closeness makes her a unique authority on Montaigne. “I alone,” she proclaims, “was perfectly acquainted with that great soul.” Thus she can, for example, settle the controversy as to his views on religion (*Pref*. 55). Writing the *Preface* after Montaigne’s death, Gournay’s admiration for him remains undimmed. She says, “the language of the *Essays* never wearies the reader, except when it ceases, and everything about it is perfect but its coming to an end” (*Pref*. 459), and proudly quotes the praise lavished on the book by Lipsius, adding that “the *Essays* were a match for him: he imparting, they deserving, the greatest honor” (*Pref*. 27–29).

Gournay herself would acquire a more mixed reputation. Lipsius, with whom she exchanged correspondence, praised her too, using the already well-worn trope that her intelligence exceeded the normal bounds of womankind: “is it possible that so keen an understanding and so solid a judgment, not to speak of such wisdom and knowledge, can be found in one of your sex and in such times as these?”[7] She was called the “tenth muse” and, after her death, eulogized as both daughter to Montaigne and sister to Lipsius. But she was also the target of satirical mockery, as in a 1610 work called simply the *Anti-Gournay*. At one point pranksters tricked her into thinking that the King of England was soliciting an autobiography and portrait from her. Gournay, not the sort to take such treatment with good humor, sued them.

In the end, though, it was the esteem of Montaigne that would have meant the most to her. And this she certainly had, to judge by a passage added to the original version of the *Essays*. In it, Montaigne calls Gournay “my covenant daughter, whom I love indeed more than a daughter of my own, and cherish in my retirement and solitude as one of the best parts of my own being. She is the only person I still think about in this world. If youthful promise means anything, her soul will some day be capable of the finest things, among others of perfection in that most sacred kind of friendship which, so we read, her sex has not yet been able to attain” (*Essays* 2.17). Note here the echo of Montaigne’s attitude toward his brilliantly promising friend La Boétie, a parallel Gournay herself draws explicitly in the *Preface* (99). The insertion in the *Essays* is under a cloud of suspicion, though. Scholars are unsure whether Gournay herself may have added it, to burnish her own reputation. This would be consistent with what has been termed “her readiness to convert his appreciation of her into a

vehicle for self-promotion."[8] And she did on occasion engage in literary subterfuge, as when she published a revised version of the works of the Pléiade poet Pierre Ronsard, in which corrections of her own were presented as stemming from Ronsard himself.

Perhaps Gournay saw herself as being so close to the mind of Montaigne that it didn't make much difference which of them wrote something. She said that "I cannot take a step, whether in writing or speaking, without finding myself in his footsteps; and I believe that I am often supposed to take his place (*que je l'usurpe*)" (*Pref.* 85). Many of his habits as a writer also become hers. Like the *Essays*, the writings of Gournay indulge in self-conscious digressions followed by announcements that she is getting back to the topic at hand (e.g. *Pref.* 73, 87, *MG* 122). She defends Montaigne's focus on his own personality and his quest for virtue, saying of his critics, "it seems to them that the science of living is so easy that one is foolish in deigning to publish the practice of it" (*Pref.* 75). Her artful self-presentation as an author also recalls Montaigne. If anything, she is even more concerned about her reputation, since as she puts it, "to be unknown is, in a way, not to be" (*Pref.* 91). At a philosophical level, she adopts his use of skeptical strategies. She says, as he had, that outlandish stories should not be rejected, only treated as "unproven" (*Pref.* 73). Gournay even doubts her own worth, since integrity is often doubtful in other people; only Montaigne's admiration for her makes her confident that she must be deserving of that esteem (*Pref.* 65).

Gournay also deploys skeptical strategies in arguing for the equality of the sexes.[9] Montaigne argued in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (*Essays* 2.12) that there is no obvious hierarchy between different knowers. We find different perspectives being adopted by the same person at different times, by people of different cultures, and even by animals as opposed to humans. Who are we to say which perspective is the best? You can see how this line of thought could be a bulwark against epistemic injustice, and Gournay used it in exactly that way. The man who just smiles condescendingly at the views of a woman is, we might say, failing to realize that her perspective is on a par with his.

Since Gournay was a feminist who claimed to carry on the legacy of Montaigne, it would have been welcome to her if Montaigne had seen the feminist implications of his own philosophy. She was convinced that he did, mostly on the strength of a passage in which Montaigne wrote that "male

and female are cast in the same mold: save for education and custom the difference between them is not great" (*Essays* 3.5, cf. *MG* 82). As we'll see shortly, this idea is unfolded at length in Gournay's own writings on the equality of women. In the same passage, Montaigne cites Plato as an upholder of gender equality, something also found in Gournay (*MG* 76). Unfortunately though, Montaigne's views on this topic were more ambivalent than she would like to admit. He dedicated one of his essays (2.35) to recounting tales of virtuous women, but all the examples that come to his mind are women who killed themselves for their husbands. Elsewhere, he states that women are weak in reasoning: "they allow themselves to be led to where natural impressions act most alone, like animals" (*Essays* 2.8). In a passage that would be a blow to Gournay's claims to have shared an intimacy with Montaigne like that he had with La Boétie, Montaigne says that whereas women have beauty, it is men who have reason, wisdom, and loving friendship: "that is why they are in charge of world affairs" (*Essays* 3.3).

So in adopting a thoroughly egalitarian view of the sexes, Gournay was going well beyond Montaigne, or perhaps saying what Montaigne would have said if he had been more consistent in his epistemic egalitarianism. (After all, if even non-human animals have a valid point of view on the world, then surely so do women.) It's worth stressing that Gournay does indeed argue for the *equality* of the sexes, and not for the *superiority* of women.[10] The more provocative move of claiming superiority was made by some women authors of this period, like Lucrezia Marinella, an almost exact contemporary of Gournay's (Marinella was born in 1571 and died in 1653, while Gournay lived from 1565 to 1645). But Gournay says, again ringing bells that might have sounded in Montaigne's tower, "I avoid all extremes, and am content to make [women] equal to men" (*MG* 75).

Her interest in gender and the relationship between the sexes is already evident in an early work, a narrative called the *Promenade of Monsieur de Montaigne*. It was published the year before her edition of the *Essays*, and claims to be a written version of a story she used to delight Montaigne when he was visiting with her. Again, Gournay is taking license for literary purposes here. In fact the story was likely written after his death, and is based on a story by another author named Claude de Taillemont. With what I take to be ironically obvious disingenuousness, she says in her dedication of the work to Montaigne that she has taken the material from another book,

but can't quite remember the title or author of her source. The main thing is that her own tale is indeed original: "I prefer to be empty rather than full of debts" (*MG* 30). Without going into the complex details of the story here, it may suffice to say that the heroine is pursued by two male lovers, and that Gournay uses this plot to show how women are seen as "conquests" by men (*MG* 45) and unfairly treated, if not abused, by faithless and cynical suitors. As in her *Preface* to the *Essays*, she digresses to defend the idea that women should be taken seriously as intellectuals. Philosophy will lead them to virtue, not wantonness (53), even if it may make them unconventional in their way of life. Presumably thinking of herself, she writes that "great intellects always stray from the beaten path, the more so because they have persuaded themselves that what is straying, according to custom, is submission to reason" (*MG* 55). The distance she takes here from custom again recalls the skeptical attitudes she shares with Montaigne.[11]

What appears as a digression in the *Promenade* takes center stage in Gournay's *The Equality of Men and Women*. Written for Anne of Austria, wife of the French king Louis XIII, it first appeared in 1622 but was revised and expanded thereafter, just as Montaigne did with his *Essays* and Gournay did with a number of her other works. She admits that women are often in practice inferior to men, but this (as Montaigne said in that one "feminist" passage) is due to the poor education they are offered (*MG* 81, cf. 132). In fact, as she observes elsewhere, educated women like herself may have to hide their learning, because society frowns on it (*MG* 124). That's another observation that would fit right in with Fricker's discussion of epistemic injustice, as with the executive who had to disclaim authorship of her ideas to get them taken seriously. Gournay furthermore argues that women should be placed on a par with men in political and religious contexts. She criticizes the Salic law, which as we've seen prevented women from inheriting the throne (*MG* 84), and recommends that women should be allowed to perform the sacraments as male priests do (*MG* 91), advice the Catholic Church is still declining to take today, about four hundred years after she wrote. Not that Gournay was tempted by Protestantism. In this work she responds to the claim that women cannot understand Scripture by saying that men can't either (*MG* 91), which of course would undercut the whole Lutheran and Calvinist program.

Philosophically, though, the heart of Gournay's case is that women and men share the same nature. As she puts it, "the human animal, taken rightly,

is neither man nor woman, the sexes having been made double, not so as to constitute a difference in species, but for the sake of propagation alone… There is nothing more like a tomcat on a windowsill than a female cat. Man and woman are so thoroughly one that if man is more than woman, woman is more than man." (*MG* 86–87). Here Gournay is relying on a truism of Aristotelian thought: biologically speaking, both men and women belong to the same species, and sex is merely accidental to them as humans. When combined with the point familiar from Montaigne, that there is great variation within each type of creature, Gournay can infer that the potential capacities that come along with membership of the human species are realized to different degrees by different individuals. This undermines an widespread assumption of her day that she mentions in her preface to the *Essays*, namely that even the best of women will be only as great as the least of men (*Pref*. 69).

In the opinion of Lipsius, apparently of Montaigne, and most definitely of Gournay herself, Gournay did count among the best of women. But she was ready to recognize that she had equals. She belonged to the entourage of Marguerite of Valois, who is not to be confused with Marguerite of Navarre. Though you could be forgiven for being confused, because this Marguerite was *also* a queen of Navarre, and then queen of France no less. She presided over a literary salon in the early seventeenth century, of which Gournay was a regular member.[12] Gournay also engaged in learned correspondence of the type we discussed when looking at the later French humanists Scaliger and Casaubon. In particular, we have an interesting exchange of letters between her and another prominent woman of the day, the much younger Anna Maria van Schurman, who did not die until 1678. Schurman was a Protestant who was in touch with many leading intellectuals. As pointed out in an article devoted to her correspondence with Gournay, this illustrates how women participated in the early phase of the European "republic of letters."[13]

Not content with being Montaigne's symbolic daughter and Lipsius' symbolic sister, Gournay offers when writing to Schurman to serve as "mother" to her. (By this logic Schurman would, I suppose, be Montaigne's intellectual granddaughter.) Gournay is not shy in lavishing praise upon her, and compares her to the comet or "new star" seen in the night sky by Tycho Brahe. Schurman returned the favor, writing a poem about the elder woman of letters, in which she praised her as a "strong defender of the cause of our

sex.” But they didn’t quite see eye to eye on what it meant to be a woman of letters. Gournay gently criticized Shurman for spending too much time on learning ancient languages. Be wary of devoting too much effort to Latin and Greek, she advised, and don’t worry about Hebrew at all: “languages take an inordinate and too long a time for a mind as capable of matters, and of the best, as yours.”[14] She would later give even more radical advice to the future king Louis XIII, saying he should not even bother with Greek and Latin, since everything worth reading was now available in French. These passages may indicate a receding of humanist ambitions from the highpoint of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As French vernacular literatures advanced and more translations were made, mastery of classical languages became less vital. Perhaps, though, there is also a subtle anti-Protestant agenda in discouraging Schurman from the study of Hebrew. As we saw her saying already, Scripture is not something individual believers should be confident of understanding.

As we can see from these developments, and from the dates of her publications, Marie de Gournay has brought us well into the seventeenth century. It obviously made sense to discuss her here following on from Montaigne. Equally obviously, we are not done with the age of Reformation. We’ve dealt with central Europe and the Low Countries, and this look at Gournay has rounded off our tour of Renaissance France. But there is another region that still needs our attention, if we’re going to understand how the Reformation was taken up by intellectuals around Europe in the sixteenth century. It’s a place whose most famous son, at least from this period and maybe from any period, called a “sceptered isle.” The phrase comes from a passage in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, which calls the inhabitants of this island a “happy breed.” How happy they were to be living through this time of conflict and uncertainty, though, is rather doubtful.

# PART III

# ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

# 37

# GOD'S IS THE QUARREL

## *The English Reformation*

Just how intense was the ideological disagreement in sixteenth-century Britian? Well, consider the affair of the Queen's candlesticks. They adorned Elizabeth I's private chapel, along with a cross, which seems harmless enough. But some reformers saw this as an unacceptable gesture in the direction of Catholic pageantry: these candles smelled not of potpourri, but of popery. At least four times, the offending decorations were defaced or knocked over by outraged individuals who were putting the "protest" into "Protestantism." Unfazed, Elizabeth simply had them replaced. A small enough episode, but as I say, this was an age in which small things mattered. Passionate conflicts were pursued over such apparent trivia as the vestments worn by priests, whether the host should be lifted into the air before administering the eucharistic communion, and whether the person receiving it should kneel. As for such theological issues as the exact mechanics of the Eucharist or the way in which God offers salvation to humankind, these were considered far from trivial. In defense of their preferred answers to these questions, people were willing to languish for months or years in prison, to die an agonizing death by being burnt at the stake, and of course to inflict these punishments on their fellow Christians. The general mood was that extremism in the cause of piety was no vice. Even those who considered themselves "moderate," like Elizabeth herself, inflicted savage punishments on those they considered dangerously radical.

None of this was unique to England, as we know from having discussed the Peasants' Revolt, the religious wars in the Low Countries, and the St. Barthlomew's Day Massacre in France. But the development of the Reformation in Britain was unique, and created a unique context for philosophy in the British Isles through the sixteenth century and beyond.[1] The story actually begins well before the rise of Luther and Calvin, with the late fourteenth-century Englishman John Wyclif, who inspired the so-called "Lollard" movement.[2] (The name was probably an insult, indicating that Lollardy was so much nonsensical babble.) The Lollards anticipated the Reformation, rejecting the authority of the established church and questioning the efficacy of its sacraments. Even opponents of the Lollards, like the bishop Reginald Pecock, made a strident case for reform in fifteenth-century England. His writings were aimed at the lay public and sought to "invigorate Christian society as a whole" by "training each individual in theology, moral philosophy, and rational modes of thought."[3] It would be natural to assume, then, that when the ideas of Luther made their way to England, they fell upon fertile soil and so easily took root.

Scholars are, however, divided about the relevance of Lollardy to the success of the Reformation in England. On the one hand, regions of Lollard activity were often areas where popular Protestantism flourished. On the other hand, Lollardy was greatly weakened by the early sixteenth century, and the earliest Protestant leaders in England did not have a Lollard background. For our interests, it's worth mentioning that one of those leaders, Robert Barnes, was a member of an early group of Protestant sympathizers, derided as "Little Germany," who met at the White House Inn in Cambridge. As we'll be seeing, the universities at Oxford and Cambridge were central in the English Reformation, just one of many reasons that the history of philosophy and religion in this period were inextricably intertwined.

If Lollardy wasn't the driving force for reform in England, then what was? One obvious answer would be that Henry VIII wanted to get divorced, and the Pope wouldn't let him. You may well have learned all about this in high school, or in Hilary Mantel's brilliant novels about Henry's fixer Thomas Cromwell. But just in case, here's a quick refresher. Henry was wedded to Catherine, his brother's widow. When he tired of her and the fact that she hadn't given him a male heir, he fixed his eye on Anne Boleyn. He tried to get his marriage dissolved on the grounds that it was illegitimate to

marry one's own sister-in-law, but the Pope refused to grant this request, leading to a split from the church. This familiar story suggests that Henry's motives were entirely cynical and breathtakingly self-interested. But there were issues of greater import here than who would be sharing the King's bedroom.

Ecclesiastical and secular power had been competing with one another throughout the medieval period. In step with his changing romantic affections, Henry's ideas about this long-standing issue evolved. He came to think that, as monarch, it was he and not the Pope who was the supreme religious authority for his people. During his reign, the difference between political sedition and unacceptable religious teaching became blurred, then erased all together. The power of the crown was used to burn both books and heretics, and the question of what good Christians should believe had an answer that was in a sense constantly evolving and in a sense always the same: they should believe whatever the King did. Having been selected by God to lead his people, Henry saw himself not as the amateur theologian he in fact was, but as the rightful arbiter of religious doctrine.

His views, and thus the "correct" views, shifted in response to such varied factors as papal intransigence, pushback from Parliament, and the influence of Anne Boleyn, who had grown up in the French court and helped to import the reformist agenda of the circle of Lefèvre d'Étaples. (Indeed, a recent book about Henry and Anne describes her religious stance as "Lefèvrist."[4]) The upshot was a kind of compromise. Papal authority was rejected and fundamental aspects of English religion like monasteries and pilgrimage were eliminated, a massive upheaval for the life of ordinary believers. Yet many features of Catholic practice were retained, ranging from liturgical details to fundamental doctrine. Notably, Henry was firmly convinced of the real presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. He also believed that good works and human effort were needed to achieve salvation, rather than accepting the Lutheran concept of justification by faith alone.

There was a serious downside to making the monarch's views definitive in this way, even aside from the fact that a given king might turn out to be a capricious megalomaniac like Henry. Monarchs die, and their replacements are selected by a combination of blind luck and warfare. So Henry's religious revolution could have been followed by a further push in the direction of Protestantism, a return to the Catholic fold, or an attempt to

solidify his arguably rather muddled middle position. In the event, all three of these things happened, and in that order. He was succeeded in 1547 by Edward VI. Since Edward was a Protestant who was happy to move the country even more decisively away from the Church of Rome, the party of reform continued to think it quite right that royal and religious authority should be fused together. Then suddenly, this came to seem like a much worse policy. Edward died young in 1553 and was followed by Mary, the Catholic daughter of Henry and his first wife, Catherine. Persecution was now directed against Protestants instead of Catholics, with a new raft of books placed on the banned list, and almost three hundred martyrs burnt during her reign. Some Protestants found this grimly satisfying. Instead of wringing their hands at the unpredictable and inadequate reforms approved by Protestant monarchs, they could now revel in the more familiar and morally gratifying role of innocent victims. One of them, John Scory, exulted that "banishments, gallows, fires, and the cruelty of tyrants are again restored to the Church!"[5]

But not for long. Mary reigned for only about as long as Edward had. When she died in 1558, Elizabeth ascended to the throne, where she would remain for the rest of the century and beyond, dying only in 1603. This was an opportunity for Protestantism to become entrenched, though not without plenty of further violence and disputation. At first Elizabeth was relatively tolerant of religious conservatives, if only to avoid picking fights with them, and more importantly with foreign Catholic powers, especially Spain. Then, too, as the story of the candlesticks shows, she was herself something of a conservative Protestant, though the really distinctive feature of her religious convictions was a tactical reluctance to reveal what exactly they might be. Then, in a misguided attempt to support a Catholic uprising against her rule, the sitting Pope excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570, declaring that as far as he was concerned no one owed her obedience anymore. This was, at best, unhelpful for Catholics in England, as it reinforced the notion that they were seditious traitors. Again, the line between religious and political dissent was being erased.

Yet Elizabeth also needed to hold the line against more radical Protestant movements.[6] These included the Presbyterians, who wanted to eliminate the hierarchical structure of the Church of England, a leftover from Catholicism. And then there were the Puritans. This term, like "Lollard," originated as an unflattering description, in this case applied to those who

wanted to strip churches of their last decorations—no more candlesticks!—and make official doctrine conform to the more radical ideas circulating on the Continent. The Puritans were disdainful of Elizabeth's middle path, which they called "neither hot nor cold," and considered the English Reformation to be a job that was at best half done. Elizabeth turned the weapons of state oppression against them, so that both Catholics and radical Protestants were in danger during her reign. We see a phenomenon here that has survived into our own age: the English suspicion of all things European. This had been a problem for Mary, who could win support for the return of traditional rituals, but found precious little enthusiasm for obedience to the Pope. On the other side, the Puritans were resented for their self-righteousness and disruption of popular religious practices. As one saying had it, the Puritan was one who "loves God with all his soul, but hates his neighbor with all his heart."[7]

Perhaps no single intellectual of the age represented the middle ground between Catholicism and Puritanism, which would come to define "Anglicanism," so well as Thomas Cranmer.[8] His story also demonstrates how treacherous were the shifting sands of sixteenth-century England. In 1532 Cranmer was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury by Henry VIII. This came as a surprise to just about everyone, not least Cranmer himself. Previously he'd been a relatively obscure theologian at Cambridge University. He duly performed the service expected of him by dissolving the King's marriage. Cranmer then led the effort to shape church doctrine under Henry and Edward. He was entirely on board with ascribing religious authority to the King, writing in a letter to Henry, "your Grace, of very right and by God's law, is the supreme head of this Church of England, next immediately unto God" (23). But the aforementioned irony, that royal supremacy could be used to reassert Roman Catholicism just as much as to abolish it, was for Cranmer a fatal one. When Mary came to the throne, he was at the top of the list of reformers who needed to be cast down and punished. Cranmer tried to save his life by agreeing to abjure his previous teachings in writing. When he was sentenced to execution nonetheless, he staged a dramatic recantation on the scaffold, declaring: "asmuch as my hand offended, writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished therefore: for may I come to the fire, it shall be first burned" (155). He then thrust his own hand into the flames, a scene made iconic by its description in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

That's the version of Cranmer's career that you'd see in a Hollywood film. But this being instead a book about the history of philosophy, we should attend to the more subtle tensions and shifts in his thought, as he considered to what extent Lutheranism and Calvinism should be imported into England. When I say "imported," I mean it quite literally. In Henry's reign, Protestant literature was at first forbidden and had to be smuggled into the country after being printed abroad in places like Worms and Antwerp. The presses of both cities churned out copies of works by William Tyndale, responsible for a new English version of the Bible that was strongly influenced by Luther.[9] Cranmer himself spent time abroad, and wound up marrying the niece of Andreas Osiander; you'll remember him as the one who tried to "defend" Copernicus by saying that his new system was merely a hypothesis. Cranmer brought his new wife back to England, but had to send her into exile after Henry came to reject the idea that priests could take wives. (Given Henry's track record, perhaps he just wanted to keep them available so he could marry them himself.) This policy notwithstanding, leading reformers immigrated to enjoy the welcoming embrace of England. Peter Martyr Vermigli arrived in 1547 and became a Professor of Divinity at Oxford, where he engaged in disputations over the Eucharist, attacking the doctrine of real presence. Two years later, Martin Bucer came from Strasbourg at the invitation of Cranmer, and took a professorship at Cambridge.[10] He spent the last two years of his life there, conducting disputations of his own in which he defended the Protestant view on grace and justification.

Despite Cranmer's unflinching support for royal leadership of the church, he was often at odds with Henry on points of doctrine. He, like Bucer, accepted the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone, whereas the King was, as already mentioned, inclined to think that we can merit salvation through good works. Henry's rationale was the usual and obvious one: people need to be encouraged to behave well, not just hope that God will save them without their deserving it. Cranmer responded by stressing Luther's point that true faith always gives rise to good works. Grace and justification are not given as a reward for morally excellent behavior. On the contrary, such behavior is a kind of symptom and result of God's grace.

Another tension between Cranmer and Henry concerned the question of the Eucharist. Whereas the King believed in the real presence of Christ in

the communion, Cranmer came to accept the "sacramentalist" view that the physical bread and wine are only, as he put it, "sensible signs and tokens" (125).[11] In support of this theological position, he provided philosophical arguments, especially in a debate with the more theologically conservative Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner. There is, argued Cranmer, a fundamental metaphysical difference between spiritual and physical reality. So if the effect of the communion is meant to be spiritual, then it does not need to involve a physical change of bread into flesh. He also added a nice point about the way we use words: when Christ shared out bread to his disciples and said "this is my body," he was simply bestowing a title on it, as when people call Cranmer and Gardiner "Canterbury" and "Winchester" in light of their position as bishops (141).

In another passage from this debate, Cranmer sought to put Gardiner in his proper place, namely a subordinate one. Alluding to his opponent's training as a lawyer rather than a theologian, Cranmer suggested that Gardiner should submit to the authority of those with more expertise. Like Cranmer himself, for instance, who had earned the right to determine true doctrine for himself: "I, having exercised myself in the study of scripture and divinity from my youth, have learned now to go alone" (139). Despite Luther's talk of the "priesthood of all believers," we've seen repeatedly that leading reformers were quite happy to tell everyone else what to believe. This was often justified on humanist grounds: I know Hebrew and Greek, you don't, so you should listen to me when I tell you the meaning of the Scriptures. In the passage just quoted, Cranmer doesn't flaunt knowledge of ancient languages. But he does something similar, asserting his prerogative as a specialist to think for himself, even where his determinations departed dramatically from centuries' worth of tradition.

His deliberations issued in the English Book of Common Prayer, published in 1549 and again in a revision of 1552. Cranmer had a leading role in its composition, and it is the most lasting statement of his mature theology. It offers a wholehearted endorsement of the reform agenda, especially in the second edition. One historian has written of the Book of Common Prayer that it did away with "almost everything that had till then been central to lay eucharistic piety."[12] Yet the Book also argues for retaining some traditional church practices, on the grounds that "without some ceremonies, it is not possible to keep any order, or quiet discipline in the church" (86). Some disagreed. When I mentioned at the start of this

chapter that there were even conflicts over what priests wore in church, I had in mind John Hooper, who complained about the 1552 version of the Book because it allowed the priest to wear traditional vestments.[13] There was no Scriptural support for such a symbolic assertion of hierarchy; in vain would you search the Bible for a passage reading "no shirt, no shoes, no service." And by wearing distinctive ceremonial garb, the priests were separating themselves from the laity.

The fact that Cranmer was willing to defend such practices shows that in a way he too was a conservative. He was willing to overturn customs and institutions that seemed problematic to him, and there were plenty of those, ranging from details of the Mass to monasteries and pilgrimages. But other features of traditional religion could be kept, because they were "indifferent," that is, neither required by God's revelation nor inconsistent with it. The same justification was later given by theologians in the time of Elizabeth, when they concluded their disputation over those candlesticks by somewhat grudgingly admitting that it didn't really matter whether they stood in her chapel. A more momentous example was an episode involving John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury under Elizabeth as of 1583. Against the Presbyterians, he defended the structure of the Church of England, with its ranked layers of bishops, priests, and deacons. This on the grounds that no one arrangement is prescribed in Scripture, so that any practically effective solution would be acceptable. Yet any such appeal to the "indifference" of certain matters was rejected by more radical Protestants. For them, Scripture should be followed to the letter in all things. Everything that wasn't right was wrong.

The second edition of the Book of Common Prayer from 1552 would turn out to mark the limit of established reform in England. Those who wanted a more thorough divestment (in Hooper's case, quite literally) of Catholic customs would continue to see the changes in religious practice as being inadequate. Modern historians have given explanations for the incomplete elimination of the old traditions. They have argued that, far from being fertile ground, prepared by the Lollards for religious revolution, late medieval England actually had a thriving and successful Catholic culture. People were not crying out for change, and there was no equivalent of the Peasants' Revolt in sixteenth-century England. Rather, change was imposed from above, in a so-called "magisterial" Reformation. Furthermore, because Catholicism enjoyed broad acceptance, it died only

slowly. The wider population might be ready to ditch the Pope, a distant figure to whom they owed little or no devotion. But they clung to the customs and rituals that structured their lives and provided familiar spiritual comforts. Scholars thus admit that "historians now cannot decide when the Reformation occurred,"[14] and that by the end of the century English "churchgoers were de-Catholicised but un-Protestantised. What they were not is a good deal clearer than what they were."[15] Maybe what they were, most of all, was confused. They might well have appreciated the summary of the Reformation found in a classic book spoofing literary history, called *From Beowulf to Virginia Woolf*: "throughout the middle ages England had been Roman Catholic, but with Henry's divorce she became Christian, although the French still obstinately believed in God and remained Catholic."

We can leave it to the less satirical historians to debate the question of whether the Reformation in England was fast or slow. But given our interest in the history of philosophy, we should at least note that the contrast between a "top down" and "bottom up" Reformation—imposed by political elites or demanded by the masses—leaves something out. A crucial role was played by a group in the middle, the university-trained philosophers and theologians.[16] Radical intellectuals were smuggling books into England and daring to form Protestant discussion groups well before Henry decided that Roman Catholicism was an impediment to his romantic designs. Even the clerics who were closest to political power were independent-minded and pushed back against royal religious dictates. We've seen that Cranmer did so while serving Henry. From the reign of Elizabeth, we might mention another Archbishop of Canterbury, Edmund Grindal. He defied the Queen in order to defend the practice of "prophesying," in which popular preachers worked to convert audiences to a more rigorous form of Protestantism. Grindal advised the Queen to be careful in exercising her authority over such religious affairs. She should not "pronounce too resolutely and peremptorily" as would be appropriate "in civil and extern matters."[17] Famously, he then added, "I choose rather to offend your earthly Majesty than to offend the heavenly majesty of God." Elizabeth was indeed offended, and he was stripped of his office.

From the case of Grindal, and in fact pretty much everything else I've covered in this chapter, we can see how contested was the relation between

state and religious power in this era. We often think of the "divine right of kings" as a medieval idea. But it was here in the sixteenth century that a king dared to say that, having been selected to rule by God, he could replace the Pope as the highest religious authority. (Indeed, the Calvinist thinker Theodore Beza commented wryly of England: "the papacy was never abolished in that country, but rather transferred to the sovereign." This in a 1566 letter written to his colleague Bullinger.) A result we've already identified, that heresy came to be treated as a form of treason, would have long-running implications for freedom of thought. Further philosophical issues were explored in connection to the debates over the Eucharist and justification by faith alone. Is it possible for bread to turn into another substance while retaining its sensible properties? If good works do not justify, what role is left for free will and moral responsibility?

I won't belabor these now familiar points, but would instead like to highlight a couple of other philosophical topics that became salient in the English Reformation. First, the question of authenticity and belief. In this period, people spoke of "Nicodemism," a reference to the Biblical figure Nicodemus, a Jewish leader who was only willing to speak to Jesus in secret at night (John 3:1–2). Nicodemism was the practice of hiding true religious convictions out of fear of persecution. Elizabeth herself could be accused of this, given her reticence to make her own views known both before and after she became Queen. But the charge could be aimed at wide swaths of the population. Protestant rule failed for decades to eradicate sympathy for Catholicism, but understandably, few people were ready to burn at the stake in the name of that sympathy. The Spanish ambassador and bishop, Álvaro de Quadra, spoke out against this hypocrisy, saying that "it is far better to suffer most bitter cruelties than to give the least sign of consent to such wicked and abominable rites,"[18] by which he meant Protestant services. Similarly the Oxford academic Robert Persons, a Catholic sympathizer, thought that one should not agree to go to a Protestant church just to avoid trouble.

A similarly strict line was taken by Protestants. We saw how Calvin advised his French supporters to go into exile rather than pretend to be good Catholics. During the persecution of Protestants under Mary Tudor, many English reformers did just that. When Protestantism returned, its theologians thought that many people were still playing it safe. William Perkins, for instance, enjoined the faithful not just to parrot religious truths

but to "apply them inwardly to your hearts and consciences, and outwardly to your lives and conversation. This is the very point in which we fail."[19] So similar were the Catholic and Protestant frustrations over this issue that one Puritan, the delightfully named Edmund Bunny, recycled invective against religious hypocrisy from a Jesuit author. (I'm guessing that insincere celebrations of Easter, in particular, made him hopping mad.) The form of words used in that quotation from Perkins shows why this is a topic of philosophical interest. Can one hold a sincere belief "inwardly" without manifesting it "outwardly"? Or is it morally unacceptable to go through the motions while silently thinking that they are bogus? Speaking of the Jesuits, this is an issue we'll revisit when we get to them and their policy of "mental reservation."

A second area of philosophical interest worth flagging here is the role of religion in forming identity and community. It's a familiar worry that the loss of uniform religious commitment tends to undermine social cohesion. The modern-day version of that concern has it that the rise of secularism has removed an important bond, one that used to hold together nation states and unify their populations. The sixteenth-century English had a similar fear, though in their case it was prompted by the unraveling of traditional customs in the name of Protestant piety. A recent book by Andy Wood looks at the value of "neighborliness" in this period, and shows how widespread was the feeling that reform was the opposite of a good fence: it makes for *bad* neighbors.[20] He provides many choice quotes, including the one I already offered you about Puritans loving God and hating their neighbors. Here's another one, which is on the long side but well worth savoring. It's taken from a dialogue written by Thomas Smith in 1549:

> Some with this opinion and some with that, some holding this way and some that way, and some an other, and that so stifly as though the truth must be as they say that have the upper hand in contention. And this contention is not the least cause of these uproars of the people; some holding of the one learning and some holding of the other. In my mind it made no matter if there were no learned men at all…for of diversity thereof, comes diverse opinions.

Notice that Smith traced the "uproars" he so lamented to the conflict between "learned" men. This provides support for the idea that a few stubbornly convinced intellectuals were indeed having a dramatic impact on wider society. The Reformation is proof that ideas do affect the world, even if not in the way their inventors intended.

# 38

# TO KILL A KING

## *The Scottish Reformation*

If you want to annoy a Scot, a good way to do it is to say "England" when you mean "Britain." Far be it from me, then, to suppose that having covered the English Reformation, we've sufficiently covered the *British* Reformation. Certainly, there were parallels between the story of reform north and south of the border.[1] For instance, there were Hussites and Lollards in Scotland too, who already in the late medieval era anticipated the religious critique of the sixteenth century. In fact the leading Scottish Protestant John Knox began his history of the Reformation by describing the martyring of a Hussite back in 1433. And as in England, the Reformation led to violent repression. Patrick Hamilton was burned at the stake at St Andrews in the year 1528, followed by other martyrs like the iconoclast George Wishart in 1546. The violence was just as counterproductive in the north as it had been in the south. Knox remarked of the burning that "the reek of Master Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it blew upon." But there were major differences too, one of which was well captured by none other than King James VI of Scotland, who was also King James I of England (I make that James VII in total).[2] He wrote that the Reformation in Scotland was "a popular tumult and rebellion, not proceeding from the princes' order, as in did in England."

Indeed, whereas the official religion in the south swung back and forth between Protestantism and Catholicism, the rule *cuius regio, eius religio*—

the prevailing religion is that of the ruler—was not observed in Scotland. Mary Stewart, also known as Mary Queen of Scots, was a Catholic who reigned from 1542 to 1567. But for long stretches she ruled from France, and even when she was in Scotland, she said of the people there, "I am their Queen and so they call me, but they use me not so." Smack in the middle of her reign, in 1560, Scotland adopted the Reformation as official doctrine when the Scottish Parliament approved a broadly Calvinist confession of faith. Knox put a positive spin on the divergence between the monarch and her people: "that Parliament, we are bold to affirm, was more lawful, and more free than any Parliament that they are able to produce for a hundred years before it, or any that hath since ensued; for in it the votes of men were free and given of conscience; in others, they were bought or given at the devotion of the prince."

We shouldn't insist *too* much on the contrast between a "top down" English Reformation and "bottom up" Scottish one. The leading Scots reformers were not peasants. They were educated men who often spent time abroad learning their dangerous ideas. Knox himself studied at St Andrews but spent time in England and in such continental cities as Frankfurt and that unofficial capitol of Calvinism, Geneva. This helps to explain the parallels between Scottish and Huguenot thought, especially in the political arena, which I'll be focusing on in what follows. Still, Scottish Protestantism did have a distinct flavor. Another case of its "bottom up" tendencies, the Scottish church or "kirk" adopted broadly a Presbyterian tendency, which as we saw means avoidance of hierarchy. I'm glad to say, though, that they did have archbishops, if only so I can report the name of one of them: Patrick Adamson.

It was not Adamson, though, but John Knox who deserved the title of "captain kirk." His many detractors might have reached for a different pun: here was a man who put the "Knox" in "obnoxious." He was a firebrand preacher whose style was so confrontational that to this day there is a cannon at Edinburgh Castle named after him. His stance was based on the teachings of Calvin, and it was in no small part thanks to him that in Scotland this approach gradually won out over ideas closer to those of Luther and Zwingli.[3] Knox was a firm believer in predestination of the elect, and denied that God's love of all humans would result in His offering them all grace and redemption. When it came to matters of liturgy and church practice, he was uncompromising in the true sense of the word.

There was no room in his theology for the concept of "indifference," which we saw being used to excuse Queen Elizabeth's candlesticks, the fancy clothes of priests, and so on. For Knox, any form of worship not explicitly required by Scripture was idolatry, which he defined "whatever is done in God's service or honor without the express commandment of His own Word" (*JK* 73).[4] During his time in England, he notoriously got the advice to kneel when receiving communion eliminated from the Book of Common Prayer.

As for the Catholic version of the Mass, it was idolatry pure and simple. In a rather ironic echo of the methods of the schoolmen, Knox made this point in syllogistic form: "all worshipping, honouring, or service of God invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment, is idolatry. The mass is invented by the brain of man without any commandment of God. Therefore it is idolatry."[5] The question was, what to do about it? Knox's answer was effectively "whatever it takes." Outraged by the Catholic rule of Mary Tudor in England, Knox composed a treatise with a title as subtle as its author: *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. The "regiment of women" was not a battalion of ladies, of course. What Knox meant was that it is monstrous for a woman to hold political power.[6] In the text, he actually goes further and says that this is "more than a monster in nature" (4). It's interesting to note that he appeals to nature like this to support his central thesis, rather than just citing Scripture (though he does plenty of that too).[7] He says, for example, that "nature doth paint [women] forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish," (9) and even deigns to quote Aristotle as being in agreement with this opinion. The dominance of males over females among animals shows the natural inferiority of women (25). In particular, they lack prudence, and are so fickle that they cannot exert consistent governance (20–21).

Today's readers will of course find the *First Blast* repellent for its misogyny. At the time, the objection was more that it was impolitic. Though the screed was aimed at Mary Tudor, it left Knox in an awkward position when he had to deal directly with Mary Stewart, and also her mother Mary Guise, who ruled Scotland on her behalf as regent.[8] Actually in this period, if Knox had only argued that people named Mary shouldn't hold political power, that would almost have amounted to the same thesis. But not quite,

because of Elizabeth I. When she came to the throne, Knox's earlier diatribe against the rule of women made it more or less impossible for him to engage with English politics. He himself admitted, "my *First Blast* hath blown from me all my friends in England."[9] Nor was it only queens and queen mothers who had reason to be offended. Knox stated that anyone put in a position of authority by a female ruler was holding their office fraudulently, since "from a corrupt and venomed fountain can spring no wholesome water" (42).

This goes together with a more general tendency on Knox's part to see subordinates as tainted by association with unacceptable rulers, and thus as obligated to do something to remove those rulers. We find this stated explicitly in his *Appelation*, or call for action, printed in Geneva in 1558 but aimed at the nobility of Scotland. Here Knox argued with his customary forcefulness that the nobles have "no excuse" if they fail to remove irreligious, in other words Catholic, authority figures from their posts (95). That includes bishops, who should be compelled by the Scottish nobles to stop engaging in idolatry (73). Whereas Calvin had argued for patience in the face of wicked rule, Knox urges his readers to take active steps. This is something we've seen already in Huguenot treatises: lesser magistrates may be morally permitted, even required, to move against their superiors. But in Knox's *Appelation* we see hints of a more radical idea, namely that *everyone* should be prepared to rise up. He says that all are commanded to seek justice "according to their possibility" (100) and that God rightfully sends collective punishments against those who let evil go on without stopping it. Thus in the case of England, it had been the duty of "the nobility, judges, rulers *and people* of England" to resist Mary Tudor and even to kill her (104, my emphasis).

Knox made his radicalism still more explicit in another call to action, this one aimed at commoners. No less than the nobles, even humble folk should "compel bishops and clergy to cease their tyranny" (116). The same logic of collective responsibility reappears, now applied explicitly to the lower classes. You don't have to be an "author of iniquity" to be at fault. Mere tacit consent is enough, and makes the people "criminal and guilty, with princes and rulers, of the same crimes" (124–25). This would be an extreme view even today. We don't normally think that private citizens are effectively permitted to declare war on the head of state in their country. Knox seems to have been carried to his shocking view more by political

circumstances than by a well thought-out political theory.[10] He did write, in the summary of a prospective *Second Blast* against idolatrous rule, that if the people have appointed an idolator to rule over them, then "most justly may the same men depose and punish him that unadvisedly before they did nominate, appoint and elect" (129). But Knox's preferred mode was that of the Old Testament prophet calling down fire and brimstone on his enemies, not that of the cool-headed philosopher arguing from first principles.

Another Scotsman was ready to supply a more cerebral argument leading to the same conclusions. This was George Buchanan.[11] Born in 1506, he studied first in St Andrews and then in Paris, at a time when another important Scottish intellectual was there: John Mair, whom we'll meet properly below (Chapter 49). Buchanan also spent time in Italy, where he may have encountered republican political ideas. As far as religion goes, Buchanan first flirted with Protestantism, then became a Catholic priest, and then finally joined the reform cause for good. He was among those who helped build a case for deposing Mary Stewart from the Scottish throne, and wrote a work on her crimes that appeared in 1571. About a decade later he published a history of Scotland, which drew on rather fanciful ideas about earlier Scottish monarchs put forward in an earlier history by Hector Boece. Yet there was also useful and reliable information in Buchanan's *History*, for instance on Scottish geography and language. This project suggests a connection between Protestantism and Scottish nationalism, or at least national pride. Actually, the Bible was not translated into Scots in this period, or indeed until the twentieth century, so the Protestants' focus on spreading literacy in order to read the Bible actually may have helped anglicize the country. But a contemporary witness speaks of how the Bible was studied and discussed in Scots in "almost every private house."[12] So again, it seems fair to speak of a separate and distinctive *Scottish* Reformation, not just a smaller version of the English Reformation being replayed up north.

Buchanan's history of Scotland claims that the monarchy in this nation was always elective. We read there, "the authority of Scottish kings derived from the law: the kingdom was not accustomed to be ruled by the whims of one person, but according to the written law and the consent of the nobility. Any kings who attempted to overthrow this practice had paid dearly for their rashness."[13] Much like François Hotman in France, Buchanan was

weaving constitutionalist ideas into a historical treatise. But it was in another work that Buchanan argued most directly for constitutionalism, and unflinchingly followed that premise to state openly the conclusions Knox only hinted at. Buchanan's *Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots* was written in the late 1560s in defense of the deposition of Mary Stewart, but published only in 1579.[14] In 1584 it was banned in Scotland, for reasons that will be pretty obvious as we go on.

Rather surprisingly, given that it was written to justify toppling a monarch, Buchanan's *Dialogue* is dedicated to James VI. Buchanan, by this time a famous humanist, was a tutor to James. One contemporary said that in this James was more fortunate than Alexander the Great, whose teacher was merely Aristotle. And the reader has to stick with the text for quite some time before reaching material that might cause a king or queen to shift uncomfortably on the throne. The work is built around a fundamental contrast between the king and his opposite, the tyrant. This leads Buchanan to devote a long section to the nature and virtues of true kings, before he comes to the more contentious issue of tyranny and how it may be opposed. His treatment of kingship fits squarely into the tradition of "mirrors for princes," in which scholars gave advice to rulers on how best to carry out their office. We get such predictable points as the metaphor of the king as the "head" of the body politic (21), the urgent need for kings to acquire virtue, and the pivotal role of education in that process (77), precisely the kind of education that someone like James could get from someone like Buchanan.

Having said that, even in this section Buchanan stresses the importance of binding the king to abide by the law. The monarch is *not* the ultimate lawmaking authority (55), as often claimed in medieval political tracts. Rather, a king is appointed by the people, who for the sake of establishing a commonwealth under a single leader choose some virtuous man to lead them. Buchanan stresses the freedom of the people in this process. They can "bestow authority on whomever they wish" (27). He also stresses their continued authority over the laws and the king. The people cede authority only for the sake of their own interests, so by definition there can be no legitimate political arrangement that does not serve those interests. For example, Buchanan thinks the people may consent to hereditary monarchy, since this helps to ensure stability, which is good for them. But he adds that the unpredictable qualities of those who inherit the throne would mean there

is even more reason to shackle the king with the instrument of law (99). As for kingly "absolute power" over the law, as we saw being defended by Jean Bodin, Buchanan dismisses this out of hand. To give a king license to change or defy the laws would be tantamount to eliminating law altogether (83). The people would surely never grant such a power, since it could be used to oppress them.

It is of course precisely such oppression that marks rulers as tyrants, who are "enemies of God and man" and have no "bond of civility or common humanity" with the rest of the people (83). Buchanan continues, even while talking about the tyrant, to stress that what *ought* to happen is that the tyrant be brought to heel by the law (137). Within a legal framework, a ruler can be put on trial and they should submit to this treatment, a prescient description of what would happen in a few generations, when Charles I would be tried and executed as an outcome of the English Civil War. But Buchanan goes further still by asking what should happen if a tyrant is unwilling to answer for his crimes. There is only one remedy: violence, which may be rightfully pursued by any individual, not just by the lower magistrates as more cautiously proposed in Huguenot treatises of the period. So now we have a philosophical rationale for the conclusion also reached by John Knox. Because sovereignty has a popular, constitutional basis, the people have the right to depose an unjust monarch, even to kill them if necessary. *Any* member of the people can carry out that task if the circumstances demand.

Buchanan's interlocutor in the dialogue makes a couple of obvious objections to this breathtaking declaration, which are duly answered. Haven't the people taken an oath of obedience to the ruler? Yes, but that oath is part of a two-way agreement, and if the ruler breaks the deal first by wielding power tyrannically, then this releases the people from their duty (153, see also 13). And, a more pressing concern: won't Buchanan's advice lead to political chaos? You can't have a situation where every individual in a country thinks they have the right to engage in regicide, on the grounds that in their opinion it is tyrannicide. To this Buchanan responds, "I am explaining what legitimately may or should be done, I am not issuing a call to action (*non ad rem suscipiendum exhortor*)" (157). Which is a fair point. To say that a private citizen would be justified when taking matters into his own hands to defy a tyrant who cannot be brought to heel in any other way, whether by the law or by the magistracy, is not to throw the door open to

just any political assassination. An action that is righteous in one context might be monstrous in another. Still, given the times in which it was written and the immediate context of Mary's deposition, it's equally clear that Buchanan was far from making an abstract point about moral permissibility.

A curious thing about these daring defenses of tyrannicide is that they seem to have grown out of Christian fervor on the one hand, and an antiquarian fascination with non-Christian literature on the other hand. We needn't further belabor the religious context, though it would be worth adding that in a situation of tyranny there was still a genuine ruler to whom the people could look, namely the one in heaven. A colleague of both Knox and Buchanan named Christopher Goodman wrote a work entitled *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed*, which argued that the people are allowed to act against injustice when the magistrates do not, because "God giveth the sword into the people's hand, and He Himself is become immediately their head."[15] When subjects bring their monarchs to account, they do so in the name of a higher, divine justice. After all, the monarch is just as much a subject of God as anyone else, a point made by Buchanan's friend Andrew Melville, who observed that "there are two kinds and two kingdoms. There is Christ Jesus the king, and his kingdom the church, whose subject is King James, and of whose kingdom he is neither king nor lord, but member."[16]

This brings us to the part about antiquarian fascination. Melville was, like Buchanan, a skilled philologist who helped spread that other revolution of the sixteenth century to Scotland: the humanist revolution. Knox might have been taking his chief inspiration from the Old Testament, but Buchanan's key source was Cicero. He cites this Roman author explicitly in favor of the idea that laws are introduced to keep kings under control (39), and also echoes Cicero in his treatment of tyranny. In particular, Cicero had already set out the key idea that a lawless tyrant has abandoned any relationship of fellowship with the people, thus subjecting himself to violent retribution.[17] Then, too, ancient political conceptions lie behind Buchanan's understanding of citizens not just as dutiful subjects, but as moral agents in their own right who can display virtue both by showing fealty to a good king and showing defiance to a bad one. When we think of humanism in this period, our thoughts typically go to the discovery of old texts and the painstaking editorial and translation efforts that were lavished upon them. And rightly so; but for a man like Buchanan, there was an intimate

connection between that scholarly life of the mind and the life lived well in a political community.

# 39

# WRITE TILL YOUR INK BE DRY

## *Humanism in Britain*

I have a friend from England who once spent a miserable week at his in-laws, suffering through an unbroken succession of ready-made meals prepared in the microwave. My friend isn't much of a cook, but in desperation he resorted to making a meal for the whole family: a simple pasta with meat sauce. To his surprise, his homemade food was greeted with little enthusiasm. His father-in-law gamely picked away at his plate of spaghetti bolognese for a while, but then pushed it away, saying, "I'm sorry, we just don't like foreign food." I love this story, because it illustrates so nicely something I've already mentioned, the literally "insular" attitude of the British toward all things European. Paradoxically, though, when the British do welcome foreign fare onto their island, they enthusiastically make it their own. In the modern day, a politician made headlines by saying that the national dish of the United Kingdom is chicken tikka masala, while the meal my friend made is in fact now so common that it is known simply as "spag bol."

As we've been seeing, this is how the British handled the Reformation, first resisting it and then domesticating it. The same approach was taken with humanism. In this case the foreign import came not from Germany and Switzerland, but from Italy, the Netherlands, and France, as British scholars took up the ideas and educational program of such figures as Guarino Veronese, Marsilio Ficino, Erasmus, and Peter Ramus. Actually, that list of places and figures is pretty well the itinerary I'll be following in this

chapter. I'm first going to talk about the initial stirrings of humanism in fifteenth-century England, which centered on the travel of books and people back and forth to Italy. Then I'll move on to humanism in the Tudor period and especially in the early sixteenth century, when English humanism became more of a homegrown phenomenon under the influence of Erasmus. I'll also touch on developments under Elizabeth, though there will be a chance to learn much more about that in coming chapters devoted to Elizabethan literature and science. Finally, we'll head back to Scotland and talk about Andrew Melville, who studied in Paris and then drew on Ramism to reform the educational institutions of Glasgow and St Andrews.

In both England and Scotland, that sort of restructuring would be attempted only in the sixteenth century. It's been said that "the fifteenth century suggests how humanist interest could survive without educational reform. It was an interest that thrived within institutions but was not institutional."[1] At this stage universities and libraries were still more or less as they had been in the late medieval period, something confirmed by the great Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini when he visited England for four years, starting in 1418. He was bitterly disappointed that he found no opportunity to study Greek and no interesting manuscripts. Of course for him this meant manuscripts of otherwise unknown classical works, not anything medieval. Poggio's sojourn seems to have had less impact than those of other, less famous Italian visitors, like Piero del Monte, a "papal collector" who came in the 1430s.

Speaking of collectors, it was thanks in part to such contacts that certain members of the English elite started to take an interest in that most humanist of enterprises: acquiring books. The most outstanding example in this period was Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, whom the later humanist John Leland called a "singular phoenix of erudition." Since Humphrey collected books and phoenixes have a habit of bursting into flame, it's fortunate that Leland meant this metaphorically. To be more precise, the duke's books were manuscripts, since this was before the rise of printing. His library included numerous Latin classics and translations of Greek works, including one of Aristotle's *Politics* which was produced for the duke by none other than Leonardo Bruni. They were passed on to Oxford University, creating a basis for humanist research there. Oxford expressed its gratitude in fulsome terms: "previously there had been, it is true, a University of Oxford. But study there was none, for there were no books.

Now however through your gifts, we too can discern the secrets of learning."[2]

Though Humphrey has long been praised for his intellectual cultivation, it's not clear whether he spent much time actually thinking about the books he was collecting. His interest in the project may have had more to do with establishing a glorious reputation than advancing any particular ideology or intellectual approach.[3] But he at least provided a model for scholarly exchange with Italians, like the aforementioned Del Monte and Tito Livio Frulovisi, who was from Ferrara. That city would go on to be important in this story of cultural exchange, as Englishmen journeyed there to study with Guarino Veronese.[4] The first to do so was William Grey, later a bishop, and especially relevant for us because he collected works by Plato and the *Ethics* and *Politics* of Aristotle. His private collection, too, was donated to a university, in this case Cambridge. Then there was John Free,[5] who learned Greek well enough that he was able to produce reliable translations into English for another patron, named John Tiptoft. One of Free's productions was a version of a text by Synesius of Cyrene, with a title to gladden the heart of shiny-headed fellows like myself: *A Paradox Proving that Baldness Is Much Better than Bushy Hair*.[6]

With these developments, the potential for humanism in England was like my scalp: unlocked. The reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI saw humanists continuing to win support from powerful patrons, including members of the royal family. There was still a connection between Italian and English humanism, especially in the case of John Colet.[7] He traveled to Italy right at the end of the fifteenth century and knew Marsilio Ficino. Upon his return, Colet disseminated the ideas of Florentine Platonism in lectures on theology at Oxford. But in this period, the most powerful influence came from the most famous humanist in Europe, the Dutch scholar Erasmus. His ideas reached such significant figures as Thomas Cranmer, who has been described by Diarmaid MacCullough as having been "more of an Erasmian than a Protestant" early in his career.[8] Even later on, Cranmer was so closely associated with scholarship that it was said, "if learning were discountenanced, it was esteemed to cast some disparagement upon him; if it flourished, it was a sign that Cranmer prevailed at court."[9]

In fact James McConica's 1965 book on humanism in this period relates pretty well all "modernizing" scholarly activity to the influence of Erasmus.[10] While other historians have seen this as something of an exaggeration, Erasmus clearly did have quite an impact. He visited England in person, for one thing. You might remember that he wrote his famous *In Praise of Folly* while staying with Thomas More. He was also friends with Colet and other members of the group of humanists associated with More, like Richard Pace. The work of Colet, More, and others inspired him to comment, "it is marvellous to see what an extensive and rich crop of ancient learning is springing up here in England." Under Henry VIII works by Erasmus were translated into English, and Erasmus composed educational works for use in England.

To be specific, they were to be used at St Paul's School in London, a new institution that had a humanist orientation thanks to its founder, John Colet. As in Italy and northern Europe, humanists saw a close connection between the study of antiquity and the improvement of young souls. Speaking of his students at St Paul's, Colet said, "I would they were taught always in good literature, both Latin and Greek, and good authors such as have the very Roman eloquence joined with wisdom, especially Christian authors who wrote their wisdom in clear, chaste Latin."[11] The same idea is captured in a work by Richard Pace, *On the Fruits of a Liberal Education*.[12] Taking as its motto an ancient saying that "all virtues originate in learning," Pace says that mastery of rhetorical eloquence distinguishes man from beast, allows for the establishment of cities and laws, and is a prerequisite for all other arts. All of which sounds thoroughly Erasmian, yet Erasmus himself was not overly impressed by the work. He compared it to "sick men's dreams" and asked whether it was meant seriously or not. "If it was meant seriously, how can one take it seriously? But if it was meant comically, why isn't it funny?"

Fortunately, other treatises were being written on the same theme. Another associate of More's named Thomas Elyot composed the *Book of the Governor*.[13] The title makes it sound like it should be about political philosophy, but for the most part that's true only in a rather indirect sense. Instead the treatise gives advice for how to educate a young man to prepare him for political life. In the prologue, Elyot explains that he has "gathered as well of the sayings of most noble authors (Greeks and Latins) as by mine

own experience, I being continually trained in some daily affairs of the public weal" (cxcii). This is not a bluff: he was a clerk of the King's Council under Henry VIII and later an English ambassador. As for the "public weal" or "commonwealth," Elyot explains that this is equivalent to the Latin notion of a *res publica* or "republic." It is a political community, a "living body," which must be ruled by reason to maintain order and proportion in it (1), like the ordering of the elements in the universe (6). This cannot be achieved with democracy, which as the history of ancient Athens showed is inevitably like a "monster with many heads" (9).

All these claims will remind us of one of those "noble Greeks," namely Plato, and his *Republic*. But as Elyot goes on, he gives advice you wouldn't find in Plato: teach your kids Latin! His advice here, in the spirit of the ancient rhetoric specialist Quintilian, is humane and pedagogically astute. Children need time to play, should have language instruction integrated into everyday life as by introducing them to the names of objects around them, and in general should work with "natural disposition, and not by coercion" (48). Unfortunately, the youth of Elyot's own day lag well behind their potential, because their parents are too stingy to pay for proper instruction, and there are too few qualified masters around (98, 164). Even when children do receive proper schooling, they often stop after learning Latin, at the age of thirteen. This is a waste, since "the fruit of speech is wise sentence, which is gathered and made of sundry learnings" (115–16). Namely the ones we'd expect from other humanist texts: argument theory, rhetoric, and philosophy with a strong emphasis on ethics using works by Aristotle, Cicero, and "above all" Plato (72–73, 91–93).

Less expected, and more fun, are the last chapters in the book, in which Elyot explores the educational role of non-academic pastimes. For sport, Elyot warmly recommends training with the longbow. Indeed, he indulges in paranoid speculation that crossbows and gunpowder weapons were introduced into England by foreign enemies to undermine the physical condition and military preparedness of the people (303). (If he were alive today, he'd probably say the same about spaghetti bolognese.) But the most remarkable of these closing sections are those that offer a philosophical defense of dancing. Yes, *dancing*. He explains away a passage from Augustine that takes a dim view of this practice, on the grounds that he objected only to more lascivious forms of dance. A more positive view can be gleaned from the great pagan authors, like (again) Plato, who compared

the exquisite motions of the heavens to a cosmic dance (218). When done properly, dancing instills a similar harmony in the soul, by encouraging the acquisition of a key virtue, namely prudence. Elyot analyzes the parts of prudence, and relates them to the different stages of a Renaissance dance.

With these ideas Elyot was himself in harmony with other humanists of the age, who made similar remarks about music.[14] We tend to think of sixteenth-century intellectuals as a pretty joyless lot, but in fact even strict reformers such as Calvin recommended the use of music in church, albeit with the same caveat given by Elyot regarding dance, namely that these activities are beneficial so long as they aim at moral improvement and not mere pleasure. In this spirit Erasmus referred to Plato's restrictions on music, which again are found in the *Republic*, where only certain modes of performance are permitted in the ideal city. A number of English humanists complained about musicians who reveled in mere technique rather than seeking to aid the appreciation of sacred texts. Thus the reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, whom we saw coming from abroad to teach at Oxford, wrote that church music is to be welcomed so long as the performers sing "not only in voice, but also in heart, for the voice soundeth in vain, where the mind is not affected."[15]

Humanism and the arts would continue to flourish under Elizabeth.[16] Her reign did after all produce the greatest writer of English literature, and she was herself responsible for such scholarly productions as a translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. She received a solid humanist education from Roger Ascham, yet another humanist who wrote about education in a book called simply *The Schoolmaster*, and also in a work whose topic Elyot would have applauded, archery. Ascham explained that he would school the princess in New Testament Greek first thing in the morning and then move on to ancient rhetoricians like Isocrates and Sophocles.[17] We will probably be pleasantly surprised to see a woman being provided with this sort of education, even if this woman was in every respect an unusual one. Actually, though, aristocratic women had been involved with humanism throughout the Tudor period. Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, was an early example; she even endowed colleges at Cambridge University. Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, supported humanists including Colet and More, and hired no less a humanist than Juan Luis Vives to teach her daughter Mary.

The tradition was carried on by Henry's last wife, the one who survived her husband (seldom has a husband been so difficult to survive). This was Katherine Parr. Her circle included the aforementioned Ascham, and she was herself an author, penning a pious text called *Lamentation of a Sinner* (see further Chapter 48). The humanist Nicholas Udall wrote the following when dedicating a work to her: "When I consider, most gracious Queen Katherine, the great number of noble women in this time and country of England, not only given to the study of humane sciences and of strange tongues, but also so thoroughly expert in holy scriptures…I cannot but think and esteem the famous learned antiquity so far behind these times, that there cannot justly be made any comparison between them."[18] That's a bold and striking reversal of the usual Renaissance lament that the "moderns" could scarcely hope to live up to their classical models.

One last thing to notice about English humanism is that it was often, well, English. Most of the original texts I've mentioned were written in this vernacular language rather than Latin, and humanists from John Free to Elizabeth devoted themselves to providing English translations of classical texts. Humanists also extended their interest to the English language itself. The first philological explorations of Anglo-Saxon literature came during the reign of Elizabeth, thanks to scholars like William Lambarde and Laurence Nowell.[19] Nowell was employed as a tutor by a powerful advisor to the Queen, William Cecil, who was in fact himself something of a humanist, a collector of manuscripts and highly proficient in Greek as well as Latin. In a project probably motivated by English nationalism, Nowell applied the tools of philology to the history of the island. He made perhaps the first modern map of Britain and Ireland, and heavily annotated his copy of a Latin-English dictionary by adding, in his own hand, equivalents from the vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon, as well as lists of ancient English legal terms and place names. As a study of this extraordinary document has pointed out, it illustrates (literally) how printed books and manuscripts coexisted through the early modern period. In fact, the result of Nowell's labor is a book that is both printed *and* handwritten.[20]

But as we already know, not all the nationalists in the British isles were English. I mentioned above the history of Scotland penned by Hector Boece, which was more imaginative than accurate. Along with this work of historical fantasy, Boece found time to kickstart the Renaissance in Scotland, in his capacity as instructor of Classics at King's College in

Aberdeen. But the real stars in the firmament of Scottish humanism were George Buchanan, whom we already met, and Andrew Melville, whom we'll meet right now.[21] The two men were close. They met in Paris, where Melville was a student and Buchanan his private tutor in Latin poetry. By this time Melville was already a precocious classicist. He was influenced by his brother Richard, who had studied in Germany with Melanchthon, and by the time Andrew went to study at St Andrews he was astonishing his teachers and fellow students with his mastery of Greek.

Melville pursued further education in France, sitting at the feet of Buchanan and studying with other luminaries. Peter Ramus, for one, as well as Ramus' enemy Jacques Charpentier for mathematics, for law François Hotman, and for Greek Adrien Turnèbe, whom Joseph Scaliger (who certainly ought to know) called the most learned man of the age. Young Melville also acquired knowledge of Hebrew and other Near Eastern languages at this time. He then taught elsewhere in France and in Switzerland, most notably in Geneva, but also in Poitiers. I mention the latter just so I can tell the following anecdote: Poitiers suffered a siege during the wars of religion, and one of Melville's students was struck by stray artillery fire. As he died in Melville's arms, he cried out, *in ancient Greek*, "teacher, my course is done!"

As that story suggests, Melville was an inspiring teacher. And he needed to be, once he returned to Scotland in 1574 to oversee the launch of a new curriculum (*nova erectio*) at Glasgow. Due to the instability of the political situation in Scotland, the university there was in a parlous state. Surviving figures on enrollment show that since the 1550s only a handful of new students had been arriving each year, and in 1558 none at all. Melville brought in a new approach based on what he had learned from Ramus, in which rhetoric would be taught in the "shortest, easiest, and most accurate" way possible.[22] He then moved on to St Andrews, setting up similar reforms in 1579. One notable feature of Melville's new curriculum was the abolition of the "regent" system, whereby individual masters would teach all subjects in rotation. Instead, instructors would now focus on teaching their own specialist disciplines, more like what happens at universities nowadays. This made it more feasible to include the teaching of relatively niche topics like Hebrew and Greek.

As happened all across Europe, the aggressive adoption of humanist methods ruffled feathers amongst scholastics, who in St Andrews still

abided by the slogan *absurdum est dicere erasse Aristotele*, "it's absurd to say that Aristotle has been erased." Melville debated these hostile colleagues in private and in public. According to the story of his life recorded by his nephew James, Melville succeeded in persuading some to freshen up their philosophical ideas by studying Aristotle in the original. But to be on the safe side, Melville and his allies set up a commission in St Andrews that produced a condemnation of unacceptable teachings. This was in 1583, just a bit more than three hundred years after a similar round of condemnations at Paris in the 1270s. That's quite a tribute, albeit a back-handed one, to the longevity of Aristotelian scholasticism and its power to influence young minds. Like the medieval censors of Paris, the St Andrews commission fretted that impressionable students would "maintain godless and profane opinions obstinately, to the great slander of the Word of God, and offense of the simple and unlearned."[23] There was at least a bit of updating, though, since among the propositions on the blacklist was a claim any good Protestant would know to reject: that humans can be good using our natural power of free will.

With Melville, then, we have a confluence of the two streams that ran in parallel through the sixteenth century, Protestant religious reform and humanist educational reform. This wasn't always the case in Britain. The initial stirrings of humanism in England in the fifteenth century came well before Luther started causing trouble, and Thomas More, a central figure in early sixteenth-century English humanism, would die a Catholic martyr. After his downfall, some of his scholarly friends rushed to excuse themselves for having associated with him. Erasmus regretted that More had not followed his own example and stayed on the fence: "I wish he had never dabbled in so perilous a business and left theology to the theologians."[24] But there would be no fence-sitting for Melville. His combination of Protestant fervor and humanist pedagogy has invited comparisons to Luther's associate Melanchthon. Melville wrote poems taking a Protestant approach to Biblical themes like the stories of Moses and Job, and was a prominent defender of Presbyterianism. His tone tended to be polemic rather than politic, and he had a penchant for satire, as in his delightfully named anti-Anglican poem *Anti-Tami-Cami-Categoria*. All this got him into a good deal of trouble, though not quite as much trouble as caught up with More. Melville was forced into exile from Scotland to England in 1584, and was later put into the Tower of London in 1607.

There, he covered the walls with Latin poetry, using his shoe as a writing instrument. Now that's what I call having the sole of a humanist.

# 40

# NO PLACE WILL PLEASE ME SO

## *Thomas More*

As you've no doubt noticed, I am a big believer in the importance of historical context for understanding philosophy. But you might think that even I would make an exception for Thomas More's *Utopia*. After all, this is a book about a place that has no history, for the very good reason that it doesn't exist. But as it turns out, all of More's writings dramatically illustrate the importance of historical and biographical circumstance, and that certainly includes *Utopia*. This work was inspired in part by the contact of Europeans with the Americas, something no reader can miss, given that the fictional character who describes this fantastic society, Raphael Hythloday, is said to have been a companion of Amerigo Vespucci and is described as a leading expert on "unknown peoples and unexplored lands" (9–10).[1] Hythloday's account alludes to other contemporary developments, too, like the printing press and the humanist study of Greek language and literature. Indeed, the writing of *Utopia* would have been unimaginable without the rise of humanism. It is clearly a response to Plato's *Republic*, which More would have been able to consult in the original Greek. Just to ensure that we don't miss this either, he has Hythloday refer to Plato by name numerous times. A familiar humanist theme, the tension between a life of study and contemplation and a life of political engagement, is also crucial for *Utopia*. That choice is the main focus of the dialogue between Hythloday and a fictionalized version of Thomas More himself, in book 1, before we get to the famous description of Utopia in book 2.

Which brings us to the relevance of More's own biography. The tension between contemplation and action was one he felt keenly.[2] After studying as a teenager at Oxford (remember, this was the typical age for university students), he underwent a period of spiritual turmoil that lasted from 1494 until late 1504 or early 1505, when he got married. In so doing, he turned his back on the possibility of committing himself to a chaste, monastic life, one he had tentatively been pursuing by residing in the London Charterhouse of Carthusian monks. He would rather, he supposedly said, be a "god-fearing husband than an immoral priest." Nor would family life be his sole earthly concern. More would in due course become one of England's most important politicians, albeit a reluctant one. He said in a letter that he joined the royal court "much against [his] will," and his friend Erasmus claimed that "no man was ever more consumed with ambition to enter a court than [More] was to avoid it."[3] But enter it he did. He would serve as ambassador, Speaker of the House of Commons, and as of 1529 Lord Chancellor, all under the king who would eventually have him put to death, Henry VIII.

*Utopia* may be a work of vivid imagination, but its writing fits snugly into this story of concrete political activity. It was apparently composed in two parts, first in Flanders during a lull in trade negotiations, and then back in England. The fictional setting is a conversation in Antwerp between More, his real-life colleague Peter Giles, and the invented Hythloday. As we've seen with other authors, the writing of dialogues was a sign of humanist tastes, and that certainly applies to More. Even before meeting Erasmus while the great Dutch scholar was visiting England, More had been steeped in humanist study at Oxford University, where figures like John Colet and William Grocyn were promoting an agenda imported from Italy. I already mentioned Colet's Ficino-inspired lectures; similarly Grocyn had studied in Florence under no less an authority than Poliziano, and was the first to give public lectures on Greek in Oxford. More was very much their student. He translated into English a biography of Pico della Mirandola written by the latter's nephew Giovanni Francesco Pico, and cooperated with Erasmus on translations of the ancient satirical writer Lucian, a clear inspiration for Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* and for More's *Utopia*. More also lectured on Augustine's *City of God*; I'll come back to that.

If the philosophical dialogue was the most humanist of genres, maybe the second most humanist genre was history writing. So of course More produced a historical work too, about Richard III, the king whose defeat opened the way for the Tudor dynasty. Living under the Tudors, More obviously wasn't going to offer a sympathetic portrait of Richard. In fact his *History* would help to inspire the villainous, hunchbacked antihero of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Erasmus once remarked that More "always had a special hatred for tyranny,"[4] and this attitude certainly comes across in the *History*. For More as for other humanists, the study of history fell under the art of rhetoric, and historical writing should have an ethical purpose, using eloquence to move the audience to virtuous attitudes and actions.[5] Toward this end, and in imitation of ancient historians like Sallust and Tacitus, More filled his history with set piece speeches. Classicizing historians had been doing this for ages, from Byzantines like Michael Psellos to Italians like Machiavelli. A more unusual feature of this work is that More wrote it in two languages, Latin and English, and in parallel rather than by translating one into the other. This exemplifies the way that Latin and the vernacular coexisted in this period as vehicles for humanist expression.

Toward the end of More's life, opposition to tyranny would become a far less abstract concern. He was a supporter of Henry VIII's first queen, Catherine, and was unwilling to go along with the King's choice to set her aside, or with Henry's moves to put the church under royal authority. More resigned as Chancellor over the latter issue. Perhaps he hoped to return to a quiet life of scholarship. Instead, he provoked the King's wrath by refusing to swear an oath of allegiance to the new line of succession through Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn. For this More was incarcerated and ultimately put to death, on July 6, 1535. He would thereafter be considered a Catholic martyr, which is rather ironic given that he had created some martyrs of his own in the service of the King, during the years when Henry was still opposing the cause of the Reformation. In his service, More became an implacable enemy of Protestantism. He oversaw the banning of books by the reformers, was personally involved in questioning suspects, and can be credited (though that seems the wrong word) with half a dozen actual executions on charges of heresy.

This phase of More's career is, to put it mildly, perplexing. How could this learned man, a devotee of the peace-loving and moderate Erasmus, and a strident defender of free and frank speech in Parliament, have overseen

such repression and violence? Well, he tells us, in another dialogue called *Concerning Heresies*, and in other works written against the Reformation. In total these works on heresy amount to about one million words! No wonder modern scholars have identified heresy as "the single most time-consuming issue Thomas More dealt with in his chancellorship, and probably in the whole of the last ten years of his life."[6] More understood heresy in traditional terms as the "obstinate" insistence on teachings contrary to those of the church, in particular teachings relevant to salvation. He saw it as the worst of all crimes, worse even than murder, since heretics endanger the souls of their victims and not merely their bodies. Being both a skilled humanist and a skilled lawyer, More mounted one of the most impressive (and certainly most extensive) early refutations of Protestantism. Alongside the usual complaint that the doctrine of salvation through faith alone would deprive believers of any reason to perform morally good actions, he mercilessly critiqued the idea that Scripture can by itself determine true doctrine. For starters, without the authority of the church it wouldn't even be clear which Scriptural books are authentic and which apocryphal. Besides, Scripture itself establishes the legitimacy of the papacy and the whole ecclesiastical hierarchy, so that the Protestants' vaunted reliance on the Bible undermines their vaunting defiance of the Pope.

Still, More's career as a polemicist remains difficult to square with his earlier writings, especially *Utopia*, which includes a passage on tolerance of religious diversity. He has Hythloday explain that the Utopians hold a variety of beliefs, from sun worship to a monotheism centered on Mithra, a god from Persian history. Freedom of religion is enjoyed by the citizens so long as it does not lead to dissension (93–94). Even leaving this passage aside, the work as a whole isn't what you'd expect from a man who would go on to persecute heretics. It is ironic and playful, to the point that it defies easy interpretation. You might recall that Erasmus wrote his equally ironic and playful *In Praise of Folly* while staying at More's house. In the dedication of the work to More, Erasmus mentions the delight his host takes in "jokes of this kind," and *Utopia* bears that out. You probably know that the very title is a pun: *Utopia* is a double wordplay on Greek, since it can mean "no (*ou*) place (*topos*)" or "good (*eu*) place." The etymological fun doesn't stop there, either. Hythloday's name means "purveyor of nonsense,"

the main river of Utopia is called “Anydrus,” meaning “waterless,” and the chief city is Amaurot, meaning “unknown.”

More added a further layer of irony by keeping up the pretense that the whole dialogue was based on a real encounter (109). He wrote in a letter that, had he wanted to write a pure fiction about a perfect society, he would have indicated this by inventing geographical names that allude to the unreality of the place. Which, as we’ve just seen, is exactly what he did. To keep up the joke, the book was published with a supposed map of Utopia and even an alphabet for its language. This language is said by Hythloday to be not unlike Persian but also somehow descended from Greek, as one can see from the place names—another hint at the ironic etymologies. In the preface More makes a big deal about being a stickler for accuracy in his recounting of the conversation with Hythloday, admitting with comic exaggeration that he isn’t entirely sure about the length of a bridge connecting Utopia to the mainland. He then adds casually that he can’t address the much more fundamental question of Utopia’s location, because he forgot to ask (5).

So this is, like the *Praise of Folly*, a unserious work that is meant to be taken seriously. Then there’s a further complication, namely that the character of More in the dialogue (let’s call him “Thomas”) is not persuaded by Hythloday’s account. Not because he denies the existence of Utopia or challenges its description, but because he is skeptical about the wisdom of the Utopians’ way of life. Thomas is a realist, if not a cynic, and his attitude throws the idealism of Hythloday into sharp relief. As I’ve mentioned, the first book contains a debate about whether it is advisable to engage in political life. Hythloday says there is no point in doing so, because good advice will be ignored by bad rulers and advisors will inevitably be morally compromised. Thomas counters that one should settle for incremental improvements rather than insisting on perfection. One has to approach things indirectly, handling the ruler with tact and rhetorical skill. This is the voice of the pragmatic, civically engaged humanist.

The scholarly consensus is that this opening debate was added as an insertion, after More had already written the stage-setting of the dialogue and the account of Utopia in book 2. But it makes thematic sense to have it here. Hythloday’s pessimism about politics is backed up by his complaints about the evils of English society. These are then picked up in book 2, insofar as Utopia eliminates the sources of those evils. In fact Erasmus

commented that the purpose of More's work, as he understood it, was "to show what are the things that occasion mischief in commonwealths."[7] For instance, England allows people to sink into poverty and then puts them to death for stealing what they need to live, something Hythloday calls "making people thieves and then punishing them for it" (20). In Utopia, by contrast, there is no poverty and no theft. There can't be, because private property doesn't exist there. Of course the communism of Utopia is taken from Plato's *Republic*, the source duly being flagged for the reader (37).[8] Indeed, the Utopian practice goes beyond Plato, who had recommended communism only for the elite class of guardians in his ideal state, not for the whole society. In another sense, though, it falls short of Plato, because in Utopia the communism is only economic and does not extend to the sharing of sexual partners and children. The Utopians' gender politics are more traditional, with wives obeying their husbands (55), though women do train for war, are highly educated, and can even be priests.

Platonic or not, these proposals do not impress Thomas. He says that communism could never work, because everyone would stop working without being "spurred on" by "the hope of gain" (38–39). Hythloday replies that communism does indeed work, and that he's seen it do so with his own eyes, namely in Utopia. So that's evidence taken from a fictional place, offered by a fictional witness: hardly a ringing endorsement of the feasibility of this economic policy. In book 1, Thomas defends his pragmatism of low expectations by saying that "it is impossible to make everything good unless all men are good, and that I don't expect to see for quite a few years yet" (35). Then at the very end of the work, Thomas issues a final verdict in his authorial voice: "not a few of the laws and customs described as existing among the Utopians were really absurd" (106). This especially applies to the communism. On the other hand, he adds, "I freely confess that in the Utopian commonwealth there are very many features that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see" (107).

Taking these passages together, it looks as though More (the author) is pointing to a kind of chicken-and-egg problem. Utopia could be real if there were virtuous citizens available to live in it. Sadly, we would need to have a utopia already up and running in order to produce such citizens, because the imperfect people we have around us in real life could never make up such an ideal society. That is in itself a reminiscence of Plato, who in the

*Republic* showed keen awareness of the difficulty of actually establishing a city in accordance with his specifications. He has Socrates defend its possibility, but admits that it would take an extraordinary set of circumstances to bring it about. Another author who might have been on More's mind here could be Augustine. As I mentioned, More was well acquainted with Augustine's *City of God*, which contrasts the polities of our earthly realm to the perfect society of the blessed in heaven.[9] So perhaps one point being made in *Utopia* is that such a society is impossible in practical terms, because human sinfulness makes it unrealizable. It would be lovely to have all things shared in common, to live in cities where all doors can safely remain unlocked because "nothing is private" (46). But given that we humans are in fact selfish and acquisitive, it's simply not going to happen. A human community without greed would be like a river without water.

One might object to this line of interpretation by asking: are the Utopians really so virtuous? If so, why does Hythloday keep alluding to the systematic regime of punishments imposed in Utopia? It seems these would be superfluous if the people are so morally admirable. The punitive measures include the death penalty for some crimes, while for others the punishment is slavery. Yes, Utopia has slaves, whose chains are made of gold because the Utopians think so little of precious metals; they also use it for chamberpots (61). The modern reader will doubtless be appalled by the appearance of slavery here. But would this have been the intended effect for sixteenth-century readers? Again, it's hard to say, because it is emphasized that this is quite a "humane" version of enslavement. No one is born into slavery, so that the children of enslaved persons are born free. Or, at least, as free as anyone is in Utopia, which is not very. The people are kept in line in part by the public nature of their lives: "because they live in the full view of all, they are bound to be either working at their usual trades or enjoying their leisure in a respectable way" (59). They are not even allowed to leave their districts to take a walk without express permission.

It's worth contrasting this with another utopian society imagined around the same time: the abbey of Theleme described in Rabelais' *Pantagruel*. As we saw (Chapter 25), the motto of the abbey was "do as you will." Since the people are like-minded and virtuous, they all choose to do the same thing. But that doesn't seem to be the case in More's Utopia, where the inhabitants are constantly steered toward right behavior using mutual

surveillance and threats. As for what counts as "right" behavior, this is determined by the Utopians' rather utilitarian approach to life. They seek to maximize pleasure, though they eschew crass hedonism on the grounds that the higher intellectual pleasures are superior to those of the body. As several commentators have pointed out, a question already posed by the debate in book 1 was whether what is expedient is also good (in humanist terms, whether *utilitas* aligns with *honestas*).[10] The character Thomas is, as we saw, a pragmatist. He thinks that you should do whatever works, even if it means exhibiting a degree of moral flexibility and even putting up with outright wickedness. Hythloday disagrees. He is a true idealist, and so are the Utopians: they think that the right thing to do just *is* whatever will work.

We can see this from their policy in matters of war. While the citizens are trained to fight, just in case, they prefer to hire mercenaries to do it for them, since they think warfare is an activity fit for beasts (85). This is why they keep those gold chamberpots and chains around: they can be melted down to pay hired armies when necessary (61). They are also willing to use bribery and assassination of enemy leaders to avoid pitched battles. This, they reason, is actually morally preferable since it avoids a larger number of deaths (87). The coldly calculative reasoning here is seen in other domains too, as with the memorable provision that Utopian couples should look at one another naked before getting married, to ward off later disappointment. Such passages would surely have amused and shocked contemporary readers, leaving them to wonder what the deeper point might be. I suspect it was, at least in part, that the Utopian moral universe is one that humans might reasonably choose to live in, if they did not have Christian truth.

Actually contact with European travelers has brought the Utopians into contact with Christianity. Some citizens have embraced it, seeing this previously unknown faith as harmonizing with their predominantly monotheistic beliefs (93). The Utopians are also convinced that a good afterlife awaits those who act well in this life; they evidently wouldn't think much of Lutheranism, which rejected the idea that salvation is merited by good works. But Utopia is still fundamentally a pagan society, as underscored by its cultural connection to Greece and Persia. So More might be suggesting that even the ideal condition of such a society will still look pretty problematic from a Christian point of view. This way of understanding *Utopia* makes it easier to reconcile the book with More's later activities as a persecutor of heretics. He was well aware of the failings

of English society; book 1 of *Utopia* shows that beyond doubt. But he was also convinced that it quite literally had a saving grace, through its devotion to Christianity under the umbrella of the universal church. And he was determined to defend that to the death, whether it was the death of Protestants or his own.

The ambiguities of *Utopia* did not prevent it from becoming a famous and influential work. "Utopia" does mean "noplace," but by the end of the sixteenth century, it was everywhere. Several works were written in Italy in imitation of More, like Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* and the less famous fantasies of Doni, Patrizi, and Zuccolo.[11] English humanism had been sparked by visits from and to Italy, but here we have a case of influence running in the opposite direction. There were also further utopian writings in England, facilitated by the English publication of More's work in 1551.[12] About thirty years later, two dialogues modeled on More's appeared. These were by Thomas Nicholls and Thomas Lupton. Lupton got in on the Morean wordplay, calling the interlocutors in his dialogue "Sivqila" and "Omen," which are the Latin words for "someone (*aliquis*)" and "no one (*nemo*)" spelled backwards. The connection to Atlantic exploration, invoked to explain Hythloday's encounter with the Utopians, is also present here, since Nicholls translated Spanish travel literature. But these two utopian dialogues lack the nuance and elusive irony of More's. They are straightforwardly moralistic, focused on the task of describing how society really ought to be rather than how society might be if one proceeded from entirely rational, yet ultimately unacceptable, premises. More's Utopia, by contrast, is a place that really might have been designed by Greek philosophers. If he was ambivalent toward it, that mirrors the familiar attitude of the Christian humanist toward the wonders of pagan culture, admiring its achievements and lamenting its limitations. In the end, it seems to me, More would have agreed with those cynics who still tell us today that philosophy on its own will get you nowhere.

# 41

# WITH SUCH PERFECTION GOVERN

## *English Political Thought*

It's time that I correct a misleading impression. In this book and in the previous volume on Renaissance philosophy in Italy, I've devoted a lot of attention to fairly radical political ideas, from the breathtaking cynicism of Machiavelli to the theme of tyrannicide in the Huguenots and Scottish reformers. This focus is certainly defensible. The most daring ideas tend to be the most interesting, and in this case they had plenty of long-term influence. Just for example, Sam Adams, who was an agitator of the American Revolution before he was a brand of beer, wrote his masters thesis on the question whether one may rightfully resist a supreme magistrate to preserve the commonwealth.[1] That's about as loud an echo of sixteenth-century Protestant political theory as you could want. But I don't want you to get the idea that most theorists of this period wanted to overturn the social and political order or destabilize the monarchy. Even so bold an author as Tyndale, famous for his provocative English translation of the Bible, can be found saying that the king's supremacy is such that he can be judged by no man, only by God.[2]

So for a more balanced understanding of political thought in the period, we also need to look at the more subtle and gradual shifts that occurred between the late medieval and early modern periods. The fifteenth century tends to get skipped when writing the history of political philosophy, but it was actually an important transitional period, not least because it was at this

time that Parliament started to be seen as a genuinely representative assembly rather than just a high court of nobles.[3] We even find the Parliament being compared to the ancient Roman Senate. This was still far away from the Parliament that would fight a civil war against the king in the seventeenth century. The fifteenth-century idea was more that the Parliament would support and advise the king. Still, the Parliament had a legitimacy of its own and could offer a check and counterweight to royal power.

As in France that legitimacy was grounded in a concept that goes back to the medieval period: that society is made up of three "estates," those who "work, pray, and fight," meaning the so-called "commons" or "commonality"; the clergy; and the warrior and ruling class or nobility. A separate house for the commons, which could introduce bills for consideration by the nobles and kings, had already been established in the fourteenth century. But this was, of course, still a very hierarchical system dominated by the monarch and the nobility. The existing order was taken to be good, both because it was ordained by God and because it was "natural." That was a core message of numerous works written in the Tudor period on the topic of the "commonwealth" or "common weal," a term that refers both to the body politic and the benefit that comes from its good order. A fine illustration would be the *Tree of Commonwealth*, written by Edmund Dudley while he was in prison on the orders of Henry VIII.[4] You might think that his circumstances would have led Dudley to question the wisdom of having a rigidly hierarchical society with a mighty king at the top. But far from it. His treatise explains the relationship between the three estates as a God-given system in which subordinates must patiently accept their lot. The nobles and king wield their inherited power with impunity, and hopefully with mercy and justice. The result is a well-structured commonwealth comparable to a "fair and mighty tree growing in a fair field or pasture, under the cover or shade whereof all beasts, both fat and lean, are protected and comforted."

For an earlier example of the same sort of attitude, it's worth quoting a passage found not in a political treatise, but in a sermon given by Robert Stillington, Bishop of Bath, in 1467:

> Justice was groundwell and root of all prosperity, peace and political rule of every realm, whereupon all the laws of the world have been ground and set, which rests there; that is to say, the law of God, law of nature, and positive law; and by saying of all philosophers, felicity or

> peace in every realm is evermore caused of justice, as it appears by probable persuasions of philosophers. Wherefore first be asked, what is justice? Justice is, every person to do his office that he is put in according to his estate or degree, and as for this land, it is understood that it stands by three estates and above that one principle; that is, to wit, lords spiritual, lords temporal, and commons, and over that, state royal above, as our sovereign lord the king.

Here we have a distant echo of Plato's *Republic*: justice in the state is for each person or group to carry out their proper task. And also an appeal to the medieval theory of nested laws, those given by God, those written into human nature, and those devised by humans (this is what Stillington means by "positive" law). It was taken for granted by nearly all authors in this period that the king would be subject to these different kinds of law, including laws made by humans. But just as standard was the assumption that the laws of God and man put the monarch above all others, with unchallenged supremacy.

That political philosophers of the time were broadly happy with this arrangement is shown by the fact that the most famous of them, John Fortescue, wrote a work entitled *In Praise of the Laws of England*.[5] Fortescue was himself a member of Parliament, was knighted, and served as justice of the peace. He was also a supporter of Henry VI in the Wars of the Roses. So very much an establishment figure. But take another look at that title. He wants to praise the *laws* of England, and a key reason for his enthusiasm is that the king does indeed rule within those laws, which is not something that can be taken for granted. There are two ways that a monarch might rule over a kingdom: "royal" and "both royal and political" (*Fort*. 17, 83).[6] Both are compatible with the natural law, but Fortescue leaves no doubt that the second form of government is preferable.

The difference has precisely to do with the laws. A merely "royal" ruler governs without constraint or restriction. Ultimately, the only law is his will. By contrast, a "royal and political" ruler like the English king cannot arbitrarily change the laws. He needs the consent of the people to do so. So in such a regime, the people are "ruled by laws that they themselves desire, they freely enjoy their goods, and are despoiled neither by their own king nor any other" (*Fort*. 17). Fortescue adds that the king, no less than the people, should be glad to work within this sort of system, since it binds the lower estates to him and provides for harmony. Being an Englishman, he takes the opportunity to pour scorn upon the French for putting up with a more tyrannical state. The only reason they don't rise up in rebellion is that

they are too cowardly (*Fort*. 111). By contrast the English constitutional arrangement, which supposedly has consent at its core, is a recipe for long-lasting stability, as shown by England's past history (*Fort*. 27). England's situation in Fortescue's day might seem a mighty strong counterexample, but he doesn't see fit to mention that.

Speaking of history, the two kinds of rule also have different origins, according to Fortescue. Merely royal rule has always been established through brute force, whereas political rule arises through a kind of social contract (*Fort*. 18, 85). While this seems to anticipate the later ideas of the Huguenots and even Hobbes, Fortescue was actually drawing on medieval theories. Thomas Aquinas was a main source of inspiration, and gave Fortescue the contrast between different types of law. The scholastic background becomes especially clear when Fortescue alludes to Averroes' explanation of how principles are established in Aristotelian science (*Fort*. 14). His writings, then, were not revolutionary in political or intellectual terms. Nonetheless Fortescue offered a polite but firm push in the direction of a certain form of governance. Alongside his emphasis on the lawfulness of political rule and awfulness of merely royal rule, he stressed the need for a council to advise and (though he doesn't come out and put it this way) constrain the king. These should be drawn from the spiritual and secular lords, that is, high-ranking churchmen and nobles. So even if he insisted upon the people's consent to their rulers, Fortescue was far more an oligarchic thinker than a democrat.

In this respect he set the stage for what would come in political writings of the sixteenth century. We've already seen an example with Thomas Elyot's *Book of the Governor*, which proposed that a humanist education was just the thing to prepare aristocrats for giving good advice to their ruler.[7] Elyot even cited an ancient maxim that it is better to have a wicked king than wicked advisors. The same sort of oligarchic ideas animate a work written at just the same time, Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*.[8] The "Pole" of the title is Reginald Pole, a powerful cousin of Henry VIII who broke with the King and sided with the Pope; he then became a Catholic bishop. In Starkey's dialogue, he is shown in conversation with Thomas Lupset, a member of Pole's household who had philosophical interests. For instance, Lupset wrote a work inspired by Stoicism on how to approach death. Thanks to his connections with Pole, Starkey traveled widely in Europe and was influenced by the ideas of the

Italian Renaissance. Indeed, the modern editor of his *Dialogue* says that Starkey was "the most Italianate Englishman of his generation and among the most eager importers of Italian concepts in the sixteenth century."[9] Starkey's use of the dialogue form may itself be a sign of this influence.

The circle orbiting around Pole was more generally involved in the takeup of humanist ideas in England. Through this group Starkey would have known the ideas of Erasmus, Colet, and More. But unlike More's *Utopia*, Starkey's *Dialogue* engages with the politics of his own day rather than imagining an ideal state. Indeed, at one point Starkey disavows the approach of Plato, which would describe an unattainably perfect state. In this respect Starkey is more like Fortescue, who discussed the real political regime of England. Fortescue may in fact have influenced Starkey, who like him says the monarch's authority is properly founded upon the consent of the people, including the commons.[10] The king absolutely must abide by the laws, as for him to do otherwise is an "open gate to tyranny" (*Stark*. 69).

Yet there are differences too. For one thing Starkey's study of ancient authors, like Aristotle and Cicero, leads him to frame politics in more explicitly ethical terms. Admittedly, Fortescue had already stated that happiness lies in virtue and that virtue is encouraged by good laws, so that "whoever enjoys justice is made happy by the law" (*Fort*. 9). But the theme of individual flourishing is far more pronounced in Starkey. Like the Italian humanists, he develops the concept of "civic virtue," saying that there is little point in "virtue that is not published abroad to the profit of others," and that "every man ought to apply himself to the setting forward of the common weal" (*Stark*. 4, 14). His very definition of civil life also builds in an ethical perspective: it is "a political order of a multitude conspiring together in virtue and honesty" (*Stark*. 14). On these grounds, Starkey answers the question posed in the first book of More's *Utopia*, as to whether it is advisable to engage in political life, with a resounding "yes."

However, whereas even the Wars of the Roses didn't stop Fortescue from painting a rosy picture of English political life, Starkey laments the parlous state of England in his own day. There is "a pestilence in the political body" (*Stark*. 105), as witnessed by abandoned towns and a shortage of labor. He's still an Englishman, though, so he makes sure to mention that things are even worse in France, and in Spain and Italy too (*Stark*. 61). Part of the problem is a lack of virtue among the English nobility, who out of "inordinate love for themselves" fail to do their part to

support the common good (*Stark*. 22–23). Then there's a deeper problem, namely the way that monarchs are appointed. While Starkey is cautious enough to say that the sitting king, Henry VIII, is eminently praiseworthy (*Stark*. 111), he has his mouthpiece Reginald Pole argue that monarchs should be put in place through election by the "common voice of Parliament" (*Stark*. 112) rather than by inheritance. When Lupset responds that a hereditary monarchy has the advantage of reducing the chances of civil war, Pole says that this is not generally true, though it may be a good point as concerns the situation in England (*Stark*. 72), perhaps another attempt to defuse the potentially explosive implications of his own argument.

As in Fortescue, the need for the people to subordinate themselves to a ruler is connected to a historical account of the origins of kingship. In a passage that may again make us think ahead to Hobbes, Starkey describes a primordial situation of wild disorder in the distant past, which was tamed only thanks to the advice of "certain men of great wit and policy with perfect eloquence and high philosophy" (*Stark*. 35). Good thing there were some humanist philosophers hanging around in the state of nature! Their suggestion was to establish political constitutions, which might be monarchial, oligarchic, or democratic. Any of these would impose peace and encourage happiness among the people, so long as the rulers looked to the common weal (*Stark*. 36). But obviously Starkey is thinking mostly of monarchy as the outcome of this process, and he approves of this solution, remarking that a good king is "the ground of all felicity in the civil life" (*Stark*. 109). Like Fortescue, though, Starkey also leaves a significant role for a council of advisors, who will represent Parliament and help the king to rule wisely. Actually, more than that. Starkey says that "the king should do nothing pertaining to the state of his realm without the authority of his proper council" (*Stark*. 113).

On the whole, then, these more mainsteam political treatises from the Tudor period might remind us of ideas current in France around the same time. I don't mean the provocative treatises of the Huguenots, which came somewhat later, but an author like Claude de Seyssel, who advocated monarchy as the best form of government, as long as the monarch is bound by certain "bridles" (see Chapter 31 above).[11] These would include the law, to which the king is subject, and a council that would steer the king's choices and even have veto power over him. Furthermore, the king's power

would be given to him through election by the nobility. This proposal could have been known from Marsilius of Padua or simply from Aristotle's *Politics*, which was in fact getting quite a bit of attention in this period.[12] Among ancient treatises on practical philosophy, it was less popular than Cicero's work *On Duties* or Aristotle's own *Nicomachean Ethics*. But like Sam Adams in a Boston pub, its contents were greedily imbibed by university students. I quoted earlier a report about the popularity of Jean Bodin's writing amongst students at Cambridge. Well, that same report says that the students could quote Aristotle's *Politics* from memory. William Cecil, a powerful minister under Queen Elizabeth, even asked the scholastic thinker John Case to write a commentary on the *Politics*, which was published in 1588. Case used the opportunity to defend the permissibility of having female monarchs, in every sense of the word a "politic" thing to argue for during the reign of Elizabeth. He was critical of the concept of elective kingship, which may have inspired Starkey. The upshot was, as a study of this commentary has put it, "to transform Aristotle from ancient Greek *polis* dweller to Tudor loyalist and proto-feminist."[13]

One of the numerous English scholars approaching Aristotle in a humanist spirit was the unexcitingly named Thomas Smith. He was a Protestant who taught the *Politics* at Cambridge, on the basis of the original Greek, and was also a member of Parliament and an ambassador. So despite his unmemorable name, he managed to be involved in pretty much all the movements we've been looking at over the last few chapters, from the English Reformation to humanism and political affairs. One work of his in particular deserves not to be forgotten: *A Discourse of the Commonweal of This Realm of England*, which takes a secular and empirical approach to the topic of political economy.[14] In this work Smith echoes Bodin's explanation of inflation by blaming it on debasement of coinage. He also echoes a point from Thomas More's *Utopia*, namely that individual interest, or to put it more bluntly, greed, is a powerful mechanism that can be used to drive economic activity. To economically beneficial activities, he writes, "men may well be provoked, encouraged, and allured as if they that be industrious and painful be rewarded well for their pains and be suffered to take gains and wealth as reward for their labors."[15] Relatedly, he compares the national economy to a clock, in which each part makes the next part go. Or rather, his attention is not restricted to only the *national* economy. He

realizes that the wider international context, what he calls “the common market of the world,” has a powerful effect on England. Yet another observation that has lost none of its relevance nowadays.

Indeed, just about everything I’ve mentioned in this chapter seems to point forward to later developments. Of course, unlike the barrels of tea thrown into Boston Harbor at the instigation of Sam Adams, we shouldn’t go overboard. I’m not saying that Thomas Smith already anticipated all the ideas of the similarly named Adam Smith, or that Thomas Hobbes was just repeating the views of Fortescue or Starkey. But these thinkers of the Tudor age did anticipate much of what would emerge in the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries. This is true at the level of fine detail, as with Smith’s clock analogy, and also at the level of broad principle. Slowly but surely, political theory was moving away from the assumption that sovereignty is legimated through divine fiat or the natural law, and toward the notion that people might actually have to consent to be ruled. The monarchs of the time noticed this, and were unsurprisingly annoyed. In 1567, Elizabeth gave a speech to Parliament in which she asserted the age-old comparison of the body politic to the human body. She was the head, and Parliament the feet, so it was pretty clear who should be in charge. “God forbid,” Elizabeth warned, that “your liberty should make my bondage.”

It’s often thought that Protestantism undermined such appeals to a naturalist, even organic conception of political life. For Protestants, especially radical ones like the Puritans, true authority was Scriptural rather than rational or natural.[16] Religious acceptability was the only test that rulers needed to pass, and fiery Protestant preachers claimed the right to give a failing grade. Now, the English authors we’ve just discussed did continue to refer to the concept of natural law, juxtaposing it to divine and human law in good scholastic fashion. There was even a poem by John Bale called *Comedy Concerning Three Laws*, which deals with the laws of nature, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Natural law gives a speech about herself, stating, “God hath appointed me, mankind to oversee, and in his heart to sit. To teach him, for to know, in the creatures high and low, His glorious majesty.” (Obviously I’m quoting this for the philosophical content, not the quality of the verse.) Nature could also be invoked in arguments over concrete political issues. We saw John Knox saying that the rule of women is unnatural, a point that was rebutted by John Aylmer: “I reason against him thus: whatsoever preserves

commonwealths, and destroys them not, is not against nature; but the rule of women has preserved commonwealths; ergo, it is not against nature." Still, the increasing tendency to base political authority on something like a contract, a primordial agreement in which the people would have transferred authority to a sovereign, was gradually chipping away at the traditional foundations of monarchial rule. To realize that the king's power is artificial is to take the first step toward questioning that power. After all, what is manmade can be unmade by men.

# 42

# THE WORLD'S LAW

## *Richard Hooker*

When I was learning to drive as a teenager, one of my friends gave me some advice, which has stayed fixed in my memory thanks to his somewhat grandiloquent phrasing: when driving on a three-lane highway, "the middle lane affords one many luxuries." It's a sentiment that has had many adherents, from Aristotle to Goldilocks to Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. When faced with extreme options, the best path lies comfortably in the middle. Plenty of people in Reformation-era Britian would have agreed. The Puritan firebrands and conservative Catholics may stick in the memory, but plenty of others were embracing a more moderate approach to matters of state and religion. Or at least they were presenting themselves as moderate, even if this meant welcoming the execution of people who strayed too far from the middle path. That would apply to a good number of the political thinkers we've been discussing, and indeed to Queen Elizabeth herself. The religious settlement of Elizabethan England was Protestant, yet it retained the church structure and rituals familiar from a time before the Reformation. Similarly, the political settlement involved a hereditary monarchy, with royal authority granted by God Himself, but also granted significant power to influential advisors and to Parliament.

As for the Puritan firebrands, they saw such compromises as, well, compromises. They were failures to embrace fully the lessons of the Reformation. Scripture alone should be the arbiter of religion, and true

religion should be used as the litmus test for political legitimacy.[1] We're talking here about men like Thomas Cartwright, who adopted Presbyterianism—in other words, a rejection of the episcopacy, or hierarchy in the Church of England—and who preferred a mixed constitution over monarchical government. Or Robert Browne, who met Cartwright at Cambridge and in 1582 published his *Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying*, which denied all authority over the church to the sitting monarch. The Queen's power was purely civic in nature, not religious. Instead, religious authority should be arranged in a fashion one is tempted to call "democratic": representatives of the whole church would choose the ministers. Shockingly, Browne then added, "we give these definitions so general, that they may be applied also to the civil state." Instead of waiting, or "tarrying," for the government to catch up with such radical notions, these reformers explored the idea of separating from the wider society. One separatist, Robert Harrison, said that he saw no reason to give allegiance to rulers who failed in their religious duties: "a living dog is better than they are." The church can rightfully depose such a ruler, and those rulers who earn the right to stay in office would do so purely on the basis of a compact or covenant agreed (perhaps tacitly) with their subjects.

Of course, it would hardly count as a radical proposal nowadays to say that rulers should serve at the pleasure of the ruled. But at the time this was heady stuff, which threatened to destabilize both the state and church of late sixteenth-century England. Who was going to speak up for the middle ground that lay between Presbyterianism and the supposed "superstition" and theocracy of Catholic tradition? Richard Hooker, that's who. Not only him, of course. He was following the lead of his sometime patron, the longserving Archibishop of Canterbury John Whitgift. Whitgift engaged in polemical disputes with the aforementioned Thomas Cartwright, who would also be a chief target of Hooker's major work, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. It was dedicated to Whitgift and approved by him. The first four books were published in 1593 but the complete work runs to eight books, some of them appearing only after Hooker's death, which came with period-ending finality in 1600.[2] In his refutation of the Presbyterian views espoused by Cartwright and his allies, Hooker ranges widely over substantive and methodological questions. He touches on everything from the relationship of reason to Scripture, to the decorations, music, and clothing to be used in churches, to the nature of political rule. But if you

had to distill the whole thing down to one simple message, it would be this: the radical reformers are wrong to try to base everything in Scripture, because we often need to use our natural reason as well. This is no departure from true godliness, according to Hooker, because it was God who gave us rationality as well as revelation.

By the time Hooker published the *Laws* he was already an experienced theologian, almost forty years in age. Born near Exeter in 1554, he studied at Oxford and was a lecturer in Hebrew there.[3] So he gives us yet another example of the merger between Protestant religion and the humanist study of ancient languages. He then became Master of the Temple Church at the Inns of Court in London, the epicenter of legal study in England. (His later focus on the topic of laws was thus hardly accidental.) It was here that Hooker engaged in his first prominent dispute, with a Puritan theologian named Walter Travers, who had views like those of Cartwright. Travers and Hooker offered rival lectures at the Temple Church, and it was said that "the pulpit spoke pure Canterbury in the morning, and Geneva in the afternoon." The point of this remark was to contrast Hooker's Anglican views with those of Travers, which were modeled on a more rigorous form of Calvinism.

The main issue at dispute between the two was one we've seen generating arguments across several generations now, not least with Luther and Erasmus, namely sin and grace. Anticipating the positive evaluation of human nature found in his later treatise, the *Laws*, Hooker pushed back against Travers' radically Calvinist view that the human has no role in salvation, with God predestining the saved and doing all the work to save them.[4] Of course Hooker agreed that divine grace is needed for salvation. No Protestant would deny that in this period, and no Catholic either. But he suggested that the function of grace is to perfect human nature after its corruption by sin. This is pretty familiar to us, but things get more interesting when we look at the related question of whether a believer can *know* that they have been offered grace and redemption. In 1585 Hooker wrote a work with the charming title *A Learned and Comfortable Sermon on the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect*. Here "comfortable" means "comforting," and that is indeed the point. Hooker's central question is, "they in whose hearts the light of grace doth shine, they that are taught of God, why are they so weak in faith?" He wants to reassure his readers that they can have a degree of confidence, or "certainty," in their own salvation.

He compares this attitude to the faith we should have in our own reason. Though we cannot know everything, the things we can establish through rational investigation are known with certainty.

The certainty in question, though, is of a rather special kind. Hooker makes a nice distinction between what we would now call subjective and objective certainty. Imagine that you are taking a mathematics test. You're nervous, and you know you have often made mistakes on math tests in the past. So as you write out a slightly tricky proof, despite being pretty confident it's right and having double-checked it for mistakes, you wouldn't venture to say that you are one hundred percent sure that it is right. Maybe you wouldn't even bet money on it. But, good news: your answer *is* right. And in itself it is completely certain. It's a mathematical proof, after all! Thus the objective certainty of the proof outstrips your limited, subjective *feeling* of certainty. Now, Hooker wants to apply this contrast to truths of religion. God's bestowal of grace to the faithful is as certain as anything could be. Still, we might feel a lot less certain about it than we do about, say, (easier) mathematical proofs or things we believe on the basis of the senses. As Hooker puts it, "we have less certainty of evidence concerning things believed than concerning things sensibly or naturally perceived. Of the latter, who doubts at any time, of the former, at some time who doesn't?"[5] It is acceptable, indeed natural, to doubt in matters of faith, but one should remember that these doubts don't affect the rock solid certainty of what is believed. Such modesty in belief is, Hooker thinks, a great comfort. "Let them beware who challenge to themselves a strength which they have not, lest they lose the comfortable support of that weakness which indeed they have."

As you can tell from this, Hooker could strike a calm, even gentle tone even in rather polemical contexts. The same is shown by the *Laws*, which despite its sustained attack on the Presbyterians is at pains to argue in a measured and persuasive way. Hooker even suggests that what divides Cartwright and his allies from the Elizabethan consensus view is not, in the end, that big a deal (2.1). Surely, as fellow Christians, they can reach some sort of agreement? Toward that end, it would do the Presbyterians good to reflect on how certain they truly are about their dissident opinions. After all, we're not talking about mathematical proofs here, but deep and difficult matters of religion and politics. While Hooker's opponents surely feel they have good reasons on their side, they can hardly take these reasons to be

completely decisive! So it would behoove them to stop making so much fuss. Hooker suggests in the Preface of the *Laws* that the Presbyterians should, given the inevitable uncertainty that surrounds the thorny issues at stake, submit publicly to the appointed authorities in those issues. These would of course be the crown and the established church. Instead, as "private men" they go around smashing up churches and trying to win the allegiance of common believers, whose opinions are easily swayed and, in Hooker's view, hardly worth taking seriously.

So here we have an all-purpose argument for conservatism and obedience to authority. Gentle tone or not, it's hard to imagine Puritan readers being persuaded to change their minds (and not only because it's hard to imagine the Puritans changing their minds for any reason). But Hooker's case grows stronger as the work proper begins. He puts his finger on a genuinely weak point in the Presbyterian position, namely their appeal to the principle of "Scripture alone." As Catholics like Thomas More had pointed out, this methodology is problematic, if not incoherent. For one thing, Scripture can hardly be the warrant for its own authority, since that would be circular (2.4). For another, it clearly does not give us guidance on all matters. As Hooker says, we don't have to consult the Bible to know how to go about picking up a piece of straw (2.1). Rather, Scripture tells us what is necessary for our salvation, especially things we wouldn't have been able to work out on our own (1.14). It leaves much else undecided, even with regard to religion. Hence the aforementioned discussion of things like church decorations, which for Hooker are (in keeping with the Church of England's view since the time of Henry VIII) "indifferent," that is, left to human discretion. They concern only the "outward form" of the church, whereas salvation is attained through membership in the invisible, inward church. As Hooker puts it, Scripture tells us how to arrive at salvation, but its directions are compatible with traveling along a paved or a gravel road (3.3).

Furthermore, some guidelines found explicitly in the Bible may not be intended for us (1.15). Commandments handed down to the ancient Israelites don't necessarily remain in force now, a point of some political significance since the Puritans liked to refer to the Old Testament as a model for English governance.[6] Rather, God's commands always look to certain goals, and when the goals are no longer relevant neither are the commands (3.10). As these examples show, Hooker believes that Christians

needed to do some careful thinking to understand the Bible and its demands, and they also need to work out for themselves other rules to live by. Fortunately God has provided them with the means to do just that: natural reason. "God," Hooker remarks, "is Nature's author, and her voice merely His instrument" (1.8). Far from honoring God by denigrating reason and exalting Scripture above it, the Presbyterians were rejecting a precious divine gift. Of course, the clear verdict of Scripture is always a powerful consideration. Indeed, it is the most powerful proof of all, having more weight than a thousand church councils (2.7). But usually we lack such clear directives, so we must rationally reflect and follow the course that seems most probable.

Hooker develops this idea when he comes to talk about the different kinds of law. Following Thomas Aquinas, he speaks firstly of the eternal law, which may be considered as being in a sense identical to God. This is the ultimate standard for all law. The eternal law gives rise to two kinds of lower laws: the revealed laws found in Scripture and the natural law. The "hotter" Protestants, as they were called at the time, had little use for the concept of natural law, and Hooker's discussion shows us why. He explicitly contrasts the natural law to Scriptural laws, which his opponents saw as the sole source of true religion. Understanding this full well, Hooker says that the root of the Presbyterian error is a failure to grasp how other kinds of law relate to the eternal law (1.16). Of course, Scripture is rooted in that law, but so is the natural law. Furthermore, specific human laws—like the laws of England—are rightly made in accordance with Scriptural and natural laws. It's been observed in a recent book that Hooker is here deploying a Platonist theory of participation.[7] Platonists standardly taught that transcendent causes contain their effects. So here, the natural law and even human laws are participations of the eternal law, and unfold its commands. We use our power of rationality to discern principles of natural law, for instance that children should respect their parents, and to forge useful and good laws for running our societies, for instance that children can come into their inheritance at the age of eighteen (my examples, not Hooker's). Thus "the law of reason constitutes the rational, cognitive participation of human beings in the providential order of the universe."[8]

Hooker applies these ideas to the fraught question of political authority by saying that state institutions are in general guided by the natural law, and in particular instances determined by human choices. It is natural for

humans to group together in societies to fulfill basic needs, and then to seek peace and justice within these societies. We do this by appointing certain people to rule over us, to enforce laws and prevent conflict. This has to be achieved artificially and by consent, unlike in the family where nature itself puts the parents in charge over the children (1.10). But unlike many Puritan theorists, Hooker does not think that political life is based *purely* on consent. Though each individual state is brought into existence through a covenant between ruler and ruled, the general tendency and need to create such covenants is rooted in human nature. Thus Hooker is both a constitutionalist, who believes in a hereditary monarchy put in place by the will of the people, and a naturalist, who believes that this act of consensus was prompted by the natural law.[9] Ultimately, in fact, it is God who decrees that we set up political states, because our doing so is just one more way to participate in the eternal law. All this is explained in detail in the posthumous eighth book of Hooker's *Laws*, where he also defends the fact that the queen or king is the head of the Church of England. Of course, he doesn't insist that this arrangement is required by Scripture, or even by nature. Rather, it is just one good way to arrange things. Church and state power are in principle distinct, and could be exerted by different authorities. It's just that in England, it has been found expedient to unite both kinds of authority in one sovereign.[10]

All this is just about philosophically clever and subtle enough to forestall the lingering suspicion that the whole theory is simply engineered to justify the Elizabethan settlement. As Diarmaid MacCulloch has written, "one feels that if the parliamentary legislation of 1559 had prescribed that English clergy were to preach standing on their heads, then Hooker would have found a theological reason for justifying it."[11] As I've said, Hooker seems to be a conservative figure, no less than Thomas More earlier in the century. For More in the 1530s, that meant fighting Protestantism; for Hooker in the 1590s, it meant being a moderate Protestant, and adhering to the Anglican settlement. It has, though, been strenuously argued that Hooker was far more principled than this would suggest, and that in the landscape of late sixteenth-century Protestantism, it was Hooker who was the true heir of Calvin and Luther.

This case has been made extensively by a leading Hooker scholar, W.J. Torrance Kirby.[12] He has criticized the long-standing tendency to identify

Hooker, and by extension Anglicanism, with a "middle way (*via media*)" between Calvinist Protestantism and Catholicism. Kirby points out that, despite their rallying cry of "Scripture alone," the leading reformers did give a place in their theories to "merely human nature." For example, they contrasted the "two realms" of inner grace and of worldly affairs, and warned against confusing the two. Hooker was just following their lead when he said that political affairs should be governed by the world's law, whereas Puritans like Cartwright insisted on identifying the spiritual with the external. This is why they insisted that no external authority could be recognized who violated the demands of religious life. By contrast, we saw Luther and Calvin denying that their revolutionary understanding of the spiritual realm should lead to real revolution in the political realm. To take another example, Kirby sees it as being faithful to Calvin when Hooker and Archbishop Whitgift say that the external form of the church is a matter for the "wit of man" to determine.[13] Kirby also provides ample evidence that Hooker saw himself as being true to the great reformers, and not as departing from their teachings. This is all fairly convincing, and I'm not going to presume to argue with it. I would point out, though, that Cartwright, Browne, and the other Puritans were also picking up on themes genuinely present in the writings of the leading reformers, especially Calvin. And they were just as convinced as Hooker that they were adhering to his thought. The real problem in late sixteenth-century England is not that one group was being true to Protestantism while another wasn't. It was that Protestantism and its founding authors simply left plenty of room for disagreement.

So disagree they did. Shortly before Hooker's death, in 1599, he was pilloried in a text called *A Christian Letter of Certain English Protestants*.[14] It accused him of setting up the natural law as a second and independent source of authority apart from Scripture. Far from supporting the true church, this would undermine its very foundations. In fact the authors of the *Letter* thought Hooker sounded like a Catholic, writing that he sought "to scatter the prophane grains of popery." As if that weren't bad enough, they also said he wrote as if he were a (shudder) *philosopher*. Hooker was one amongst a group of sinister "poets, philosophers, rhetoricians, physicians, schoolmen, and whatsoever," and wrote like "another Aristotle by a certain metaphysical and cryptical method so as to bring men into a maze." And you have to say that these "certain Protestants"—who were, as Hooker

forewarned, indeed mighty "certain" in their opinions—had a point. I already mentioned in passing that some of Hooker's argumentative moves repeat those made by defenders of Catholicism like Thomas More. Back in 1530 or so, a supporter of the papacy might very well have pointed out that, given the uncertainty and difficulty of religious questions, one should follow the established authority—namely the one in Rome! As for Hooker's subtle reflections on political legitimacy, they are strikingly similar to what we can find in some contemporary Catholic thinkers. As we'll see later, Spanish Jesuits likewise defended a constitutionalist monarchy grounded in the natural law (see Chapter 67).

Of course, Hooker was no Catholic. He dismissed the teachings of Rome as mere superstition. Indeed, it would probably be fair to say that he was willing to indulge in arguments like the ones criticized in the *Letter* simply because he didn't take Catholicism seriously as an intellectual or theological threat. For him and for most people, it was no longer a live option in late sixteenth-century England. So he did not hesitate to use against the Presbyterians arguments that could, in theory, be used just as well by Catholics. But there is another, more principled reason that Hooker's arguments couldn't be used to support Catholicism. The Pope claimed to exercise universal spiritual authority over all Christians. In contrast, Hooker thought in strictly national terms. His theory leaves a great deal to human discretion and human consent: the form and religion of each state are determined by the people who live under that state.[15] The English thus choose one system, the French another, and so on. In this respect, too, he truly was a defender of the Church of England.

# 43

# HEAVEN-BRED POESY

## *Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser*

Now, I know what you're thinking. Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser: weren't they famous poets, not philosophers? What are they doing in this book? Well, I'm not one to rely on mere appeals to authority, and if I were then reading Richard Hooker would have shown me the error of my ways. Still, when great authorities are on my side, there's no harm in mentioning it. Especially when the authority in question is Aristotle! So I'm going to start this discussion by reminding you that Aristotle's writings include a work called the *Poetics*, a foundational work of literary theory. Even better, it features a passage in which Aristotle compares the writing of poetry to the writing of history, and says that the poets' enterprise is "more philosophical (*philosophoteron*)," because "poetry concerns itself more with the universal, whereas history speaks of the particular" (ch. 9, 1451b, my translation). Thanks to the humanist movement, this passage and the *Poetics* in general were well known in Elizabethan England. And in this context, Aristotle's judgment was used to support an even bolder claim: that poetry is superior not only to history, but also to philosophy itself.

I trust that Aristotle wouldn't agree, and as you might imagine, neither do I. But we philosophers should always be ready to listen to counterarguments. So let's turn to the proponent of this claim, Philip Sidney. He was innovative in his poetic style but perhaps best known as the author of a prose work, the romantic pastoral tale *Arcadia*. It does show

some interest in philosophy.[1] But I want to focus here on a much shorter text, his brief *Defense of Poesy*. The title already raises a question: why would anyone have felt the need to defend poetry in the Elizabethan period? This was the age of Shakespeare, after all! True, but to Sidney's mind the royal court was not doing all it could to support the cause of literature. Furthermore, this was also the age of religious reform, when the arts could provoke considerable anxiety, if not outright opposition. In particular, poetry could easily be associated with classical pagan culture or the medieval, and hence Catholic, literary tradition. Roger Ascham's humanist work on education, *The Schoolmaster*, made this point when it decried the "rude beggarly rhyming" that had been brought into England from papist Europe "by men of excellent wit indeed, but of small learning and less judgment."[2] So there was pressure on the poets to show how their chosen art could be reconciled with the strictures of a godly, Protestant society.

Sidney had an additional reason to be on the defensive about poetry. As grandson of the Duke of Northumberland, he was a high-ranking aristocrat who might have been expected to distinguish himself through warfare and diplomacy, not by writing verse. By this measure, he was not a complete failure. He was even knighted in 1583, one year before his early death at the age of thirty-one. But he fell out of royal favor after advocating too openly for a strong stance against Spain. So he may have seen his literary career as a kind of consolation prize. Ironically, this made him the ideal messenger for promoting poetry among his aristocratic peers: they would believe Sidney "because he only partly believed himself."[3] On this reading, his *Defense* was a bid to depict poetry as a valid alternative to military prowess. This would help to explain the way he begins, by telling of a defender of the art of horsemanship who argued so eloquently in praise of this skill that it made Sidney almost wish he were a horse. This opening gambit satirically positions poetry as a foil to a paradigmatically chivalric art, and thereby invites the reader to reflect on Sidney's own social position.

It's the sort of self-presentation familiar to us from Erasmus and other humanists who imitated him. And, indeed, the whole *Defense*, knowingly ironic yet serious in its themes, echoes the tone of a work like Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly*. Sidney's lightly worn literary persona was hard won. Along with his noble lineage, he brought to the *Defense* an impressive humanist pedigree. He traveled widely in Europe, studying in Padua, Frankfurt, and Paris, where he sat at the feet of Peter Ramus and experienced the St.

Bartholomew's Day Massacre. He was formed by the new educational model of Philip Melanchthon, which fused Protestant piety with humanist scholarship.[4] Amongst his friends were such outstanding Protestant literary figures as François Hotman and Philippe du Plessis-Mornay; Lipsius called him the "flower of England." Rich, charming, brilliant—and did I mention rich?—Sidney moved easily in these circles and shared his ideas about poetry with refined colleagues. But not with anyone else. None of Sidney's writings were printed in his lifetime, so they were known only through manuscripts that circulated among like-minded aristocrats.

Putting all this together, we can say that the goal of Sidney's *Defense* was to use humanist rhetorical methods to make a case for poetry as the most excellent of pursuits, aiming to convince both the highborn and the godly. That's a lot of hurdles to jump over, but Sidney was himself no mean horseman, and mounted a powerful case. His central contention was that the poet is the writer best positioned to instill virtue in his readers. Because of its aesthetic appeal, it can delight as it instructs, like a "medicine of cherries." This makes it an ideal teaching aid, especially for those who are just forming their character. He chastizes philosophers who have made slighting comments about poetry, since it is in fact "the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges." As evidence he points out that the earliest philosophers, Presocratics like Parmenides and Empedocles, presented their ideas in poetic form—which is true, though their poems aren't exactly suitable for beginners. It's also a little awkward for Sidney that a favorite author of the humanists, Plato, banished the poets from the ideal society described in his *Republic*. Sidney defuses this objection by arguing that Plato was only against poetry that teaches falsehoods, for instance about the gods. He was "banishing the abuse, not the thing."

But the main classical inspiration for Sidney is the one I mentioned at the outset: Aristotle's *Poetics*. He takes from it the idea that the function of poetry is *mimesis*, or "imitation." The poet uses this technique to persuade his audience to adopt true beliefs about God and morality. This is where the competition between poetry, history, and philosophy comes in. The problem with history is that it is tied to factual events, which constrains its ability to impart instructive lessons. The poet's freedom to invent means that he can, like the philosopher, focus attention on moral precepts without getting bogged down in the tiresome question of what actually happened in a given

place and time. Now, in fact, Renaissance historians were happy to be selective and creative, precisely because they wanted to offer their readers moral and political instruction and not just a neutral chronicle of events. But Sidney might say that this just shows the historians' awareness of their own limits. To achieve their aims, they need to use what we could quite literally call "poetic license." As for philosophy, it has the reverse problem. Since it is entirely general and abstract, it cannot move the reader. Only poetry can use both precept and example, so it has the virtues of both philosophy and history and the weaknesses of neither.

Sidney's focus on virtue is well-chosen, since this should dispel religious concerns about the "merely" aesthetic, and also show the utility of poetry for aristocratic readers interested in personal excellence. But like the hero of a Greek tragedy, Sidney's argument has a fatal flaw. The best poetry is not nearly as didactic as Sidney suggests it should be. Great poetic works do not surrender their lessons easily, but have layers of meaning that reveal themselves only to close interpretive scrutiny. They inexhaustibly reward reading and rereading. As an example, let's consider what is arguably the greatest literary work of this period not written by Shakespeare: Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene*. As it happens there was a connection between Spenser and Sidney. The two were about the same age, but Spenser came from a less exalted background; when he attended university he had to make his way as a servant to other students. Fortunately for him, Sidney put his money where his mouth was by sponsoring Spenser and other authors, to the point that his name became proverbial for the act of literary patronage. As late as the eighteenth century, we find a bit of doggerel verse complaining about the demise of such generosity: "for now no Sidneys will three hundred give, that needy Spenser and his Fame may live."[5]

Though Spenser rose to greater heights than one of his background could have expected, he did not achieve his full ambitions. Or at least that's the usual verdict on the turn his career took in 1580, when he was sent to Ireland on the crown's business. Ireland was considered as a primitive backwater, not least by Spenser himself, so the posting hardly seemed like a promotion, though it has been argued that the relatively autonomous political situation there could have provided opportunities for the ambitious.[6] Nor was Spenser's attitude to his new home wholly negative. He called attention to the long history of literacy in Ireland and also to its tradition of bards, impressive to a poet like himself. But it wouldn't be

unfair to call him an apologist for the depredations inflicted on the island during the reign of Elizabeth, in particular the killing of thirty thousand Irish to make room for a plantation of four thousand English at Munster. Spenser described the horrific consequences of a scorched earth policy used in Ireland, starving the population: "out of every corner of the woods and glens they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them; they looked like anatomies of death." He blamed it all on the Irish themselves, though. They were killed not by the sword but "by the extremity of famine, which they themselves had wrought."

As you may know, our phrase "beyond the pale" refers to the idea of a "pale" or supposedly "civilized" area around Dublin that was under the control of the English. A contemporary, William Camden, thus said that whereas the English Pale was a place of law, the Irish folk outside it "reject all laws and live after a barbarous manner."[7] Spenser wouldn't have disagreed. But he was also critical of the "Old English" who had lived there for a long time, deeming them corrupted by exposure to this barbaric land. The solution, he felt, was to import even more English people and more English language. The Irish tongue should be stamped out, because "the mind must needs be affected with the words, so that the speech being Irish, the heart must needs be Irish."[8] His views were unveiled in one of the more unsettling humanist dialogues from this period, *A View of the State of Ireland*.[9] Its two characters discuss what is to be done with this country, and how to remedy its defects. Spenser would like to see the rural populace give up their nomadic ways, by settling down to focus on agriculture rather than wandering around with livestock. He is at pains to say that it is indeed the populace, and not the place, that is to blame for the backwardness of Ireland.[10] Rather implausibly, he suggests that the Irish are descendants of the Scythians, who in antiquity were considered to be the most barbaric of the barbarians. This is convenient for Spenser, since it means that there is nothing intrinsically barbaric about the land or the conditions it offers. If the English could just exterminate the locals, or completely overturn their way of life, then the place wouldn't be half bad.

I linger on this in part because it gives us a first glimpse of attitudes we'll delve into more deeply later in this book. Spenser's writing on Ireland is an early articulation of the ideology of colonialism. Like the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, the flowering of scholarship in

the sixteenth century had a dark side. There was an easy slide from celebrating "humanistic" values to rationalizing the oppression of people who supposedly lack full humanity. But the material on Ireland is also of more immediate relevance, since the contrast between "civilized" and "savage" is a leitmotif of *The Faerie Queene*.[11] When Spenser presented the whole work to patrons he called it "the wild fruit which savage soil hath bred, which being through long wars left almost waste, with brutish barbarism is overspread." The poem itself features numerous passages that touch on the same theme, as when savage characters appear to challenge or aid the chivalric knights and ladies who are Spenser's protagonists, or when the fairy kingdom is contrasted to the wild and untamed forest.

At first glance the allegorical meaning seems pretty clear. The court of the fairy queen represents civilization in general, and more specifically the court of Elizabeth, while unmannered and rude characters and places represent Ireland, or any other context where refined values and behavior are lacking. Civilization goes with virtue and barbarity with vice, an equation that Spenser encourages when he writes of lust as a "wild and savage man" (4.7.5). But this simple reading might be a bit *too* simple. An influential interpretation of *The Faerie Queene* by Stephen Greenblatt is more nuanced. He calls attention to the way that Spenser evokes both the attractiveness and fearfulness of the wild and untamed, the passionate and licentious. His poem lingers over the seductive aspects of vice, only to stage acts of destruction that purge the sinfulness that has just been described. A central example is the so-called "Bower of Bliss" (2.12), a haven of sensual delights presided over by a witch called Acrasia (*akrasia* is ancient Greek for weakness of will) who can turn humans into animals, presumably symbolizing the effects of unrestrained pleasure on humanity. The knight Guyon defeats her, and literally binds her up to stop her from doing further mischief. As Greenblatt writes, "civility is won through the exercise of violence over what is deemed barbarous and evil, and the passages of love and leisure are not moments set apart from this process but its rewards."[12] The orgy of destruction, offered to the reader in lieu of the sexual orgy they may have been anticipating, would have recalled for Spenser and his readers the destruction of churches and their decorations in iconoclasm.

All this is typical of *The Faerie Queene*, which seems to wear its symbolic meanings *on* its sleeve, only to reveal that in fact it has other, more complex ideas *up* its sleeve. As in the Bower of Bliss, the reader faces

a powerful temptation: to adopt a straightforward allegorical reading of each episode. Characters and places in the poem are literally called things like "Despair" and "Error." Even when the meaning isn't quite that obvious there is often a thinly concealed one. For instance, the female heroine and enchantress of the first book are named respectively Una and Duess, alluding to the concepts of unity and duality. The knightly hero of this book, whose true love is Una and who is seduced by Duess, is known simply as "Redcross" after the symbol emblazoned on his shield. Spenser might as well have started the poem with a note to the reader that says, "now, don't miss that the Arthurian romance is just an allegory for the journey of the soul to salvation." In fact, he pretty well did say this, in a letter about the poem addressed to one particular reader, his friend and patron Walter Raleigh. Raleigh was famously an intrepid explorer, but Spenser was taking no chances that he might get lost in the symbolism. So he explained that the poem is a "continued allegory, or dark conceit" and proceeded to decode it for Raleigh's benefit, making Spenser an "allegorical critic of his own poem," as one scholar has put it.[13]

That moralizing defender of poetry, Philip Sidney, would certainly have approved of all this, had he lived to see it. (The *Fairie Queene* was published in installments, the first three books in 1589 with a further three books in 1596.) It may be that Spenser himself wanted to encourage a straightforwardly moralistic reading of the work, so as to forestall any objections that he was indulging in an outmoded and religiously suspect medieval form of writing. As the aforementioned Ascham once put it, "in our forefathers' time, when papistry as a standing pool covered and overflowed all England, few books were read in our tongue [that is, English], saving certain books of chivalry…made in monasteries by idle monks."[14] But Spenser does not really dispel the tension between the romantic epic form and his religious message. Fundamentally, stories about knights and damsels are about heroic deeds, and good deeds are precisely what does *not* merit salvation according to Protestant belief.[15] When you think about it, isn't an allegorical tale showing how the soul confronts and defeats temptation and sin rather…*Catholic*? Perhaps the idea is instead that the knights do not win grace, but receive it at the very beginning, as when the knight of the first book dons the red cross before setting out on his adventures. Then the virtuous deeds could flow from divine dispensation,

serving as signs of grace rather than cases of earning grace.[16] That would be perfectly in tune with reformed thought, but it doesn't sit very well with the way the poem unfolds, since it seems that the knights' redemption still hangs in the balance. They are in constant peril of seduction by sin, and also by false belief. The Redcross knight encounters a figure representing Islam named *Sansfoy*, meaning "without faith" (1.2.12). Another opponent is a monstrous representative of popery whose poisonous bile is vomit "full of books and papers" (1.1.20), a none too subtle dig at the scholastics. The aforementioned Duessa, meanwhile, is based on the Whore of Babylon, a figure typically used by Protestants to symbolize the Catholic Church. These points make clear Spenser's religious commitments without convincing us that a truly Protestant theology can be allegorized in the form of an Arthurian romance.

Equally vexed is the poem's relationship to philosophy. Already in 1628 an exegete of Spenser called him a "disciple of Plato's school,"[17] and in modern times too it has been argued that Spenser was powerfully influenced by Platonism. This intellectual debt is supposed to be shown especially in an episode in the third book of *The Faerie Queene*, about the so-called Garden of Adonis (3.6). Other scholars have vigorously disputed that interpretation.[18] There is general agreement that Spenser was well enough informed about the history of philosophy to have drawn on Platonism; he was a member of the European intelligentsia who benefited from the work of Italian Renaissance scholars like Ficino and Pico. But there is no consensus about whether the poem in general, or the section on the Garden of Adonis in particular, are simply recasting Platonist metaphysics in verse form. So let's look at that passage and make up our own minds.

The relevant section tells of how the goddess Venus is searching for Cupid in "the savage woods and forests wide" (3.6.16) when she encounters the realm of Adonis, who is responsible for sending children into the world. This Garden is like a more acceptable counterpart of the Bower of Bliss, where sexuality serves its appropriate purpose, namely reproduction. Spenser calls it the seedbed or "first seminary of all things that are born to live and die, according to their kinds" (3.6.30). The reference to "kinds" here does sound like an allusion to Platonic Forms,[19] and there are strong Platonic resonances in Spenser's description of Adonis' dispatching of

souls into their new lives (3.6.32–33). This is worth quoting at length, in part so you get a sense of the poem's style:

> He letteth in, he letteth out to wend,
> All that to come into the world desire;
> A thousand thousand naked babes attend
> About him day and night, which do require,
> That he with fleshly weeds would them attire:
> Such as him list, such as eternal fate
> Ordained hath, he clothes with sinful mire,
> And sendeth forth to live in mortal state,
> Till they again return back by the hinder gate.
>
> After that they again returned been,
> They in that garden planted be again;
> And grow afresh, as they had never seen
> Fleshly corruption, nor mortal pain.
> Some thousand years so do they there remain,
> And then of him are clad with other hue,
> Or sent into the changeful world again,
> Til thither they return, where first they grew:
> So like a wheel around they run from old to new.

We have here an Elizabethan English version of Plato's myths of the soul (like the ones at the end of the *Phaedo* or *Republic*), where disembodied souls come into the world and receive bodies like donning a new set of clothes.[20] Shortly after this passage, we learn that souls can go into different species of animals (3.6.35), another idea familiar from Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy. Through its many incarnations the soul remains the same, or as Spenser writes, "the substance is not changed, nor altered, but the only form and outward fashion" (3.6.38).

To my mind the question is not so much *whether* Spenser is evoking Platonist ideas here. It's *why* he is doing it. Platonism goes well with his suspicion of body and bodily desire. That attitude was clear from the destruction of the Bower of Bliss, and there are other examples, as when the four elements that make up the body are allegorically described as a threat to human rationality.[21] Spenser is also fascinated by the way that images draw our minds and desires toward their exemplars, as in Plato's *Symposium*.[22] On the other hand, there is a tension between such Platonist tropes and Spenser's presumably more fundamental Protestant beliefs. Think again about the story of Adonis. How are this god and Venus

supposed to relate to the Christian God? And what exactly is the moral lesson of the story? Spenser associates receiving a body with sinfulness, when he says that Adonis "clothes with sinful mire" the souls who are being born. That is easy to understand as a Christianization of Platonic myth, but if so the Christianization is very incomplete. This myth has souls returning after death to the Garden to be purified for "some thousand years" before being reborn again. Surely Spenser doesn't want us to believe in this kind of cyclical reincarnation. Rather, he seems to be playing around with classical pagan ideas, letting them both harmonize and clash with true religion. Like bodily pleasures, they are seductive, yet to be treated with extreme caution. One critic, struck by the ambivalence of the whole passage, actually thinks that the Garden scene is meant to *subvert* Platonic philosophy.[23]

Now, I'm no Spenser expert. In fact, until I read up on him my main association with the name "Spenser" was a 1980s TV show about a private detective from my home town of Boston. But for what it's worth, my own feeling is that *The Faerie Queene* is itself a mystery that calls for some literary sleuthing: a difficult and elusive text, not the simple allegorical work it at first seems to be. It has been called "the most unreadable poem in the English language." That's a title it earns on the basis of its prodigious length alone, as it stretches over some thirty-five thousand lines. But the description also fits because *The Faerie Queene* manages to offer itself as being "readable" in a rather straightforward way, and then to undermine that very reading. It is a Protestant work that revels in medieval chivalry, full of both moral strictures and lurid pleasures, self-conscious, self-defeating, self-interpreting, and self-misinterpreting. Does this make it better than philosophy, or worse? Or just different? Well, if I may again trouble you with my own opinion, I am not sure that Sidney's distinction between poetry and philosophy really holds up. Philosophy is not a specific mode of writing, after all, like poetry is. It can be presented in poetic form, or as a dialogue, a treatise, a novel, you name it. Or how about this: philosophical theater? Presumably such a thing should be possible, if all the world really is a stage.

# 44

# HAST ANY PHILOSOPHY IN THEE?

## *William Shakespeare*

When I first started my new job in Munich back in 2012, one of the delights in store was my first visit to the dedicated Shakespeare Library at the LMU. I walked in and stood there, just gazing at the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves full of volumes about the greatest literary figure of the English language. Editions, translations, studies of every possible theme, every aspect of historical context, comparisons to authors of the same time period and of other periods, and so on. Given that I work in ancient philosophy, I'm used to the fact that more has been written about Plato and Aristotle than anyone could ever hope to read. But Shakespeare studies, I now realized, are of a whole different order: this was a secondary literature of truly mountainous proportions. Finally I walked in to look around…and noticed that there was a second room.

So now, some years later, I feel the need to explain why I'm adding my own pebble to the top of that mountain by including several chapters on him in this book. It would be nice to be able to say that it is fresh and original to approach Shakespeare from a specifically philosophical direction. Which is sort of true. The introduction to a fairly recent *Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy* calls this particular area of scholarship "an emerging and comparatively small field."[1] But when the comparison is the rest of Shakespeare studies, that isn't saying much. In fact Edinburgh University Press has a whole book series dedicated to philosophy and Shakespeare,

and there are monographs and collections of articles on topics like ethics in Shakespeare,[2] Shakespeare's political philosophy,[3] Shakespeare as a "philosopher of history,"[4] and skepticism in Shakespeare.[5] Then there are comprehensive studies like A.D. Nuttall's readable and insightful *Shakespeare the Thinker*, which ranges over many philosophical topics in a wide gamut of the plays.[6]

So in approaching this daunting topic, I should say right at the outset that I am asking not what this book can do for Shakespeare, but what Shakespeare can do for this book. In this chapter I'm going to explore how some abiding themes of epistemology and political philosophy from the Reformation period are reflected in the plays. This will allow us to understand what it could mean to approach a figure like Shakespeare as a philosopher, and show us how ideas like skepticism and resistance to tyranny were being reflected in a very different kind of literature than we have usually been discussing. Of course, Shakespeare was not necessarily representative of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century attitudes, but his plays did have a much more popular audience in mind than, say, a treatise by Richard Hooker or Thomas More. When, for instance, he thematizes skepticism in *Othello* and *Hamlet*, the "groundlings" who could only afford standing room tickets at the Globe Theatre were apparently expected to appreciate those themes. No less a commentator than C.L.R. James stated that "Shakespeare was himself the first intellectual whose life has been shaped by the communication of ideas to the general public."[7] But I don't just want to use Shakespeare to go back over ideas that are already familiar to us. In the following chapters I'll be using him to introduce a few themes we haven't yet explored, or at least not as much as I'd like: individualism, which makes a nice pairing with *Hamlet*; attitudes toward the newly contacted Americas, as thematized in *The Tempest*; and witchcraft. No prizes for guessing which play will be relevant there.

Before we dive in I should mention that, even if Shakespeare is not usually considered a philosopher and received no formal training in the subject, he certainly knew something about philosophy. *Troilus and Cressida* (2.2) alludes to a passage in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* which declares the young unfit hearers for lectures on moral philosophy.[8] Plato's *Alcibiades* also seems to be referenced in this play, and I suppose that it also influenced a passage in *Julius Caesar* where Brutus is encouraged to see his

own reflection in Cassius (1.2). We find Stoicism mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1.1): "let's be no Stoics nor no stocks, I pray." Not a great pun by his standards, but a noteworthy passage since, as we'll be seeing, the Stoics are important in Shakespeare's thought. Even more telling are passages where Shakespeare has characters say things about philosophy itself. There's a more genuinely amusing line in *Much Ado About Nothing* 5.1: "never yet philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently." And in *Romeo and Juliet* (3.3), when the Friar tells Romeo to seek solace in philosophy, "adversity's sweet milk," Romeo replies, "Hang up philosophy! Unless philosophy can make a Juliet, displant a town, reverse a prince's doom, it helps not, it prevails not: talk no more."

Not advice we'll be following, of course, but it does lead us to the first main theme I wanted to discuss, namely Shakespeare's tendency toward skepticism. It has been observed that like Montaigne, whose writings he must have known at least by the time he wrote the *Tempest*, Shakespeare was "radically sceptical about the value of reason in human life."[9] Attuned as he was to the nuances and complexities of human psychology, he was doubtful that the dry and abstract reassurances of philosophy can provide genuine comfort in adversity. This may remind us of Sidney's argument that poetry has a better chance of instilling virtue than philosophy does. Deeper still, Shakespeare often suggests that no precepts of moral philosophy, indeed no reasons at all, can explain his characters' behavior. Take, for instance, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, who, when asked to explain his vindictive pursuit of Antonio, says, "I give no reason, nor I will not, more than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing" (4.1). Such tragic characters as Hamlet and Macbeth lack self-knowledge and perversely refuse to acquire it.[10] This overturns our expectation (rooted in Aristotle, even if he worked with a more basic idea of "recognition" in his *Poetics*) that the main character in a tragedy should undergo some kind of transformative realization about themselves. It's a Shakespearean insight that we are just as much, if not more, driven by self-delusion as by rational analysis of our own motives or the motivations of others. This is encapsulated in a wonderful line from Sonnet 138: "when my love swears that she is made of truth, I do believe her, though I know she lies."

The greatest Shakespearean exploration of skepticism is *Othello*, in which a Moor comes to results that are anything but utopian. Just as a refresher, the Moor in question is the titular character Othello, who is

tricked by his supposed friend Iago into suspecting his beloved Desdemona of having an affair. In principle, Iago's motivation is that he thinks Othello might in fact have seduced his own wife. But it's made clear early on that this is something of an excuse. Iago says, "I know not if't be true, but I, for mere suspicion in that kind, will do as if for surety" (1.3). Like Shylock, Iago is driven by an all-too-human malevolence, not by reasoned beliefs based on solid evidence. His genius is to manipulate and exploit the uncertainty of others, in particular Othello. It's actually emphasized in the play that Othello is *not* a particularly jealous man. His weakness is rather his insecurity about whether Desdemona could really love one such as him.[11] Thus, when Iago raises the specter of infidelity, Othello demands, "be sure thou prove my love a whore—be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof…or at least so prove it, that the probation bear no hinge nor loop to hang a doubt on." And again in the same scene: "by the world, I think my wife be honest, and think she is not, I think that thou art just, and think thou art not. I'll have some proof" (3.3). Notice the echo of that paradox from Sonnet 138.

Othello's desperate search for reassurance reminds me of the dilemma addressed by Hooker in his early work offering comfort to the faithful who are not sure whether they will be saved. I don't find it too far of a stretch to suppose that Othello's desire for proof of Desdemona's love is a stand-in for the Christian believer's desire to have proof of grace from a loving God. If so, then Shakespeare is in agreement with Hooker: such desire is misplaced, because love calls for faith, and is not to be put to the test by demanding solid evidence. But even if you don't buy this suggestion, you can hardly deny that Shakespeare shares a late sixteenth-century preoccupation with skepticism. The later poet John Keats spoke of Shakespeare's "negative capability," by which he meant that the Bard was "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." The theme emerges in many of the plays, not least *Hamlet*. There the hesitations of the main character are explained in part by his desire to get proof of his uncle Claudius' misdeeds, while the ghost of his father is distrusted by Horatio. Which, of course, provokes the most famous reference to our favorite discipline in all of Shakespeare, and quite possibly in the English language: urging him to have an open mind, Hamlet tells Horatio that there are more things on heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy (1.5).

But a closer comparison to *Othello* would be *King Lear*, in particular its opening scene, in which Lear invites his daughters to pledge their devotion to him before distributing his inheritance. His plan is evidently to give the largest share to his one virtuous daughter, Cordelia.[12] But she refuses to play the game, and when asked what she can say to match the effusive flattery offered by her sisters says simply, "nothing" (1.1). When pressed, she describes her relationship to her father in coldly transactional terms: "you have begot me, bred me, loved me; I return those duties back as are right fit, obey you, love you, and most honor you." As with Othello, Lear's tragedy is set in train by his demand for proof of affection. But here, there is an additional layer of meaning because of the political context. This isn't just about whether a father feels loved, it's about who is going to rule after Lear is gone. By having Cordelia decline to flatter her way into power (or rather, into power for her husband-to-be), Shakespeare marks a shift in political thinking. Though the play is set in deep antiquity, the character of Lear is operating within a medieval, fealty-based conception of authority, sealed with bonds of personal affection. Cordelia represents something more modern, a contractual approach to politics. As one scholar has written of the scene, "once Cordelia dissolves the old bonds of faith and duty, a new moral universe must be constituted."[13]

Of course *King Lear* is not the only play by Shakespeare set in the distant past. As the aforementioned A.D. Nuttall has written, antiquity served him as a "perfect laboratory for free-ranging political hypothesis," set apart in time rather than in place, like More's *Utopia*.[14] There is no better example than *Julius Caesar*. Despite its title the main character of the play is in fact Brutus, who faces the *Hamlet*-like dilemma of whether or not to kill a tyrant, in an attempt to save the Roman Republic from Caesar's "ambition." This sounds familiar, doesn't it? After considering all those writings about tyrannicide by Huguenots and radical Protestants in Britain, we might almost have expected Shakespeare to explore the same theme, and so he does. Like Montaigne's friend La Boétie in *On Voluntary Servitude*, this play makes the point that tyrants can succeed only because their victims allow it. After all, Caesar is just another man like other men. As Cassius says when encouraging Brutus to act, there is no cause to be "in awe of such a thing as I myself" (2.1). And when Brutus comes to defend his action he does so in terms that would fit nicely into La Boétie's work:

"had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?" (3.2).

This line comes in the first of the paired speeches delivered by Brutus and Mark Antony to the Roman people, who are showed being swayed Brutus' way, and then Antony's, once they have lent him their ears. This triggers a riot in protest at the assassination. It's less than clear from all this what Shakespeare thinks about tyrannicide.[15] As he shows in the final acts of the play, this particular one led to a civil war, and we all know that the conspirators failed to keep the Republic alive. By contrast, it's pretty evident from *Julius Caesar* what Shakespeare thinks about rhetoric: it's dangerous. Actually rhetoric students in the Renaissance were sometimes given Caesar's killing as a model case, and had to practice arguing for and against it. With his portrayal of Antony's emotive speech and its effects, Shakespeare demonstrates both the power and risks of that skill. In this light it's interesting to note that Cicero, the polestar by whom the humanist rhetoricians steered, is present in *Julius Caesar* mostly by being absent. He is a very minor character, whose views on the conspiracy are a matter of speculation (2.1), and who is then mentioned as a victim of Antony's purges later in the drama (4.3).

Of course, there's a world of difference between writing a *treatise* about tyranny or about rhetoric, and writing a *play* about them. For one thing, though we usually know what Shakespeare's characters think, we often can't tell what he thinks (about tyrannicide, for instance). Another difference is that the philosophical issues are made personal. Here they are focused in the person of Brutus, a thoroughly admirable character who is pronounced "the noblest Roman of all" by even his enemy Antony (5.5). In that passage Antony observes that among the conspirators, only Brutus acted on principle. Cassius is a clear contrast, motivated by loathing of Caesar and thus far from the ideal, dispassionate protector of the laws imagined in a work like the Huguenot treatise *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (see above, Chapter 31).[16] Brutus is best positioned to play that role, because of his upright character and also his personal admiration for Caesar as a man, something he emphasizes in his speech to the Roman people: "[I] did love Caesar when I struck him" (3.1).

As several scholars have noted, there are strong clues that Brutus is meant to be a Stoic.[17] Maybe the most obvious is when Cassius says to him,

"of your philosophy you make no use, if you give place to accidental evils" (4.3). In this same scene, we're shown Brutus responding to the death of his wife Portia with a degree of self-control that even Epictetus might envy. "Even so, great men great losses should endure," remarks one comrade, while Cassius sounds like Montaigne when he says in rueful admiration, "I have as much of this in art as you. But yet my nature could not bear it so." But Brutus is better at remaining steadfast in the face of misfortune than he is at ignoring the call of sentiment. While Portia is still alive, we see him struggling to reconcile his love for her with his need to keep the conspiracy secret, and his affection for Caesar himself makes it hard for him to act on behalf of the Republic. More like Hamlet than like Epictetus, he says after a sleepless and fretful night, "between the acting of a dreadful thing and the first motion, all the interim is like a phantasma, or a hideous dream" (2.1). Another scholar who has plumbed the philosophical depths of Shakespeare's plays, Patrick Gray, has written that Brutus "aims to become an exemplary Stoic sage. But he fails to remain indifferent to the imminent collapse of the Roman Republic…in his concern for other people, Brutus reveals an aspect of his character which cannot be reconciled to his ambition to be seen as a philosopher: a refractory streak of kindness."[18]

As these examples show, philosophers can get plenty out of Shakespeare, which makes it a bit surprising that they failed to do so for quite some time.[19] Eventually they would come around: Hegel was a fan, and the twentieth-century French thinker Emmanuel Levinas commented with understandable hyperbole that "the whole of philosophy is only a meditation of Shakespeare." The first significant philosopher to engage with Shakespeare was the Earl of Shaftesbury, who in the early eighteenth century praised one play in particular as "almost one continued moral: a series of deep reflections, drawn from one mouth, upon the subject of one single accident and calamity, naturally fitted to move horror and compassion." The Shakespearean text that inspired this effusive remark is one I've already mentioned a few times, but it demands our full attention.

# 45

# A FACE WITHOUT A HEART

## *Shakespeare's* Hamlet *and Individualism*

Some years ago, a new film version of *Hamlet* was released and my mother asked my father whether he'd like to go see it. "Don't think so," he replied. "I've already seen *Hamlet*." She found this attitude preposterous, but I sort of know what he means. I've seen the play performed live, and it does suffer from an excess of familiarity. Even if the actors are wonderful, it's a real challenge to hear its many famous lines as anything but well-known quotations, less like a drama than a compilation of Shakespeare's greatest hits. If you're philosophically minded, you may have a further problem, which is that you'll keep getting distracted by thoughts about metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology. It's striking how many of the famous passages evoke philosophical ideas. Even once you get past the ten-word distillation of existentialism "to be or not to be, that is the question" (3.1), there are such recognizable philosophical one-liners as "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (2.2), "what a piece of work is a man!" (2.2), "be cruel, only to be kind" (3.4), and "there is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2).

There's a good reason for this, which is that Hamlet himself is philosophically minded. He is after all a university student, and I have a pretty good idea what his major might be. His irony, detachment, and reflectivity make him one of the great characters of literature and, so it's often said, a distinctively "modern" character. But these same features make him pretty useless when it comes to the task he is meant to be performing,

namely seeking revenge by killing his uncle, the new king Claudius. This is a play that is mostly about failure to act, which might seem like a dramatic flaw, but since this is Shakespeare of course it isn't. He was recycling an existing story about a prince who feigns madness as part of a plan to seek revenge against his uncle. Faced with the narrative problem of how to keep the audience interested as they wait for the climactic revenge to be exacted, Shakespeare decided to make his hero's procrastination a theme in its own right. Rather than simply putting practical obstacles in his way, he would explore the psychology of a young man who cannot bring himself to act.[1]

Hence the self-conscious nature of the play, its habit of drawing attention to its own theatricality: Hamlet is a man who has been miscast in his own story. Even worse, he *knows* he is miscast. His suicidal musings in the "to be or not to be" speech and another soliloquy—the one that begins with "oh that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!"—push this idea to its limit. Rather than doing what the plot, and the ghost of his father, demand, Hamlet seriously considers never doing anything again. All those philosophical remarks suggest that Hamlet is meant to be a student who has encountered the ideas circulating amongst intellectuals in the late sixteenth century, like skepticism and Epicureanism. Shakespeare is satirizing and critiquing the way that such ideas can be ethically undermining.[2] We've often seen humanists grappling with the question of whether to live a life of practical engagement or scholarly remove. Hamlet prefers the latter option, but is suddenly thrust into a situation where he is meant to take the former option. He finds that it goes against his character, in every sense of that word. As one critic has observed, "Hamlet does only one thing consistently in the play which bears his name: he never fails to resist his assigned role as revenge-tragedy hero."[3]

But Shakespeare isn't only satirizing philosophy; he's *doing* philosophy. The clash between Hamlet's personal disposition and his assigned dramatic role is only the central example of a theme that runs throughout the play. This theme is frequently discussed in connection with Renaissance literature under the heading of "individualism." Which means what, exactly? Well, it sort of depends which scholar you are reading, but the basic idea would be something like this: in medieval culture, people saw themselves primarily in terms of the roles they performed. The chivalric knight understood himself in terms of honor, skilled violence, and

exploitation of the peasants, while the peasants understood themselves in terms of their responsibilities as workers, family members, villagers, and so on. Such classifications certainly persisted into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as we saw with the widespread conception that society is made up of three estates, the nobility, clergy, and commons. In keeping with that conception, political thought still tended to look to the balancing of the interests of the three estates or other large groupings. But in the Renaissance, another way of seeing the self started to emerge. People saw themselves as individuals with peculiar characteristics and interests, and wanted others to see them in the same way. In politics this could mean demanding freedom to explore and pursue idiosyncratic conceptions of the good. In ethics it could take the form of emphasizing personal rather than collective responsibility, including the responsibility to forge one's own moral principles and character.

The nineteenth-century scholar Jacob Burckhardt saw Renaissance Italy in particular as the crucible for the emergence of such ideas. In 1860, he wrote that it was there and then that "man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such."[4] But what we've seen elsewhere in contemporary Europe suggests that individualism was a factor outside Italy, too. We can connect it to the rise of Neo-Stoicism, where authors like Lipsius and Charron recommended "constancy" as a bulwark against what, in this context, I can only call the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Theirs was an ethic that encouraged individual agents to look after their own happiness and virtue, rather than seeking fulfillment within the community. Or consider something even more transformative: the Protestant tendency to make individual believers responsible for their own relationship to God. This already started with Erasmus, who didn't leave the church but did deemphasize outward, communal ritual in favor of inner piety. In mainstream Protestantism, individual believers were encouraged to seek their own encounter with Scripture and look into their own hearts to discover faith. More recently we've seen radical Protestant dissenters effectively claiming that they had the right, indeed the duty, to determine for themselves what true religion should be. When Hooker implored the Puritans to consider whether they were really so sure of their own personal convictions, and whether they shouldn't instead submit to a more authoritative consensus, he was missing the key point. For them religion was *all about* personal conviction. Yet Hooker too recognized the

importance of the individual conscience, as when he drew a contrast between public and private knowledge. His example was that everyone can see the moon, whereas grace lies hidden within. Thus many people, "believing one and the same promise, all have not the same fullness of persuasion."[5]

Now it must be said that modern-day scholars themselves have their own personal views on individualism in the Renaissance, including whether it was really something new. Medievalists have pointed out that in the previous centuries, there were already conceptions of personal piety and individual moral responsibility.[6] After all, the medievals were deeply shaped by the thought of Augustine, whose greatest work, the *Confessions*, is precisely the story of one man's spiritual journey toward God. If there was a dramatic shift with respect to individualism, we might date it as early as 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council instructed Christians to make confession to a priest at least annually, leading to an increase in spiritual introspection. So maybe the Renaissance focus on such introspection, as in Erasmus, was the culmination of a centuries-long development. Then, too, among those who do think that something new was afoot in the Renaissance, there are a range of opinions about what exactly it was. A book by John Jeffries Martin, tellingly entitled *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, combats Burckhardt on his own ground by focusing on Italy in this period. Martin finds that the "defining problem of identity in the Renaissance" was "how the experience of the inner world of each person was related to the larger social environment in which he or she lived…the self was experienced as something in which one's internal perceptions and beliefs either were or were not at home in the larger world."[7] Martin's point is that people were not necessarily discovering themselves as isolated, self-governing individuals. They were just pushing back against societal expectations, the roles that their communities assigned to them.

As for England, there's an interesting study by Elizabeth Hanson about "discovering the subject," which focuses on the disturbing phenomenon of judicial interrogation and torture.[8] As Hanson notes, torture was a practice without standing in English law, but it was used increasingly in the Elizabethan and Jacobean age, often (though not only) against religious dissenters. Violence was being deployed to extract the secrets hidden within the individual self. Those who were subject to such treatment emphasized

the cruelty involved, of course, and sometimes even gloried in it: the Catholic Robert Southwell fulminated, "go on you good magistrates, rack us, torture us, condemn us, yea grind us! Your iniquity is proof of our faith." But there was a more subtle complaint too. As Hanson puts it, the Catholics argued that the torturers "treat a realm of experience that the victims increasingly defined as interior, private, and subjective as though it were external, discoverable activity." One victim said that he was steadfast in refusing to divulge his own sins: "these were the hidden matters, these were the secrets, in concealing of which I so greatly rejoiced, to the revealing whereof I cannot, nor will not be brought, come rack, come rope!"[9] Very different is the approach of Stephen Greenblatt, who sees sixteenth-century literature as being deeply concerned with the idea of "self-fashioning."[10] Greenblatt's Renaissance is not just modern but postmodern. He finds in its texts the idea that we are nothing more and nothing less than the stories we tell about ourselves, so that each person creates a self through improvised attempts to present themselves to the world. Even the most convincing displays of emotion might just be for show. There's a line from *Hamlet* that expresses the idea rather nicely. Claudius is challenging Laertes to follow through on his anger and grief by taking action against Hamlet, and asks whether he is "like the painting of sorrow, a face without a heart?" (4.7).

When reading up on Renaissance individualism, especially in the English context, you're bound to come across references to Shakespeare sooner or later. Usually sooner. The very first sentence of Hanson's book cites the scene where Hamlet accuses Guildenstern of trying to play on him like a pipe: "you would pluck out the heart of my mystery" (3.2). Another chapter begins with an arresting line from *King Lear*: "to know our enemies minds we rip their hearts" (4.6). She has a whole section on *Othello*, not just because it ends with Iago being threatened with torture but because the whole play is about the attempt to divine what is in other people's souls. She quotes, for instance, a scene where Othello says to Iago, "by heaven I'll know thy thought," and Iago replies in a way that wouldn't be out of place in the interrogation chamber: "you cannot, if my heart were in your hand, nor shall not while 'tis in my custody" (3.3). Greenblatt draws on *Othello* too. It provides him such proof texts as Iago's apparently contradictory remark "I am not what I am" (1.1). In the same scene, Iago refers to "the native art and figure" of his heart, which prompts Greenblatt to the

observation that “his heart is precisely a series of acts and figures, each referring to something else.” In general, Shakespeare is on this reading a “fashioner of narrative selves, the master improviser.”[11]

Since I already said above that *Othello* is the great Shakespearean treatment of skepticism, it seems to be asking too much of that play to have it be his great treatment of individualism too. So I’m going to award that prize to *Hamlet*. Individual conscience and self-consciousness are clearly on Shakespeare’s mind throughout the play, and not only in famous bits like Polonius’ instruction to his son, “to thine own self be true” (1.3). Already in the first scene, Horatio is asked whether the ghost isn’t just like the dead king, Old Hamlet, and replies “as thou art to thyself” (1.1). An audience member probably wouldn’t think much of this at first viewing, but as the play unfolds, you realize that the younger Hamlet’s abiding concern is precisely to be “like himself”—if he could only figure out how. Hamlet the character and *Hamlet* the play are deeply invested in the idea that people should be authentic, should know who they are and act accordingly. At one point Hamlet accuses Ophelia and women in general, “God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another” (3.1). Later Ophelia muses, “we know what we are, but know not what we may be,” but even as she says this, she is mad and no longer knows what she is. Hamlet himself will use his own feigned madness as an excuse to Laertes, arguing that he literally lost his self-identity: “was’t Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet. If Hamlet from himself be ta’en away, and when he’s not himself does wrong Laertes, then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it. Who does it then? His madness” (5.2). For me this recalls a speech from another play, a confused and confusing dialogue of Richard III with himself: “what do I fear? Myself? There’s none else by. Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I. Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am. Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why—lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself? Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good that I myself have done myself? O no! Alas, I rather hate myself for hateful deeds committed by myself. I am a villain; yet I lie, I am not” (5.3).

Shakespeare also noticed, and wanted his audience to notice, that there is something ironic or even paradoxical about using theater to insist upon authenticity. After all, the speakers on the stage are, as Iago would put it, not who they are. They are actors playing parts. If you’ve seen *Hamlet* you’ll remember that there is a play within the play, the so-called

"mousetrap." To get Claudius to betray himself Hamlet orchestrates a performance of a murder just like the one his uncle has committed. This shows that fictions can do real work in the world.[12] But they are still not real, which means that they are not enough for Hamlet. Early on in the play, he has made this point to his mother, when she asks him why he is taking his father's death so hard: "why seems it so particular with thee?" (1.2). Hamlet replies:

> Seems, madam! Nay it is; I know not "seems."'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, nor customary suits of solemn black, nor windy suspiration of forced breath, no, nor the fruitful river in the eye, nor the dejected 'havior of the visage, together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief, that can denote me truly: these indeed seem, for they are actions that a man might play. But I have that within which passeth show; these but the trappings and the suits of woe.

Even without all the other passages I've quoted, you could tell just from this one that Shakespeare was interested in the way that public performance can come apart from private perspective. Hamlet is saying that he is not merely playing the role of grieving son; his grief is real, and lies within where only he can perceive it. But if his grief is so real, why does it not prompt him to act? In a mirror image of this scene with Gertrude, Hamlet later sees one of the actors, "in a fiction, in a dream of passion," able to put on a convincing show of grief, whereas Hamlet "must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words" (2.2) His anguish over his father is genuine, but worse still is his failure to align his inner and outer selves, to find a match between inward feeling and appropriate action.

Or perhaps we shouldn't speak of the "outward self" at all. I find my own self inclined to disagree with Greenblatt, since I think that in *Hamlet* at least there is some commitment to the idea of a core self that underlies the "trappings and suits" of the roles we play. I say this in part because of the allusions to a far more traditional understanding of that self in the play, according to which each of us is an immortal soul that can survive bodily death. The clearest statement of this comes when Hamlet tells Horatio that he will boldly pursue the ghost to question it: "and for my soul, what can it do to that, being a thing immortal as itself?" (1.4). It's a favorite idea of Hamlet's that the body, even if it seems "too too solid," is actually just a "quintessence of dust" (2.2). He refers more than once to the dissolving of dead bodies into dust (4.2, 5.1), which could perhaps be a glancing allusion to the Epicurean theory that all bodies are made of atoms.

But Hamlet, and presumably Shakespeare, do not seem to be convinced that the self is a purely rational soul which finds itself in a body, though this Platonist idea certainly had plenty of adherents in the Renaissance. Admittedly, the play refers to the "god-like reason" (4.4) that distinguishes humans from the beasts, and the speech that begins "what a piece of work is a man" goes on to eulogize human beings in rather Platonist terms: "in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god" (2.2). But as we already saw when discussing Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare is dubious about the idea that the self could be constituted by cold, dispassionate reason, in accordance with the moral code of the Stoics. *Hamlet* too has a Stoic, namely Horatio. He says of himself that he is "more an antique Roman than a Dane" (5.2) and Hamlet praises him as one who, "in suffering all, suffers nothing," a man who "is not passion's slave." It's been noted that Horatio seems to be the only significant character in the play who is *not* "playing a part."[13] But no one watches *Hamlet* and identifies with Horatio. Nor does he ever intervene meaningfully in the action. He is there at the beginning to see the ghost, and at the end to encourage flights of angels to sing Hamlet to his rest. He is ultimately an ineffectual observer. So are we out in the audience. But we are still doing something important: we're seeing our own selves in Hamlet, precisely because we empathize with the experience of *not* seeing our own selves.

One man who would certainly have recognized this, if only he could have seen the play performed, was Michel de Montaigne. The elusiveness of identity was a great theme in his *Essays* too, as epitomized in the remark, "where I seek myself I cannot find myself" (*Essays* 1.10). Montaigne was as interested as Shakespeare in the phenomenon one scholar has described as "the gap that lies between the magnificent social role (that of a king, for instance) and the fallible human being behind the performance."[14] For another commentator, Montaigne holds that "living in the world required the reservation, or even the creation, of an idea of the self in order to sustain a proper outward appearance. For there to be different parts well played, there had to be an actor capable of judging and distinguishing the part from reality: there had to be a self."[15] Sadly, we know for sure that Montaigne didn't get to enjoy *Hamlet* and admire its resonance with his own thought, since he died before it was written. Conversely, we don't know for sure whether Shakespeare read Montaigne before writing it. But there is a clear allusion to Montaigne in one of Shakespeare's later plays, the *Tempest*.

Which means it shouldn't cause a storm of controversy when I compare the way these two great authors handled a very different topic: the encounter with the peoples of the so-called "New World."

# 46

# BRAVE NEW WORLD

## *Shakespeare's* Tempest *and Colonialism*

The infamous Gunpowder Plot to blow up Parliament would not come until 1605, a few years after the death of Queen Elizabeth. But other things were already exploding during her reign, including the population. The rising number of people drove down wages and drove up prices. As usual, the wealthy ruling class were the least affected by the situation, but it did not escape their notice entirely. Indeed, economic problems throughout the sixteenth century helped to inspire the wave of writings on the improvement of the "commonwealth" that we've already discussed, and those were of course written by members of the elite. At the top of the hierarchy, economic expansion was one of the central preoccupations of Elizabeth and her council of advisors. They wanted trade to explode too. The cloth industry was the powerhouse of the sixteenth-century economy. It was in order to facilitate the production of wool that landowners engaged in the controversial practice of "enclosure," where public lands were given over to private use, often for the grazing of animals. That practice is mentioned critically in some of the texts we've already discussed. Thomas More complained about enclosure in *Utopia*, and Thomas Smith warned against its excessive use in his *Discourse on the Commonweal*.

With land and resources at home seeming increasingly scarce, an alternative solution suggested itself: why not seek land and resources abroad? It was a natural thought, since the sixteenth century was a time of increasing links between England and other European nations. The

Reformation itself was one driver of that process, as when Protestants fled to Britain from repression in France. This offered some economic benefits, since not a few of those Protestants were skilled craftspersons. Trade links were also established with Spain, Italy, and as far as Russia and the Balkans. Ironically, given that trips to the continent had helped spark humanist studies in England, some humanists took a dim view of such international connections. In that widely read treatise on education, *The Schoolmaster*, Roger Ascham complained about the bad effects that Italian culture was having on English visitors. He compared Italy to the island of Circe, which seduces Ulysses and his sailors in the *Odyssey*.[1] A 1606 work by Thomas Palmer, entitled *Essay of the Means How to Make Our Travels More Profitable*, used the techniques of Peter Ramus to offer advice for the voyager. He agreed with Ascham when it came to Italy, a land of unfavorable climate and poor manners. Admittedly, the political ideas being tried out in its cities were worthy of interest, but you could read about these in books, so there was no need to go visit in person. A steady stream of invective was aimed at Spain, too, unsurprisingly given the political, religious, and military rivalry between the English and Spanish at this time. Another travel writer, or perhaps better anti-travel writer, named Lewis Lewkenor wrote to discourage his countrymen from visiting Spain, painting it as a land of oppression.

The shortcomings of mainland Europe gave the English all the more reason to turn in the other direction. We already know from the story of Edmund Spenser that the late sixteenth century saw attempts to subdue and colonize Ireland. This too was motivated in part by anti-Spanish sentiment. Robert Payne's 1589 tract in favor of the Munster Plantation, *A Brief Description of Ireland*, argued that the English needed to act quickly lest Spain establish outposts there. And then there were the Americas. The Spanish and Portuguese were well ahead in the race to exploit these newly contacted lands, so the English put their minds to catching up. In the 1570s Martin Frobisher made three unsuccessful trips in search of a "Northwest passage" to Asia, and Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe by going south around South America. But the Americas offered more than an obstacle in the way of getting to China and India. Riches awaited those who could establish colonies there, like the ones set up by Walter Raleigh on Roanoke Island and Virginia in the 1580s.

Or so argued Raleigh's colleagues and propagandists, Arthur Barlowe, Thomas Harriot, and Richard Hakluyt.[2] Hakluyt is a particularly interesting figure. Having studied theology and the new topic of geography at Oxford, he produced a whole series of works on travel, beginning in 1581 with his *Diverse Voyages Touching the Discovery of America and the Islands Adjacent*, which was dedicated to none other than Philip Sidney. Hakluyt was painfully aware of the explorations undertaken by the Spanish and Portuguese, because he was a polyglot who had been avidly reading travel literature produced all across Europe. He argued that the long history of exploration by people from the British Isles meant that "there is none, that of right may be more bold in this enterprise than the Englishmen." Sidney was impressed, calling the work a "very good trumpet" for expeditions to North America. Another work by Hakluyt, his *Discourse on Western Planting*, aimed to persuade Queen Elizabeth and her circle of advisors that colonization was a worthy enterprise. It would not only bring riches to the nation, but also make a foothold for Protestantism. What a disaster it would be if the Catholic nations were to establish their superstitions as the religion of these newly discovered lands!

Which brings us to a challenge faced by these colonizing projects: the Americas might have been newly discovered by Europeans, but there were lots of other people who already knew about them, for the very good reason that they lived there. The propagandists tried to spin this as just another opportunity. Pushing back against the idea that the native Americans were savage cannibals, they emphasized their pacifism and religiosity. Barlowe wrote in his report of a journey to the eastern American coast that the natives there were "most gentle, loving, and faithful, void of all guile and treason, and such as lived after the manner of the golden age." Harriot likewise argued that that the native people encountered in Virginia were "not to be feared" and that, since they already believed in a greatest god who rules over other, minor dieties, it should be relatively straightforward to convert them to Christianity. He also made more chilling remarks, as when he noted that the natives would "have cause both to fear and love us, that shall inhabit with them." There was already good reason for the part about fearing, because as Harriot noticed, natives were dying of illness in droves just after meeting European visitors, as if shot by "invisible bullets."

We tend to assume that to the Europeans, the natives of the Americas seemed like nothing they had ever experienced. But in fact, these English

aristocrats thought about them in much the same way as they thought about two other, much more familiar, groups of people. First, the laboring classes of England, the sort of people who would be displaced by enclosure.[3] Of course, men like Raleigh weren't establishing colonies for the sake of the English poor. He wanted to get rich himself: in addition to his North American adventure, Raleigh tried to locate El Dorado in South America, correctly believing that precious metal would be found in these lands, albeit on the incorrect grounds that the climate was similar to that of West Africa, which was known to have gold.[4] But even if this failed, the Americas could also be settled by what men like Hakluyt considered as the excess population of England. They would be exported to cultivate the newly claimed lands. Second, we have the natives of Ireland, whose "uncivilized" state was used as a rationale for displacing and massacring them. Again, Raleigh's name comes up here because he was involved in the colonization of Ireland too; Harriot in fact wound up living on the estate Raleigh established there.

The colonizers were hardly going to hesitate to use the same techniques against the native Americans. The English liked to present themselves as being more gentle and pious in their approach than the Spanish, and Raleigh in particular was uncomfortable with the prospect of enslaving or exterminating the native peoples. But the travel literature of the time leaves no doubt that these people could rightly be placed under European stewardship. They might have their own kings, but these "primitive" monarchs should submit to the greater authority of the English monarchy—assuming the invisible bullets didn't get them first. Of course the greatest benefit they could have from association with the English would be belief in Protestant Christianity. These were intelligent and rational people, but they were still in the words of Harriot "savage and deprived of the true knowledge of God." Tellingly (and underscoring the parallel with Ireland), Harriot's *Report* on Virginia included artistic renderings of the Picts, the ancient inhabitants of the British Isles who were made to benefit from domination by more civilized folk. It had worked long ago in Britain, so why not now in America?

Reports of explorations were avidly consumed by a wide range of readers, well beyond those who had the political and economic resources to respond to demands for even more exploration, even more conquest. They reached, for example, William Shakespeare. One of his late plays, *The*

*Tempest*, draws on an account of a shipwreck in Bermuda, after which a number of sailors incredibly managed to survive on an uninhabited island. Any playwright could take inspiration from such titillating material, but it took Shakespeare to fashion the story into one of the first reflections on colonialism in English literature. Or, at least, that's a very popular reading of the play, which we'll be exploring in what follows. The central character of *The Tempest* is the magician Prospero, who like a humanist scholar is so fond of his books that he prefers them to a kingdom (1.2). Which is just as well, since he used to be Duke of Milan but was deposed by his wicked brother and exiled to a remote island, along with those books and his daughter Miranda. With the help of his magical assistant Ariel, Prospero summons the titular storm in order to bring his enemies to the island, so as to take vengeance—vengeance he will ultimately forego. In a peaceful ending urged upon him by Ariel, he chooses the path of forgiveness.

If Prospero is the key figure in the drama, the key figure for the interpretation we're interested in is Caliban.[5] His name, a near anagram of the word "cannibal," has over the past century come to stand for the victims of colonialism. For example, Aimé Césaire, a leader of the Negritude literary movement, did a French version of *The Tempest* that sets the play in a colony and focuses our attention on Caliban's efforts at resistance. A book about the political thought of C.L.R. James is called *Caliban's Freedom*, while Paget Henry's introduction to the thought of James and other Afro-Caribbean philosophers is called *Caliban's Reason*. For the modern reader this way of understanding Caliban can seem almost inevitable. Prospero calls him "my slave"; he is portrayed as subhuman, of a "vile race," a "monster," a "demi-devil," and a "thing of darkness." There is a good deal of emphasis on the fact that he formerly lacked language, or at least the language spoken by Prospero and Miranda. It was she who taught him to speak, something Caliban sees as valueless: "you taught me language," he tells her, "and my profit on 't is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language!" (2.1).

There are more subtle clues that Shakespeare wanted to thematize colonialism and servitude in this play. The question "where is the master?" appears twice in the chaotic opening scene, when the boat is struck by the magical storm. Later Caliban allies with two servant characters from the boat, the buffoonish Trinculo and the drunkard Stephano, whom Caliban welcomes as a "new master." Ironically, Caliban equates servitude under

Stephano with “freedom” from the “tyrant” he had previously served, namely Prospero (2.2). The most straightforward interpretation of all this would take Shakespeare as sympathizing with Prospero and approving of his sovereignty over the degenerate Caliban. After all, as a child of his age Shakespeare would hardly be likely to challenge the right of Europeans to dominate the non-Christian peoples of the New World. When, at the end of the play, Caliban comes to regret his rebellion and promises to “be wise hereafter and seek for grace” (5.1) we are meant to feel that order has been restored. The fact that Caliban was in cahoots with Trinculo and Stephano confirms the aforementioned parallel, seen by many at this time, between the inhabitants of the Americas and the lower-class inhabitants of England. The underlings are put back in their lowly place, even as Prospero is restored to his lofty dukedom. As Shakespeare himself might put it, all’s well that ends well, the happy ending here being an assertion of power of European lords over their subjects, both domestic and foreign.

But this is Shakespeare, so we probably shouldn’t settle for the most straightforward interpretation. We can start with that story about the real shipwreck in the Bermudas. It didn’t involve any encounter with natives, so if Shakespeare did mean Caliban to stand in for such people then he was altering his source material. Also Shakespeare, genius though he was, couldn’t have known that the British were going to spend the next centuries colonizing and enslaving the rest of the world.[6] We should be wary of taking our own historical knowledge for granted and reading the play through that lens. Furthermore, the play’s representation of Caliban doesn’t really suggest a threatening colonized figure who is put down before he can overthrow his rightful rulers. Rather, the uprising of the three servants is consistently played for laughs. Nor is Caliban even the most brutish of the three. When Trinculo and Stephano discover some fine clothes and start putting them on with drunken abandon, it is Caliban who has the presence of mind to try to get them back on mission. Then, too, Caliban isn’t exactly a “native” of a newly discovered land. He is there because of his mother, the witch Sycorax, who is from North Africa (“Argier”). Shakespeare allows Caliban to shout at Prospero, “this island’s mine by Sycorax, my mother, which thou tak’st from me” (1.2). We are then told that Caliban started to get rough treatment from Prospero only after he tried to rape Miranda. This scene obviously puts Caliban in a bad light, but it also raises the question of whether Prospero has a rightful claim to rule the island.

To understand the role of Caliban in the play, we need to attend to the fact that he is thematically paired with two other characters. Firstly Ferdinand, Miranda's love interest. He is obviously a more appropriate suitor than Caliban, and his courtship of Miranda fits with Prospero's political designs. Yet Prospero treats him too as a threat to his daughter's chastity, and issues dire warnings about what will happen if he takes her virginity before they wed. Secondly and more importantly, Ariel. Ariel and Caliban are in a way opposites. Ariel is as obedient and helpful as Caliban is recalcitrant and rebellious, and the two are associated with the opposing elements of air and earth (it's mentioned twice that Caliban has been confined to a prison made of "rock," 1.2). Still, both are servants and both spend much of the play complaining about their servitude. Yet it seems much harder to read Ariel as symbolizing the inhabitants of the New World, as has so often been done with Caliban. This spirit of the air is more reminiscent of Puck from *Midsummer Night's Dream*. So the parallel between Ariel and Caliban confirms that Shakespeare was thinking about lordship and servitude, but tends to undermine the notion that he was thinking specifically about *colonial* lordship and servitude. It could even be that the two servants are meant to represent something more psychological than political: the two may allegorize the higher and lower parts of Prospero's own soul. A hint at this comes at the end, when Ariel persuades Prospero to take pity on his enemies: the magician says, "with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury do I take part" (5.1).

But before we abandon the notion that Shakespeare was even thinking about the New World and its peoples, or at least, the notion that he was thinking about it in any depth, we should deal with one further complication. It comes in the form of another source he drew on when writing *The Tempest*: an essay by Montaigne called *On Cannibals* (*Essays* 1.31). There is a scene in *The Tempest* that is clearly inspired by a passage from this essay.[7] In it, an irritatingly long-winded but basically sympathetic character named Gonzalo gives a speech imagining the kind of society he would like to establish on this apparently uninhabited island (2.1). It's a kind of miniature version of Thomas More's *Utopia*. Adopting the same outside-the-box thinking we associate with Montaigne, Gonzalo imagines a "commonwealth" with no "magistrate," "letters, riches, poverty, and use of service, none," "no occupation, all men idle, all, and women too," "no sovereignty." He concludes, "I would with such perfection govern, sir, t'

excel the Golden Age." Which is as good an opportunity as any to reveal that I've been taking all the chapter titles for this section of the book from Shakespeare ("I would with such perfection govern" provided the title of Chapter 41). If you noticed this already on your own, then you can take quiet satisfaction. But better not tell anyone, because as Shakespeare said, "there is not one wise man in twenty that will praise himself" (*Much Ado About Nothing* 5.2).

*On Cannibals* is one of Montaigne's most famous essays, but I have waited to discuss it until now because it makes for such interesting reading alongside *The Tempest*. It is among the first texts to propose a positive attitude toward the natives of the Americas, in an anticipation of the "noble savage" idea that will later appear so famously in Rousseau. Montaigne writes that if these peoples are "wild," then they are so only in the sense of wild fruits that grow in nature without human interference. The natives are, he says, "close neighbors to their original state of nature" and thus spontaneously obey the natural law. Thus their elders "preach two things only: bravery before their enemies and love for their wives." Montaigne actually met a "savage" who was brought to France from the Americas. He was unable to communicate with him, but could still call on his Shakespeare-like ability to put himself in the shoes of very different people. So he speculates about how Europe must have seemed to this man, how he would be amazed that so many people put up with grinding poverty and don't just kill the few who are wealthy. (He wasn't far wrong about this, either: in the seventeenth century, a young Native American of the Wyandot people came to France and was shocked to see beggars in the streets.) Montaigne's capacity for human sympathy is also on show in another of his essays (*On Coaches* 3.6), where he imagines how the natives of the Americas would have seen the Spaniards when they first arrived: "unknown monsters," within shining skin (their armor), bearing blades and cannons. Montaigne says, "we took advantage of their ignorance to pervert them toward treachery, toward every kind of cruelty and inhumanity, by the example of our own manners."

Montaigne has frequently, and rightly, been celebrated for these passages. He didn't know what was going to happen over the next centuries either, but if he could have seen into the future, he wouldn't have been surprised. He knew already that it was the Europeans who were monstrous, not the natives. If we accept that with his own "delicate monster" Caliban,

Shakespeare was indeed trying to represent newly contacted peoples, then we also have to accept that that representation was far more ambiguous than what we find in Montaigne. Shakespeare was under no illusions as to the cruelty of the English, as shown by a remark of Stephano in the play: in England they will not give a single coin "to relieve a lame beggar, [but] they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian" (2.2). He also has Gonzalo say of apparitions summoned by Prospero, "these are people of the island—who, though they are of monstrous shape, yet note their manners are more gentle, kind, than of our human generation you shall find many, nay, almost any" (3.3). So the spirit of Montaigne seems to have found its way into this play, alongside the spirit of Hakluyt.

Which of these two spirits claims Shakespeare's own allegiance? I find it hard to say, so will content myself by observing that the question of colonialism in *The Tempest* relates closely to the other question most commonly asked about the play: are we supposed to see Prospero as representing Shakespeare himself?[8] Like the identification of Caliban with a New World cannibal, this identification is a tempting one. Prospero's magic may symbolize the magic of the theater, and his valedictory closing remarks are sometimes thought to voice a kind of retirement speech by the playwright. "Our revels are ended," it says, before referring to the magic spirits as "actors" and saying that "the great globe…shall dissolve," which of course sounds like an allusion to the Globe Theater. But if we do assume that Prospero is Shakespeare, we will be hard pressed to adopt a nuanced reading of the role of Caliban in the play. After all, the more we empathize with the plight of this "demi-devil," the more we will take umbrage at his mistreatment, and the more our admiration for Prospero will be undermined. I can readily believe that Shakespeare, having read Montaigne, had misgivings about England's colonial adventures. If so, I find it impossible to believe that he cast himself in the role of the colonizer.

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# WEIRD SISTERS

## *Shakespeare's* Macbeth *and Witchcraft*

The aforementioned suggestion that in the *Tempest*, the characters of Caliban and Ariel might represent aspects of Prospero's own mind—his lower passions and reason, perhaps—may have struck you as implausible, since it sounds like Shakespeare would be anticipating Freud by several hundred years. But actually it's very plausible, because of what lay in Shakespeare's past, not his future. Medieval plays tended to personify abstract ideas and psychological phenomena, especially religious and moral ones. It's a tradition that goes at least as far back as Boethius' personification of Philosophy herself in his *Consolation*, and to early medieval works like Hildegard of Bingen's plays, which were to be performed by the sisters of her convent, playing "characters" who were the virtues, vices, or the soul itself. By the sixteenth century, it was common to explore inner conflicts in a theatrical context. Such works are sometimes described as exhibiting a "psychomachia," or battle of the soul.[1] With that sort of cultural background, it was perfectly natural for Shakespeare to put onstage an actor playing the part of Time, who shows up to move the plot forward in *The Winter's Tale*. That's a case of straightforward personification, but other roles might have worked on multiple levels for their original audience, functioning simultaneously as symbolic and dramatic. Thus a figure like Iago could be both the villain of the story and an external manifestation of Othello's jealousy. A further layer of ambiguity

would be added when Shakespeare makes such characters subhuman, like Caliban, or superhuman, like Ariel.

This allows for a psychological interpretation of magic in Shakespeare. Instead of seeing it as a departure from everyday reality, or as symbolizing the artificiality of theater, we could think of it as a way to represent things that are real, but only insofar as they exist in the mind. I want now to explore this hypothesis by talking about *Macbeth*.[2] The very title conjures up eerie, unsettling images: Macbeth's visions of a dagger floating in the air before him, and of Banquo's ghost; his wife Lady Macbeth trying to rub invisible blood off her hands as she sleepwalks; and of course the witches whose first appearance opens the play. These scenes of the supernatural and unnatural would have played very differently when they were first staged than they do today, because most of the people in the audience would have believed in witchcraft and found it genuinely terrifying. So to understand these elements of *Macbeth*, and what they might have to do with philosophy, we need to take a detour into the fascinating and disturbing world of early modern beliefs about witches.

Admittedly, it's a bit unfair of me to focus on this topic while discussing Shakespeare, because in this period accusations of witchcraft were vastly more common in continental Europe than they were in England. Thousands of supposed witches were put on trial and executed in Germany, for instance. There were thousands of trials in Scotland too. By contrast, for England we're talking about figures in the low hundreds, with an outsized proportion of those cases coming in Essex for some reason.[3] Still, for Elizabethan and Jacobean theatergoers witchcraft was a serious concern. Indeed, it was a serious concern for Elizabeth and James themselves. Both of their reigns saw statutes passed that lay out punishments for engaging in witchcraft. In the case of Elizabeth this was in part a reaction to an attack on the Queen by means of sorcery, using wax effigies that were discovered by the authorities. King James even wrote a treatise on demonology, in which he piously explained that we may best know God by coming to understand the works of his enemy, the fallen angel Satan.

The personal interest taken in this threat by heads of state, no less, clearly suggests a political context for the witch trials, and many scholars have tried to fill out that context.[4] One obvious point is that the time of the witch trials coincides with that of the Reformation and the unrest it

unleashed. In politically unsettled times, accusations of black magic were perhaps a way to enforce orthodoxy and conformity. Also, there's some evidence that in England, such accusations were more common in places where Puritanism was especially strong. A common theme in Protestant writings on witchcraft was that the practice had something in common with Catholicism. Where the godly, reformed folk believed that the time of miracles was long past and approached religion as a matter of individual spirituality, the Catholics were still mired in superstition and believed in supernatural works that required the employment of physical objects. Thus witch-hunting may have been an extreme expression of reformism, the ultimate form of Protestant "discipline." That isn't a fully adequate explanation, since there was quite a bit of witch-hunting among Catholics too. But there's no doubt that witches were understood as an inversion of true religion. They celebrated black sabbaths with the Devil, engaged in processions, observed special unholy days mirroring the holidays of the true church, and so on. This, by the way, is a common feature of beliefs about witchcraft all over the world. In some African belief systems witches are like backwards humans, who do things like eating salt when they are thirsty, standing on their heads, and traveling at night rather than in daytime.[5] Similarly, in Shakespeare's England witches were thought to worship the Devil with their backs turned to him, make the night air thick so they could fly through it, and stare at the ground when speaking instead of making eye contact. (This last detail also casts suspicion on modern-day philosophers.)

Another kind of historical context was the economic precarity of sixteenth-century England. Scholars have noticed that the accused were often poor, old, and of course female. These were marginal and sometimes indigent people, who survived by begging for charity. A classic scenario is that the neighbors of such women, who were also very poor, felt unable to help them. Turned away with nothing, the woman might react angrily, or mutter curses under her breath. If the neighbors then fell ill, had a bad harvest, or had livestock die, then charges of witchcraft might result, a manifestation of guilty feeling on the part of the neighbors who were happier to see the old lady as unholy than to see themselves as uncharitable.[6] On this account, too, witchcraft would be another manifestation of the religious and socioeconomic upheavals that disrupted the bonds of medieval society. As we know from the humanists' anxious writings about the commonwealth, the elite of English society were well

aware of dissension and violence amongst the general population. So we might expect these elites to have misgivings about the vogue for accusations of witchcraft. Indeed, historians tend to understand the relatively low numbers of convictions and executions for witchcraft in England as a case of "top down" resistance to a "bottom up" expression of social disharmony.

More generally, a mainstay of scholarship on early modern witchcraft is the contrast between popular and elite attitudes on the subject. Amongst the common folk, belief in magic and witchcraft seems to have been widespread, if not universal. Even in areas with hardly any witch trials, like Wales, people certainly believed that witches existed. This point has been made in a vast and rich book by Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. He remarks that in popular society talk of witchcraft was just "the language of everyday misfortune."[7] In a world suffused with the supernatural, people also turned to so-called "cunning" men and women for the benefits to be had from white magic, like healing from illnesses or predictions of the future. This was a stark contrast to the attitudes of the educated scholars, who uniformly condemned all use of magic, whether for good or bad ends. These men (of course they were almost all men, just as the witches were almost all women) wanted people to put their trust in God, not in the local healer or soothsayer.

Were the elite scholars also more dubious about the very existence of witchcraft than their contemporaries? The answer is not a straightforward one. At one extreme were authors who issued manuals for witch-hunting and dire warnings about dark magic. King James' treatise on demonology is a famous example, but certainly not the first. It was preceded by a treatise called *Hammer of Witches* (*Malleus maleficarum*), surprisingly produced not by a heavy metal band but by two Dominican inquisitors from Germany named Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger. Then there was that work *On the Demonomanie of Sorcerers* by the great French political writer Jean Bodin. As I suggested in the chapter on him, Bodin's choice to write on this topic at first seems odd, but in fact fits perfectly with his ambition to promote social cohesion and order (see Chapter 32). He wanted the state to stamp out black magic, just as it might stamp out theft or more conventional violence. While Bodin took a strong stand against witchcraft, a number of other figures who are familiar to us adopted a more balanced attitude. For them magic and witchcraft were real, yet accusations of witchcraft were

often bogus. A good example would be Cornelius Agrippa, who as you might recall wrote about magic but also defended an accused witch in the city of Metz. Such figures as Paracelsus and Symphorien Champier were also alarmed by the way charges of witchcraft were being thrown around, yet in principle accepted that witchcraft is possible.[8] Down in Italy, a comparable example would be *Strix*, a dialogue about the reality of witchcraft by Gianfresco Pico della Mirandola. It stages arguments between skeptics and believers, with the believers winning out in the end, in part on the predictably humanist grounds that similar phenomena are known from antiquity.

In these cases, the moderate skepticism that was so widespread in sixteenth-century philosophy was simply not skeptical enough. What was really needed was some thorough, wholehearted debunking. For which we can return to England and a book called *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, written by Reginald Scot and published in 1584.[9] The title meant not discovering and prosecuting witches, but on the contrary, unmasking witchcraft itself as fraudulent. Scot was convinced that witch-hunting would undermine the very aim Bodin wanted to pursue, namely social harmony. Appalled by an outbreak of accusations in Kent over the previous two decades, he set out to show that tales of black magic were just that: tales, without substance. They had to be, because the Devil and his demons are themselves without substance (and presumably without tails too). They do exist, but are incorporeal forces that cannot interact with physical bodies. As for the humans who were supposed to be witches, ascribing magical abilities to them was clearly irreligious, since supernatural power belongs only to God. How, then, to explain widespread belief in sorcery, and especially the fact that some people actually believed themselves to be witches and openly admitted their guilt?

To answer this question, Scot turned to the scientific theories of his day, citing those he called “learned philosophers and physicians.” He acknowledged the existence of what was sometimes called “natural magic,” which sounds like a contradiction in terms: isn’t the whole point of magic that it is unnatural or supernatural? But this was a widely acknowledged category in the period, and really just referred to natural causes whose workings are obscure to humans. There were plenty of examples of such “occult” powers, like the attractive powers of magnets and the healing effects of certain herbs, and in general “the hidden secrecies of living

creatures, of plants, of metals." So-called "cunning folk" might just be people who knew about these powers, for instance which plants would treat which illnesses. In a sense Scot was not too far away from the elite demonologists and witch-hunters here, since they usually accepted that the Devil and his servants brought about their effects through natural means. To say otherwise would be to put their power on a par with God's. But for Scot, their claims about witchcraft, "being contrary to nature, probability, and reason, are void of truth or possibility."

The power of nature also helps to explain why people believed in witchcraft in the first place. Scot repeats an anecdote told by Girolamo Cardano about a servant who was strongly convinced that he was a powerful witch. His master provided him with a heartier diet until the man was "recovered so in strength, that the humor was suppressed, he was easily won from his absurd and dangerous opinions, and from all his fond imaginations." Two words in this passage are worth lingering over: "humor" and "imaginations." As you know, medical theory in this period posited four fundamental bodily humors, one of which was especially important in this context. This was black bile, an excess of which was thought to lead to the disease called "melancholy" (actually this word comes from the ancient Greek words for "black" and "bile"). Melancholy had long been associated with delusions, so it was natural—in every sense of the word—for Scot to argue that supposed witches were merely suffering from this illness. In particular, melancholy was having profound effects on their imaginations. The same idea appears in Spenser's *Fairie Queen*, where the imagination is symbolized as the melancholic Phantastes, living in a part of the brain where illusions run rampant. Scot gives examples of the dire results of an imagination that is affected by melancholy: poor souls who thought they were kings, or earthen pots, or the mythic Atlas who holds up the heavens with his mighty hands.

Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft* offered a sophisticated and powerful critique, but did not really have its intended effect. Its proposal that demons are immaterial, and thus completely outside of the causal framework of our world, was unacceptable to most contemporaries. In fact, when witchcraft trials in England started to subside around 1620 it was not so much because people stopped believing in witchcraft, as because people stopped thinking they could prove that it had been used on particular occasions. Through this whole period, there was a steady move away from the medieval practice of

subjecting suspected witches to an "ordeal," like throwing them into water to see if they would float. Instead, the accused were put on trial, not unlike an inquiry into heresy. The legal process involved collecting witness statements and evidence, though this was rarely "evidence" in any sense we would find plausible today. For instance, it was common to look for a "devil's mark," like an extra nipple, which is where the witch would feed her demonically possessed familiar animal. But more often than not lawyers and judges were making do with mere rumor and angry accusation, which was not enough to secure a conviction. As the seventeenth century went on many in the social elite, especially in legal circles, came to the view that witchcraft was "theoretically possible" but "impossible to prove."[10]

So Scot did not really succeed in getting people to give up their belief in witchcraft. Still worse, his book was frequently just mined for the extensive information it provided about witchcraft lore. Scot offered many stories about witches and their supposed malefic deeds on the way to casting doubt on these stories. But the stories tended to stick in the mind more than the skeptical arguments. Which brings us, finally, back to Shakespeare, since it was precisely such stories that shaped his own imagination when it came to black magic. An anonymous work on witchcraft from the early nineteenth century boldly proclaims that it was Scot's *Discovery* that "supplied Shakespeare with his witch and wizard lore."[11] This might be an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that *Macbeth* reflects many of the ideas just surveyed.[12] We can see this already in the brief opening scene, where the witches refer to their familiars ("Graymalkin" and "Paddock") and remind us that witchcraft is about inversion or reversal: "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1), a line echoed by Macbeth himself a couple of scenes later, when he says, "so foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3). Further on in the play, we see that the three witches are only representatives of greater, darker powers, whom they call "masters." These are spirits who show Macbeth misleading riddles about his future (4.1), and Hecate the goddess of witchcraft. There are also mentions of Satan, the "common enemy of man" (3.1) and the "angel" served by the wicked Macbeth (5.8). We even get references to such specific ideas as that the Devil can "thicken and obscure the air," as described in King James' work on demonology. Here, too, the "weird sisters" can fly through the night, or summon storm winds that "fight against the churches" (1.1, 1.3, 4.1).

By the way, “weird” (or “weyward,” as printed in the 1613 Folio edition) doesn’t necessarily mean that the witches are strange; it comes from the Old English word for fate (*wyrd*).[13] That fits with the witches’ role in the plot. By offering Macbeth one prediction that, as the audience already knows, will come out true (Macbeth’s promotion to the title of Thain of Cawdor), they tempt him into murdering the good King Duncan so as to seize the crown that the witches additionally promise him. On a straightforward reading, Macbeth is like any number of classical figures who followed an ambiguous prophecy to their own doom. And like any number of writers on demonology—indeed, like King James, whose reign is mentioned in the play (4.1)—Shakespeare is teaching the audience that no good can come of trafficking with demonic power. As Banquo warns Macbeth, “oftentimes, to win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths” (1.3). But there are also hints at a view of witchcraft more like Scot’s. Macbeth poses the question whether the witches are “corporal” (1.3) and, more importantly, is uncertain as to whether the things he is experiencing are real.[14] This may lead the audience to be uncertain too: is Macbeth misled by dark forces that lie outside him, or by a darkness within his soul?

The best example would be the famous scene where Macbeth sees the weapon he used to murder Duncan floating in the air, and wonders aloud, “art thou but a dagger of the mind, a false creation, proceeding from the heat oppressèd brain?” (2.1). One can easily picture Reginald Scot shouting from the back of the Globe Theater, “yes, that’s exactly what it is! You have melancholy, go see a doctor!” He would feel further vindicated during the sleepwalking scene, in which a doctor actually appears onstage, to say of Lady Macbeth that she is “troubled with thick coming fancies” (5.1). Lady Macbeth herself tells her husband, when he is terrified by the vision of Banquo’s ghost, “it is the very painting of your fear” (3.4). Unfortunately Macbeth is more credulous demonologist than hard-nosed natural philosopher. When presented with the doctor’s analysis of Lady Macbeth’s situation, he says, “throw physic to the dogs, I’ll none of it” (5.3). But as the dagger scene shows, he is well aware that his own imagination cannot be trusted. Reflecting on the prophecy of the witches, he says, “this supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good…Present fears are less than horrible imaginings. My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

shakes so my single state of man that function is smothered in surmise, and nothing is but what is not" (1.3).

Macbeth's weakness in the face of his "horrible imaginings" goes hand in hand with his weakness in the face of temptation and political ambition. If he has any saving grace—not that it would actually save him, by the religious standards of the day—it is that he at least, Hamlet-like, dithers before embracing his foretold fate. No such hesitation for Lady Macbeth. In Act I, she works to finish what the witches have started, by getting her husband to screw his courage to the sticking place (1.7) and murder the King. Or perhaps I should say, she finishes what the *other* witches have started? Is Lady Macbeth also supposed to be a witch, or comparable to a witch? This is suggested at the end of the play when she is referred to as a "fiend-like queen" (5.8). Shakespeare's audiences would have been primed to see her this way, because the role was apparently played by the boy who had recently acted the role of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, another character with witch-like elements.[15] You probably know that female characters were always played by boys on the stage at this time, a practice Shakespeare played for gender-confused laughs in his comedies. In *Macbeth*, though, sexual ambiguity is used to provoke goosebumps rather than giggles.

Thus Macbeth says, when first meeting the witches, "you should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so" (1.3). This is then picked up in famous lines spoken by Lady Macbeth, in which she summons the forces of darkness to her aid_ "come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here…come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers…come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell" (1.5). Here the allusions to witchcraft come thick and fast. We have again the thickening of the night air and invocations of spirits and of hell, while the line "unsex me here" is a demand to undo or reverse the natural order. Just to make sure we get the point, Shakespeare later gives Lady Macbeth the most disturbing lines in the play, when she is criticizing Macbeth for his hesitation. "I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you have done to this" (1.7). In this period, witches were often associated with violence toward babies and children, accused of making them starve and of making women's breast milk run dry.

As Lyndal Roper has written, "witches were women who did not feed others except to harm them."[16] Making your breast milk turn to gall, as Lady Macbeth imagines, is about as maleficent as it gets.

All of which shows that Shakespeare was evoking yet another of the anxieties that surrounded witchcraft: the reversal of expected gender norms. Lady Macbeth is more ambitious and bold than her husband, even though he is a mighty warrior. And in a society where women were defined by the care and nourishment they offered their families, she imagines depriving a baby of its food and dashing out its brains. The assumptions flouted by Lady Macbeth are, indeed, the reason why so many women were accused of witchcraft in the first place. In principle witches could be either men or women, but in fact the accused were almost always women. Authors of the time sought to explain this. Women have weaker wills and stronger desires, it was argued, so they are more susceptible to temptation. As one writer put it, "where [the Devil] findeth easiest entrance, and best entertainment, thither will he oftenest resort."[17] Even a skeptic like Scot allowed that women are more prone to melancholic delusions, which is why those who *claim* to be witches are most often women. This argument was considered and rejected by Bodin, on the grounds that menstruation should purify their bodies of excess humors.[18]

The aforementioned Stuart Clark has offered a rather different, and far more persuasive, explanation for the fact that witchcraft was so strongly gendered. As we've been seeing, witchcraft is about inversion and reversal, about making the fair foul and the foul fair. So it only makes sense that the weakest and most vulnerable members of society, namely impoverished, elderly women, would be the most dangerous and fearsome tools of the Devil.[19] We could think about this at an even more abstract level by considering whether paranoia about witchcraft was a religious expression of fear about certain aspects of human nature, aspects that were especially associated with women. I mean things like sexual desire, emotion, and the very fact that we find ourselves in needy bodies made of blood and flesh. An interesting book from a few years ago by Charlotte-Rose Millar examines popular pamphlets about witchcraft from early modern England. No fewer than 90 percent of the accused in these stories were women, and the pamphlets almost always emphasize motives of revenge, anger, malice, and so on in explaining why these women turned to witchcraft.[20] Since

females were thought to be more prone to extreme emotion than males, they were the most natural suspects when it came to suspicion of crimes against nature. And as the doctor says of Lady Macbeth, “unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles” (5.1).

# 48

# SHE UTTERETH PIERCING ELOQUENCE

## *Women's Spiritual Literature*

Virginia Woolf's famous essay *A Room of One's Own* imagines what would have happened if Shakespeare had had a sister with gifts similar to his own.[1] Her literary curiosity would have been gently but firmly blocked by her parents: "she picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers." The demands of married life would further have stymied her development in adulthood. As for getting involved in the London theater scene like her brother did, that would have been unthinkable. Shakespeare's non-existent sister would ultimately, like Woolf herself, have committed suicide. For "who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?" Woolf's disturbing conclusion is that, in general, "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at."

This fictional narrative is intended to explain what Woolf assumed as an obvious fact: "certainly no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary Elizabethan literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of

song or sonnet."[2] It's a tremendously powerful piece of writing, even though this starting assumption is at most only half right. Surely it's true that in Elizabethan society, the plays of Shakespeare could not have been written by a woman. Woolf was interested above all in the expression of literary genius, and there's no doubting the obstacles that have stood in the way of such expression, long before and long after the sixteenth century. In this period, women were quite literally told to keep their mouths shut. Shakespeare himself alluded to this in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*: "to be slow in words is a woman's only virtue" (3.1). That looks like satire, but the same point was sometimes made with strident seriousness, as in a work on rhetoric by Thomas Wilson: "what becometh a woman best, and first of all? Silence. What second? Silence. What third? Silence. What fourth? Silence. Yea if a man should ask me 'til doomsday, I would still cry silence, silence."[3]

Yet Woolf was wrong to think that women made no contribution to Elizabethan literature. Whether they produced works of "genius" is a rather subjective matter, but they certainly did publish poems, including sonnets, as well as translations and religious writings.[4] In fact, one could argue that the sixteenth century was a turning point in the history of women's writing in England. New opportunities opened up thanks to the emergence of humanism and the Reformation. That will be clearer to us if we start by discussing a figure who was active somewhat earlier, in the first half of the fifteenth century: Margery Kempe, who was born in about 1373 and died in 1449. If we compare her with other women authors of the late medieval period, we have to say that Kempe shares very little with her near contemporary Christine de Pizan, and is far more reminiscent of mystics like Julian of Norwich. Actually Kempe got to meet Julian when this famous anchorite was an old woman. Like Julian, her thought was premised upon and licensed by experiences of a personal encounter with God. So if we are going to be in the difficult business of drawing a line between "late medieval" and "Renaissance" writing by women, we would probably want to put Kempe on the medieval side of that line.

Then, too, if we want to speak of her as having produced "writing" at all, then this should come with some caveats. The work known simply as *The Book of Margery Kempe* was dictated by her to a male companion and then copied out with extensive improvements to the language by a friendly

priest.[5] The involvement of the priest helps to legitimize the text, firstly because he is a member of the religious establishment, and secondly because, as the *Book* tells us, he was initially dubious about her spiritual gifts but won over in the end (§24). This is a common pattern in the book. Kempe is constantly met by opposition and skepticism, especially from men, but perseveres thanks to the unflagging support she receives directly from God, who is often on hand to offer her an encouraging pep talk or condemn those who refuse to take her seriously. The *Book* also makes it abundantly clear why she would have faced so much hostility. In a society where women were supposed to be silent, she was anything but, and flouted any number of conventions. Though married she took a vow of chastity; the *Book* details at length her campaign to get her husband to accept this. She traveled across Europe and as far as Jerusalem, without her husband but with a message of intense religiosity, in apparent defiance of St. Paul's ban on women preaching. She also refused to eat meat and wore white, which would normally be reserved for virgins. Hardest to ignore were Kempe's regular bouts of loud, boisterous weeping and wailing, brought on by thoughts of human sin and the sufferings of Christ. She found herself unable to prevent these outbursts even if, as sometimes happened, they came while a priest was trying to give a sermon in church (§68).

Kempe saw these intense emotional experiences as a gift from God, not least because He appeared in person to assure her that this was so (§63). The *Book* says that the "cryings" began in Jerusalem and became increasingly frequent, sometimes several times a day. They came "whenever God wished to send them, for she never knew either the time or hour when they should come. And they never came without unsurpassed sweetness of devotion and high contemplation" (§28). For some, Kempe's histrionics were not exalted but exaggerated and exasperating. At one point a group of people went to a priest to demand that he "order her to eat meat like they did, put aside her weeping, and not talk of holiness so much" (§27). But Kempe was not so easy to tame. She treated even an archbishop with fairly astonishing irreverence: when he said she had been described to him as "utterly wicked," she replied in effect, oh that's funny, I've heard the same about you. She then refused to abide by his command not to "teach." In Leicester she was confronted by an official who, after interviewing her, concluded "either you're a really good woman or else you're a really wicked woman" (§47). Through all this Kempe reveled in her Christ-like

role as a figure who has been sent to save her fellow humans, but remained unappreciated and even persecuted. She "thought it was a joyful thing to be rebuked for God's love; and it was a great solace and comfort to her when she was chided and taunted for the love of Jesus, for rebuking sin, for speaking of virtue, for talking about scripture which she had learned through sermons and by talking with clerics" (§14).

The *Book* is careful to avoid presenting Kempe as if she were wholly outside the structure of the church. Not only is an admiring priest writing all this down, but the text is at pains to mention and rebut the accusations of heresy that were thrown at her; often these connected her to Lollardy (§§13, 46, 53). Again, the Lollards were a religious group in England who have often been seen as forerunners of the Reformation, because they did things like reading the Bible in English and letting women be religious teachers. One female Lollard named Hawisia Moone said, "every man and every woman, being in good life out of sin, is as good priest and hath [as] much power of God in all things as any priest ordered, be he pope or bishop."[6] Kempe was not a card-carrying member of the group, for sure. But one modern scholar of her thought says that she at least "hovered around the grey areas on its margins," and that "if Lollardy was characterised as a reading community based on a firm commitment to the private reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular, then she was certainly part of such a community."[7] In some ways, though, Kempe was very Catholic. She went on pilgrimages and collected souvenirs and relics, was greatly moved by the miracle of the Eucharist, enthusiastically took part in church processions and services (even if she made it impossible to hear the priest), and encountered God as a visible presence, as when Christ appeared to her as a beautiful man dressed in purple (§1).[8]

As far as I can tell, then, Kempe was rebelling not so much against the church as against what would be expected of her as a married woman. It was one thing to take vows and become a nun or anchorite, like Hildegard or Julian, and quite another to be a married woman who acts like an itinerant preacher and mouths off to archbishops. It's been said of the *Book* that "there is no pro-feminist element to the text, only pro-Margery,"[9] which seems right. Still, the work justifies her idiosyncratic and provocative behavior in highly gendered terms. Like earlier medieval mystics, Kempe claimed to have direct contact with God; in the *Book* she has numerous,

lengthy conversations with Him. But where some medieval women mystics seem almost to have transcended gender, Kempe's womanhood is constantly being brought to the attention of the reader. Sexuality is a main theme of the *Book*. The constant threat of rape hangs over her during her travels, she takes the vow of chastity, and wears virginal white, having "wedded" herself to God even though she still has a human husband (§§31, 35). Some passages indulge in lightly erotic descriptions of this relationship (§§36, 86). In a more complicated version of her relationship to God, Christ appears to Kempe and addresses her as "daughter," but then asks her to take on the role of the Virgin Mary so that she can nurse Him (§86). Isabel Davis observes that here Kempe is "simultaneously mother, daughter, and wife of God, proliferating the significant roles that she plays within the Trinity and the Holy Family and increasing her spiritual authority."[10]

All this gives us a context for understanding Kempe's "cryings." Her extravagant emotion is both effect and proof of a special relationship to God, which the *Book* often labels as her "feelings." Exploiting the assumption that women are especially subject to strong emotions, Kempe cleverly and subversively used a phenomenon typically associated with the subordinate and inferior place of women to claim independence. There is even a suggestion that uncontrolled emotion is a more appropriate response to the Christian God, who after all is believed to have died in agony for us, than the cold, rational disquisitions of the churchmen and schoolmen. This could explain why, as we are told in the preface to the *Book*, Kempe was for a long time resistant to having her story written down. Her intense religiosity was best delivered through oral confrontation or through apparently unhinged wailing that did not even take the form of language.[11] It's appropriate, then, that when her *Book* was finally set down and then revised, it was not her doing the writing. She needed men for that, but she did not need anyone else to develop a unique relationship to God or to tell her what this relationship meant.

Many features of this remarkable text made for uncomfortable reading over the following generations, which is why versions of the *Book* printed in the sixteenth century eliminate them. In these versions Kempe, who in modern times has been called a "noisy contemplative," was turned into a "humble, quiet, listening woman."[12] This might seem to cast doubt on my claim that opportunities for women writers improved in the sixteenth century. But it depends on what kind of woman writer you want to be. By

the time Shakespeare's sister would have been alive, such a writer would hardly be a "crazed half witch." On the contrary, she'd be well-schooled in Latin and present herself as a refined and pious teacher of Protestant godliness. Whether Kempe was even literate is unclear, but if she was, then probably in the sense that she could read but not write, a not uncommon level of education in this era.[13] Alternatively she may have encountered the texts that were important to her by having them read out. That would above all have meant Scripture, of course, but also works by other mystics like St. Birgitta of Sweden and Richard Rolle (§17). Very different would be the situation of elite Protestant women in the sixteenth century, who were more likely to read Erasmus and Calvin than medieval mystical texts. They benefited from humanist training and were able to play a part in transmitting, interpreting, and composing texts.[14]

I do want to stress that we're talking about *elite* women here. All of the figures I'm about to discuss came from the nobility, and the first of them was actually a leading member of the royal family. This was Katherine Parr, the last of Henry VIII's queens.[15] I mentioned her briefly already (Chapter 39) as a sponsor of humanist scholarship, including translations of Erasmus, and as the author of a treatise called *Lamentation of the Sinner*. She also wrote a set of prayers or *Meditations*. Beyond her own writing she had a powerful influence on the next generation of rulers, arranging for the young Prince Edward to study with Protestant tutors like William Grindal, a student of Roger Ascham. And remember how Elizabeth translated the *Mirror of the Sinful Soul* into English when she was only eleven years old? Well, that version was dedicated to Katherine Parr. So we're very far here from Margery Kempe, who was admittedly the daughter of a rich merchant but whose world was socially and intellectually very unlike the sober and refined reformed, humanist culture of Katherine and her circle.

John Foxe, author of a famous history of Protestant martyrs, reports that Katherine retained "diverse well learned and godly persons to instruct her thoroughly" in Scripture, and this shows in her writings.[16] She may have written a lament about her own sinfulness, but her adherence to mainstream Protestantism is impeccable (that joke is for Latinist readers). A main focus in both her prayers and the *Lamentation* is the wish to be free of creaturely desires, to "have no will but God's will" (*KP* 480). She prays to God, "turn into bitterness to me all worldly and fleshly delights, which might draw me

from the love of eternal things to the love of short and vile pleasures" (*KP* 405), this being only one of numerous passages deploring the love of worldly goods. Among these goods is high social standing, which Katharine is at pains to deplore, praying that she "be as well pleased to be in the lowest place, as in the highest" (*KP* 404). Which, you might argue, is easy for her to say while quite literally sitting on a throne. But there's not much point in aiming accusations at Katherine, because she's already done it for us. She recognizes herself as "always ready and prone to evil," "barren and void of godly virtue" (*KP* 408, 417), and powerless to resist sin without divine grace. She admits that she long followed the "blind guide" of ignorance, before she finally found respite in faith, along with the realization of her own impotence in the face of sin (*KP* 455). It's a nice illustration of the way many people in this era found a broadly Calvinist, determinist teaching of redemption to be comforting rather than terrifying. As so often in Protestant texts, this goes hand in hand with a rejection of worldly wisdom. Thus Katherine writes, "I certainly never knew my own miseries and wretchedness so well, by book, admonition, or learning, as I have done by looking into the spiritual book of the crucifix" (*KP* 466). In the same vein she worries that the less educated are misled by scholars who make things too complicated, "stopping the mouths of the unlearned with subtle and crafty persuasions of philosophy and sophistry, whereof cometh no fruit" (*KP* 476).

None of this is particularly innovative in doctrinal terms; what's remarkable is that the person writing it is a woman. Humanism and Protestantism had quietly opened the door that Margery Kempe had fought to force ajar. While Katherine engages in typical false modesty, referring to her "simple and unlearned judgment" (*KP* 470), she doesn't seem to feel the need to justify or explain why the reader should be taking spiritual advice from a woman. Again, this is literally a queen we're talking about here, so she might be operating by special rules. But it does seem to be true in general that those women of the sixteenth century who did receive a good education were able to apply that education in writing. One modern-day scholar says bluntly that "no evidence has yet come to light that men routinely, if ever, prevented Tudor women from publishing anything they could persuade a printer to undertake."[17] This may seem hard to believe, but some of the most influential humanists of the age, like Juan Luis Vives and Thomas Elyot, had argued for the education of women, so as to

encourage them in virtue and true religion. A fine example would be Margaret More Roper, the daughter of Thomas More. He saw to it that she was well-schooled and advised her in a letter to pursue "medical science and sacred literature" in order to achieve the familiar aim of having a sound mind in a sound body.[18] Her education bore significant dividends: she was able to produce a translation of a work by Erasmus and comes across impressively in her letters. These include a description of her unsuccessful attempt to persuade More to follow her example by swearing the oath of allegiance, so as to avoid execution. In a reminder that gender was not entirely forgotten, More wryly compared this to Eve telling Adam that she had already tasted of the forbidden fruit, so he might as well do the same.[19]

Less inclined to cooperate was a martyr on the other side of the religious divide, Anne Askew. She was the first gentlewoman to be tried for heresy, and was burnt alive in 1546 when she was only twenty-five years old. We have a remarkable account of her interrogation from her own pen, which tells of how she was tortured but remained steadfast. At one point her questioners pushed her to answer the sort of ridiculous question that schoolmen liked to discuss: if the transubstantiated host is dropped during Mass and an animal eats it off the floor, does the animal receive the body of the Lord? She refused to respond and when told that she had to, because the practice of schoolmen was that questions must always be answered, she said that she was "but a woman and knew not the course of schools." In a classic instance of the female religious visionary pulling rank on men of worldly power, she also told her inquisitors, "God hath given me the gift of knowledge, but not of utterance."[20]

Once Protestantism became the law of the land instead of a heresy, it provided a context for other women to display their own knowledge in both utterance and writing. Often this came in the form of translations, something we've already seen with Elizabeth. Which is not to be underestimated. It's been well remarked that in this period, "translators of both sexes saw themselves as powerful cultural agents engaged in the difficult and invaluable task of importing foreign works or making domestic Latin works available to English readers."[21] It was an activity that duly attracted praise from contemporaries. A collection of writings from 1582 called *The Monument of Matrons* collects Elizabeth's translation of Marguerite with other texts, and the preface praises those women who, "for

the common benefit of their country, have not ceased…to spend their time, their wits, and also their bodies…in compiling and translating of sundry most Christian and godly books."[22]

I take this quotation from a study of one such translator, and the last figure I want to look at here: Anne Vaughan Lock (also spelled Locke), who lived in the second half of the sixteenth century.[23] She belonged to a circle of female Protestant writers that included Anne Dowriche, author of a history of the religious wars in France, and Lock's own daughter, also named Anne, who was described in a praise poem as a "learned" woman with a "manly heart" and as capable of grasping "Greek wit" and "Latin song."[24] Even among this group Anne Lock stands out for her connections —she was a friend of John Knox, who encouraged her to spend time in Geneva—and for her productivity. She translated the *Marks of the Children of God*, a text about the tribulations suffered by Calvinists of the Low Countries, evidently because she thought its consolations would be equally relevant for English Puritans. A further work of translation by Lock is an English version of a sermon by Calvin on a chapter from the book of Isaiah. She states that her aim is to render the French "so near as I possibly might, to the very words of his text, and that in so plain English as I could express." That may just sound like good practice for any translator, but the reference to "plainness" has an additional resonance in this context, since it shows Lock aiming to make the work available to the widest possible audience, a paradigmatic goal of Protestant literature.[25]

Then there is the work which Lock appended to this translation of Calvin, a collection of twenty-six sonnets under the Katherine-Parr-like title *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*. A study of these poems summarizes them neatly as follows: the "sonnets construct a poetic persona based upon an ardent desire for divine grace and a morbid fear of divine rejection, while simultaneously crafting an authorial persona who speaks publicly and displays a talent for biblical exegesis."[26] They take their departure from another poem, namely Psalm 51 of the Bible. This text may have been chosen because the Psalm includes the line "Lord thou hast opened my mouth, therefore I will sing thy songs," which looks like a pretty good justification for a woman who wants to write about religious themes. But there's a problem. Lock says herself that the sonnets are not by her, but "delivered to me by my friend with whom I knew I might be so bold to use

and publish it as pleased me." So before interpreting them as another exception to Woolf's claim that women contributed nothing to sixteenth-century literature, we need to decide whether Lock really wrote them.

In favor of her authorship, we can observe that it was quite common in this period to present one's own writings with a weak pretense of not being the author. Saying "I got this from an unnamed friend" would be an entirely typical way to do this, to the point that readers of the time might naturally have understood the meaning to be, "I wrote this myself, but am too humble to say so." For the same reason, the translation of Calvin is not published under Lock's name: she gives only her initials, "A.L." Furthermore, her version of *Marks of the Children of God* includes a poem of her own as a kind of appendix, so it makes sense that she might do the same here. On the other hand, a careful analysis of the *Meditation* has found that it greatly differs stylistically from Lock's known poetry, and that it was more likely written by Thomas Norton, a tutor to the royal family, lawyer who worked at the Inner Temple, and author of (of all things) a satirical poem against women.[27] He was someone Lock would have known and whose poetry she might have selected for inclusion alongside the translation of Calvin's sermon. So when she says that she got this from a friend and is making so bold as to publish it, she might mean just that. I won't weigh in with a view of my own as to the authorship of the sonnets. But I would like to point out that if they are not by Lock, they were at least selected by her for the book. She might have done this for the very same reason just mentioned: that the *Meditation* and its Biblical source encourage everyone to speak out in God's praise.

# 49

# I'LL TEACH YOU DIFFERENCES

## *British Scholasticism*

Here's my favorite anecdote about Oxford University. In the middle of the nineteenth century, so the story goes, the beams in the roof of the New College dining hall needed to be replaced. The fellows asked the forester of the college whether he could help. He replied, "we were wondering when you'd ask," and explained that a grove of trees had been planted five hundred years earlier and protected by generations of foresters for exactly this purpose. Though it seems that this story isn't entirely accurate, it does convey a deeper truth about Oxford. As one of Europe's oldest universities, it is distinguished by tradition and (very) long-term planning. It's a place where change tends to happen slowly. When things have been done in a certain way for the last several centuries, why start doing things differently? Yet as far back as the sixteenth century, the fellows of Oxford did start to do things differently—very differently, in fact. Even this already long-lived institution could not remain untouched by the intellectual and spiritual upheavals of the Renaissance and Reformation.

Some of the changes were at the institutional level. The establishment of grammar schools meant the universities were not the only place where the young could study. Thanks to this development and the Protestant focus on reading Scripture for oneself, literacy became more widespread, at least among boys and men. The period also saw the emergence of other institutions of higher education. Notably the Inns of Court in London, which had existed for some time, became an important center of legal study

and general education in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At the old universities, meanwhile, students increasingly took instruction directly from masters in an early version of the "tutorial" system that is (of course) still in use at Oxford and Cambridge to this day.[1] They might even live in the homes of their tutors. Elite students would hire their tutors directly, often satisfying themselves with gaining general reading and mathematical skills without bothering to finish off their degree. Poorer students kept the wolf from the door by working as servants for their well-born classmates, as we saw Edmund Spenser doing.

Then there were the changes to the teaching curriculum. The schoolmen could not just keep reading ancient philosophy in medieval Latin translations and writing sophisticated and technical, some might say "pedantic," logical treatises as they had been doing since the fourteenth century. The impact of humanism and Protestant polemics against the superfluous sophistry of the schools rendered all that obsolete. But as on the continent, scholasticism in Britain proved surprisingly resilient and adaptable.[2] Around the end of the fifteenth century, university masters were still working within the framework familiar to us from the late medieval period. Yet they were already innovating within that framework, in ways that foreshadowed more radical changes to come. We can illustrate that with the thought of a Scottish philosopher who established himself at Paris, named John Mair or John Major (he wrote his name both ways). He was born near Edinburgh in about 1467 and studied at Cambridge University, then Paris, where he rose to the level of teaching theology at the Sorbonne. His time in Paris made him a well-known figure, enough so that Rabelais parodied him as the author of *How to Make Puddings*. Some of the students who would have seen him teach were well-known too, like John Knox, George Buchanan, and even Ignatius Loyola and John Calvin. Closer in approach to Mair himself were a circle of fellow scholastics who were his students or students of his students.[3] They included David Cranston, George Lokert, Gilbert Crab, and William Manderston. This group helped to make scholarly connections between France and Scotland stronger than those between France and England. Both Lokert and Manderston, for instance, held the post of rector at the University of St Andrews.

Mair and his colleagues produced numerous treatises on logic, still the core of the arts curriculum provided to young students. Though they wrote in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, their methods were still

broadly those of late medieval logicians. These were men who were refining and innovating within an established tradition. This means, for starters, that they wrote in a highly technical Latin that could be understood by trained schoolmen all over Europe—and nobody else. The Latin of these logical treatises was all but an artificial language. It was regimented to avoid ambiguity, unlike natural languages such as Scots, English, or French.[4] The goal here was, in a way, exactly the reverse of the humanist enterprise. Rather than shaping Latin for rhetorical excellence, all rhetorical and merely conventional features were stripped away to reveal pure logical form. The result was a Latin that might strike humanists as barbaric, but had the advantage of capturing perfectly the contents of the mind. For the Aristotelian schoolmen, that mental language is the same for everyone, regardless of what language they speak over dinner. To take a simple example, the logic of the schoolmen dealt extensively with propositions in which one term is "predicated" of another, for instance "the giraffe is tall." Here the subject term is "the giraffe," the predicate is "tall," and the verb "is" serves to connect them. A sentence like "the giraffe runs" doesn't look like it fits that structure, but the schoolmen force it to do so by understanding it to mean that the predicate "running" is asserted to hold of the giraffe. Even statements about existence are construed accordingly. If I say "there is a giraffe" or "the giraffe exists," this means that existence is predicated of the giraffe.[5]

On the other hand Mair and his colleagues did not ignore linguistic complexity when it seemed to have consequences for reasoning and logical implication. One illustration is their handling of verb tenses. They did not simply pretend that tense is only a feature of natural language, but they did say some pretty counterintuitive things about it. For instance, that we can take the following proposition to be true: "a child was an adult." The reasoning here is that unless otherwise specified, the word "child" should mean "any person who *is or was* a child," and all adults have at some point been such a person. Other examples of propositions that come out true, and for the same reason, are "a living man is dead" and "an old man will be a boy."[6] These propositions, weird though they may be, still fit the predication structure preferred by the schoolmen. But it had been clear since antiquity that not all propositions can be translated into a subject, a predicate, and a connector or "copula." Already the Stoics had devoted attention to conditional statements, which have the form "if A then B."

Long before Mair and his group came along, conditionals had been integrated into Aristotelian logic. But there was still some work to do here, as when these schoolmen explored the implications of promises.[7] A statement like "if you give me a giraffe, then I'll never say a bad word about you again" looks at first like it should behave the same as "if Socrates is standing, then he is not sitting." But it turns out that it doesn't, because Socrates' standing makes it *impossible* for him to sit, whereas your giving me a giraffe doesn't make it impossible for me to badmouth you. It just means that I would be breaking my promise.

At this point you are quite likely sympathizing with those who saw the scholastics as practicing pointless pedantry. Like, for example, Phillip Melanchthon, who remarked of one work by Mair, "what wagonloads of trifles! If he is a specimen of the Paris doctors, no wonder they are unfavorable to Luther."[8] But let's not be too hasty, because Mair and his students were very interested in applying logic to important philosophical issues and concrete situations. Take, for instance, their handling of belief. Ideally, we should always build our beliefs on rock-solid foundations, which are the self-evident principles from which other beliefs are derived by the laws of logic. A paradigm of such reasoning would be geometry, where we start with axioms and use them to prove further propositions. For Mair this same structure is found in ethics.[9] We start from obviously true rules of moral reasoning, which can look rather banal, like "one should do whatever is good." Mair uses the medieval term "synderesis" for our grasp of these principles, whereas he calls "conscience" whatever we go on to infer from the principles. Given the complexity of ethical reasoning, it is always possible that we may make mistakes, but morally speaking we should always do what we take to follow from the principles: it is a sin to do what you take to be sinful, even if it isn't in fact sinful.

In many cases, though, Mair seems to be skeptical about how far deduction can take us in the practical sphere. Reaching the right ethical decision could call for drawing analogies, working through concrete consequences, and the like. For this reason it has been argued that his writings supply us with an early example of something we'll talk about below, when we get to the Jesuits: casuistry.[10] This means engaging in moral reasoning on a "case by case" basis. We see Mair do this, for instance, when he takes up the problem of paying for insurance. It may

seem that someone who insures a shipment by boat is taking money from the merchant without performing any legitimate service. That looks uncomfortably close to the condemned practice of usury, where one person charges another for the service of lending them money. But Mair argues that the insurer is more like a paid mercenary who protects the shipment, because they are taking money to share risk. This is the kind of argument we need to give when it is not possible to find ironclad arguments grounded in first principles.

The uncertainty we often feel about our own beliefs also plays a significant role in religion. Mair has an interesting treatment of the "faith" by which believers feel certainty about their religious commitments.[11] He comes rather close to the modern-day understanding by saying that a person is performing an act of faith if they believe something for which they have insufficient evidence. If a giraffe is standing right in front of you, then you don't need to have faith in the giraffe, but your reasons for having faith in God's offer of salvation are not quite so compelling. On the other hand Mair thinks that faith does require *some* basis. You can't just decide to believe whatever you want for no reason, as by becoming convinced through a sheer act of will that the number of stars is even. So faith must be a cooperation between the intellect, which grasps reasons to believe something, and the will, which moves the person actually to believe it.

Mair had the chance to put his own beliefs on the line, too. As Melanchthon's sarcastic remark implies, the "doctors" of Paris were significant public figures whose opinions mattered. Mair was consulted on such questions as the validity of Henry VIII's first marriage—he rejected the King's attempt to set Catherine aside—and the notorious Reuchlin affair over the use of Jewish learning. He also wrote a *History of Greater Britain* to advocate for the union of England and Scotland. On more abstract political questions, Mair took views that can be counted as moderate for the time, comparable to French thinkers like Claude de Seyssel.[12] Like Seyssel he was a monarchist, but one who thought that the monarch's power is subject to some restrictions by his subjects. Mair was certainly not enthusiastic about the prospect of tyrannicide, stating that the toppling of the much-criticized Richard II in England was a case of "frivolous rashness." Still, in extreme cases the people do have the right to depose their monarch, since monarchical power is based on appointment by the people. Mair drew a typical scholastic distinction here, explaining that the

ruler is “normally (*regulariter*)” in authority over the subjects, yet the people retain a “dispositional (*habitualiter*)” authority. His views on church government were similar. The papacy, like monarchy, is an instrument by which the community secures its own welfare, but in spiritual instead of temporal affairs.

As far as I know, no historian has ever thought to compare John Mair to Margery Kempe, which is understandable enough. Mair lived a few generations later and had almost nothing in common with her. Except this: both of them seem to fit a late medieval, rather than Renaissance, context. Even if Mair was ahead of his time on occasion, as when he pioneered casuistic methods in ethics, his writings on logic and other topics would for the most part have been immediately recognizable to fourteenth-century schoolmen. Many of the ideas I just mentioned appear in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which had for centuries been the standard occasion for theological discussion; it was actually this commentary that prompted Melanchthon’s damning assessment. Mair’s circle was already feeling the pressure of such criticisms. David Cranston began his own commentary on the same work with a dialogue where two speakers debate the value of scholasticism. Cranston distances himself from time-wasting technicalities but emphasizes that often, legitimate theological concerns do call for sophisticated and advanced reflection.[13] Given the cultural forces arrayed against this approach, though, it could easily have died out, and John Mair has sometimes been called the “last scholastic.”

But he really wasn’t. Certainly there were cultural developments on the horizon that would pose a challenge to the approach of Mair and his circle, which was both traditional and demanding in its technical sophistication. The religious and intellectual upheavals of the 1520s and 1530s looked like they might render that approach obsolete. As we can see from evidence like a list of books for sale in Cambridge around 1530, British thinkers were barely consulted, while humanists like Rudolph Agricola, Lefèvre d’Étaples, and Phillip Melanchthon were flying off the shelves. Still, a couple of significant English publications from the middle of the century demonstrated that a need was still felt for at least introductory texts on Aristotelian logic. In 1545, the *Dialectic* of John Seton provided just that, while also integrating material from the rhetorical tradition so beloved of humanists, from authors like Cicero and Agricola. Then in 1551, Thomas

Wilson's *Rule of Reason* broke new ground by presenting the basics of scholastic logic in English.

Wilson described his project as follows: "I have assayed through my diligence to make logic as familiar to the Englishman, as by diverse men's industries the most part of the other liberal sciences are."[14] In terms of its content the *Rule of Reason* was hardly innovative; the material covered is pretty much what was taught by professors of Aristotelian logic in fifth-century Alexandria, tenth-century Baghdad, or thirteenth-century Paris. But Wilson's approach is unusually engaging. In Aristotelian dialectic, argument forms are called "topics," which literally means "places" (from the Greek *topos*). So Wilson compares those who devise arguments to hunters looking for signs that might point to rabbits or foxes. He also shows how to apply logical tools by giving an extended example, on the question of whether priests should be allowed to marry. More entertaining still, though unintentionally so, is Ralph Lever's 1573 work *The Art of Reason*, which is again distinguished not so much for its content as its delivery. Lever tried to crowbar invented English terminology into Aristotelian logic, proposing such vocabulary as "backset," "saywhat," "foresay," and "endsay" to mean respectively "predicate," "definition," "premise," and "conclusion."[15]

But English authors were going to have to do more than come up with amusing neologisms to save Aristotelianism from irrelevance. Charles Schmitt has written that by 1565, "medieval logic had virtually disappeared, humanist rhetoric had won the day, the cultivation of Greek had advanced on a broad front, and the medieval mainstays of natural philosophy and metaphysics had retreated from the central place they once had held in university curricula."[16] Yet Schmitt made this remark to set the context for what he calls a "second wind" reviving scholasticism in the late Tudor period. The central figure who justifies this claim is John Case, who was starting out on his undergraduate degree at that same time, the mid-1560s. He would devote his energies to many of the same fields that Mair and his colleagues had pursued a few generations earlier. Case held the line against the methods of Peter Ramus, which were in danger of seducing the students of the English universities into a simplified and anti-Aristotelian approach to philosophy.[17] Against this Case proposed his own simplified, but pro-Aristotelian approach. His works were mostly introductory textbooks and

expositions of Aristotle's logic, practical philosophy, and natural philosophy.

This material was not demanding for the young readership Case had in mind, but it drew on his deep expertise and reading. His text on Aristotelian physics, which bears the attention-grabbing title *Philosopher's Stone*, announces that it draws on no fewer than twenty-three earlier exegetes. His sources range from late ancient authors like Boethius to Renaissance scholars from across Europe, like Zabarella down in Italy, and the commentators of the Iberian peninsula whom we'll be learning about in the last part of this book. It's especially noteworthy that he finds value in the medieval scholastics, writing at one point that "many today, when they hear the name of Thomas, immediately raise their eyebrows and purse their lips." If these people would just read Aquinas's writings carefully they'd discover that they are like gold that has been purified from dross. As for the greatest authority of all, he says this: "since every philosophical compendium is a waste of time without Aristotle, let me put forth Aristotle as the only philosopher and leave aside the empty and wide-ranging opinions of the present time." Case complains about the enthusiasm for Peter Ramus among young students, whereas an older, wiser man like himself realizes that "the great acuteness of Aristotle is of more worth than the flowing genius of Ramus."[18] Apart from Ramus, he aims particular invective against the novel and dangerous ideas of Machiavelli and Paracelsus. Both offer superficially appealing treatments that are in fact highly dangerous, in the case of Paracelsus to the human body, in the case of Machiavelli to the body politic.

All this sounds very conservative, and perhaps it was. But Case was also a man of his time, a keen theater-goer who moved in the same circles as a man like Philip Sidney, a group who Schmitt describes as "some of the most orthodox, most influential, and most highly placed figures of the period." We can tell this from the fact that Case's works included Latin verses written by friends, some of whom similarly contributed to a memorial volume for Sidney after his untimely death. Case also cites Sidney in his discussion of marriage, which is found in his exposition of a work on household management incorrectly ascribed to Aristotle. (Case's awareness of humanist philology is shown by his discussion of its authenticity, which cites Lefèvre d'Étaples in the course of rejecting the second part of the work.) Given the context, Case's views are downright

romantic. He insists that one should marry for love and not advantage, and that it is good for a husband to "think his own wife the wisest, justest, and most beautiful, most greatly to be feared and venerated (even if she is not so)."[19] Though he admits, following Aristotle, that women are in general inferior to men, it is not wrong for a man to think that his wife is better than him, if only because it spurs him on to virtue so as to win her esteem and respect.

A dimension of Case's thought that is apt to strike us as less appealing is his enthusiasm for what are sometimes called the "occult sciences," alchemy and astrology. Not for nothing did he write a work called *Philosopher's Stone* and compare Aquinas' thought to gold purified from base metals. He argues that natural ends can be achieved by artificial means, as when the doctor restores health, the alchemist produces gold, or the sorcerer summons storms—a comment that irresistably brings to mind Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Such things as magical talismans and astrological predictions are, he says, "not tricks, nor are they deceptions of the demons, but truly natural things as Plato and Plotinus hold." After our discussion of witchcraft, we can well understand why he is at pains here to distinguish "natural magic" from the sort that involves demonic aid. Case may have been a serious Aristotelian and trained scholastic, but that did not stop him from sharing the magical beliefs of his contemporaries. On the contrary, as far as he was concerned rational philosophy and occult study fit together perfectly, something even more true for the thinker we'll explore next.

# 50

# IF THIS BE MAGIC, LET IT BE AN ART

## *John Dee*

Amazingly, John Dee's life has never been made into a film, though there is a documentary about him and he has a walk-on role in a movie starring Cate Blanchett as Queen Elizabeth. Yet the Hollywood pitch almost writes itself. Here we have a man who met or communicated with many of the most significant figures of the Elizabethan age, like Philip Sidney, Peter Ramus, Thomas Harriot, and the Queen herself. Dee was involved in Martin Frobisher's catastrophic attempt to find a Northwest Passage to circumnavigate the globe. He invented the concept of a British empire. He produced horoscopes for the rich and powerful, and consulted with Elizabeth about astrology. Before she came to the throne, under Queen Mary, he had been arrested for magic. But before long—hey presto!—he was working for the Catholic government helping to interrogate other suspects. Or was he a Protestant spy? He traveled across Europe, going as far as Poland. Where he might have been a spy, *again*. Sorcery, exploration, intrigue, this story has it all, and I haven't even mentioned the fact that angels gave him rather scandalous advice about his sex life.

But, since this is a (mostly) serious book and not a sensationalist Hollywood movie, what follows will be a sober, nuanced discussion of Dee's thought, which will just happen to include sorcery, exploration, intrigue, and angelic (or possibly demonic) advice about sex. In fact, to forestall any accusations that my approach here will be in any way prurient, let's talk about the aspect of his career I personally find most exciting: his

library! You may think I'm kidding, and that's because I am. But let me tell you, this was some library. It has been estimated to be the largest collection in the country at the time, with no fewer than eight thousand printed books and one thousand manuscripts.[1] It included many books on philosophy, from Aristotle and Plato to the Neoplatonists and the Pseudo-Dionysius, as well as Renaissance Platonists like Ficino. Science and mathematics were well represented, from Euclid to Paracelsus. In fact Dee had more than one hundred Paracelsan works, probably the largest number in England. Of course he owned books about alchemy and magic, by authors like Trithemius and Cornelius Agrippa. There were many works on history, too, another of Dee's interests. As the Renaissance scholar Frances Yates once remarked, "the whole Renaissance is in this library."[2]

Unfortunately the collection does not survive complete today, as it was eventually ransacked while Dee was off in central Europe. But some volumes do survive, and Dee's annotations in these provide useful insight into his thought. The scope of the full original library is known through a catalogue that Dee himself had made.[3] Many works were included multiple times, sometimes in different editions: Aristotle's treatises, for example, or Plato's *Timaeus*, of which he had four copies. This would have allowed philological work on the text and also facilitated lending or resale. Euclid's *Elements*, a work of special interest to him, was represented in the library with no fewer than twenty printed copies and seven manuscripts. Alongside the annotations, another sign that these books were for use and not for show is that many of the books were unbound. The classification system, such as it was, would have meant that visitors needed Dee's help finding what they wanted. For example, books were partially arranged by size, in some cases arranged vertically along the shelf, in others piled up in stacks.

But Dee did want visitors to use the books. He called his house at Mortlake, not far from London, a "Hospice for Wandering Philosophers" and hosted and communicated with a wide variety of scholars. These included the aforementioned Ramus, Harriot, and Sidney. Sidney studied with Dee, whom he called "our unknown god," and we have a horoscope that Dee cast for him. The connection to Ramus, with whom Dee corresponded about mathematics, suggests European connections and this is not misleading. First educated at Cambridge, he went to Louvain, where he met the scientist and doctor Gemma Frisius. Here too was Gerard Mercator, a significant figure in the history of cartography (he is the namesake of the

style of world map called the "Mercator projection"). I mention this not just to convey the range of Dee's contacts, but because it foreshadows Dee's own later work on navigation, which was surely in part inspired by his time in Louvain. He then made his way to Paris, where he lectured on Euclid with such success that, according to his own report at least, students were leaning through the windows from the outside to hear him.[4]

It was Dee's reputation as an expert in the mathematical sciences that won him access to the world of Elizabeth's court. Maintaining a large household which doubled as a workshop for natural philosophy, with instruments like mirrors and clocks as well as expensive books, Dee was in constant need of money and patronage, which he sought from figures like Francis Walsingham and Elizabeth herself. We should also spare a thought for his long-suffering wife Jane, who had to keep that household running with a constant stream of noble, learned, and as we'll see shortly, deeply problematic guests.[5] This is what it looked like to establish a late sixteenth-century research institute like Tycho Brahe's Uraniborg, but without access to the independent funds Brahe enjoyed. Dee was not only trying to raise funds, though, he was also trying to influence policy. It was in this context that he proposed to the Queen the notion of a "British empire" to compete with the international reach of Spain and Portugal. In a four-volume work called *General and Rare Memorials Pertaining to the Perfect Art of Navigation*, which like his beloved library survives only partially, Dee used his historical researches to support claims of royal entitlement to part of the "new world." He pointed to fanciful stories about supposed British explorations from the distant past, like the Welsh king Madoc who supposedly beat Columbus to America by three hundred years.[6]

Since quite a bit of Dee's thought looks rather fanciful to us today, and since that is what he tends to be remembered for, I should emphasize that he really did deserve his reputation for expertise in mathematics. He valued this discipline in part for its theoretical status, as we can see from one of his best-known texts, the *Mathematical Preface* to an English translation of Euclid's *Elements*.[7] Here he promises, "I [will] frame my talk to Plato his fugitive scholars, or rather to such who well can use their outward senses." This is a doubly revealing passage. It shows his commitment to Platonism, in particular a Platonist approach to the mathematical disciplines, which are seen as offering an intermediate step between the physical and spiritual

worlds. As Dee puts it, mathematical objects have a "marvellous neutrality" and "strange participation between things supernatural, immortal, intellectual, simple and indivisible, and things natural, mortal, compounded and divisible."[8] Dee's reference to the "outward senses" is equally telling, because the *Preface* also lays great stress on the role of empirical work in science.

Accordingly, Dee was keenly interested in applied as well as pure mathematics. This showed itself from the very beginning of his career. As a student at Cambridge, he deployed his knowledge of mechanics to build an animated scarab that featured in a student production of a play by Aristophanes. Later he would impress Elizabeth by showing her a trick mirror. A mere novelty, perhaps, but one that shows how competence in optics could be used to win over a potential patron, and it doesn't get more practical than that. The same combination of theoretical and applied interests can be found in Thomas Digges, whom Dee trained as a mathematician after Digges' father died while Digges was still young. Digges called Dee his "mathematical father" and enthusiastically embraced the family business. He wrote on theoretical mathematics, as in a 1571 treatise on the Platonic solids which castigates those who cannot appreciate such discussions as "two-footed moles and toads whom destiny and nature hath ordained to crawl within the earth, and suck upon the muck."[9] On the side of applied sciences, he advised on engineering projects and a military expedition to the Netherlands in 1585. The newly emerging discipline of artillery ballistics could benefit from the expertise of such a man.

So could the incipient imperial project of navigation. Dee envisioned a discipline he called "hydrography," which would chart the tides, coastlines, and dangers that could befall mariners upon the seas. Waxing enthusiastic as usual, he said that his discussion of the principles of this art aimed "to stir the imagination mathematical and to inform the practice mechanical."[10] For navigation, the most important mathematical discipline was astronomy. So it was Dee's knowledge of the heavens and their use in wayfinding that got him involved in the attempt to find the Northwest Passage, a notorious failure. Frobisher returned with no news of the hoped for passage, though he did have a kidnapped Inuit man and plenty of mineral ore. Dee was appointed "Privy Council as a Commissioner for the Assaying of Ore from the North West," which might sound good until I tell you that the ore

contained almost no precious metal. His name suffered by association with the debacle.

But the story should not take away from Dee's standing as an astronomer. For example, both he and Digges wrote treatises about the comet or "new star" of 1577; though these were independent texts, they were often published bound together. In these writings, the two men explored the phenomenon of parallax, which we talked about when looking at Copernican and post-Copernican astronomy in central Europe. While they had a shared understanding of the mathematics involved, their interests in the topic were strikingly different. Digges was among the first Englishmen, if not the first, to lend explicit support to Copernicus' heliocentrism. For him, the comet was interesting because it proved that the heavens beyond the moon were not unchanging, as claimed by Aristotelian cosmology. As he wrote, echoing Dee's link between mathematics and Plato, "whoever wears these Platonic or—to use a more accurate expression—mathematical wings and heads upwards into the ethereal realm, leaving behind entirely the elemental regions, will see that [the new star] is much further away."[11] For Dee, by contrast, parallax was of interest because it can be used to measure the distance of astronomical bodies in general, including the usual planets.

And here, we come to the parts of his natural philosophy that may seem more fanciful, because planetary distance was important to Dee in the context of astrology. Astronomy and astrology had been closely associated since antiquity and that was certainly still the case in Dee's work. It was because of, not in spite of, his astronomical expertise that he was called on to suggest the most favorable date for Elizabeth's coronation, and later on, to reassure the government that the "new star" was not a sign of impending catastrophe. Inaccurately and rather inexplicably, that Cate Blanchett movie depicts Dee delivering precisely the opposite message to Elizabeth. Which might sound like a pedantic complaint on my part, but it's worth knowing that Dee invoked science to argue for an optimistic, expansionist, and militaristic British foreign policy, aligning him with the more hawkish members of Elizabeth's circle.

But let's get back to the reason Dee was interested in planetary distance. Like other astrologers, he believed that the stars have an influence on earthly bodies and events. Unlike other astrologers, he believed that precise calculations needed to be made concerning the distance of the stars from the

surface of the Earth. This would introduce a considerable complicating factor, since typically a document like a horoscope would only register the observed position of the stars in the sky, not worrying about how far away they are.[12] Dee had a theoretical reason for insisting on this, namely that he believed astral influence to be conveyed along "rays" that connect the stars to that which lies below them. The influence is stronger when the star spends a longer time above the affected place, strikes the place along a line that is closer to the perpendicular, and, crucially, is nearer to the Earth in terms of height.

Dee was drawing on a range of medieval texts, notably Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, and a Latin work called *On Rays* which presents itself as the translation of a treatise by the Muslim philosopher al-Kindī.[13] Yet Dee's writings on astrology are paradigmatic of Renaissance science. We can see this from one of his most important treatises, though not one that is easy to understand: the *Monas hieroglyphica*, published in 1564. It takes its name from a symbol, the *monas*, which combines several shapes that represent astrological signs and the four elements. In so doing, it captures in a single image (as Dee puts it, "teaches without words") the central claim of the work, which is that the celestial world above is powerfully connected to the elemental world below. You might remember that Tycho Brahe called alchemy "terrestrial astronomy," and Dee made exactly the same point, saying that "celestial astronomy is like a parent and teacher to inferior astronomy," meaning alchemy.[14] There are resonances with Paracelsus, too, as in the following typical example of the numerology found in the *Monas*.[15] Speaking of the letter X, Dee observes that it is the twenty-first letter of the Latin alphabet, and graphically consists of four intersecting lines, which represent the four elements. His analysis invokes the three alchemical principles from Paracelsus and the seven metals recognized in alchemy.

Dee also speaks of his enterprise as a kind of "Kabbalah," albeit that he distances himself from both Jewish Kabbalah (which he saw as a mere exploration of the Hebrew language) and the Christian appropriation of that tradition as it appeared in figures like Pico della Mirandola. As we might expect from Dee, the astrological and alchemical science is more purely mathematical. What he is really after is something like a mathematical language for describing the web of causal relations between the higher and

lower realms. Also typical are his grand claims for the possibilities open to someone who masters that language. Just as one can use knowledge of optics to manipulate light with mirrors, so the scientist can manipulate elemental bodies by understanding and manipulating astral rays, so as to "imprint the rays of any star much more strongly upon any matter subjected to it than nature itself does."[16]

This is all to some extent familiar from other Renaissance scientists, mathematicians, and Platonists we've discussed before, like Pico, Ficino, Agrippa, and Paracelsus, all of whom were available to Dee right there on the shelves of his library. But what comes next is going to sound more extravagant. As we can see from his book catalogue, Dee had a long-standing interest in angels. For example, he consulted the works of the Pseudo-Dionysius, which included *The Celestial Hierarchy*, an application of Neoplatonic metaphysics to the angelic realm.[17] He already speaks of contacting the angels during the time when he was writing his chief mathematical treatises. Nonetheless, we have to recognize a shift in his career, and indeed life, in the early 1580s, when he began to engage in serious consultation with so-called "scryers." These were not scientists, but individuals who were supposedly gifted by nature with the ability to contact the angels.

After initial dealings with a man named Barnabas Saul, Dee started to perform so-called "actions" with Edward Kelley. Kelley would almost literally look into a crystal ball (it was actually a mirror made of polished obsidian) and describe what he saw, and what was said to him by the figures who appeared, while Dee took notes. It was in part under Kelley's influence that Dee abandoned England in 1584, going to central Europe to join the Polish aristocrat Albert Laski, then on to Prague in an effort to win the support of Emperor Rudolph II (in this he would be followed by Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler).[18] Dee's family suffered greatly from all this travel and a precarious economic situation, but the worst was still to come. We know from Dee's diaries that his wife Jane was often furious at the hold Kelley had over Dee. So one can only imagine how she felt when Kelley told Dee that the angels wanted the two men to sleep with each others' wives, which they apparently went on to do. From our point of view, it's almost irresistible to see Kelley as a con man who exploited Dee's credulity and his desperate search to find something just as elusive as the Northwest Passage: a shortcut to divine truth. But we should, perhaps, try to resist at

least a little bit. Kelley himself sometimes warned Dee that they could be communicating with demons pretending to be angels, and on one occasion actually produced a book by Agrippa to point out that the so-called "angels" were plagiarizing from his works. This might have been just a canny strategy on Kelley's part, to provoke Dee into reassuring him about the authenticity of the angelic revelations. Or it may be that Kelley himself believed, or half-believed, that they were contacting some kind of supernatural force, and was himself uncertain about the nature of this contact.

Having looked at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the theme of witchcraft, we are in a good position to appreciate such worries. As we saw, the sixteenth century was a time when belief in the possibility of communicating with spiritual beings was widespread, indeed nearly universal. Even skeptics tended to argue merely that, while witchcraft is real, it is all but impossible to prove. In this cultural context, it was not at all strange for Dee, and perhaps Kelley, to worry that they were unwittingly conversing with demons instead of angels. Effectively Dee was anxious that he really was guilty of witchcraft, but he convinced himself otherwise, just as he convinced himself that Kelley was a genuine scryer. Both men (and apparently Jane Dee too, when complaining about her husband's activities) used the word "cosener," meaning a "fraudster." Certainly it was a pressing concern that the human scryer might be a cosener. This was Dee's eventual verdict on his first informant, Barnabas Saul. But even worse was the possibility that the supernatural beings themselves could be coseners.

Dee's angelic conversations have, as you might imagine, raised questions about his place in the history of science.[19] One reaction might be simply to lament the way that this sophisticated mathematician turned his back on serious research and succumbed to superstition. One of the leading scholars of Dee's thought, Nicholas Clulee, takes more or less this line. He says that Kelley drew Dee away from "more sober scientific work," and comments, "the greatest irony of Dee's career is that his attempts to get progressively closer to the truths of nature in fact led to a progressive distancing from nature."[20] But this may underestimate the extent to which interest in angels and magical practices were already on display in Dee's earlier career. It's not as if he was a hard-headed mathematician before he met Kelley, and a wild-eyed magician afterward. Clulee himself stresses that Dee's intellectual ambition was always the same: he wanted to probe

the depths of divine wisdom. It's just that he made a catastrophic mistake about which methods were best suited for reaching that goal.

I think that the consistency across Dee's career runs deeper than that. It's not only that he had the same broad objective throughout. It's also that he operated with a stable theory of knowledge.[21] This is a theory he could have found in other, broadly Platonist, authors of the Renaissance, like Agrippa. Dee shared his understanding of natural philosophy as a serious but also a relatively low-ranking science, which studies the earthly realm of the four elements. Natural magic, too, has its place here. Higher up is the combined art of astronomy and astrology, and higher still is direct concourse with the divine realm. Similar methods could be used at the different levels, which is why it would have made sense to Dee when Kelley's angels outlined a complex "language" of symbols not unlike the one explored in Dee's own *Monas hieroglyphica*. This was, supposedly, a direct revelation of the original language of Adam, the first man. Through Kelley, then, Dee could behold truths that were merely glimpsed from the perspective of the lower sciences. He said as much himself, writing to the emperor Rudolph II, "I found that neither any man living, nor any book I could yet meet withal, was able to teach me those truths I desired and long for," which is why he instead chose "to make intercession and prayer to the giver of wisdom and all good things." Of course we would now make a sharp distinction between a mathematical, empirical natural philosophy on the one hand, and on the other hand such "superstition" as talking to angels. But for Dee, these were just lower and higher steps on the same ladder.

# 51

# NATURE'S MYSTERY

## *Science in Renaissance England*

Once that movie about John Dee has been made and swept the awards season, there will be public demand for a sequel. I suggest that the next movie should *not* be about Thomas Harriot. Not that his life was uneventful. He went to Virginia as a scientific advisor in the retinue of Walter Raleigh, becoming one of the first Europeans to learn a Native American language, Algonquian, and also one of the first to get cancer from enjoying tobacco. He was also arrested after another patron, Henry Percy the Earl of Northumberland, was falsely suspected of being involved in the Gunpowder Plot to assassinate King James. There would be plenty of scientific achievements to present in the movie, too. Harriot didn't just learn Algonquian, he invented a phonetic alphabet for recording it. He devised a groundbreaking system of mathematical notation, discovered the sine law of refraction, and made pioneering advances in the study of falling bodies and specific gravities. Harriot was among the first to draw maps of the lunar surface and to see sunspots through a telescope. He beat Kepler to the realization that planets do not orbit in perfect circles. He was, in short, something of a one-man scientific revolution.[1]

The problem is just that such a movie project would shower on Harriot the one thing he seemed most determined to avoid: publicity. Having made so many incredible discoveries, the sort of breakthroughs that would shortly be putting the "light" into Enlightenment and transforming European

history forever, he discussed them with a few close associates, wrote them down in manuscripts, put these in a drawer, and left it at that. His friend William Lower chided him for letting others claim credit for discoveries he had made earlier, including (according to Lower) the non-circular paths of the planets. This has ensured that his name is not a household one, at least not in my household. Before I came across him as the author of a report on the colony established at Virginia, I had never heard of him. Specialists on the history of science know better. They have been equally amazed by his prodigious mind and his failure to share its fruits with the world, and have discussed both at length.[2] His decision not to publish has been given several explanations. Enjoying patronage as he did, he had no need to attract attention by making splashy announcements about his latest findings. He also had good reasons to avoid notoriety, as a target of rumors of atheism and then as collateral damage when his patron Northumberland was accused of conspiracy. But my favorite explanation is that it would simply have been very difficult to print his writings. They were full of diagrams and page after page of algebraic notations, more like a modern math textbook than the works of scientific prose produced by humanists only a few decades before.

Indeed, we can better appreciate the achievements of Harriot and his peers at the end of the sixteenth century if we look back to the way science was conducted by English humanists a few decades earlier. Let's begin with a quote from Europe's most famous scholar of the early sixteenth century, Erasmus. In a passage I've mentioned before, one that praises John Colet and Thomas More, Erasmus poses the rhetorical question, "what can be more acute, profound, and delicate than the judgment of Linacre?" The man being praised here was Thomas Linacre, whose major scientific contribution was to translate several works of Galen, including the philosophically significant *On Temperaments* and *On the Natural Faculties*. Linacre was also a practicing doctor, but the editors of a collection of essays on him say in their introduction, "nothing appears here on the subject of Linacre's medical practice, because nothing is known about it which would distinguish it from that of his contemporaries."[3] So it is for his humanist philology that he is remembered today. Linacre came by his expertise in ancient languages in the way customary for Englishmen of the time: he went to Italy. Having already begun to learn Greek at Oxford, he spent more than a decade in the cities of Florence, Rome, Padua, and Venice, and

studied with the outstanding classicist Poliziano and the Byzantine émigré Demetrios Chalkokondylas. At Padua, he attained a medical degree; at Venice, he collaborated with the important book printer Aldus Manutius. After returning to England, he gave gifts to set up lectureships in medicine at Oxford and also served as the first president of the College of Physicians, which introduced much-needed education and regulation in the field.

A decade after Linacre's death in 1524, Thomas Elyot—already familiar to us as author of the humanist political treatise *Book of the Governor*—published an accessible presentation of Greek medical theories called the *Castle of Health*. Elyot had learned about the topic from Linacre himself, and duly presented a thoroughly Galenic picture of health, its restoration, and maintenance, for example by suggesting appropriate diets for men and women of different humoral temperaments.[4] None of which is to be sneezed at, unlike the cold you might catch if you don't eat warming foods to offset the phlegmatic mixture of your body. These humanists were making great strides in disseminating the scientific tradition of antiquity, through translations, guides aimed at a popular audience, and the establishment of institutions for scientific study. But none of this looks much like the science of the seventeenth century, whereas Harriot's unpublished writings very much do. How can we explain this change?

If I had to give a one-word answer, it would be "mathematics." And if I had to give a two-word answer, it would be "applied mathematics." Scholars of the Italian Renaissance lavished attention on the texts of ancient mathematicians like Archimedes, Euclid, and Ptolemy, and then went on to explore concrete topics like the paths of falling bodies, timekeeping, and what we would now call a body's center of gravity.[5] Things unfolded similarly in England, where Roger Ascham warned against the corrupting effect of focusing on pure mathematical sciences: "as they sharpen men's wits over much, so they change men's manners over sore, if they be not moderately mingled and wisely applied to some good use of life."[6] For both pure and applied mathematics, English scholars took direct inspiration from their continental counterparts. The findings of European mathematicians like Regiomantanus, Niccolò Tartaglia, and Galileo were known to English scholars; Harriot's work on algebra was based directly on the writings of the French mathematician François Viète. Harriot's way of symbolizing mathematical phenomena was strongly influenced by Viète, who also used

letters for variables and was able to express geometrical shapes in algebraic terms.[7]

It's a long-standing cliché of historiography about early modern science that it developed outside the universities, which were still in the thrall of literally antiquated Aristotelian ideas. And I do mean long-standing. One contemporary praised the Elizabethan astronomer John Blagrave for seeking knowledge outside the universities, commenting that "scholars have the books, and practitioners the learning."[8] That idea might seem to be supported by the story as I've been telling it, insofar as the mathematical exploration of nature grew out of humanism, not scholasticism. Harriot's enviable position as an independent researcher supported by Walter Raleigh and Henry Percy also fits with that narrative. Percy was dubbed the "wizard earl" for his intellectual proclivities, and praised in a poem that contrasted the research he was sponsoring with the "schoolmen's vulgar trodden paths."[9]

But as so often, this neat story is at best half true. Mathematics was a well-established subject at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.[10] We can see this from, for example, a document written by John Everard in 1598 detailing what he had to study at Cambridge. Yes, plenty of Aristotelian philosophy, with interpreters of both ancient and recent vintage (literally running the gamut from A to Z, since Everard consulted commentaries ranging from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Zabarella), but also lectures on mathematics, which were held daily. The students could take instruction from such outstanding scholars as Henry Savile, who lectured on Ptolemy's astronomical work, the *Almagest*, enriching his presentation with information from up-to-date authors like Copernicus. He also taught optics, mechanics, trigonometry, and the history of ancient mathematics, for which he drew on Peter Ramus. To this day there is a professorship of astronomy at Oxford named after Savile. It seems that practically every intellectual of the period was connected to the circle around Philip Sidney, and Savile was no exception. Sidney even supplied him with letters of introduction for a trip around Europe in 1581.

Nonetheless, it has to be admitted that university teaching of the "quadrivium," the traditional mathematical arts, was not at its peak in the Elizabethan period.[11] True, these lectures existed and attendance was a requirement; fines were levied on students who failed to turn up. But all too

often, this meant that reluctant students were being bored to death by lecturers who also wished they were somewhere else. A number of them even petitioned to be excused from the chore. The aforementioned Henry Savile acknowledged all this in his own lectures, ranting about lazy students (bet that went down well) and stating that he, at least, was glad to be there, and to "restore dignity to the mathematical lectures." Savile also pointed out the limits of a narrowly humanist approach to scientific texts. These disciplines call for more than expertise in ancient languages, they demand a philosophical mind.

On balance, then, it seems fair to conclude that the universities made some contribution to scientific and mathematical knowledge in this period without being the scene of the greatest breakthroughs. We can see this from the careers of John Dee and Thomas Harriot. Dee was educated at Cambridge, Harriot at Oxford, but Dee set up an independent facility at Mortlake, while Harriot needed no institutional setting beyond the patronage he received from Raleigh and Percy. Nor was Harriot the only scholar associated with Percy. Modern historians speak of a whole "Northumberland circle" gathered around him, which besides Harriot included Walter Warner, Nathaniel Torperley, Robert Hues, and Nicholas Hill. Percy's enthusiasm for the sciences continued undimmed even after he was imprisoned in the Tower of London in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot. He even kept scientific instruments in his rooms there!

Instrumentation was crucial to Harriot's approach, too, since it allowed for mathematically precise observation of nature, which is really (to use an apt term) the constant that runs through all his most significant work. His combination of empiricism with calculation is already on show during his involvement with Raleigh's colonial project. For Raleigh's sea captains, Harriot devised easy-to-follow instructions on the use of navigational instruments. Underscoring that this was all a matter of *applied* mathematics, Richard Hakluyt praised Raleigh for engaging Harriot to show how to "unite theory with practice."[12] The same habits of mind guided Harriot in his dealings with the Native Americans that the group met in Virginia: he befriended some of them and showed a talent for linguistics. During his lifetime, Harriot's only published work was his propagandistic account of this journey, the *Brief and True Report of Virginia*, which came out in 1590. But the evidence of his manuscripts is more extraordinary. Here we find him inventing a new alphabet that could be used to write down Algonquian

language (he also wrote other things in this alphabet, meaning that it doubles as a kind of private code). This is recognizably the same man who made advances in algebraic notation and used meticulous measurement as his chief scientific method.

Historians of science are not as a rule effusive, so we can take it as a lavish compliment when one of them says of Harriot's work in mathematics: "in some of this he is startlingly original, in other parts good and in the rest mostly pretty competent."[13] Though he did do work in pure mathematics, our purposes (and my ability to understand what is going on) are better matched to his research on areas like projectile motion and specific gravity. The study of projectiles was of military significance, because cannons were now a common weapon of war. Dee's protégé Thomas Digges and his father Leonard Digges both applied geometrical analysis to understand the path described by a cannonball.[14] Despite their interest in real-world applications, they were obliged to ignore many factors like wind resistance and the variable strength of gunpowder. They were asking the more basic question of how the angle of the cannon's elevation affects the distance of the shot. Some had assumed that the cannonball moves straight for a while, and is then captured by what we would now call "gravity" and pulled back to earth. Harriot realized that, instead, the cannonball's path is for its entire flight the result of combining two other, idealized motions. First along a straight line as fired from the cannon, and second the free fall of the cannonball. Following this logic, he argued that the real trajectory would be a smooth but asymmetrical curve.

Harriot's inquiries into falling bodies involved "experiments" in the sense that he set up and carefully measured real-world scenarios, rather than just sketching diagrams from his imagination. His neighbors were no doubt glad that these involved not cannons, but the quieter method of dropping metal bullets onto a set of scales. The idea was to see how far the bullet would have to fall before its velocity was sufficient to tip the scales for a certain counterweight. Similarly, he performed extensive observations to calculate the specific gravity of various substances, like marble, diamond, crystal, and glass.[15] Here he did not need to invent a new mathematical model for what was going on, but just to use a formula ascribed to Archimedes: you weigh a sample in air and water and divide the weight in air by the difference between the two weights. Why, you might ask, would it be useful to get exact values for the specific gravity of different

materials? There are lots of applications, but if you worked at the king's treasury the one that would interest you most is that, since different metals have different specific gravities, you can use this number to test the purity of a precious metal like gold or silver.

It's almost irresistible to compare and contrast Harriot's investigations with the work being done by Galileo at the same time. Galileo was also interested in the problem of falling bodies, and like him Harriot was a convinced Copernican and early adopter of the telescope. Indeed, there is a book about Harriot that calls him the "English Galileo." But there is room for skepticism here.[16] One obvious difference is that, whereas Harriot left his ideas buried in manuscripts, Galileo was a genius of self-promotion who sought and achieved notoriety across Europe. That may indirectly confirm the hypothesis that Harriot's comfortable position was a factor in his choice not to publish. Since Galileo's situation was more precarious, he needed to convince an elite audience that he deserved the sort of support Harriot was already receiving. More significant for us is a philosophical difference. Galileo was a true natural philosopher who made claims about the nature of the world, the kind of claims that could get him in trouble with the Pope. Harriot, by contrast, was largely content to make his observations and represent what he had seen using algebra and geometry. Perhaps Harriot thought that the mathematical model of a natural phenomenon is just that, a model, and that as a mathematician it was outside his sphere of competence to offer physical theories. This would, of course, be the same "instrumentalist" line of thought Osiander used to defuse the explosive implications of Copernicus.

If that sort of methodological restraint was a general feature of Harriot's thought, then there was an important exception: he seems to have assumed that the bodies he was experimenting with were made of atoms.[17] This would have been the theory underlying Harriot's work on specific gravities. It would also help to explain his interest in the geometrical question of how to pack together spherical bodies with the least space in between. But two other members of the Northumberland circle, Walter Warner and Nicholas Hill, were much more forthright in their embrace of atomism. Hill wrote a book with the telling title *Epicurean Philosophy*, which endorsed the idea that bodies are ultimately made of impenetrable and indivisible "prime corpuscles" whose different shapes allow them to entangle with one another, for instance with loops and hooks that become joined. As for

Warner, he put forward a remarkable theory according to which atomic bodies influence one another through an all-purpose "force" (in Latin *vis*). This force fills the otherwise empty space around atoms. It is responsible for all causal interaction and observable properties in bodies made from atoms, including color, hardness and softness, motion, and even weight. With this, Warner was anticipating something we more readily associate with early modern philosophers like John Locke: a contrast between the "primary" physical qualities of corpuscles and "secondary" qualities, like color.

Now, I don't want to deny that the Northumberland circle was anticipating early modern corpuscular theory or the mathematical analysis of nature. But, as ever, we should remember that thinkers who may seem to us ahead of their time were also *of* their time. We saw before that contemporaries on the continent, like Schegk, Taurellus, Gorlaeus, and Sennert, were also experimenting with atomic theories. As for the use of mathematics to describe physical situations, that goes back to the Oxford Calculators of the fourteenth century and is something we've seen in other authors. A particularly instructive parallel would be with John Dee, who incidentally knew Harriot, probably through their mutual friend Walter Raleigh. Though Dee is known to posterity mostly as a magician, and Harriot mostly managed to avoid being known to posterity at all, they were both mathematicians who drew connections between their specialism and other disciplines, especially alchemy and optics. Harriot, like Dee, performed alchemical experiments, and the atomic theory was a natural fit with alchemical thinking. After all, if everything is made of atoms, it should be possible to break down one substance and turn it into another by combining the atomic parts differently.

The connections to optics may be even more important. The behavior of light, as in the case of reflections from mirrors or lengths of shadows, lends itself to being represented in geometrical diagrams. So it's natural that treatises on vision and light had always been written by mathematically inclined authors, starting in antiquity with Euclid and Ptolemy. They influenced medieval theorists of light like al-Kindī and Robert Grosseteste, whom I mentioned as sources for John Dee's theory of rays. Walter Warner was also thinking of them when he devised his theory of the "force" that is propagated by atoms: the force "emanates" from the atom as light does from a light source.[18] Harriot was very interested in optics. He wrote about

such phenomena as the rainbow, and above all the problem of refraction. It was in this context that he gave the clearest indication that he too was an atomist. For once, he did not confine his thoughts on this matter to private manuscripts. He didn't do anything so crass as to publish a book about it, of course. But he did put pen to paper to correspond with another scientist who was keenly interested in the behavior of light: none other than Johannes Kepler.[19]

# 52

# THE EYE SEES NOT ITSELF BUT BY REFLECTION

## *Theories of Vision*

You can tell a lot about a historical period from the examples given by its philosophers. The medievals loved to devise thought experiments invoking their omnipotent God. When Kant and other German philosophers deal with aesthetic experience they speak of the awesomeness of nature, a good fit for the literary culture of the day. What it says about our own time that philosophers can't stop talking about killing people with runaway trolleys, I'll leave you to judge. Back in antiquity, philosophical illustrations were a bit more wholesome. The standard example of a visual illusion, used already by Plato in his *Republic* (602c), is that something straight, like a wooden rod, will look bent if it is half submerged in water. For centuries thereafter philosophers mentioned the apparently bent stick, but without being able to explain why it looks bent. The answer is, of course, that although the stick is not bent, the light coming from the stick to your eye *is* bent, or refracted, by the water. One is tempted to say that the water refracts the light whereas air doesn't. But that's not quite right. Air refracts light too, just not as much as the water does. The difference in the "refractive index" of the two different media explains the illusion.

As I mentioned, Thomas Harriot was keenly interested in this phenomenon, and by 1601 discovered a general physical law to characterize it. It's now called Snell's law, not Harriot's law, since as usual he only wrote

it down in his unpublished manuscripts.[1] (Actually Descartes was the first to publish a proof of the law, in 1637, after the result was publicized the previous year by his friend Mersenne.) It's also called the "sine law of refraction" since it allows for the calculation of the refractive index by dividing the sine of the angle at which light strikes the medium by the sine of the angle of refraction. If you'll pardon the expression, there are some striking parallels here, namely with Harriot's work on specific gravity. As in that case, he needed to do careful observations with different materials to get a constant for each substance. With specific gravity that meant weighing samples in water and air; here it meant putting objects with markings on them into water and measuring the apparent position of the markings compared to what he knew was the real position. He calculated his results out to six figures! This was overkill, since his actual observations weren't accurate enough to bear this level of precision, but it shows how carefully he was proceeding. There was another parallel to the specific gravity research, namely that the work on refraction was highly useful. Specific gravity was important for weighing metals like gold and silver. Refraction was important for something Harriot might have seen as even more crucial, namely astronomy. Since air does bend light, too, the real positions of stars seen through our atmosphere would need to be recalculated by correcting for refraction.

I just said that Harriot failed to convey this information to the world, but that's putting it mildly. He even deliberately concealed it.[2] Unlike Dee examining the ore brought back from the Americas, Harriot had a golden opportunity: he could have revealed the sine law when he entered into a correspondence with Johannes Kepler in 1606. This was prompted by his reading of Kepler's own work on optics, published two years earlier. Though Harriot was apparently in no hurry to share his law with the world, he apparently wanted to make sure that no one else would do it first. The exchange between them was ultimately frustrating, especially for Kepler. Harriot sent him only enough information from his own observations to disprove Kepler's preferred theory, which was that the index of refraction simply correlates with density. Kepler was persuaded that his guess was wrong, and badly wanted to know the real formula. "Now you," he wrote to Harriot, "excellent initiate of the mysteries of nature, reveal the causes." True to form, Harriot refused to do this, though he gave a hint at his own understanding when he teased Kepler, "I have now led you to the doors of

the house of Nature, where her secrets lie hidden. If the doors are too narrow for you, then mathematically abstract and contract yourself to an atom and then you will easily enter. Later, when you leave, tell me what marvels you have seen."

This suggests that Harriot wanted to explain refraction in terms of an atomic theory of matter, which is confirmed by the work of Nathaniel Torperley, a fellow member of the Northumberland circle. Harriot thought highly enough of him to make Torperley his literary executor. But as Aristotle once said when criticizing Plato, "truth is more dear to us than our friends," and Torperley didn't hesitate to dish out some heavy criticism of Harriot's atomistic explanation of refraction. Think again about the body of water with an apparently bent stick in it. You might also see sunlight reflecting off the surface of that water, which shows that the water is reflecting some of the light while letting other light through, with the latter being refracted. Harriot's idea was apparently that the reflected light is bouncing off the top layer of atoms that make up the water. The refracted light, meanwhile, filters through the atoms of the body and in the process changes direction as it seeks a path through the empty spaces between these atoms. Robert Goulding has aptly called this a "zigzag through a pinboard" account of refraction.[3] Torperley found it unconvincing. For one thing, the many rays of light should be bouncing off the atoms in all directions and not filtering through at just one angle all the time. For another thing, the refracted light that passes through the body somehow takes on its color.[4] A stick in water may look somewhat blue, for instance, in addition to looking bent.

If the physical makeup of bodies was controversial, the nature of light itself was still more mysterious. Astronomers like Harriot had every reason to concern themselves with this problem, since the only way for them to study the heavenly bodies was by means of the light that comes from them. The phenomena of parallax and refraction are just two examples of the way that optics and astronomy went hand in hand, linking Harriot's investigations in both fields. But no one from this period illustrates the point better than his exasperated correspondent Kepler. His work on optics represented a significant shift in the philosophy of light. Here at the turn of the seventeenth century, the state of the art was still quite literally medieval. The most advanced account of light had been produced by the Muslim scientist Ibn al-Haytham, known in Latin as Alhazen.[5] His works were used

by a medieval author called Witelo. Writings of both men were available in print by the time of Harriot and Kepler, thanks to the *Thesaurus of Optics* published in 1572 by Friedrich Risner, a student of Peter Ramus.

The account that Harriot and Kepler could find in these texts took distance from Aristotle's theory of light and vision without fully abandoning his ideas. For Aristotle, light simply enables a transparent medium to transmit the image of a visual object to the eye. By contrast, for Ibn al-Haytham light is propagated along straight lines from light sources, and then from the surfaces of the other bodies they illuminate. Imagine that I am looking at a giraffe standing in a pond, wondering why its legs look even more bent than usual. Aristotle would say that the light suffusing the air between me and the giraffe "activates" the capacity of the air to bring to my sight an image of the giraffe. One way to think about this is that the illuminated air is indirectly putting my eyes in contact with the giraffe, because my eyes are touching the air which is touching the giraffe. This solves the problem of how the giraffe could be causing me to see her even though she is all the way over there. If the Sun goes down, I will stop seeing the giraffe, which for Aristotle is simply because without light the air loses its ability to connect eyesight to its object.

Ibn al-Haytham and Witelo would say instead that rays go from the Sun to the giraffe and then to my eyes. There are many advantages of this account over that of Aristotle. For starters, it can better explain mirror images. It can also account for the fact that I can see a luminous object through *dark* air, like a giraffe at nighttime decorated with Christmas lights. (Well, how do *you* celebrate the holidays?) Finally, this idea of light as consisting of rays lends itself to a geometrical analysis of optical phenomena. You can imagine the rays spreading out in a cone from each luminous point, with the light strongest along the perpendicular line through the center of the cone. Still, the upshot of the whole process would be much as Aristotle thought: an image of the giraffe comes to my eyes, conveyed by the luminous rays. Kepler agrees with a lot of this, especially the idea that we can represent light mathematically. However, he sees light in more physical terms.[6] He says that "a ray is nothing but the motion of light itself," and understands the light as a physical phenomenon that can, as it were, "bounce" off objects when it is reflected. This is not to say that light is a body, or that it moves across space bit by bit, like flowing water. Rather, it traverses the entire space instantly, and is a kind of compromise between

material bodies and immaterial things. Kepler thus calls light "the chain linking the corporeal and spiritual world."

As this remark reminds us, Kepler was a committed Platonist, albeit a rather unorthodox one. We can see this from his discussion of the Sun, which is influenced by an equally unorthodox Platonist, Nicholas Cusanus. Inspired by Cusanus' comparison of God to a sphere, and of course by Copernicus' heliocentrism, Kepler sees the Sun as nearly divine. At the center of all things, it is the seat of the soul of the universe, and diffuses both light and life: "all other things that participate in light imitate the Sun." In a significant break from the previous tradition, for Kepler what comes to the eye from the Sun, from other light sources, and from the things that they illuminate, is not an "image" of what is seen, what was called a visual *species* in medieval Latin. The only *species* involved is light itself, which, as noted by Torperley, can absorb color from the surfaces it has visited. Or actually, that isn't quite right, because we can also see the *absence* of light. The study of the stars frequently involved seeing shadows or obstructions to light, for example when observing a solar eclipse. This is why Kepler says that "the things to be considered optically in astronomy are…the things themselves set before the sense of sight, by way of considering the species of things, that is, light and shadow."

It's worth dwelling briefly on just how Kepler might have gone about observing a solar eclipse. As you've surely been warned if you ever had the chance to see one, you shouldn't look straight at it. Instead, as amateur stargazers do today, Kepler would have used an apparatus with a pinhole. It allows through a small amount of light, projecting the image upside down onto a screen, just as, on Kepler's account of vision, light falls on the retina of the eye to create the image that we see. The larger version of this device is called a "camera obscura," with light allowed through an aperture into a darkened room. Kepler was very interested in the phenomenon. He once set up an illuminated book in front of a pinhole camera and led taut strings from its edges to the images of the projected image, running through the aperture. This helped him to prove that any distortion caused by the apparatus, for instance by the size or shape of the pinhole, could be explained and corrected through geometrical analysis. For example, he could show why a triangular aperture would, at a certain distance, throw a circular rather than a triangular image of the sun, something that the medieval optical texts couldn't easily account for.

All this served the same goal as correcting for the refraction of light in air when observing the heavens. Kepler wanted to use optical theory to improve the accuracy of astronomical data, so that the science of the stars could be put on a more confident footing. But, as brief reflection will show, all the ideas we've just been discussing could just as well *disturb* our confidence in vision. The idea that I am not seeing that giraffe, or even an "image" of the giraffe, but merely the light coming from the giraffe, is already somewhat disconcerting. In Kepler we can find telling turns of phrase pointing in that direction, as when he describes observing the Moon through a camera obscura, and says "the moon's ray was in the paper."[7] And that's without even getting into things like mirror images, parallax, and the pervasive refraction of light. The more you think about this, the more you might start to suspect that you quite literally cannot believe your own eyes. Which brings us to an interesting book by Stuart Clark called *Vanities of the Eye*.[8] It catalogues the many reasons that early modern people started to distrust the visual experience.

Some of his examples are already familiar to us. When discussing *Macbeth*, we saw that demonic influence could cause people to see things that aren't there, for example a dagger floating in the air. Such illusions were especially associated with demons because these malevolent forces have no bodies and so can only manipulate us through images. As one author of the time put it, the Devil works his effects only "by the delusion of the eye." We also saw that a more natural explanation could be given for the same sort of phenomena, namely melancholy. This disease could affect the imagination by unbalancing the humoral mixture of the brain. So the delusional melancholic would actually be "seeing" things prompted by an internal disturbance rather than an outside cause. This might help to explain why the "enthusiastic" visions formerly appreciated as religious experiences were now more apt to be greeted by suspicion. In the early fifteenth century Margery Kempe could convince a good number of people that she was seeing Christ, even if she also ran into a fair bit of skepticism. Now around the year 1600, she'd more likely just be diagnosed with melancholy or charged with witchcraft. (Or both.)

Another important factor in explaining that change was, of course, the Reformation. The Protestants dismissed all supposed modern-day wonders, with one author remarking that they were "miracles in sight, but in deed no miracles." More generally, they tended to value the auditory over the

visible. Godly people listen to the Bible being read out to them; they don't hope to see angels or feast their eyes on statues of saints dripping with blood. Luther put it with his characteristic bluntness: "do not look for Christ with your eyes but put your eyes in your ears." The general attitude on this side of the religious divide is captured well in the book that gives Clark the title of his own study, George Hakewill's 1608 treatise, *The Vanity of the Eye*. Hakewill was a Calvinist theologian and college rector at Oxford. This work, which he wrote for a blind friend, attacks eyesight from every conceivable perspective. It is subject to mistakes due to everything from optical illusions to illness, sorcery, and demonic possession. It is also associated with wicked desires, like lust. Worst of all, it's associated with Catholicism!

Now, as Clark notes, this is rather an oversimplification.[9] Catholics could be and were accused of an overly visual culture of worship. Their churches, untouched by the purifying bonfire of iconoclasm, were full of images of those bleeding saints and the suffering Christ. In their ceremony of the Mass the priest would dramatically lift up the host for the congregation to behold. But according to the Catholic understanding of this miraculous event, there is a clash between the appearance of the sacrificial host and its real nature. It *looks* like bread, but in fact it is Christ's body. So in this case it was actually the Protestants (or, at least, some Protestants) who insisted that what you see is what you get. The bread really is what it looks like, and merely symbolizes Christ's body. Indeed, on their view, this is the whole idea of a "sacrament": one thing stands in for or represents another.

Still, the point stands that the Protestant trend toward an anti-visual culture reinforced other cultural forces that were undermining trust in the senses, and especially vision. The logician Thomas Wilson, whom I mentioned a couple of episodes back as the author of a work on logic in English called the *Rule of Reason*, once wrote that "the eyesight is most quick, and containeth the impression of things most assuredly." But increasingly, there was good reason to fear that eyesight is *too* quick, that it leaps to conclusions and misleads us. Clark therefore connects this theme with another trend of the time, namely the rebirth of philosophical skepticism in authors like Montaigne and Charron (it may not be a coincidence that Hakewill was an admirer of Charron's treatise *On Wisdom*). At first glance, it might look like the optical research done by

Harriot and Kepler fits into that picture. Just as an inner force like melancholy or demonic possession might deceive you from the inside, so a curved mirror or the refraction of light might deceive you from the outside. And as I've said, one might be disturbed by Kepler's claim that we only ever see light, not the actual light sources or illuminated objects. Worse still, light can be manipulated, as with John Dee's famous trick mirror, which he used to amuse the Queen. Protestant debunkers exposed charlatans who created miraculous auras of light using mirrors, and Kepler himself told of playing a trick on friends, where he used the camera obscura technique to make it look like magic Hebrew letters were dancing on the wall.[10]

But the association of optical advances with philosophical doubt should itself be treated with a bit of skepticism. Sure, the science of light and vision could be used to play tricks, but that wasn't the real goal. As I've said, what Kepler and Harriot really wanted to do was to put themselves in a position to *correct* for optical effects, especially when doing astronomy. Their project was thus to use mathematics and measurements to free the scientist from illusion and distortion. The implicit message was not, "you can't even trust your own eyes, so who knows what to believe?" It was "you can't trust your own eyes, but you can trust geometry."[11] So while seventeenth-century skepticism does bear some relation to what we've been discussing, seventeenth-century mathematical science was the real inheritance of Kepler, of Harriot, and the rest of the Northumberland circle. They were forerunners of the Descartes who explained the rainbow and invented a coordinate system to represent space, not the Descartes who invoked the evil demon hypothesis. Vision would continue to be the central illustration of science's potential to raise skeptical challenges and then answer those challenges. Just think of the way that telescopes and microscopes would be revealing truths of nature that are hidden from normal human sensation. Yet again, from this vantage point at the end of the sixteenth century, we can glimpse fleeting images of what was yet to come.

# 53

# METAL MORE ATTRACTIVE

## *William Gilbert and Magnetism*

A pretty standard way of demarcating "early modern" philosophy is to say that it spans the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If we take this really literally, that would put the divide between premodern and modern philosophy in 1600. Imagine if they'd known at the time! They might have thrown parties to celebrate the fact that the Enlightenment was just around the corner. Of course that didn't happen, but the year did see one publication that rather poignantly brings the story of premodern philosophy full circle. According to another standard historical convention, Western philosophy is assumed to start with the Presocratics, and in particular with Thales of Miletus. One of the very few things known about him is that he said the magnet has a soul. More than two millennia later, in that momentous year of 1600, William Gilbert published *Concerning the Magnet, Magnetic Bodies and this Great Magnet, the Earth: A New Philosophy, Demonstrated by Means of Many Arguments and Experiments*.[1] Here we are, after more than two millennia of philosophy, still worrying about magnets. But we've come a long way, not least in terms of having more information to work with. Just that title gives us more information about Gilbert than we have for Thales' ideas about magnets.

In fact, we can use the title of his book as a handy guide to his innovations in the field of magnetism and electricity. Let's start with the phrase "magnetic bodies." These had long been a subject of puzzlement and

fascination.[2] It was difficult, on pretty well any premodern theory of matter, to explain why a lodestone and a piece of iron should move toward one another. We see here what looks like spontaneous action, which is presumably what inspired Thales to credit the magnet with a soul. But we don't normally see this kind of motion in stone and metal. Rather, it seems to belong only to organic life, like when plants grow on their own, or when a cat moves with sudden and lethal speed in the direction of the sofa to take a nap. One exception to this rule would be that elemental bodies do, according to Aristotelian physics, naturally rise and fall, with earth and water moving toward the center of the Earth because they are "heavy," air and fire away from it because they are "light." But that's clearly not what we're seeing with the magnet. Even more puzzling, magnetism seems to involve action at a distance, because the lodestone can attract the iron to it across a gap of space. That's very hard to explain by invoking the properties recognized in Aristotelian science, like heat or moisture. In antiquity, the Epicurean poet Lucretius tried to account for it in atomic terms. His idea was that atoms are streaming off of the lodestone toward the iron and pushing air out of the way, creating a partial vacuum that sucks the two bodies together. But given that atomism was only just starting to revive around the end of the sixteenth century, this sort of explanation wasn't very appealing. Instead, magnetism was often recognized as one of many "hidden" or "occult" powers found in nature, like the stingray's ability to stun its prey or poison's ability to kill. Thus that treatise *On the Hidden Causes of Things* by Jean Fernel mentioned the magnet, along with poisons and other similar phenomena, among the causes which "stay hidden in the gloom of veiled nature."[3]

Gilbert thought he could do better, by offering the "new philosophy" of magnetism mentioned in his title. One thing that was new was a theory of elemental bodies.[4] In Aristotelianism, earth is characterized by its dryness, its coldness, and its tendency to move downward. But once it reaches its natural place, it stops moving, and indeed becomes entirely inert. Gilbert disagrees. He dismisses as ridiculous the idea that earth is "dead" or a "useless weight." Rather, all material bodies are full of "native and inborn powers" that give rise to motion. In a sense he is still thinking a bit like Thales, in that he ascribes a "vital" force to the magnet.[5] Actually, not only to the magnet. Gilbert says that the pure element of earth, which he calls

“true earth,” always “revolves with a necessary motion and an inherent tendency to turn.” We never actually encounter absolutely pure elements in everyday life. But a lodestone or a piece of iron has a very high proportion of true earth in it, which explains the tendency to come together as they join in the natural orientation and motion of this element.

This is a rather daring proposal about the underlying chemistry of the lodestone and iron, since the former is (as its name implies) indeed a stone, whereas the latter is a metal. How are we to believe that two such different substances are *both* close to being true earth? Gilbert’s answer to this question draws him into geological speculation. He thinks that metals form when vapors from deep within the Earth come together as juices that penetrate into other solid bodies. So the metallic properties of iron, which make it seem so unlike a lodestone, are just the result of the process by which it is formed. Still, both iron and the lodestone are made of the same stuff, namely true earth with some impurities mixed in. All this implies that magnetism must be a far more pervasive phenomenon than we might have supposed. It isn’t going to belong just to special stones that we occasionally dig up, for example in Magnesia, the region in ancient Greece that gives the magnet its name. Instead, all true earth is magnetic.

Which takes us to the next bit of Gilbert’s title: the even bolder claim that the Earth itself is a “great magnet.” This brilliant insight was based to some extent on the discoveries of earlier authors. Back in the thirteenth century, a writer on magnets named Peter Peregrinus had already done observations of spherical magnets, and noticed that they have poles of attraction. As you know, two magnets brought near each other will be attracted if oriented in the right way, but if one of the two magnets is turned around, they will instead repel each other. This already implies that magnetism is not just an indiscriminate tendency to attract things of the right sort; rather, it seems to involve some sort of specific directionality. Then in 1581, so about a couple of decades before Gilbert’s treatise appeared, Robert Norman published a book called *The New Attractive*, a title I commend to anyone who is thinking of starting a fashion magazine. Norman described experiments with magnetic needles set upon corks floating in water. Norman found that the needle would settle on a certain direction and maintain equilibrium. Furthermore, he found that a magnetic needle “dips” slightly, with the tip of the needle slightly lower than its back end. In other words, the needle doesn’t just aim north, but points right

through the Earth, along a genuinely straight line between (say) London and the pole. Both phenomena suggested even more strongly that magnetism is not just a power to attract, but a tendency to be aligned in a certain direction.

Norman assumed that his magnets were orienting themselves toward some target, which he called the "respective point." But again, Gilbert disagreed. Magnets are not, like elemental bodies in the Aristotelian theory, trying to get to some "natural place."[6] They are just arranging themselves in the way that is natural for true earth. In fact, Gilbert thought that, strictly speaking, we should not say that magnets "attract" or are "attracted" by other bodies. That would imply some kind of compulsion, as if the lodestone were pulling iron toward it with an invisible string, or the pole were tugging from afar at the needle. Instead, Gilbert speaks of "magnetic coition, or primary running together." Magnetic needles allowed to turn freely, like on a cork in water, will quite literally "fall into line" and point along a path which has the pole at its end. And when two bodies made mostly of true earth are near each other, they will join together to cooperate in this effort. This is also how Gilbert explains magnetic repulsion. If you hold two magnets with their north poles facing, they seem to be pushing away from one another. But in fact, says Gilbert, they are just trying to turn themselves around so that they can get back into what would be a "natural" arrangement.

Of course, magnetic orientation allows for the manufacture of compasses, which linked the research of Norman and Gilbert to the urgent practical question of navigation. No less than the astronomical interests of John Dee, Thomas Harriot, and others, research into magnetism was motivated by the demands of England's burgeoning projects in trade and colonialism. One of the scientific problems that arose in this context was "magnetic variation," the fact that compass needles do not quite point due north. This was obviously very inconvenient for precise navigational calculation, so Gilbert and other theorists did their best to explain it, and if possible to correct for the variation.[7] Thomas Digges, for example, surveyed observations about compass readings from different locations. But these suffered from inaccuracy, and he concluded in the end that with the currently available data, the problem was insoluble. All navigators could do is collect readings on local variation and tabulate the results. This information could then be used to adjust calculations made at any given

place. Gilbert took a similar view, but added an explanation for the irregularity of the variation. The surface of the Earth, he speculated, has unevenly distributed deposits of iron, and the high concentration of "true earth" in this ore can affect the compasses. Shortly after the appearance of Gilbert's treatise, this idea was rejected by the French cartographer Guillaume de Nautonnier. He thought that iron deposits would never have an appreciable effect compared to the size of the whole Earth. So he proposed a different, and correct, explanation: that the magnetic poles of the Earth have a location slightly different from the geographical poles.

Nautonnier agreed with Gilbert on the more fundamental point that the Earth is a huge magnet. Gilbert called the spherical magnet that was so prominent in his experiments a *terella*, literally a "small Earth," and believed that he could extrapolate from the effects he observed to a literally global scale. The Earth itself has magnetic poles and is spinning on an axis that stretches between those poles, which is why we have the daily rotation that gives us night and day. This suggests that Gilbert was working with a Copernican theory, according to which the Earth goes around the Sun once each year and turns on its axis each day. Indeed, some scholars assume that the "whole point" of Gilbert's theory was to support Copernicus.[8] But we can't exclude that he had in mind a geocentric model with a rotating Earth. In any case, we should be careful not to infer that *all* cosmic attraction was, to Gilbert's mind, attributable to magnetism. Remember, it's only "true earth" and bodies made mostly of earth that display magnetic properties. So the Earth and the other planets are not staying in their orbits around the Sun because of magnetism. And when you jump, it's not magnetism that makes you fall back down immediately (unless you are Michael Jordan).

Instead, Gilbert speaks of a very broad phenomenon he calls "electricity." Like the word "magnet," this term comes from ancient Greek. In this case it derives from *electron*, meaning "amber," because you can rub amber and then use it to attract other small objects like, say, wood shavings. Nowadays we explain this as "static electricity," but from Gilbert's point of view it exemplifies a general tendency of bodies to gather themselves together. "Electricity" is the reason the Earth holds together, and explains the phenomena Newton would soon enough be accounting for with his theory of "gravity." Cannonballs, apples, and (most) basketball players fall when they are up in the air, because the Earth, says Gilbert, "calls bodies back to itself." He no longer needs the Aristotelian idea of heavy and light

bodies.[9] And good thing too, since in Copernican cosmology the centerpoint of the Earth is not the middle of the universe. So it would make little sense to say that "heavy" objects are moving toward that point and "light" things away from it.

A striking feature of Gilbert's arguments for all of this, one flagged in the title of his treatise, is that his theory is "demonstrated by means of many arguments *and experiments*."[10] The preface announces that the work is addressed to "true philosophizers, honest men, who seek knowledge not from books only but from things themselves." Gilbert has gone to the trouble of adding asterisks in the margins of the work to indicate experimental observations, with the size of the asterisk corresponding to the importance of the observation. He is dismissive of what we might call "armchair scientists," remarking that "stronger conclusions arise from certain experiments and validated arguments than from probable conjectures and the beliefs of common speculators." The better part of a century ago, the scholar Edgar Zilsel made an intriguing proposal about this "empirical" dimension of Gilbert's work.[11] He argued that the advances made by Gilbert were made possible by the closing of socioeconomic gaps between the elite and the working class. No longer were "scientists" university scholars who never saw the outside of the library. They were now men of affairs, who were out in the world and who met people who actually made things and worked with their hands. Surely, Zilsel speculates, blacksmiths and miners had been noticing magnetic phenomena. And surely, this could have fed into the discoveries of scientists like Gilbert, who were curious about these same phenomena and were of sufficient education and social standing to publish what was being observed. The aforementioned Robert Norman might offer a good example. He was himself more craftsman than scientist, and was simply building compasses before he started doing such experiments as mounting magnetic needles on floating corks.

Zilsel's thesis is an intriguing one, and could be fruitful for understanding what would come in the seventeenth century. For that period, the most celebrated philosopher-craftsman would probably be Spinoza, who was a lens grinder. Even without going forward into the coming generations, we've already seen how important high-level craft skills were for the astronomical observations made by Tycho Brahe. Unfortunately, though, it's not clear whether Zilsel's hypothesis really stands up when

applied to the case of magnetic theory.[12] Norman explicitly said that he only started doing his experiments on the advice of "certain learned and expert friends," so he arguably illustrates that craftspersons were *not* inclined to such pursuits unless encouraged by elite scholars. As for Gilbert, there is no evidence whatsoever that he was getting information from tradespersons; this is just a wild guess on Zilsel's part. Still, there was something important happening in this period. Even if the upper-class scientists weren't getting ideas from the working class, they were increasingly doing careful, empirical observation. We've seen this with Thomas Harriot and now Gilbert; a general statement would come before long in the work of Francis Bacon.

But knowing me as you do, you're probably already expecting what I am going to say next: we should not get so excited about Gilbert as a harbinger of things to come that we forget to see him within his own historical context. I've already underscored the comparison between Gilbert and contemporaries like Dee and Harriot. There are also resonances between his theory of matter and what we find in the Paracelsan movement.[13] When he alludes to the fundamental principles of physical stuff, Gilbert mentions salt and sulfur, the basic principles of Paracelsus. Then, at a more abstract level, he thinks that we can isolate pure substances and analyze their natures through violent chemical processes like melting and burning. Between this and his radically different understanding of elemental motion, we can say that Gilbert was part of the wave of anti-Aristotelian natural philosophy that was sweeping across Europe at this time, as with such diverse figures as Telesio, Bruno, Schegk, Sennert, Fernel, and of course the Copernicans. The Aristotelians noticed the new developments and tried to take account of them. A study of university disputations has shown that magnetism was already a fairly frequent topic of discussion in the sixteenth century, and that Gilbert's work started being mentioned in these events already in 1606.[14] Of course, the scholastics persisted in invoking principles of Aristotelian physics, from substantial forms to the four elements and their natural places, even in the face of new theories like Gilbert's and an increasing tendency toward corpuscular theories like the one given so long ago by Lucretius. Like a light body in a heavy medium, ancient science wasn't going to go down without a fight.

# 54

# UNPATHED WATERS, UNDREAMED SHORES

## *Robert Fludd*

For all that talk of 1600 as a historical turning point, typically Renaissance phenomena like humanism and even typically medieval phenomena like scholasticism survived in Europe well beyond that date. So it's perfectly reasonable that one of the more important books on the figure of interest to us in this chapter should be called *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance*, even though Fludd did not die until 1637.[1] With this title the author William Huffman suggests that Fludd, contrary to his name, represents only the last ebb of a certain tradition of thought, one that is distinctive to the Renaissance. It's the tradition we associate with figures like Cornelius Agrippa, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and John Dee. These were men who looked back to antiquity for inspiration and liked what they saw: a near-unanimous chorus of agreement praising divine, transcendent principles that govern the crude matter of our cosmos. Aristotle, so central in the eyes of the scholastics, seemed in comparison a rather limited thinker, and also something of an outlier within antique philosophy. His pedantic writings put him out of step with the perennial wisdom that could be found in Plato and the Neoplatonists, before them in the Presocratics, and still further afield in the venerable teachings of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, and Indians.

To delve into these sources was to discover the underlying harmonies of the universe and reveal secret powers. What more narrow-minded contemporaries might attack as “black magic” or “demonology” was in fact a philosophical and scientific enterprise. After all, there could be no doubt that God had endowed natural things with many occult properties. As we just saw, magnetism was important as an obvious case of an occult power. True, the Devil is real and works evil in the world. But those who label any and all mastery of hidden forces as “demonic” are quite literally fearing what they do not understand. Then, too, if the most ancient wisdom is both true and scientific, there is no reason not to combine it with the latest findings of mathematics and natural philosophy. That explains why someone like John Dee could see astronomical observations, mathematical inquiries, and communication with angels as part of a single enterprise, and why the Paracelsan approach to chemistry was magical and empirical in equal measure. Medicine, too, was a field where the supernatural and the natural both played an important role, as in Marsilio Ficino’s astrological and talismanic prescriptions on prolonging life.

In fact, the range of ideas I’ve just described didn’t die with Robert Fludd. For example, that key figure of the Enlightenment, Isaac Newton, was fascinated by alchemy. Still, Fludd is as good a choice as any to represent the “end of the Renaissance” in England, or at least of this particular aspect of the Renaissance. He was born in the early 1570s in Kent, the son of a knight. Noble lineage was important to him. In one of several works where he tangled with critics, he managed to pack modesty and immodesty into a single autobiographical remark by saying that he was “noble enough by birth, but of the lowest rank of Medical Doctor at London” (56).[2] Fludd gained his expertise in medicine at St John’s College at Oxford, where, as Huffman points out, he was unusual as a nobleman who chose to study this topic; in another move atypical for the nobility, he actually finished his university degree.[3] But his time at Oxford was interrupted by a voyage of discovery around Europe. He spoke proudly of imitating his ancient heroes like Plato, Hermes, and Pythagoras and other Presocratics, who ventured abroad to Egypt, Ethiopia, or Asia in search of wisdom (85). Fludd himself didn’t get that far, but did visit Paris, Rome, and Heidelberg, in the process deepening his knowledge of Paracelsan science and other philosophical and occult traditions. After returning home and graduating, he set himself up as a physician in London. He also

continued his interest in chemistry, even receiving a royal patent for an improved technique in making steel.

Fludd insisted that he was reiterating the wisdom of the past, but the system he forged is nothing we can find easily in other Renaissance occultists, and still less in Plato or other ancients. One reason for his unadmitted originality is his creative harmonization of Christian Scripture with pagan philosophy. Fludd even claims that Plato was influenced by Moses (229), just one reason that this Greek thinker ranks so highly in Fludd's estimation. By contrast, he says that Aristotle departed pridefully from the grand tradition of ancient wisdom: "by his vainglory, he added to some truths many of his own inventions, making as it were a gallimaufry of good and bad, of true and false, of wisdom and folly together" (227). As we see here, and will see again, Fludd had a flair for stylish insults.

The Biblical passage most central to Fludd's system comes right at the beginning of the book of Genesis: "and the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light. And there was light" (1:2–3). Here we have all three main principles of Fludd's cosmology: darkness, light, and water. He explains the interaction of these principles in such works as his *Philosophical Key*, dedicated to King James I, and the *Mosaicall Philosophy*, whose title means that it is based on Moses, not that it is a mosaic put together from various parts, though that is also true. Darkness and light represent the positive and negative will of God (240). They can also be understood in Aristotelian terms as privation or prime matter, and form (103–104). The two interact when God gives light to darkness, also known as chaos or void. This produces the first determinate kind of matter, which is water. Like Thales, who is having a bit of a Renaissance of his own given that his views on magnets were just relevant in the last chapter, Fludd thinks that water is the fundamental element from which other elements and bodies are made (62). The coldness and wetness of water are complemented by the heat and dryness of light or fire. As in Aristotle, these four contrary qualities underlie all natural phenomena.

Fludd tries to support his theory with empirical observation (or by "ocular proof," as he puts it). Plants and animals are quite literally sparked into life by a warm inner spirit, which is associated with divine light. Even minerals have this principle in them, as seen best in the brilliance of the

most valuable minerals, like gold or gemstones (65). It's handy for Fludd that there are three basic constituents in Paracelsan chemistry, namely salt, sulfur, and mercury, because he can relate these to darkness, water, and fire.[4] At a grander scale, the heat of the Sun causes circulation of the air, something Fludd compares to the circulation of vital power in human blood. When William Harvey came along with his pioneering theory of the circulatory system, Fludd welcomed it as being fully in agreement with his own thought. But the context of Fludd's proposal was very different. He wanted to establish a pervasive analogy between the world of nature and the human body, pursuing the ancient idea of the human as a "microcosm."

Indeed, another of his works on these themes is called *History of the Macrocosm and Microcosm*. In this work Fludd notes the tendency of air to expand when it is heated (75), and in the *Mosaicall Philosophy*, he describes an instrument that can be used to study this phenomenon experimentally. It's a so-called "weather glass," which contains a column of water below a column of air in a glass tube (219).[5] As the surrounding temperature changes the air contracts and expands, as shown by the level of the water in the glass. Fludd is clearly immensely pleased with this device, and compares it to both the human body and the whole atmosphere. We might compare this to Gilbert's inferences about the magnetism of the whole Earth, drawn from the study of spherical magnets. In both cases, global phenomena were being inferred from observations that could be made at a smaller scale in a laboratory.

Nor was that the full extent of Fludd's experimentation. Alongside minerals, meteorology, and the human body, he was keenly interested in plants and agriculture. In particular, he had a thing for wheat, which he calls the "principalest of vegetables" (167). For him wheat is a body dominated by salt, but containing a "vegetating fire" that gives it innate warmth. This allows wheat to multiply itself as it grows, through what Fludd calls a "magnetic virtue" that draws life out of the air and sun. We have here the fundamental principle of light giving rise to vital power, in this case in a plant. The theory might sound like pure speculation, but again, Fludd claimed empirical support for it. He heated wheat to break it down into its constituents, and claimed that he had successfully used a balm of wheat to heal a persistent pain in his own hand (114–15).[6]

That allusion to the "magnetism" involved in the growth of wheat was no passing fancy on Fludd's part. He was aware of Gilbert's work, and saw the magnet as illustrating the Paracelsan principle that like attracts like. He invoked magnetism to explain another healing technique, known as the "weapon-salve."[7] The idea was to put a special compound or "salve" on the bloody weapon that had caused a wound. Supposedly, this could heal the victim of the wound even from miles away. Like a magnet, this procedure involved action at a distance; and like a magnet, claims of its efficacy were polarizing. Recommended by Paracelsus, the weapon-salve was a matter of controversy among numerous authors, including Daniel Sennert. Of all the writings devoted to the topic, the one with the second-best title was composed by William Foster: published in 1631, it was called *A Sponge to Wipe Away the Weapon-Salve*. Foster nailed the title page to Fludd's door to mock his devotion to such magical practices. This provoked a treatise with an even better title: *Dr Fludd's Answer to Foster, or the Squeezing of Parson Foster's Sponge*. It was a forthright defense of medicine involving unknown occult powers. Fludd offered numerous parallels to show that such action at a distance was entirely possible: the magnet, of course, but also contagious diseases and for that matter even fire, which can warm us from across a room (192).

Fludd's explanation for the weapon-salve cure is that there is a causal "sympathy" between the blood on the weapon and the body of the wounded man, so that treating one causes the other to heal. He offers empirical evidence in support of this principle, telling of an Italian nobleman who lost his nose in a fight. As we saw, when Tycho Brahe was faced with the same situation he simply wore an artificial nose. This nobleman was more resourceful, and more brutal: he used flesh taken from a slave's arm to make himself a new nose. But when the slave died, it rotted off. This story reveals more about early European slavery than it does about reconstructive surgery. But it also tells us something about Fludd's ideas of nature and causation. His world is one of hidden connections and harmonic resonances between things. In fact he compares the sympathetic relation between the blood on the weapon and the wounded person to strings that reverberate on the same note (199). Thus, where Foster condemned the weapon-salve as engaging in diabolical sorcery, Fludd satisfied himself that it was instead an example of "natural" magic. He did, however, hasten to add that he had never used the technique himself (212).

This seems to be a habitual strategy on Fludd's part: speak out in defense of the occult, but then disclaim personal involvement. We see it again in his writings on a mysterious group called the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, whose anonymous writings were circulating around Europe, provoking curiosity and condemnation among intellectuals.[8] In 1616, Fludd published a so-called *Apology*, in other words "defense," of the Rosicrucians against one of their more forthright critics, Andreas Libavius. Again, the full title is an enjoyable one. It punningly says that the goal of the work is to cleanse the reputation of the Rosicrucians "with, as it were, a Fludd of truth." Much as he endorsed the weapon-salve without ever trying it, Fludd says that he hoped to make contact with the brotherhood but had never managed to do so; still, he is convinced they are wise philosophers and good Christians. So far from consorting with the Devil, a slander thrown at the Rosicrucians by Libavius, they were no doubt receiving their inspiration directly from the Holy Spirit (49–50), which is how they had learned to exploit occult powers in nature. But how can we be sure that this is holy magic and not evil sorcery? Simple: demonic practices can bring only bad results, so anything that causes benefit is done in the name of God. Fludd's taste for the arcane notwithstanding, we might see here a resonance with more mainstream Protestant ideas. Like Calvin, Fludd insists that it is actually God who makes everything happen. Thus the pious and effective magician must rely entirely on divine assistance (194).

These controversies over the weapon-salve and the Rosicrucians are only two of the numerous debates in which Fludd defended the theory and practice of the occult arts. In 1623 he was moved to refute an obscure author named Patrick Scot who had raised skeptical doubts about alchemy.[9] In his reply, Fludd argues for the possibility of creating the so-called "elixir" or philosopher's stone, which he defines as "a spiritual body made worthy by the action of nature and the assistance of art to receive…the spark or beam of wisdom" (159). For Scot the very idea was anathema to both philosophy and religion. As usual transforming the worst accusations into the highest praise, Fludd insisted that the elixir in fact serves wisdom and is thus the philosopher's "greatest friend" (151). Furthermore, its feasibility is supported in Scripture. Sadly, there isn't a passage in the Bible that says, "guys, alchemy works." So Fludd needs to invoke his scripturally based cosmology, particularly the idea of a divine spirit that gives life to created things. This is the "spark or beam of wisdom" mentioned in his

definition of the elixir. Actually God's spirit is present in everything, which for Fludd is what Plato meant when he talked about the World Soul (154) and the bestowal of form upon matter (157). In a sense, the elixir's power is just an extraordinary illustration of a universal phenomenon, one we can learn about by consulting both religious and pagan philosophical texts.

In that same year of 1623, Fludd was concluding a further debate and beginning another. The new opponent was Marin Mersenne, who is best known for his correspondence with Descartes. Mersenne was appalled at the sinister activities of Fludd, and called him a "evil magician (*cacomagus*), a doctor and propagator of foul and horrendous magic, a heretical magician (*haereticomagus*)." Fludd, never one to back down from a fight, referred to Mersenne and Foster, his rival in the weapon-salve controversy, as "roaring, bragging, and fresh-water pseudophilosophers" without parallel in Europe (188). But Fludd's most famous critic was Kepler.[10] The refutation and counter-refutation between him and Fludd began in 1619 and ended in 1623, with Kepler attacking Fludd's theory of the microcosm and macrocosm. It's tempting to say that Kepler aimed his invective at Fludd in spite of the fact that he himself had similar Platonic and occultist leanings. But, in fact, it was precisely because their views were so similar that the two came into conflict. As Huffman writes, "the argument between the two was the question of whose Neoplatonic structure of the heavens was the correct one."[11] Of course Kepler would have been the first to admit that mathematical harmonies are woven into the universe; his own works were based entirely on this assumption. The problem was just that Fludd had, in his estimation, chosen the wrong mathematical description for those harmonies. Fludd was no less dismissive. He charged Kepler with trying to work backwards from natural phenomena to immaterial truths, whereas Fludd was arguing directly from mathematical first principles. Thus he boasted that Kepler "has hold of the tail, I grasp the head" (124).

Despite this line of response, we should remember that Fludd was willing, indeed eager, to invoke empirical observations in defending his philosophical theories. The two ideas are not inconsistent. Fludd began from the best possible starting points, namely pure mathematics, Platonic literature, and the Bible itself. But he sought *confirmation* in physical phenomena, whether these took the form of dubious anecdotes about Italian noblemen with missing noses or the very real functioning of his weather

glass. Perhaps, then, we should after all think of him not as the end of something, but as a transitional figure. Like Agrippa, Ficino, and Dee, Fludd was steeped in ideas of magic and alchemy, pagan philosophy, and Christian religiosity, a heady brew that we readily associate with the Renaissance. But like Dee, Harriot, and Gilbert, he was also involved in scientific experimentation and instrument-building, which we just as readily associate with the seventeenth century. It's appropriate that in the philosophy of Fludd, which derives all things from water, Renaissance philosophy was flowing forward into the age of Enlightenment, even if he would have insisted that the light had been present all along.

# PART IV

# THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

# 55

# DON'T GIVE UP POPE

## *Catholic Reformation*

In his *Constitutional Catechism for Use in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies* Luigi Galanti, a Benedictine monk and member of Parliament in nineteenth-century Naples, exulted in the *lack* of religious liberty enjoyed by his nation. "Having just one religion," he wrote, "we do not need to proclaim freedom of worship as other countries, where there are followers of different religions, have been obliged to do. Happy as we are to have this powerful bond, we will not live in fear of those bloody scenes between Catholics and Protestants witnessed even in recent years in France."[1] A people united under one faith, a faith that could trace itself back to the very roots of Christian tradition: all as if the Reformation had never happened! In fact it hadn't happened for most of southern Europe. In places like Portugal, Spain, and Italy the old church had held on against Lutheranism, Calvinism, Puritanism, Unitarianism, Presbyterianism, and so on. Only one -ism was needed: the original one, namely Catholicism. This result, so essential for maintaining peace and so opposed to freedom of conscience, was the achievement of a second reformation that dominated European religious and intellectual life for most of the sixteenth century and beyond. It emerged in explicit opposition to the Protestant Reformation, which is why it is commonly called the "Counter-Reformation."

Whether this is the best name for it is a matter of dispute. The German term *Gegenreformation* ("Counter-Reformation") came into use by

historians in the late eighteenth century. As you might imagine, given that the expression reduces so much Catholic thought to a mere reaction against Luther and the other reformers, it was especially favored by Protestant historians. In the nineteenth century Catholic scholars hit on the idea of instead calling it a "Catholic Reformation." A 1946 book by the Catholic Church historian Hubert Jedin considered the choice between the two terms and suggested simply using both.[2] It's an attractive proposal, not just because it is so conciliatory (and as we'll see in a moment, being "conciliatory" in this context is rather appropriate), but because both locutions do capture a fundamental truth about this historical development.

It was indeed a "Counter"-Reformation, insofar as Catholics of the sixteenth century were under tremendous pressure to respond to the movement started by Luther. They asserted the validity of medieval theology, long-established ritual, and papal authority. Knowing it would not be enough simply to assert that they had been right all along, they wrote at length in defense of Catholic doctrine. They took pains to establish the exact differences between themselves and the Protestants, in other words, to draw a line between acceptable belief and heresy. And they took steps to clean house, cracking down on priestly misdeeds and the sale of indulgences, which made it all too easy for the Protestant opponents to criticize them. Which brings us to the justice of calling it a "Catholic" Reformation. This was hardly the first time the church had noticed its own corruption and tried to do something about it. We can go back at least as far as Pope Gregory VII, a reforming Pope of the eleventh century. We might also think of the tensions caused when reforming religious orders adopted a policy of voluntary poverty in criticism of the church's obscene wealth. Still later, church councils were called in reaction to the Great Schism and heretical innovations of Wyclif and Hus around the turn of the fourteenth century.[3]

In short, Catholics were busily engaging in reform of their church well before Luther came along. They had centuries of practice reforming themselves, for goodness' sake! This, along with the deep conviction that God was on their side, must have made them confident that with a few concessions, a bit less corruption, and a tidal wave of polemical literature, they could restore the unity of the Christian community under Rome. That might in turn help to explain why it took them so long to organize a new church council to respond to the Protestant threat. It eventually started in

1545, more than two decades after Luther launched the Reformation, and then ran with interruptions until 1563. This was the Council of Trent, named for its location in northern Italy; finding a politically acceptable spot was another reason it took so long to begin.[4] You'll also see the adjective "Tridentine" to describe Catholicism after this council, because Trent is called *Tridentum* in Latin.

Even though this was a council, you wouldn't expect it to be very conciliatory, since the purpose was to defeat the critics of the church. Yet in a sense it was. The churchmen at Trent took a "big tent" approach, seeking to define Catholic doctrine in a way that could accommodate the wide range of opinions held by those who were still loyal to the papacy.[5] Simultaneously, they were at pains to show that the Protestants fell outside the boundaries of acceptable belief. While agreeing that divine grace was a precondition for salvation, the council rejected the idea that humans are saved by "faith alone." Humans exercise free will in accepting the gift of grace, and the church and its priests are needed to administer the sacraments that signify that acceptance. Speaking of which, certain Protestant views on the Eucharist were also anathematized. In a sweeping rejection of the Protestants' idea that the truths of religion were to be found in "scripture alone (*sola scriptura*)," Trent insisted on the authoritative status of church doctrines as they had developed over the centuries.

For an example of an individual thinker involved in these events, let's consider Alfonso de Castro.[6] He was a Franciscan who was trained at Salamanca—a city that will be important in the coming chapters—and was in attendance at the beginning of the council. Castro had already published an anti-Protestant work called *Against All Heresies* and the deliberations at Trent encouraged him to write another one, *On the Just Punishment of Heretics*. But if Castro was unflinching in his condemnation of the Protestants, he was also willing to point out the shortcomings of his own side. Explaining how heresies arise in the first place, he named such factors as substandard preaching, negligence on the part of bishops, and vice amongst the clergy. Books could also be dangerous. Translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, allowing non-specialists to read it, was a potential source of heresy, as was incautious use of pagan literature including philosophy. Along with avoiding these mistakes, the best bulwark against heresy was the church hierarchy. The pope, cardinals, and bishops held their positions by divine law and could not be rightly deposed, not for

mortal sin and not even for holding heretical opinions themselves. Despite his enthusiasm for hierarchy, though, Castro believed that the best way to establish doctrine would be the sort of thing happening at Trent: a universal church council. Decisions made by more local groups of clergy would more likely to go astray, as when the masters at Paris had succumbed to political pressure and supported Henry VIII's divorce.

Castro helps us to see that, from a philosophical point of view, the most interesting thing about the Council of Trent was that it was indeed a council. (From the point of view of bishops who wanted to go skiing, the most important thing is that it was at Trent.) One can see Trent as the culmination of the long development within the church that scholars call "conciliarism." If you think of the pope as a monarch, as mirroring the function of a king or emperor in the secular realm, then the church council would be analogous to a group of advisors or a parliament. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw an increasing trend toward limiting royal power by giving a role to political councilors or lawmakers, even as the monarch retained supreme authority. Conciliarism was a parallel development within the church. Actually the direction of influence may go the other way around. The idea that church doctrine is settled at councils, not by decisions handed down straight from the pope, would have helped the same kind of structure to seem attractive and plausible in the secular realm. After all, if the sacred power of a pope is compatible with the authority of a lower legislative body, surely the same could be true for a king. In an apparent confirmation of this connection, we find that some of the same thinkers who embraced conciliarism in church affairs also wanted to restrict the monarchy in secular affairs. An example would be the Scottish scholastic John Mair, who argued for both positions.[7]

It's handy that scholasticism has just come up, since this is another significant connection between philosophy and the Catholic Reformation. As you know, the Protestant opposition to scholasticism was more nuanced than is often supposed. Still, the vindication of church tradition at Trent went hand in hand with an embrace of scholastic thought, especially that of Thomas Aquinas, who was elevated to the status of "doctor of the church" in 1567 (see Chapter 62). Aquinas and the scholastics more generally were crucial for the Jesuits, whose tireless defense of the church, missionary work, and intellectual contributions were a prominent feature of the Catholic Reformation, and arguably its single most important feature when

it comes to the history of philosophy (see Chapter 61). Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, studied at the Sorbonne beginning in 1528, where in his own words he learned all about "Aristotle and his logic." Following suit, a whole series of Jesuit thinkers, especially in the Iberian peninsula, updated and elaborated upon the work done by medieval philosophers. Which is not to say that humanism, the constant competitor of scholasticism in this period, was irrelevant. Admittedly, Loyola did say that "theology could manage perfectly well with a little less Cicero," and at Trent the ancient Latin version of Scripture by Jerome was declared to be preferable despite humanist quibbles against it, because of its "long use."[8] Worse still, works by Erasmus were placed on the Index of books prohibited by the church, in the most backhanded of compliments to the challenging nature of his Biblical scholarship. Still, I hardly need to remind you that the epicenter and source of humanism in Western Europe was Italy, which was also the epicenter and source of the Counter-Reformation. We'll be seeing how humanism found fertile soil in Spain as well (Chapter 59).

This illustrates a more general pattern, which is that trends found in the Protestant Reformation were often mirrored in the Catholic one, and vice versa. The same tactics deployed by Protestants were put to use by Catholic propagandists. For instance, the reformers are famous for their emphasis on preaching, but we just saw that Catholics like Castro also saw this as a key weapon in retaining the faithful and warding off heresy. Another tool we associate with the Protestants is the printing press. You might remember that they especially used the cheap pamphlets that scholars call *Flugschriften* to spread reformist ideas. While this connection is indeed important, it's not as if Catholics failed to notice the power of printing.[9] As I mentioned when discussing the printing press, those indulgences that attracted so much criticism were printed in mass quantities; the publishers would leave blank spaces to write in the individual details about the sinner who was paying for forgiveness. Print was also enthusiastically used by supporters of Savonarola, the fiery preacher who was something of a harbinger of the Reformation at the heart of Catholic Italy. Once Protestantism did arrive, the works of Catholic polemicists and apologists were churned out as fast as the presses could print them. In fact in the sixteenth century there were only two years, 1561 and 1562, where more Protestant material was printed than Catholic material.

Of course, printing books and pamphlets makes more sense when your target audience can read. So again, though we associate increasing literacy more with Protestantism than Catholicism, there were educational efforts on both sides of the confessional divide. The Jesuits were important here. Invoking the motto *puerilis institutio est renovatio mundi* ("education of youth is the renewal of the world"), they founded schools of three levels for different age groups, calling them respectively "colleges," "academies," and "universities." Overall, between 1550 and 1700 the Catholics founded more new universities than the Protestants did, outpacing them fifty to thirty-three.[10] The relevance of this for our concerns should be obvious: philosophy was taught at these institutions, and sometimes at the highest of levels, as in the aforementioned scholastic center of Salamanca, founded way back in 1218.

Of course, philosophy wasn't the only discipline that could be pressed into the service of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Among closely adjacent fields, a particularly important one was history. Historiography keeps flitting in and out of our story, as with Machiavelli's engagement with Roman history in his *Discourses* and François Hotman's *Francogallia*, which looked back to medieval political arrangements in France to mount an argument for curbing the power of the monarchy. Hotman's history was on behalf of the Huguenots, but Catholics could play the game too. Take Cesare Baronio, a cardinal and historian whose *Ecclesiastical Annals* laid out the church's perspective on its own development. His method was to provide extensive documentation, putting a mass of evidence at the reader's disposal. Some scholars have seen this rather "modern" technique as being in tension, or even contradiction, with Baronio's theological agenda. But Stefania Tutino argues that, on the contrary, it was that very agenda that explains his approach.[11] Baronio assumed that his ample quotations would let "the truth shine more and more clearly." In a letter, he explained why: "in history we need to let the dogma appear through the traditions and through the truth, not through the historian's own arguments, so that we may leave it to the reader, be he Catholic or heretic, to discover the certainty of the truth from the things that are being said." But as Tutino shows, you didn't have to be Protestant to think that certainty had not been reached. Palo Beni, for a time a Jesuit until he was kicked out of the order in 1593, became a commentator on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. This led him to reflect on the issue of certain and merely probable arguments. Beni

concluded that Baronio's *Annals*, which he admired despite what he considered their excessive length, were indeed the work of a theologian and not a historian. Baronio had failed to recognize that the story of the church is one of human action, not divine verities. And in the realm of human action, our explanations and reconstructions must inevitably remain uncertain, falling more within the remit of rhetorical persuasion than demonstrative proof.

Speaking of persuasion, a final commonality between the Catholic and Protestant Reformations, or at least the last one I'll mention here, is the way political power and social structures became linked to religious persuasions. The most obvious point here is that your religious confession was mostly determined by your location. Except for the occasional dissenters and recusants, people in places like England, Scotland, Switzerland, and most of Germany would be Protestant, whereas the Italians and Spanish were overwhelmingly Catholic. Even France and the Low Countries, after extensive warfare, eventually settled on confessional boundaries. But when scholars speak of "confessionalization" they mean more than this. They are also talking about how the state and its mechanisms increasingly became involved in religious life.[12] Whether in Catholic or Protestant realms, secular authorities worked together with religious authorities to enforce religious orthodoxy. That meant everything from weaving religious instruction into the broader educational programs, as I've already described, to checking that rituals were being carried out correctly in the churches, to the demanding of oaths. In extreme circumstances, the authorities turned to stricter measures still: censorship and persecution, up to and including torture and execution.

Such violent enforcement of orthodoxy is, sadly, something else that spanned the religious divide. The execution of Servetus in Calvin's Geneva was notorious, and provoked Castellio into writing his pioneering defense of religious freedom. Over in England, Elizabeth used all the power of her state to enforce what she saw as a moderate Protestantism, and her victims included both Catholics and Puritans. But I have no doubt that when you think of religious oppression in this period, the things that leap to mind first come from the Catholic sphere: the Index of condemned books and the Inquisition. Though you might imagine the Inquisition as a purely church-based phenomenon, in fact it illustrates the Reformation-era—or perhaps we should now say Reformat*ions*-era—trend toward collaboration between

state and religious institutions. The history of church inquisition actually goes back well before the sixteenth century, at least to 1184 when bishops were instructed to search for heretics amongst their flocks. But in the form that interests us, it began in 1478 under Ferdinand and Isabella, the Christian leaders of the so-called “reconquest” of the Iberian peninsula. This marked the first time that a secular power took charge of religious persecution. Still, the practice took on a new meaning and level of activity in the wake of Protestant reform. In 1542, we see the introduction of a “Holy Office” of cardinal overseers for inquisition around Europe and beyond. This attempt to enforce orthodoxy would be profound in its effects, though not always as successful as its architects hoped.

# 56

# CANCEL CULTURE

## *The Inquisition*

If you know your Monty Python, you'll already have an idea of the weapons used by the Inquisition: "surprise, fear, ruthless efficiency, nice red uniforms, and an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope." But with all due respect to Britain's greatest comedy troupe, they might not be the best guide to this historical phenomenon. Their famous sketch is specifically about the *Spanish* Inquisition, whose operations might have been fearsome, but were more grindingly bureaucratic than ruthlessly efficient, and whose relationship to the Pope in Rome was rather indirect. Indeed, the first thing we need to get clear here is that the Inquisition was not only Spanish. It was in Rome, and in 1542, that six cardinals (who, to be fair, do wear nice red uniforms) were appointed as "commisaries and inquisitors general" by Pope Paul III. This so-called "Holy Office" was given universal authority to pursue heresy across all Christendom.[1] In the 1550s another pope, Paul IV, declared that the Holy Office in Rome "has precedence over all the other tribunals and that its ministers will be revered by all others, who will submit humbly and obey them in every circumstance." As this already implies, there were other tribunals, and had been for quite some time. In Spain, the Inquisition began under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1478, and though it fell ultimately under papal authority it was largely overseen by the Spanish crown. It was the monarchs who, for instance, appointed the notorious Dominican friar Tomás de Torquemada in 1482, with all the Spanish tribunals united under his leadership in 1483. The Spanish Inquisition was

therefore a remarkable collaboration between secular and ecclesiastical authorities. Inevitably, the Inquisitions in Iberia took on a distinctive, local character. For example, they were more likely to be staffed by jurists rather than theologians, as in Italy.

Looking further back still, there were medieval precursors for the Inquisition, as for other aspects of the Catholic Reformation. The two main tasks of the Inquisition were persecuting heretics and censoring books. In both cases the inquisitors saw this as a kind of purification or benevolent correction. The general populace was protected from corruption by heretical ideas, and even the heretics themselves were meant to be helped by being encouraged to abandon their false beliefs. If this occasionally called for torturing or even killing them, well, doing violence to their bodies was just a way to purify their souls. Such attitudes also went back to the middle ages, as with the attempts to stamp out dangerous teachings at the University of Paris in the 1270s. The list or "Index" of condemned books produced during the Catholic Reformation is a descendant of the lists of banned doctrines written up on that occasion. For an earlier example of outright violence against heretics, we need look no further than the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars in France in the early thirteenth century.

So maybe the Spanish Inquisition wasn't all that unexpected after all. But neither was it business as usual. Early medieval Iberian culture was characterized by a religious diversity sometimes called *convivencia* ("living together"). Nowadays this is widely celebrated, but the Christian Spanish monarchs saw it as a problem to be overcome. As the leaders of the so-called *reconquista* ("reconquest"), Ferdinand and Isabella demanded in 1492 that Jews either convert or go into exile, over the protests of a delegation that included the philosopher Isaac Abravanel. This was a change in policy. In 1477, just a year before the founding of the Inquisition, Isabella had said of the Jews, "they are mine and under my care and protection."[2] Because of their economic activities and intellectual attainments, Jews were a valuable segment of the population. The two monarchs had even employed Jewish doctors at their court. But since the middle of the fifteenth century some Christians had been demanding *limpieza*, "cleansing" Spain of its Jews, and this became royal policy in 1492.

But it turned out to be not so simple. The Jewish-Christian converts, or *conversos*, were under great suspicion of being insincere in their new faith, and that suspicion stuck to their children. Behaviors like failing to eat pork or shellfish were seen as evidence of "judaizing," that is, secret adherence to the old faith. And thanks to the existence of the Inquisition, there was an organization in place that could turn these suspicions into legal proceedings. The *conversos* were understandably appalled, and complained that people were being executed on the basis of "false witness." Of a wave of executions in Aranda in 1501, one observer remarked that "of all those who were burnt, not one was a heretic."[3] Up to 1520, the great majority of cases considered by the Inquisition had to do with judaizing. It's estimated that about two thousand people were put to death up to this time; many further death sentences were handed down, but the intended victims fled and were instead burnt in effigy.

The sorry tale would be repeated about a century later, with the expulsion of the Spanish Muslims, or *moriscos*. Given the large existing Muslim population, the crown was at first willing to show patience, and elected in 1528 to give them time to come to the true faith. Again there were suspicions of feigned conversion, not least because Muslim jurists approved the use of "dissimulation" (in Arabic *taqiyya*), that is, simply pretending to be Christian. In a development that would have been exasperating for the authorities, many refused to believe that an absolute choice must be made. The Inquisition found it necessary to persecute people for saying that "every one should be allowed to practice his own religion," or that "the Jew and the Muslim could each be saved in his own law."[4] In 1582 royal patience ran out, and it was decided to deal with the *moriscos* "as was done with the Jews." Yet the removal was not carried out until 1609–14, when about 275,000 people were exiled, mostly to North Africa. (That's vastly higher than the likely number of Jewish exiles in 1492, which is estimated at about eight thousand, approximately half the Jewish population.) Children were deliberately separated from their parents, lives once again destroyed.

These two waves of persecution suggest that religious intolerance in Iberia was directed against influence from, or secret adherence to, the two other Abrahamic religions.[5] But we need to consider a development that emerged between the campaigns against the *conversos* and *moriscos*. This was, of course, the Reformation, which came along just as the suppression

of judaizing was beginning to die down around 1520. The number of Protestants in Spain started out small and stayed that way. But they sufficed to reignite the Inquisition and deflect its attention to heretical teachings within the Christian fold. The first trial of a Lutheran came in 1523, and by mid-century people were regularly being put on trial for Protestant leanings. This was largely a farce, as there was hardly any genuine sympathy for Protestantism in Spain. But the Inquisition was convinced otherwise. In Seville one of its clerks hysterically remarked, "this city is lost and full of Lutherans!"[6] For lack of Spanish heretics, the inquisitors turned to persecuting foreigners. In his study of the Spanish Inquisition, Henry Kamen reports that in Barcelona fifty-one supposed Lutherans were burnt in person or in effigy between the years 1552 and 1578, every single one of them from abroad.[7]

In both Italy and Spain, it was also possible to attract attention by aligning oneself with the humanism of Erasmus.[8] As we've seen, his philological work on the Bible and emphasis on personal spirituality seemed to be at least adjacent to Protestantism. This led to a deep suspicion of scholars who were inspired by his work, like for example Juan Gil, who was arrested in 1550 and found to be in error, though not heretical. Nonetheless he wound up spending three years in jail and was forbidden ever to write about theology.[9] Another case, which has been studied in depth by Lu Ann Homza, concerned a humanist named Juan de Vergara.[10] He was a highly placed intellectual who served as secretary to two archbishops in Toledo. He was also the Spaniard who corresponded most regularly with Erasmus, which is already the best humanist credential he could have, but he also showed his philological skills by translating several works of Aristotle. Vergara came into the clutches of the Inquisition because his brother was arrested for consorting with a group of mystics, the so-called *alumbrados* ("illuminated ones"), who had been condemned by the Inquisitor General in 1525.[11] If you ever used citrus juice as "invisible ink" to write messages, then be glad that the Inquisition wasn't around, because Vergara got in trouble for doing precisely that to pass messages to his brother in prison. Initially charged only with interfering with inquisitorial business, he was vulnerable to further accusations of heresy due to his Erasmian sympathies, including a willingness to improve on the

received Latin version of the Bible. He was ultimately given a hefty fine and confined in a monastery, where he died in 1557.

One interesting feature of the records from this trial is that Vergara, highly intelligent and articulate, fearlessly met the accusations of the inquisitors with accusations of his own: the institution was corrupt, and the witnesses called to testify against him were malevolent or had been pressured into lying. This sounds extraordinarily brave, but in fact Vergara was far from the only person in this period to raise doubts about the integrity, reliability, and motivation of inquisitorial processes. Most trials originated not with active investigations launched by the authorities, but with complaints by everyday people against one another. We saw that in the case of witchcraft trials, marginal members of society were often put on trial after dubious testimony given by their neighbors. The same is true here. *Conversos* were vulnerable to accusers who were unconvinced that they were good Christians, or maybe just didn't like them. It was obvious that *conversos* were being punished for having parents who belonged to the wrong religion, and many noticed this and said so. Another point of criticism had to do with money. The Spanish Inquisition lacked sufficient funding as an institution, and kept itself going with fines and confiscations of property. Predictably, this led some to say that supposed heretics were burnt only for their money, or that the Inquisition burnt only the rich. Apparently a common saying had it that "it is the goods that are the heretics."[12]

The history of opposition to the Inquisition is one point mentioned by what we might call "revisionist" historians. In the popular imagination, it is perhaps the most heinous episode of persecution in European history prior to the twentieth century. Certainly the numbers are alarming: estimates of the number of trials performed by the Inquisition over its history suggest that there were some fifty thousand in Portugal, two hundred thousand in Spain, and fifty to seventy thousand in Italy.[13] But the percentage of these trials that resulted in executions were in the single digits. For example, the two hundred thousand trials in Spain led to about three thousand executions, while the fifty thousand trials in Portugal yielded around two thousand deaths. One reason for this is that death was a sentence exacted only against heretics who refused to admit their mistakes or who reoffended. Then, too, remember that many thousands of people were being killed in religious violence elsewhere in Europe, not least in England with

the executions under Queen Mary and Elizabeth. Arguably, if you were a real or suspected heretic you might have been better off dealing with the Inquisition of southern Europe than the enforcers of orthodoxy in other jurisdictions. It was important to the inquisitors that they were operating within a legal framework, which meant taking testimony and evaluating it, giving people a chance to admit their error, and offering a kind of "grace period" during which people were invited to admit lapses without penalty. So one modern scholar calls the Inquisition "a deliberate and—at least by early modern standards—rather restrained system."[14] Finally, although I've been talking indiscriminately about "Spain" there was actually a patchwork of territories across Iberia at this time subject to different political regimes. In some of these places the Inquisition was very active, while in others it was almost non-existent, and there was also a good degree of variation across time. All these points are made in a book by the aforementioned Henry Kamen. Tellingly subtitled "a historical revision," it argues in great detail that we misconceive this historical phenomenon if we think of it in terms of merciless, irrational, and inescapable violence, and that Spain in particular was less bloody than other regions of Europe in the period.[15]

This is all pretty convincing, even if it ultimately amounts to the claim that the Catholic Inquisition didn't quite win the race to the bottom. But it isn't really our business to decide whether, or rather how strongly, to condemn the inquisitors. What we want to do is understand their impact on the history of philosophy. The foregoing details add, for instance, to our sense that in the sixteenth century something was already emerging that comes closer to the modern conception of the state and its powers. Here a legal regime was being used as a tool of ideological control. True, the enforcement was spotty and involved a good deal of improvisation and arbitrariness. But the bureaucratization of the whole process makes it more like modern totalitarianism than anything that happened in the medieval period. We can also think of this effort at enforcing conformity as the flip side of what we discussed under the heading of individualism. If Erasmus and the Reformation stood for inner spirituality, the Inquisition stood against any divergence between acceptable public observance and unacceptable private belief. One witness alluded to the difficulty of reaching the truth about such matters when he admitted that an accused man did go to Mass, but added, "whether he does this with his heart, I don't know, since one cannot know the heart of another person."[16]

But the most directly relevant point is of course that philosophers were, from now on, going to be working within an unprecedented situation of systematic censorship. Here again popular conceptions are wildly inaccurate, because despite such things as the aforementioned condemnations in Paris, philosophy in the medieval period was only very rarely and ineffectively controlled by authoritative institutions. One difference is a factor we cannot mention often enough: the printing press. It created the possibility of disseminating hundreds or thousands of copies of a single work, which in turn led to the possibility of trying to control that dissemination. This brings us to the second main task of the Inquisition, the censoring of literature. Of course, a primary target of this effort was Protestant theological and polemical writing, as we can see from the many "Indices" produced around Catholic Europe. But scientific works also fell prey to the censors, and the mere threat of being put on the Index may have led to a good deal of *self*-censorship. It's important to bear this in mind, since as we're about to see, the Inquisition was not that successful in exerting control over what was actually published and read.

The first Index of prohibited books was published in Paris in 1544, followed by further lists in Louvain, Venice, Spain, Portugal, and then finally in 1559, at Rome, where the Index was posted at Saint Peter's Basilica and the palace of the Inquisition.[17] There was a good deal of cut and paste involved here. A massive further Index published in Spain might have looked impressive on a shelf, but it mostly just reproduced earlier lists, regardless of whether the books in question had any chance of turning up in Spain. For example, fifty-four of the titles were of books in Dutch and only 1 percent of them were in Castillian, the language that Spaniards would most likely want to read. I take this figure from Kamen, who remarks that the Indices were basically lists of books that were "both unobtainable and incomprehensible."[18] The same goes for Portugal, where an Index published in 1624 ran to over one thousand pages, because it reproduced the whole Roman index and added new material.[19]

The length of these Indices alone suggests how unenforceable they were, to the point where we might wonder what in the world the inquisitors were thinking. Part of the answer is that this campaign of censorship was not really about making texts unavailable. It had at least as much, if not more, to do with marking certain authors and texts as heretical so as to alert the pious reader to what they were dealing with. Thus many "censored" books

that have come down to us today simply have a line drawn through the name of the author, to indicate that he was a Protestant. This act, the so-called *damnatio memoriae* ("damning of memory"), was intended to condemn, not to withhold the text from a potential audience.[20] Similarly, librarians would keep copies of books but simply note *prohibetur, author damnatus* ("prohibited, author condemned!").[21] This was the Renaissance equivalent of putting a parental advisory sticker on a record whose songs have swear words in the lyrics, and we know how well that worked. More extreme, but still not *very* extreme, measures included a more literal kind of cut and paste: literally snipping out the name of a condemned author, or gluing blank paper over it, a technique that could also be used with individual offending passages so that the rest of the book remained usable. A fairly hilarious case, mentioned by Hannah Marcus in her study of these early modern expurgations, is found in a copy of the *History of Animals* by Conrad Gessner. Since Gessner was a condemned author, someone pasted the Latin for "pious doctrine" over his name, leaving this to stand proudly at the top of a title page adorned with a woodcut image of a moose.[22] Other methods noted by Marcus include blotting out names with ink, or more creatively, modifying the letters of a name to turn it into nonsense, like by transforming an F into an E by adding a line at the bottom.

But these amusing examples shouldn't mislead us into thinking that the Inquisition's censorship activities were harmless. Some of the most interesting thinkers of the period really were taken out of circulation or, at least, turned into forbidden material. A short list of philosophical authors would include Agrippa, Bodin, Bruno, Cardano, Copernicus, Galileo, Machiavelli, Melanchthon, Telesio, and of course Erasmus. This is what a real "cancel culture" looks like. Scholars and scientists were put in a doubly awkward position. Firstly because they were not allowed access to important research, and even if they could get at the books, they couldn't admit that they were using them. Secondly because they were asked to help with the task of censoring and expurgating the forbidden literature. In Spain the Holy Office made an appeal for such assistance in 1583, saying it hoped that "learned and pious men" would step forward to deal with the mass of heretical literature: "of these works, in order to be safely handled by everyone's hands, some parts must necessarily and constantly be destroyed and amputated."[23] The two points were intimately connected, because

scholars could get a special license to consult books they really needed, especially if they contained information not available elsewhere. Also, the issuing of the licenses might be made contingent on the scholars' cooperation with the Inquisition. As is still the case with annoying administrative tasks handed out to academics, another downside of not helping was that someone else would wind up doing it, someone you'd rather wasn't involved. One doctor lamented that the Roman Index had been produced without any "physicians or philosophers" present to give expert advice, and a royal chaplain in Spain observed that the censors there were "usually nonentities who know not a word either of Greek or of Hebrew, and lack either judgment or capacity."[24]

Once the Inquisition got past indexing authors simply because they were known Protestants, they were drawn into the more challenging task of deciding which specific tenets and doctrines had to be censored and expurgated. Guido Giglioni has studied the case of Juan Huarte de San Juan, a medical author whose work had a chapter removed because it agreed with a controversial claim of the ancient doctor Galen, namely that the rational soul is dependent on the body. Huarte responded by simply republishing the book with the same ideas, now emphasizing the sound theological basis for his claim: in bestowing His gifts, God "adjusts Himself to the natural good of each individual," matching the virtues and other features of the soul to the dispositions of the body.[25] Another illuminating case would be astrology. Surprisingly, a study of the Indices of Iberia shows that the inquisitors usually bent over backwards to allow discussion of this topic.[26] One could not invoke astrology or magic to suggest that humans lack free will, as by saying that all our actions are determined in advance by the stars, but prognostication was allowed for use in agriculture, navigation, and medicine. Such fine judgments were beyond the capacity of some censors. At Padua, a Dominican theologian was asked to expurgate the works of the formidable scholastic thinker Jacopo Zabarella, and protested that it would just be too difficult and time-consuming, as it would require "turning the whole work upside down with different interpretations, making different links, and carefully putting together different discourses."[27] This is one of the many ironies of the Inquisition, and of censorship more generally: if you want to forbid ideas intelligently, you need to understand them.

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# LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

## *Exploration and Science*

There's an understandable temptation to see the sixteenth century as a kind of prequel, a period interesting primarily because of what came next. Since I'm as vulnerable to this temptation as anyone, I have suggested at various points that Enlightenment science emerged in part due to developments in the sixteenth century. The humanist assault on scholastic orthodoxy and the reformers' assault on religious orthodoxy made it possible to think new thoughts and look to direct experience rather than long-recorded wisdom. I do think that this is part of the story, but there is a piece of advice we should always remember when trying to understand the course of human affairs: follow the money. The scientific achievements that were already starting to come thick and fast around the turn of the seventeenth century did involve novel epistemologies and cultural and religious factors, but they also had more than a little to do with the desire to get stinking rich. That's why the British scientists I've already covered were so fascinated by alchemy, and by astronomy and magnetism, which were needed for navigation and thus for the exploitation of the New World. This spectrum of philosophical inquiries might just lead to a literal pot of gold.

And not only British scientists. As Elizabeth and her advisors were keenly aware, they were competing (not entirely successfully) with other burgeoning imperial powers, especially Spain and Portugal. The monarchs of these nations sent representatives around the world and oversaw the scientific activities that supported those travels. It has thus been remarked

that Spanish science and its anticipation of the Enlightenment had "more to do with economics and politics than with religion."[1] Not that most people think of Spanish or Portuguese exploration primarily as an anticipation of the Enlightenment. Another book on the topic poses the exasperated question, "why do students and the general public think of the Iberian empires in terms of ignorant, zealot friars and plundering conquistadors rather than of savvy naturalists and learned cosmographers?"[2] Well, it might have something to do with all the zealot friars and plundering conquistadors who wreaked catastrophe upon much of the world's population. We'll get to that, but first we should familiarize ourselves with the historical context of global exploration, and the way that science and philosophy were involved in that effort and significantly pushed forward as a result.[3]

Even this less unpleasant aspect of the tale begins with Spain and Portugal quite literally dividing the world between them. They did so in the Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494 in the wake of a papal edict the previous year that called for a split in colonializing activities. The Spanish would be active to the west, and the Portuguese to the east, of a line of longitude running through the Atlantic and encircling the whole Earth. Brazil, for example, became a Portuguese territory because its eastern end was on their side of the line. This is also why the Portuguese can claim the dubious distinction of being the first European power to get involved in the slave trade in West Africa, and why it was the Portuguese who took up the challenge of navigating along the African coast, around the Cape of Good Hope to Asia. (Vasco de Gama managed the feat for the first time in 1498.) Working out exactly which bits of land would belong to whom, in both the Atlantic and Pacific zones, and then reaching and exploiting those lands, would call for careful astronomical calculation and advances in all the technologies of seafaring.

This gave the Iberian governments reason to do something of great historical significance: they set up scientific institutions that can be seen as forerunners of more famous bodies like the Royal Society in Britain. To oversee the explorations, the Portuguese created a Casa da India in 1500, which was then used as a model by the Spanish for their own Casa de la Contratación ("House of Trade"). In 1524, a further body called the Council of Indies was established to oversee administrative and legal affairs in the crown's foreign possessions. The platform was set for a rationalized, bureaucratic approach to global exploitation. This involved everything from

training the pilots of the ships, to issuing patents—beginning with one for a bilge pump in 1524—and of course the making of maps.[4] Astronomical observations were crucial here. For example, the cosmographer Jaime Juan, as one historian recounts, was assigned "to undertake a variety of tasks in voyages to New Spain and the Philippines. The duties included supervision of pilots to see how their practices could be improved, teaching them to use navigational instruments, making maps in the Indies, and determining the latitude and longitude (from lunar eclipses) of localities in New Spain."[5]

Expeditions were mounted for the sake of collecting information of all conceivable kinds. Plants and animals were surveyed in so-called "natural histories" like Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *On the Natural History of the Indies*, which described more than 250 previously unknown species. Oviedo wrote in rapturous terms about the marvels to be found across the seas: "what mortal mind would be able to understand such diversity of languages, customs, and habits in the people of the Indies? Such diversity of animals, both domestic and savage? The indescribable multitude of trees…cultivated by Indians, as well as those that nature, by its own operation, produces without the help of mortal hands? All the plants and herbs useful and beneficial to mankind?"[6] He sent his friend an iguana preserved (presumably not very well) in a barrel of soil, and tried to describe the taste of armadillo. These were creatures that could not be found in the pages of Aristotle's zoology or in other classical authors like Pliny. The Portuguese scientist Garcia de Orta, who was active in India, put the point as diplomatically as he could: "I do not speak ill of the Greeks, since there are many fine things to be found in them, but also many falsehoods."[7] Among the most obvious falsehoods was that the ancients thought it would be impossible for humans to live at the equator. Not an unreasonable conclusion if you are living in the ancient Mediterranean and the only example at hand is the Sahara Desert, but now European explorers were finding whole civilizations living at this supposedly uninhabitable latitude.

Another Portuguese scientist, João de Castro, thus commented that experience of the world was allowing the moderns to outdo the ancients.[8] The same conclusion was reached by a Spanish Jesuit named José Acosta, whose 1590 work *Natural and Moral History of the East and West Indies* drew on his own time in Peru. He noted that, for all that had been written about the newly discovered lands, he had "not seen any author who tries to

find the causes and reason of those novelties and wonders of nature."[9] His scholastic education would have made that failing unacceptable to him. Aristotelian science, after all, demands giving causal accounts of general phenomena in nature. Acosta did his best, for example by attempting to understand the chemical process that used mercury to extract silver from the ore that was mined in the Americas. He also took up a question that could hardly fail to strike those who sailed between Europe and the Americas: why is it easier to voyage in one direction than the other? He had no idea, of course, but did come up with the promising suggestion that it was the result of air's moving faster near the equator.[10] This he further explained, in non-Copernican terms, by saying that the celestial sphere draws the air with it as it revolves around the Earth. Acosta also sought to account for the puzzling fact that the weather near the equator was not always as hot as the ancients would have predicted. Out in Peru, he found himself needing to go into the Sun to keep warm, and could only "laugh at Aristotle's philosophy."[11] His explanation was that the Sun is indeed intense at this latitude, but it heats the water and turns it into vapor, which cools down the air.

Acosta complained that other authors typically dealt with the overwhelming amount of novel information coming from global exploration by simply presenting it to their readers without any attempt to find the causes. They did not even always consider whether the reports that had come to them were true. A nice example comes from the encounter with the Tehuelche people in what is now southeast Argentina. These so-called "Patagonians" were strikingly tall, which could have led to the realization that they enjoyed a more nutritious diet than was available in Renaissance Europe. Instead, the Europeans leapt to the conclusion that the Patagonians were "giants," which prompted the further question whether they were unnatural "monsters" or simply rational humans of unusual size. It was hard to say, especially hearing about it at second or third hand. So even as pictures of these supposed giants were being used to decorate maps of the Americas, some scholars expressed skepticism as to whether there really were giants on the far side of the ocean. A modern-day discussion of this case concludes that in the face of such uncertainty, scientific authors took refuge in mere "encyclopedic reportage of sometimes contradictory evidence, leaving readers to make up their own minds."[12]

There was one thing everyone could agree on, though: that there was no substitute for going to have look for yourself. The "natural historians" who actually went to the Americas to discover medicinal plants were dismissive about physicians back home, who ought to take advice from those who had studied the plants in their natural habitat. Eyewitness testimony was crucial, and the Europeans were not too proud to turn to the so-called "Indians" for information so as to benefit from their native expertise. In one case the Council of the Indies licensed the use of "balsam" from the New World on the advice of an explorer who was married to an Amerindian woman and had consulted his in-laws.[13] Nor did the authorities simply wait for information to trickle in. Questionnaires were sent out to solicit information, with momentous results for the history of science and philosophy. One such effort, the *Relaciones de Indias*, resulted in a goldmine of information about Mesoamerican society, politics, and religion. While certainly problematic, because they so often convey Amerindian ideas through the filter of European ideas and language, these and other documents from the colonial context are among our main sources for understanding Mesoamerican philosophy.[14]

The Americas weren't the only place of encounter with previously unfamiliar intellectual traditions. It was at this time that Europeans first had the opportunity to grapple with Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and other traditions of Asian thought. The central figure in this story is another Jesuit, one named Matteo Ricci.[15] Born in 1552 in the Italian city of Macerata, Ricci studied in Rome and then at Coimbra in Portugal, where he had the opportunity to attend classes on Aquinas given by no less a thinker than Luis de Molina. He then went to Asia as a religious missionary, one of the many Jesuits who were fanning out across the globe to spread the faith (see Chapter 61 below). Ricci was initially sent to Goa on the western coast of India, which the Portuguese had established as the capital of their eastern empire back in 1510 after killing about six thousand Muslim inhabitants to get a clean slate.[16]

Ricci's methods would be considerably more peaceful. He went on to reside in a number of cities in China, including Beijing and Nanjing, two of the main urban centers of Ming-period China. At first he followed the lead of other Jesuit missionaries by adopting the dress and shaved head of a Buddhist monk. In fact his elder colleague, Michele Ruggieri, called

himself *seng*, the same word used for these monks. Ruggieri also had a catechism of Christian belief produced called the *Tianzhu Shilu* (*Record of the Lord of Heaven*), which was full of Buddhist terminology. Confusingly, in this same work criticisms were leveled at the Buddhist worldview. Once Ricci matured as a thinker and achieved remarkable proficiency in the Chinese language, he carried out the anti-Buddhist program more consistently—but with a twist, in that he had identified Confucian philosophy as a much better fit with Christianity. He started to dress like a Confucian scholar and committed classical works of Confucianism to memory, amazing his Chinese hosts with his ability to recite them at length. This won him the highest praise he could have hoped to receive: "there is nothing foreign about him, except for his face."[17]

Ricci's attitude toward Chinese intellectual tradition was a nuanced one. When it came to natural philosophy, he felt that they lagged well behind the Europeans. He said that "the sciences are not much cultivated among them," something he explained with reference to their onerous writing system. Among these people he had the status of "another Ptolemy, since they know nothing."[18] He duly took advantage, fashioning sundials and astrolabes more advanced than anything the Chinese had, which he would often distribute as gifts to win favor among the elites whom he wanted to win over to Christianity. The Chinese were also impressed by the quality of European books—rather ironically, since paper was originally a Chinese invention—and also by the realism of European painting. What Ricci told them about this is telling: Chinese painters represent only the *yang*, where Europeans paint both *yang* and *yin*. As that suggests, Ricci was conversant with the terminology of Chinese philosophical literature. In fact he developed a profound appreciation for Confucian thought, and wrote works that explored what he saw as a deep compatibility between Confucian and European philosophy. This was a genuine exchange of ideas between representatives of two cultures, one that Ricci dramatized by composing a dialogue called *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. He benefitted greatly from conversations with Zhang Huang, a Confucian scholar who was a third-generation student of the great Wang Yangming, and who was determined to strip away Buddhist and Daoist ideas that had accreted to the classical Confucian tradition. Following suit, Ricci praised the ethical teachings of Kongzi, the man we call Confucius, "who, ignorant of the things of the other life, had only given doctrines of living a good life in this

present world, and of governing and conserving the peace of the realm and the republic."[19]

By contrast, Ricci was unsparing in his criticism of other schools of thought in China. He polemicized against tendencies toward dualism, and was especially concerned to refute Buddhism. Most memorable here is the face-to-face debate he had with the leading Buddhist scholar of Nanjing, whose name was Xuelang Hong'en. Ricci had a public clash with him over the nature of the world's creator, in which Hong'en dismissed the need for a transcendent power like the Christian God. Even a humble creature like a human is capable of creating all things, just by thinking about them! In this case Ricci apparently failed to appreciate the full metaphysical and epistemological import of what his opponent was saying. He simply replied that ideas are only representations of things in the world, like images in a mirror.[20] Given his antipathy toward Buddhism, it was awkward for him that his own belief in the afterlife resonated more powerfully with that tradition than with Confucianism. But Ricci did his best to persuade his Chinese allies, who were sympathetic to Confucianism, of the Christian religion and of the power of European philosophy more generally. Thus he argued on behalf of the Greek scheme of four elements and against the Chinese five-element scheme, which counts metal and wood among the fundamental materials. He even did his part to spread knowledge of Stoicism in China by translating a Latin version of the writings of Epictetus into Chinese.

Of course, Ricci was no disinterested explorer of ideas. His determination to master Chinese literature and philosophy stemmed from a deeper motivation, which was to win souls for Christ. Still, he stands as the best example from this period of a European voyager who found within himself the intellectual resources and curiosity to master a non-European philosophical tradition. His strong preference for Confucianism and opposition to Buddhism show just how deeply he had immersed himself. Ricci did not see Chinese thought as monolithic. On the contrary, he was well aware of its diversity, and within that diversity he definitely knew what he liked. In his dealings with men like the Confucian scholar Zhang Huang or Li Zhizao, a young man whom Ricci tutored in mathematics, Ricci also showed himself able to treat non-Europeans as peers and colleagues. It all makes for a sharp contrast with the behavior mostly displayed by the colonizers of the sixteenth century. Even as Ricci was successfully "going

native” in China, the Spanish were meting out the most savage of treatment to the so-called “natives” of the Americas. Supposedly they, like Ricci, came to spread the Catholic faith. But what they in fact brought was for the most part servitude and death; and what they were for the most part seeking was not souls, but wealth. The hypocrisy and cruelty was evident, and some few Europeans were willing to demand that it stop.

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# LAMBS TO THE SLAUGHTER

## *Debating the New World*

When people who were living through the Renaissance noticed the "newness" of their own period, they often pointed to a trio of discoveries that symbolized the changing times: gunpowder, the printing press, and what they called the "New World."[1] It's a sobering thought that all three unleashed mass death. The lethality of gunpowder speaks (loudly) for itself. The printing press is less obviously dangerous, but can take some of the blame for creating the conditions that led to the Wars of Religion. Of the three, though, the real killer was the encounter between Europeans and the peoples of the Caribbean and Americas. It's a controversial question how many people were living there before contact occurred, and what percentage of the Amerindians died as a result.[2] At the higher end of estimates, we may be talking about the largest extermination in human history. Some scholars have put the pre-contact population at more than 100 million and suggested a death rate as high as 90 or 95 percent. Even much lower estimates of both population and death rate would give us numbers well into the millions. It's also debated whether to call this a "genocide." Those who are reluctant to do so argue that the vast majority of deaths were caused unintentionally, simply by spreading unfamiliar diseases like smallpox. This explanation in terms of disease is what holds sway in the popular imagination. But there is no doubt that the Europeans, and especially the Spanish, deliberately caused staggering numbers of deaths

through warfare and pitiless enslavement. As the Caribbean historian Eric Williams wrote, “it has been said of the Spanish conquistadors that first they fell on their knees, and then they fell on the aborigines.”[3]

The sheer destruction caused by the European invaders was, as Williams here suggests, compounded by their hypocrisy. Theirs was an endeavor sanctioned by the Catholic Church, whose 1493 decision to give the Castillian crown jurisdiction over the Americas came with the caveat that they “never inflict hardships or dangers” on the people who lived there. Given the brutality that the Spanish nonetheless exercised under this license, you could be forgiven for assuming that their attitude was entirely cynical, that they gave no thought to whether their activities could be justified. Actually, though, the Spanish were keen to reassure themselves that what they were doing was perfectly legitimate. Farcically, the conquistadors would read out (in Latin!) a document to the perplexed inhabitants of the land they were seizing, stating the juridical basis for what they were doing. This coupling of legal nicety and notorious atrocity may remind us of the Spanish Inquisition. And in fact it was Ferdinand and Isabella, the same monarchs who started the Inquisition and expelled the Jews from Spain, who first sought to justify the colonial enterprise. In 1501 Isabella wrote to the governor of Hispaniola, the island now split into Haiti and the Dominican Republic, to say that she wished “the Indians to be well treated as our subjects and our vassals.”[4] This is reminiscent of the concern we saw her expressing for the fate of the Spanish Jews, and if the concern was sincere it was similarly ineffective. In 1504 and again in 1512, Ferdinand organized meetings of jurists, who were asked to provide a rationale for what everyone knew the Spanish were going to do anyway: extract every last bit of value out of the newly encountered lands without regard to the welfare of its inhabitants.

It’s here that, to its eternal shame, philosophy becomes relevant. In putting together their arguments, colonial apologists drew on the most reliable and authoritative of sources, namely Aristotle. When writing the first book of his *Politics*, he had been in the similar situation of wanting to give a rational explanation for something we nowadays find inexcusable, namely slavery.[5] If you are feeling charitable, the idea he came up with can be read as an attempt to restrict or even reform the practice: some people are “naturally” slaves, the implication being that it would be inappropriate to enslave people who do not have such a defective nature. Natural slaves

lack independent rational control (*Politics* 1254b) and cannot achieve happiness, the true goal of human life. So they in fact benefit from having a master to take charge of them, exerting from outside the sort of discipline and reasonable choices that they cannot manage on their own. Of course the master benefits too, since the arrangement lets him get use out of the slave, who in Aristotle's terms functions as a kind of "living tool." One can also find in Aristotle the notion that whole peoples are slavish, because of the unfavorable climate in which they live.[6] This would resonate with something that Plato says in his *Republic*, namely that it is wrong for Greeks to enslave *other Greeks* (469b–c); better for them to go after the barbarians. Still, it seems unwarranted to assume that for Aristotle, all foreign peoples were "natural slaves."

Yet just this was assumed by some European intellectuals, based on the reports about the indigenous Americans brought back by European explorers.[7] Thus John Mair wrote that "these people live like beasts…and this has now been demonstrated by experience, wherefore the first person to conquer them, justly rules over them because they are by nature slaves."[8] Juan López de Palacios Rubios gave similar advice to the Spanish crown in 1413: the idolatry and hedonism of the Amerindians justified their subjugation. Another Spanish jurist, Juan de Matienzo, speculated that in their lack of rationality the native peoples were "no different from the animals, for they are ruled by their passions…for them there is no tomorrow and they are content that they have enough to eat and drink for a week."[9] But then the conquistadors reached Mexico and Peru, and started sending home astonished descriptions of the great cities they found there, polities that weren't so unlike the city states described by Aristotle and Plato. These were people with laws, commerce, a writing system, and elaborate religious beliefs. No fair-minded observer could still believe that the indigenous people were tantamount to animals—though, as we'll see shortly, at least one observer who was not so fair-minded managed to believe it nevertheless. Someone who took the evidence seriously was Francisco de Vitoria, a Dominican friar who will be pivotal when we get to the so-called "School of Salamanca" and the renewal of scholastic philosophy in the Iberian Peninsula (see Chapter 63). Vitoria was among other things a profound legal thinker, and revisited the status of the Native Americans from this perspective.

Though he had studied with students of John Mair at Paris, Vitoria found it hard to agree with Mair that these people were all natural slaves, in light of more recent accounts of their sophisticated culture, and what he called the "rational order in their affairs." On the other hand, to deny that European Christians had legitimate authority (*dominium*) in the Americas would be of "great detriment to the Spanish princes and is thus unacceptable to us."[10] Vitoria concluded, therefore, that the indigenous people were fully rational, but had the misfortune to inhabit defective societies. This explained why they engaged in such notorious practices as cannibalism, sodomy, and human sacrifice. The existence of such customs in the Americas showed that its people were unable fully to grasp the requirements of the "natural law," whose principles should be inscribed in all humans and give them guidance in moral and political affairs (see further below, Chapters 66 and 67). Even without the benefit of Christian revelation, these people should have known better than to eat each other and sacrifice one another to gods. They might be able to build cities, but they didn't know how to treat their fellow humans.

Vitoria reasoned that when it came to such things, the indigenous were not unlike grown children, who needed guidance from the morally superior Spanish (one hardly knows whether to laugh or cry at this). Still, this didn't mean that the Spanish could simply exploit them without restrictions. As Vitoria said, the rightful authority of the Europeans over the Amerindians should be used to provide them with ethical and religious education, as you might offer to a child who has not yet been properly socialized. This would not be slavery, but benevolent oversight. Furthermore, Christian faith should not be imposed by force. Vitoria wrote that "whether or not [the Amerindians] accept the faith, it will not be lawful to attempt to impose anything on them by war, or otherwise conquer their lands."[11] Unfortunately, these relatively enlightened conclusions could be made to fit with the brutal *encomienda* system. The Native Americans were not formally enslaved, and their *encomendero* was not a master to whom these people legally belonged. Even though he was supposed to Christianize them, not use them as "living tools," this provided an excuse for forcing them together into the *encomiendas* so that they could not fall back into their old cultural and religious ways. The Spanish proceeded to work them to death mining silver and gold, meting out savage punishment to anyone who stepped out of line. All perfectly legal.

Which brings us to that observer who was not so fair-minded, a man who is always cast as the villain when telling the story of sixteenth-century debates over the New World. His name was Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and apart from his involvement in these debates, he was a scholar of a type that has become very familiar to us. Like so many from around Europe, he went to study in Italy, acquiring there humanist philological skills and a profound knowledge of ancient philosophy. Having studied with no less a figure than Pietro Pomponazzi, he set himself the task of producing new Latin versions of works by Aristotle and his late ancient commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias.[12] Not coincidentally, one of the texts he translated was the *Politics*, which included those remarks about natural slavery. Sepúlveda seems to have been a combative man; for example, he published a list of errors made by a rival Aristotle translator. This provides some context for the provocative and scathing approach he adopted when he did turn to write about the so-called "affair of the Indies."

He did so in a dialogue pitting a critic against a defender of Spanish colonialism. Reminding us that we're in the context of the Counter-Reformation, Sepúlveda makes the critical opponent a Lutheran German, named "Leopold." Arguing on behalf of the Spanish is "Democrates," who spares no effort in describing the Amerindians as base and animalistic creatures, "in whom hardly a vestige of humanity remains." More favorable reports from Mesoamerica have done nothing to convince Sepúlveda otherwise. Yes, the people there build cities, but so do bees build their hives and spiders their webs. Abominations like cannibalism and human sacrifice show that they are indeed naturally slaves, as does their cowardice, something shown by the paltry defense put up against the conquistadors by Montezuma. Indeed, the Europeans' treatment of these people was not a matter of turning them into slaves; rather, they were *already* slaves by nature before the Europeans showed up, and the Spanish were just treating them as such.[13] The Amerindians had no right to resist this treatment, since it was entirely just. For "those whose natural condition is such that they must obey others, if they refuse that lordship and there is no other recourse, may be subdued by arms; and this war is just according to the opinion of the most eminent philosophers."[14]

Despite the allusion to Aristotle, Sepúlveda is doing more here than just reiterating the natural slavery defense. He is adding, in more medieval terminology, that the Native Americans' lowly condition licenses a "just

war" against them, a war that will ultimately be to their benefit. Even once they are defeated, they should perpetually remain under European domination, for "what greater benefit and advantage could befall those barbarians than their submission to rule of those who with their prudence, virtue, and religion have converted them from barbarians and barely men into humans and civilized men to the extent that they can be?"[15] The outstanding virtues of the Spanish in particular make them the best choice to undertake this task. Thus even so extreme a figure as Sepúlveda was still concerned to find a legal, and even moral, rationale for the colonial enterprise. He was able to invoke precedent, using medieval concepts that had been developed in the context of the crusades.[16] Non-Christian peoples do have property rights and can have legitimate political arrangements. But Christians may under certain circumstances wage war against them, as when the infidels violate the natural law.

While Sepúlveda's conclusions were not that different from those reached by others who had written on the topic, his radical tone seemed needlessly provocative. So when he applied for a royal license to publish the dialogue, there were misgivings. A panel was convened to consider the matter, with the judges including another important Spanish scholastic thinker, Domingo de Soto. The event was held at Valladolid in 1550, with Sepúlveda offering a short and somewhat milder defense (*apologia*) of his position. The scholar chosen to rebut him did so at great length, going on for several days; Soto said the opponent seemed to be trying to refute not just Sepúlveda's dialogue but everything he had ever written. And with some success, in that the result of the panel was inconclusive, meaning that Sepúlveda did not get his license. As for the indefatigable critic, he is the man always cast as the hero of this story: Bartholomé de las Casas.[17] Born in Seville in 1484, he had traveled to Santo Domingo, in what is now Haiti, in 1502. Still on that side of the Atlantic, he experienced a "road to Damascus" moment in 1511, when he saw his fellow Dominican friar Antonio Montesino give a speech excoriating the Spaniards for their mistreatment of the Native Americans. "Are these not humans?" demanded Montesino. "Do they not have rational souls? Are you not obliged to love them as yourselves?" According to de las Casas, the Europeans present were stunned: "some were furious, others were incorrigible, some were saddened, but as far as I could tell, none were converted."[18]

Apart that is from de las Casas himself. He gave up his slaves and returned with Montesino to Spain, where he embarked on a relentless campaign to convince the authorities to crack down on the violent excesses of the conquistadors. While he wrote a number of works in this vein, the most frequently read, thanks to its relative and uncharacteristic brevity, is his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*.[19] He is no less biting in his attacks on the Spanish colonialists than Sepúlveda in his portrayal of the so-called "Indians." For de las Casas, it is the conquistadors who are the real barbarians and savages, as shown by the elaborate and merciless tortures they have inflicted on the native peoples. These are described in detail in the *Short Account*, dividing the evidence by geographical region. De las Casas emphasizes that having been there himself, he can provide first-person testimony about these crimes, from roasting men alive to cutting off limbs just for the fun of it. One might think of this as a particularly gruesome contribution to the genre of works reporting about the extraordinary things that could be experienced in the New World.

In contrast to the sadistic conquistadors, the natives are "docile lambs," physically delicate and by nature virtuous rather than slavish, given to asceticism almost like the desert fathers of Christian antiquity. The proof is that they have never raised a hand against the Europeans, unless sorely provoked, and are ripe for speedy conversion to Christianity given their inborn gentleness and respect for the divine. (De las Casas excuses human sacrifice as their admittedly misguided attempt to express that innate sentiment.) "We consider," he wrote, "that the Indians are truly men and that they are not only capable of understanding the Catholic faith but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it."[20] Unfortunately, the missionary efforts of the Spanish have been at best half-hearted and undermined by their own greed. De las Casas tells with bitter relish a story about one indigenous leader who solemnly explained to his people that the god worshipped by the Christians is…gold. Implicitly confirming that the colonialists did indeed see their unfortunate victims as beastly, he remarks of one *encomiendo* that "he was no more interested in the indoctrination and salvation of the Indians than if they were sticks and stones, or cats and dogs," and that in his experience, there had been "no more effort to bring Christianity to these people than there was to teach the faith to the mares and horses and other beasts of the field."[21]

His conclusions, which he would also have put forward against Sepúlveda at Valladolid, were unambiguous. As he put it in another work, the *Apologetic History*, the Native Americans were "fully capable of governing themselves and of living like men of good intelligence and more than others well ordered, sensible, prudent, and rational."[22] Like Vitoria and Sepúlveda, he based himself on legal principles, emphasizing the principle that "what touches all must be approved by all." The Spanish could exercise dominion over the Amerindians only if they agreed to it, and even the pope could not unilaterally grant authority over this foreign land.[23] So you can see why de las Casas has been widely celebrated. He seems a one-man refutation of the relativist notion that people in earlier times were operating in a different moral universe, making it impossible for us to judge them for their endorsement of such barbarities as slavery and the *encomienda* system. After all, here was someone who, already in the middle of the sixteenth century, was saying more or less what a modern observer might say if transported to Valladolid and asked to give their opinion on the matter. Nor was he alone. Remember that we saw Montaigne, in his ironically entitled essay "On Cannibals," adopting a perspective sympathetic to the Amerindians. So it does seem fair to ask, if Montaigne and de las Casas managed such moral clarity, what was wrong with their contemporaries?

But of course de las Casas was no time traveler, and a closer look turns up some more problematic attitudes on his part. His uniformly favorable portrayal of the Indians as meek and virtuous "lambs" is the exact reverse of Sepúlveda's portrayal of them as debauched and irrational. Which sounds good, until we notice that he could not conceive of variation in the individual ethical characters of the "Indians" any more than Sepúlveda could. Both of them saw these people as a morally homogenous group, and this despite an appreciation of other kinds of variation, for example in the languages they speak. So it's been observed that de las Casas was engaging in "racialist," though not racist, thinking.[24] Furthermore, we should not overlook his central emphasis on the Christianization of the indigenous people. Lambs need a shepherd, after all, and de las Casas saw the Amerindians primarily as a flock awaiting religious instruction. Revealing here is the contrast he draws between this case and that of the Muslims. Because the latter group have been exposed to Christianity and explicitly rejected it, they are enemies of the faith and subject to warfare from

Christian powers. That logic wouldn't apply in the Americas, at least not yet. But one wonders what de las Casas would have said if, after a generation or so, he found that the peoples of the "New World" were still adhering to their old ways and traditional religious beliefs. As one scholar has observed, de las Casas "tolerated the Indians because he believed they would assimilate."[25]

# 59

# MARKETPLACE OF LETTERS

## *Iberian Humanism*

Did Spain have a Renaissance? It would seem rather unfair if the answer were no, given that the Italians and northern Europeans got to have one. Even the British got in on the act, despite their national devotion to the principle "we won't have what they're having." But it's been argued that Spain is the exception, on the grounds that there is no clear transition from a "medieval" period to a period when classical culture was being revived.[1] And, given the very different situation in medieval Iberia as compared to the rest of Europe—the context of Islamic rule defeated only at the end of the fifteenth century—it's clear that if there was indeed a Renaissance in Spain, it must have been rather different than the Renaissance that happened elsewhere. Yet many of the hallmarks that we've come to associate with the Renaissance elsewhere are present in fifteenth-century Spain too: scholars going to Italy to master Greek and Ciceronian Latin; translators rendering classical texts into the vernacular; competition and influence between rhetoric and scholastic philosophy; and a turn toward inward, individualist spirituality. Much as parallel developments prepared the way for a flourishing of culture in Elizabethan England, so the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain are often called a *siglo de oro*, a "golden age" of philosophy and literature. Of course, this golden age was also helped along by quite a bit of real gold and silver, the riches that Spain and Portugal claimed from their overseas dominions, and those dominions too will play a role in the story of Iberian humanism.

But let's start closer to home, with the collaborations between men of letters in Spain and Italy. I've often had occasion to mention visitors to Italy from around Europe who returned home with the values and skills of humanism in their baggage, men like Willibald Pirckheimer, Peter Luder, Rudolph Agricola, Etienne Dolet, John Colet, and the great Erasmus himself. A comparable figure from Spain would be Nuño de Guzmán, whose wide travels brought him to Florence in 1439, where he personally met Leonardo Bruni and Giannozzo Manetti.[2] Guzmán was active as both author and patron. From his own pen came works like a compilation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and a revised Spanish translation of Seneca *On Anger*, while works he commissioned from others included translations of Cicero, Macrobius, Bruni, and Seneca again. Indeed, Guzmán had something of a fascination for Seneca, given that he was also the dedicatee of Manetti's *Life of Seneca and Socrates*. This more than a century before Lipsius' revival of Stoicism. In accounting for this fascination, the fact that Guzmán was Spanish is relevant. Seneca had lived in Roman Spain, so for an Iberian humanist he was a good candidate for the role of national hero. There was even a house in Córdoba said to be his former residence. Taking the idea further, the humanist Juan de Mena claimed that Seneca, Averroes, and Avicenna all hailed from Córdoba.[3] Reality check: Averroes was indeed from Córdoba, but Avicenna was from near Balkh in modern-day Afghanistan, so in his case de Mena was off by more than 6000 kilometers.

Speaking of Leonardo Bruni, he was involved in a clash with a Spanish scholar who indulged in that most humanist of pastimes, insulting other humanists. This was Alonso de Cartagena, the Bishop of Burgos, who himself rendered works of Cicero and Seneca into Spanish. Cartagena had no knowledge of ancient Greek, yet charged Bruni with distorting Aristotle in his elegant Latin translation of the *Ethics*.[4] "Let us," he proclaimed, "hack off at the root the error of those who think that philosophical meaning is less important than eloquence."[5] This may seem strange coming from a fellow humanist, but Cartagena had studied law and theology in Salamanca, so he could also be considered a denizen of the scholastic world. As in other parts of Europe, the universities were powerfully affected by the rise of humanism. Salamanca already established a chair of rhetoric in 1403, and other Iberian universities followed suit. The long-term effects can be seen in five orations on law given at Salamanca in 1538 and 1539 by Diego de

Covarrubias y Leyva, who would go on to become an influential jurist and bishop.[6] These orations sprinkle in references to such classical figures as Solon, Cato, and Cicero, and proclaim that Salamanca has become a center of humanist activity, a "marketplace of letters." They also use all the tools of Ciceronian rhetoric to exalt that paradigmatically scholastic enterprise, the study of the law. Jurists, argues Leyva, are greater defenders of society than soldiers, because nothing preserves a people so effectively as good laws.

Then again, a man of sufficient talent might not need to choose between legal and martial prowess. Someone who was renowned for wearing "both armor and the toga," as it was sometimes put, was Iñigo López de Mendoza, the Marquis of Santillana. He distinguished himself in wars against Spanish rivals and in expeditions against Muslim forces, but also amassed one of Iberia's great libraries, wrote admired poetry, and commissioned translations of classical authors, who of course included Seneca. The case of Santillana shows us that humanist study was being taken up at the highest level of Spanish society, and that goes for women as well as men. Just as in Italy and France, the study of "fine letters (*buenas letras*)" offered a way for Spanish women to establish themselves in the previously male world of learning. The most famous example is Beatriz Galindo, called *la latina* for her proficiency in Latin. Grand claims have been made for her achievements as a scholar. The sixteenth-century historian Fernández de Oviedo tells us that she was the Latin teacher of Queen Isabella, as just one of numerous *puellae doctae* ("learned ladies") gathered at the royal court. Galindo is also said to have written works of her own, including a set of notes and commentaries to Aristotle.

Unfortunately, a rather convincing article from 2021 pours a good deal of cold water on all this.[7] In it, Ana María Carabias Torres points out that Oviedo's evidence about Galindo is speculation made at a distance of several decades, and that the royal family already had outstanding male tutors at its disposal, including Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, also significant as a chronicler at the Council of Indies. There is, argues Torres, no contemporary evidence to tell us about Galindo's work as a scholar. Torres does not question that Galindo was an accomplished Latinist. And we do have evidence that after starting out as a relatively humble court "servant," Galindo was married to a high-ranking husband, called *artillero* because he was an expert in the use of gunpowder weapons. The two became

significant patrons, for example by founding a hospital, and Galindo knew how to stand up for herself, litigating over her inheritance after the early demise of her explosive husband. So even accepting Torres' corrective, we can still add Galindo to our list of learned women who took advantage of humanism to win influence in a male-dominated world.

In any case, it seems evident that quite a few fifteenth-century authors were already convinced that Spain was having a Renaissance. Indeed, a humanist eulogy written upon the death of Santillana in 1458 declared that, thanks to him, eloquence had changed its true home from Italy to Spain, just as it had long ago gone from Greece to Rome thanks to Cicero. Which might sound familiar, given that we saw Guillaume Budé making the same claim about humanist study emigrating from Italy to France. It's another feature of humanism that crosses borders: philological and linguistic proficiency was often joined to a forthright nationalism. We find this also in an author who is often regarded as the greatest of the Iberian humanists, Antonio de Nebrija. In his influential grammatical work, the *Art of the Castilian Language*, he argued that Castilian Spanish is in no way inferior to Latin. It was published in 1492, and in that same year Nebrija also published a Latin-Spanish dictionary. A similar sentiment was put forward by Juan de Valdes in his *Dialogue on Language*, in which it is concluded that of all the vernacular tongues, Spanish is most like Latin and therefore best. In keeping with these attitudes humanists devoted themselves to translating classical texts, and also the Bible, into Spanish. We're about to see an example of this in the work of the humanist and theologian Luis de Léon, who had this to say about writing in the vernacular: "Words are not dignified because they are Latin, but because they are used with dignity, whether they are French or Spanish…Plato did not write vulgar books in vulgar style just because he used his own 'vulgar' language nor did Cicero speak less highly because he used the language which was vulgar in his time."[8]

Before we get to him, though, we should pause to note that humanism was also bound up with a more famous development we associate with the year 1492: the encounter with the Americas, and the subsequent exploration and subdual of vast parts of the globe by the Iberian powers.[9] Along with smallpox and slavery, the Spanish also brought Cicero. By the middle of the sixteenth century, it was possible to study Latin at a high level in Mexico City. This had been the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan; maybe now this

metropolis, and not Paris or Madrid, would be the new home of humanism? That was the ambition of Cervantes de Salazar, an acquaintance of the great humanist Juan Luis Vives (who, let's not forget, was also Spanish, though he spent much of his life abroad: as a *converso*, he would have had reason to fear persecution in his native land). Salazar also knew Hernán Córtes, the *conquistador* who took Mexico for Spain, and aimed to use this conquest to broaden the horizons of humanism. And not without success. Antonio Valeranio was an Amerindian who became a great Latinist, capable of speaking extemporaneously in the best Ciceronian style. On the other side of the world, similar exploits were being pursued by the Portuguese in India. A Jesuit instructor at the college in Goa said of his students, "I recognize, so to speak, many Socrateses, I observe many Aristotles, and I hear many Ciceros, although, to speak the truth, India does not exactly abound with humanists."[10]

This is the first chapter of an important subplot within the larger story of colonialism. From the very beginning, Europeans imposed on their foreign subjects educational institutions modeled on those that already existed back home. They thought of this as a benevolent intervention, bringing the light of knowledge and true religion to benighted peoples. We tend to see things otherwise today, of course, and would be more inclined to speak of cultural imperialism. But without setting such justified reservations aside, we should notice that the Europeans did learn from the non-Europeans too, and were often well aware that they were doing so. We've seen that with Matteo Ricci and his engagement with Confucianism, and with the *Relaciones de Indias*, the Spanish texts containing surveys of these unfamiliar lands and peoples. In India, European scholars engaged with texts like the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Much like Ricci in his work on Chinese philosophy, they thought they could find many parallels between Christianity and ancient Indian wisdom, something they recorded in marginal notes on the texts.[11] Also like Ricci, they strove to master the local languages, and as a result even noticed that the structure of these languages mirrored that of Latin and Greek. This was an early insight into the fact that Sanskrit and the classical European tongues belong to the same "Indo-European" language family. It's a small but striking instance of the way that humanist curiosity about language was exported around the globe.

But there's more to humanism than the study of language. Thanks especially to Erasmus, the movement was intimately associated with, well,

intimacy: not of the physical kind, though humanists did produce more than a few works on the subject of love. What I mean is the Erasmian emphasis on *spiritual* intimacy and the search for a personal encounter with the divine. As we saw when talking about the Inquisition, the reception of Erasmus in Spain was not unproblematic. Initially his works did enjoy popularity, especially the writings on religious ethics like his *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*. But the proximity of his thought to Protestantism, and above all his provocative scholarship on the Bible, eventually led to his being placed on the Index of forbidden authors. More conservative approaches to the Bible were preferred in Spain, as in a project to produce a multilingual edition of the Bible in Alcalá, called the Complutensian Polyglot (because Alcalá was called "Complutum" in Latin). The aforementioned Nebrija was involved at first, but broke with the editorial team because he felt their philological techniques were unserious, too beholden to the received Latin version and the medieval scholarly tradition.[12] As a self-styled "conqueror of barbarism (*debelador de la barberie*)," he wanted to uphold higher standards.

More adventurous, indeed dangerously so, was the aforementioned Luis de Léon, often called affectionately Fray ("Brother") Luis. Born in Cuenca in 1527, he gives us another example of the interpenetration of the humanist and scholastic worlds of Spain, because he taught at the University of Salamanca for thirty years, while also producing poetry, translations, and treatises on humanist themes. The latter include a work on the "perfect wife," which puts forward the familiar argument that, since women are far weaker than men, indeed "the weakest and most abject of all animals," it is all the more admirable when they achieve virtue.[13] As for his translations, these included works by Horace and Virgil (unimpeachably humanist) and a Spanish version, along with commentary, of that Biblical ode to intimacy of the more physical kind, the *Song of Songs*. Fray Luis invoked a whole philosophy of language to support his translation efforts, which homed in on the meaning of each individual word of the text, to the point that he tried to produce a translation that had exactly as many words as the original. A modern commentator says of the result that it "must be one of the least comprehensible things ever to have appeared in Spanish."[14] But the method fit with his broadly Aristotelian philosophy of language. Words in natural language are images of our thoughts, which are themselves images of things out in the world. Some words perform their imaging function more

adequately than others, and Hebrew words are the best, because this was the first human language.

This is where things got dangerous. In his writings and university lectures, Fray Luis repeatedly argued that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament gives us the best access to the revelation, even if it had been subject to textual corruption over time. This might seem pretty obvious. Surely with any book, we should prioritize reading the original language version? To the contrary, some felt that the so-called "vulgate" Latin version produced by Jerome in antiquity was preferable, insinuating that the Hebrew version had been deliberately modified by Jewish scholars over the ages, for instance in order to conceal prefigurings of the coming of Christ. Besides which, the Council of Trent had just declared the Latin version to be "authentic." Quite, said Fray Luis, but "the difficulty lies in the meaning of the word 'authentic.'"[15] He preferred a more Erasmian view, according to which the Vulgate was admitted to be the best Latin version available, yet far from perfect, meaning that one needed to return to the original Hebrew and Greek of the Old and New Testaments to get an improved version of the text. This position brought him into conflict with a colleague named Léon de Castro, a professor of Greek with more conservative philological attitudes. Then it brought Fray Luis into conflict with the Inquisition, an almost inevitable result given that he was a *converso* with daring theological views. He was arrested in 1572.

His work on the *Song of Songs* was charged with being too frank in its discussion of its erotic themes. An accuser said that in his hands, this part of the Bible might as well be a love letter by Ovid. Fray Luis responded that he had only been trying to capture the literal, not the spiritual, significance of the text. Yet the text did have such a further significance, or even many further layers of meaning. In fact, this is why he insisted on engaging with the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. No translation could convey the full import of the original, written as it was in a "language of few words and brief phrases, which are full of different meanings."[16] The inquisitors chastised him for this attitude, since he seemed after all to be questioning the "authenticity" of the Latin version. Fray Luis boldly responded, "that the Hebrew language is equivocal is not my fault. Let them blame God: He created it."[17] Elsewhere he admitted that there are no hard and fast rules for teasing out the full range of meanings present in the Biblical text: "let the mind and reflection of a spiritual man and the reading of good authors be

both guide and teacher in this art."[18] He was eventually set free, though only after several years in prison, and allowed to resume his teaching duties. The story has it that he began his first lecture back at the university with the words "as I was saying last time…"[19]

You can't help liking the guy, and that's before we get to his more literary works, of which a modern-day scholar has written, "no one should imagine himself to have mastered the Castilian idiom until he has been able to experience a pervasive and overpowering aesthetic pleasure in reading the elegant, restrained, solemn, classical, musical, harmonious, persuasive, serene, and intense prose of Fray Luis de Leon."[20] My high-school Spanish isn't even close to meeting that standard, I'm afraid, but I can still admire the ambition and philosophical themes in Fray Luis' poems, as well as his prose. Among the former, we have an ode written in honor of a blind musician named Salinas.[21] Fray Luis offers him the reassuring thought that physical eyesight grasps only "deceitful, fleeting beauty" and is worthless in comparison to the truer, inward "vision" of higher realities. Music of the kind produced by Salinas is like a "sea of sweetness," whose aesthetic power is such that it can convey us to those realities.

While this clearly evokes themes from Neoplatonism, Fray Luis was a deeply Christian author whose greatest prose work is entitled *On the Names of Christ*. Needless to say, this treatise is of a theological nature, but it rewards philosophical attention too. It is a classic humanist dialogue, a discussion held between three friends chatting in a bucolic setting. They move through twelve different ways of referring to Christ, a project that may remind us of the *Divine Names* of another Platonist author, the Pseudo-Dionysius. Like Dionysius, Fray Luis considers the names appropriate to created things as mere symbols of divine reality, so that in this context at least, all words are ultimately metaphorical. Like the music of the blind Salinas, the right sort of language brings us toward an encounter with divinity, "until the soul, subject completely to the sweetness, completely transported, and wholly lifted above herself and no longer contained within herself, breathes forth love and tenderness and melting away in her every part, and neither speaks nor understands anything save: light, love, life, supreme rest, infinite beauty, immense and sweetest good."[22] This sounds downright mystical, suggesting as it does that the soul could even achieve identity with God. Elsewhere in the work, though, Fray Luis pulls back

from that radical suggestion, saying carefully that the soul can "be transformed *almost* into God."[23]

He has good reason for caution, since like philological work on the Bible, an interest in mysticism was something that could get you into trouble with the Inquisition. The authorities worried about the spiritual excesses of such groups as the *alumbrados*, who I already mentioned when telling the story of Juan de Vergara and his brother (you'll remember them as the ones who used citrus juice as invisible ink, cunningly hoping to defeat the Inquisition using a tool of espionage familiar to your average seven-year-old). Yet some of the greatest treasures of Spain's "golden age" would be produced by spiritual and mystical authors like John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila. Fray Luis was involved in that story, too, because he was an editor of Teresa's works and also a defender of her thought. As far as he was concerned, anyone who opposed her must be possessed by the Devil.[24] Thus we can see him as a true Erasmian; his enthusiastic embrace of both the rhetorical and spiritual aspects of humanism seems pretty "Renaissance" to me.

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# THE DARK NIGHT RISES

## *Spanish Mysticism*

There's a persistent notion that in antiquity people never or hardly ever read silently.[1] Instead, books were for reading aloud. I like to imagine the ancient librarians at Alexandria constantly saying "sssh!" amidst the cacophany, and being cheerfully ignored by the hundreds of patrons as they recited the contents of their scrolls. But sadly this is a myth, in part based on a misreading of a passage in Augustine where he describes seeing his colleague Ambrose reading quietly and is apparently surprised. (In fact he is just concerned over Ambrose's state of mind.) True, given the scarcity of books and frequency of illiteracy, reading aloud for the benefit of others was presumably far more common back then. But there's plenty of evidence that the ancients read quietly, the way we do. Plotinus even mentions the all-too-familiar phenomenon of having your mind wander while your eyes are scanning down a page, so that you don't register what you are reading. Perhaps the reason people cherish the idea of silent reading as a more recent phenomenon is that it fits so well with other ideas we have about modernity. As we've seen, a new kind of individualism is widely thought to have emerged around the time of the Reformation, with Erasmus and the Protestants promoting a private, internal spirituality at the cost of public and communal religious ritual. Hamlet, that archetypal tragic hero of individualism, is even sometimes depicted brooding as he reads a book.

So it fits with our preconceptions that another debate about silence emerged some decades before Shakespeare wrote his play, in the context of sixteenth-century Spain. It concerned not Protestants but Catholics, and not reading but prayer. Early in the century, a reform movement among Franciscans encouraged what they called "recollection (*recogimiento*)." For historians of philosophy this sounds like an allusion to Plato's theory that apparent learning is in fact recollection of knowledge that is already in the soul. But the Franciscans meant something different by it: that the soul should withdraw into itself, away from worldly things, in order to discover God. One of the methods they encouraged was daily meditation, spending one and a half hours each day in what was called "mental prayer." This kind of silent devotional practice made some people nervous. Never reluctant about criticizing their Franciscan rivals, the Dominicans came out in favor of praying aloud. The Inquisition took an interest, too, because silent prayer was associated with the suspect group of so-called "illuminated ones" (*alumbrados*), a group I've already mentioned a couple of times.[2]

Critics of the *alumbrados* and their individualist approach worried that in solitude and silence, we become more vulnerable to suggestion and deception from the Devil. That's a threat that doesn't bother us much nowadays, at least outside of horror movies. But as vividly demonstrated by the contemporary outbreak of paranoia about witchcraft, demonic influence was a paramount concern in the sixteenth century. Like the practice of reading silently, this fear went back to antiquity, when the "desert fathers" who retreated to pray in the wilderness spoke of their struggles against demonic attack, along with more quotidian concerns like bodily desires, starvation, and good old-fashioned boredom. But you don't have to be a desert father or Spanish inquisitor to wonder about the stray thoughts that come to us unbidden, especially in quiet moments when we are trying to concentrate, be at peace, or just relax. Are these thoughts trustworthy insights? Mere figments of a mind that refuses to be quiet? Or worse still, the whisperings of sinister forces that lie hidden within us, or as these Christians worried, are trying to seduce us from without? In short, can you trust the workings of your own mind when it is left to its own devices?

Despite anxieties about the Devil and the Inquisition, a small literature of private spirituality started to emerge in Spain, initiated by figures like a Franciscan named Bernardino of Laredo. A pioneer in the theory of *recogimiento*, he proposed a range of techniques for pursuing mystical

insight, including silent prayer and meditation on such images as the crucifixion of Christ.[3] As if this were not provocative enough, he may have been of *converso* stock, and even if he wasn't, the fact that he studied medicine and associated with known *conversos* would have made him suspect. He managed to stay out of trouble by carefully appealing to influential church figures to approve his writings before publishing them. This pattern of seeking institutional permission to disseminate daring ideas would repeat itself with a more famous author, one who was influenced by Bernardino: Teresa of Ávila.

Like earlier female mystics, from Hildegard of Bingen in the twelfth century to Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe in the early fifteenth century, Teresa faced an obvious obstacle to disseminating her ideas: she was a woman. In her case this was a particular hindrance, since women were thought to be more vulnerable to influence from the Devil than men. In fact, Teresa was herself willing to admit that women are especially susceptible to such influence (*Life* §12, cf. 23).[4] This exemplifies a rhetorical strategy familiar from other women writers, paradoxically inviting the reader to trust her authority as a writer by modestly renouncing any claim to authority. But Teresa was also acknowledging what the reader would already be thinking. The *alumbrados* counted several women among their number, especially Isabel de la Cruz and María de Cazalla, both arrested by the Inquisition. Then there were celebrated cases of fraudulent female mystics, like Maria de la Visitación, a Lisbon nun who faked ecstasies and stigmata, and Magdalena de la Cruz, who claimed to receive visionary trances but then admitted she had not.[5] Teresa, too, reported having ecstatic visions and even experienced miraculous phenomena like spontaneous levitation. When Teresa claimed to have both her soul and her body raised up supernaturally, suspicions naturally arose too.

This provides the context for her most important work, an account of her experiences that was somewhat misleadingly labeled as an autobiography by its editor, none other than Fray Luis de Léon. She wrote it on command, so that it could be determined whether her experiences were sent by God or by the Devil. Teresa mentions this context of writing herself (§10), cleverly using it as a kind of excuse or permission to set her ideas before the reader, given that, as she knows all too well, she does not have the "authority to write" (§6).[6] Her self-presentation as an author is double-sided. On the one

hand she is absolutely convinced that she has indeed enjoyed a special connection to God, and says that her long "experience" with spiritual development gives her a degree of assurance that might be lacking to beginners (§15). At one point she says bluntly, "I have been through all this, and so I know it" (§13). At another point, she admits that the devil has tried to tempt her "three or four times," but she knew what was happening, because "anyone who has had a true vision from God will detect a false one almost immediately" (§28). At the same time, even in the same passages, she emphasizes that she also benefits from the guidance of (male) advisors, usually those who served as her confessors. Addressing one of them in the book, she instructs that anything "foolish" she writes should be struck out (§7) and elsewhere even says that the whole work should be destroyed if it conflicts with the teachings of the church (§10).

Above all, she is relentlessly and to all appearances sincerely humble. When he treated the book as her life story, Fray Luis was presumably thinking above all of the early parts, in which Teresa laments her formerly sinful ways, which were especially inexcusable given that she had the advantage of pious parents of high social standing. She was, for instance—prepare to be shocked by her youthful indiscretions—given to *reading chivalric romances* (§2). Born in Ávila in 1515, Teresa was yet another thinker with a *converso* background, since her grandfather had been brought before the Inquisition as a judaizer in 1485. But this doesn't seem to have been known when her potentially controversial works were disseminated. When she was fifteen, she was placed in an Augustinian convent, where she was by her own account not very good at the whole "being a nun" business, constantly distracted and overly interested in superficialities. After a brush with death so near that wax was put on her eyes in preparation for her burial (§5), she started to become the Teresa we meet in the *Life*, with a crucial step being a move to a Carmelite convent in 1536. The Carmelites are an order not unlike the Franciscans, which was founded in Jerusalem in the thirteenth century. In due course, inspired by the spiritual reform of the Franciscans, Teresa would lead reformist efforts among the Carmelites. Her faction was called "discalced," literally "unshod," in other words barefoot, a sign of their intense ascetic commitment. Teresa spent much of her mature life traveling around Spain founding new houses for the order that would observe rigorous rules of conduct. It has been observed that for women this movement played something like the role that the Jesuits played for men.[7]

In addition to recounting and justifying all this, the *Life* gives us some indication of Teresa's sources. As you might already have guessed, this story of early waywardness and developing piety is in part inspired by Augustine's *Confessions*.[8] Like Augustine's work, Teresa's is framed autobiographically but is really a depiction of the soul's journey toward an appropriate relationship with God. Another author who had a powerful effect on Teresa was the Franciscan friar Francisco de Osuna, whose writings reached Teresa thanks to her uncle. Osuna exemplifies the spiritualist and reformist movement I already described. He was in favor of silent prayer, recollection, and "self-abandonment (*dejamento*)." Particularly enticing for Teresa must have been Osuna's contrast between two kinds of theology. On the one hand there is the speculative science of those who are learned (the *letrados*), like university schoolmen. On the other hand there is the "mystic" or "hidden" theology that is pursued through virtue and the love of God. As a woman who was excluded from pursuing theology of the former kind, Teresa may have embraced Osuna's mystical path as the only way to pursue her heartfelt piety. In fact she almost says as much, remarking that books are only a "substitute" to be used by those who aren't yet capable of "mental prayer" (§4). And, in a passage that displays her typical combination of tenacious self-confidence and ostentatious modesty, Teresa says, "The safest thing is to follow the course that I do. If I did not, I should have no peace—not that it is right for us women to have peace, since we have no learning" (§26).

One reason that I take Teresa's frequent declarations of humility to be sincere is that she describes this attitude as the best defense against the Devil. His evil machinations are effective in those who trust in themselves, rather than in God and the church (§25). Thus humility is more useful than knowledge (§15), and individual striving less useful than trust in God. As she puts it, "all efforts are useless" without God's grace. On the other hand, she is convinced that God will grant His aid to all who honestly seek it, which puts some distance between her theology and what the Protestants were saying (§13). In keeping with this, her advice for achieving mystical union with God is primarily negative. Our aim should be to orient our will toward the divine and let the other powers of the soul slip into a kind of quiet inactivity. Failing that, they may carry out automatic and independent background activity that doesn't impinge upon the mystic's awareness,

something she compares to the motion of the shadow cast by a sundial (§20).

This is one of the richest seams in Teresa's book for those looking to unearth philosophical gold. She takes over Augustine's description of the soul as having, or even consisting of, three powers: will, memory, and intellect. What her long practice in meditation and silent prayer has enabled her to achieve is a kind of freedom from mental activity. She has managed to stop the restless flitting of her thought from one thing to another, like a moth drawn to different lights (§17, 18). The intellect in particular is "like a raving lunatic," dwelling incessantly on matters of total irrelevance (meaning anything other than God). But once these capacities are rendered inactive one can receive spiritual gifts unbidden, as if one's stomach were filled without eating. For example, one may suddenly understand theological matters like the Trinity, "so plain to the soul that it would boldly argue against any theologian in defence of these miraculous truths" (§27). Again, none of this is the soul's own doing. "No effort of ours makes us see more or less, or calls up or dispels a vision" (§29). Thus she is skeptical about the practice of meditating on images, as by mentally picturing Christ. That might be all right for beginners, but it is an indirect method that will inevitably be undermined by wandering attention (§9).

Teresa's emphasis on psychic inactivity may seem to show that her mystical theory is one of complete passivity. That could also be encouraged by the theme of "rapture," which many may associate with Teresa thanks to the famous depiction of her by the great Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini. It is based on a passage in her book, in which she describes being pierced through with a spear wielded by an angel. In the sculpture, Teresa's head is thrown back, her mouth open and eyes half closed; the artistic rendering brings out the obvious erotic connotations of the text. But this passage is not particularly representative; in fact it is the only such moment in the whole book. Despite her youthful enthusiasm for romance literature, reading Teresa is not at all like reading medieval mystics like Hadewijch, whose project was to borrow the themes of courtly love poetry for use in mystical writing. Then, too, understanding Teresa's mystical experience as a passive ravishment would ignore the crucial role of the third power of the soul, the will. Her goal is not just to turn the soul off, as it were, but to focus its whole attention on God. A more rationalist thinker, perhaps one of those schoolmen, might think of this in terms of intellectual contemplation. But

Teresa disagrees: “the intellect is of no value here” (§16). Her idea seems to be that the intellect is always grasping some idea or representation of something or other, whereas the will can have an immediate relationship with God, something she understands as a kind of “abiding peace.” Insofar as the intellect remains engaged at all, it is no longer reasoning but just enjoying God, like a spectator who doesn’t know where to look (§17).

Teresa is keenly aware that this could sound to some readers like an endorsement of the spiritualist approach of the *alumbrados*, so she addresses the problem directly (§22). In another use of humility to deflect criticism, she admits that she isn’t really sure what the *alumbrados* believe, but supposes that they are people devoted to spiritual progress. Which sounds fine to her: “they are spiritual men and learned, and know what they are saying.” Yet she cannot go along with their claims to escape embodied life completely. It is “madness” to try to be an angel already in this life, since “our thoughts must have something to support them.” In part thanks to such strategically moderate statements, Teresa managed to avoid the sort of outright condemnation that was visited upon the *alumbrados*. Admittedly, she was denounced to the Inquisition at least six times, which shows that she struck many as a problematic and provocative figure. Along with her claims about mystical and supernatural experiences, her emphasis on voluntary poverty was provocative. But the heaviest sanction taken against her was merely to prevent the circulation of her book. One of her confessors, the Dominican friar Domingo Bañez, examined it and pronounced it free of heresy, yet also at risk of corrupting some readers. “Visions,” he warned, “should always be feared, especially in women, who are more likely to believe they come from God and to see holiness in them.”[9] Teresa was disappointed; for all her humility, she did want others to benefit from her experiences. She responded by writing other books, including the *Way of Perfection*. It pointedly notes that women may actually have an advantage over the learned, who “don’t take so much notice of things that in themselves seem trivial.”[10]

Fortunately, Teresa didn’t necessarily need to find readers to win adherents. Her indefatigable efforts on behalf of the Carmelite reform movement took her all around Spain, and she encountered and inspired many who chose to follow her path. No one was more powerfully affected than the man who, after making that choice, took the name Juan de la Cruz —in English, John of the Cross.[11] Born in 1542, John enjoyed a humanist

education, possibly including courses in philosophy, at one of the newly founded Jesuit colleges. He became a Carmelite monk in 1563 and then studied in Salamanca, where he most definitely encountered philosophy. His momentous encounter with Teresa came only in 1567, after which he became a passionate advocate for her reform movement. His reward was to be put under house arrest by his fellow Carmelites in 1577, but after some months, he escaped out a window using bedsheets as a ladder! Such exploits aside, his contribution to Teresa's legacy was that his educational background enabled him to add a scholarly, and indeed scholastic, perspective to her brand of piety and mysticism. As we'll see (Chapter 62), the ideas of Thomas Aquinas were especially influential among Jesuits and other Catholic thinkers of the period, and that applies to John too. Thus, while he does apply an Augustinian psychology to analyze mystical union, as Teresa had done, he takes from Aquinas a "rationalist" position according to which the will follows the dictates of the intellect.[12]

But no one would mistake John for a typical scholastic. Among his extensive writings those that most stand out are a pair of treatises in which he comments at great length on a poem of his own authorship. Despite his prolixity, in neither case does his commentary get to the end of the poem. The first treatise is called the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, referring to the landmark in modern-day Israel that gave the Carmelite order its name. The second is called *The Dark Night*.[13] The image of the dark night already arises in the *Ascent*, where John explains that it represents the extinguishing of worldly desires (119). In one of several passages where he explicitly cites Aristotle and other philosophers, John adds that since "two contraries cannot exist in the same subject," the soul cannot simultaneously orient itself toward the natural and the supernatural (130; cf. 157, 174, 206). Echoing Teresa's warning against the overly spiritualizing *alumbrados*, John warns that it is not possible to eliminate all our desires, since we remain embodied, natural beings (142, 147). Those that are under our control, though, should be minimized and ultimately laid to rest. As John puts it in some famous lines, "to reach satisfaction in all, desire satisfaction in nothing. To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing. To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing, to come to the knowledge of all, desire the knowledge of nothing" (150).

Like Teresa, John offers a psychological account of how this happens, in terms of certain faculties or powers. Since, as just mentioned, the will and

memory follow the intellect, we should in the first instance focus on "darkening" the intellect (135), which John says is the work of faith (158). Faith in God is nothing other than the blinding of the rational soul, stripping away what we have learned through the senses; indeed, everything that is other than God (159, 163). This is a painful process, because it alienates the soul from everything it has habitually wanted and loved, something John describes as a kind of purging or "burning" away of sensory experience and desire. Just as a piece of wood is gradually destroyed and transformed into fire, so the human soul is gradually consumed with agonizing love and unified with God (416). Borrowing a metaphor also used by Teresa, John says that the soul is "dry" when it is in this transitional state, getting consolation neither from the world nor from God (377). To make matters worse, there is no guarantee of enjoying the union with God that is the mystical practitioner's only desire. It is simply a mystery that some are granted this vision, while others are not (380). While much of this is taken over from Teresa, albeit with added technical and terminological details, John seems to go beyond her in his commitment to negative theology.[14] Certainly this is consistent with her idea of shutting down the activity of intellect to make room for God. But John is more emphatic, explaining that in the mystical union we will "think nothing (*no pensar nada*)." In a handmade drawing of the symbolic ascent up the mountain that John included in his text, there is a trail marked with the Spanish word *nada*, "nothing," repeated over and over.[15] As a much later philosopher would put it: that whereof one cannot speak, one must be silent.

# 61

# BAND OF BROTHERS

## *The Jesuits*

What do the philosophers René Descartes, Voltaire, the Marquis de Condorcet, Denis Diderot, Giambattisto Vico, and Michel Foucault all have in common? It would be a hard question if the title of this chapter wasn't staring you in the face, but thanks to that hint perhaps you've already guessed the right answer, namely that they all attended educational institutions run by the Jesuits. The founding of schools was not part of the initial plan when Ignatius of Loyola and a handful of followers started the order, but it soon became central to their mission. The first "college" was founded in Messina in 1548, with the Roman College following soon after. Over the next couple of centuries, more than eight hundred schools would be founded all over the world, especially in Europe of course, but also in the Americas and Asia.[1] One of them was the College of La Flèche, where Descartes began his studies at the tender age of ten and remained for almost a decade.[2] In other words, his most formative years were spent studying with the Jesuits. He cut his teeth on Jesuit authors of the Counter-Reformation period, like Francisco de Toledo, Pedro de Fonseca, and the Aristotelian commentators of the Portuguese city of Coimbra. We think of Descartes as a pivotal figure who broke with the philosophy of the past, and he did complain about the conservative education he had received from the Jesuits. Yet in a letter he recommended La Flèche as the best place on earth to study philosophy. He also asserted the compatibility of his own thought

with the theological commitments of the Jesuits, stating that his own philosophy was "not new, but the oldest and most common of all," and in agreement with the principles of Aristotle. Which sounds pretty Jesuit to me.

In fact, I can't help being struck by a parallel between Ignatius of Loyola's writings and the most famous work of Descartes, which is of course his *Meditations*. That treatise is a paradigm of rationalist philosophy, in which even our most basic assumptions and beliefs are subjected to radical doubt, only to be restored through a sequence of argument that begins with "I think therefore I am" and ends by confirming our confidence in the reality of the external world. Loyola never wrote anything quite like this, but his writings do encourage an inward turn, an attempt to discover truth in the private recesses of the individual mind. Perhaps, then, Jesuit intellectual culture links Descartes not only to the scholastics of sixteenth-century Iberia, but also to the religious literature of that period, and the interiority that characterized the writings of Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Loyola himself.[3] Like John, Loyola drew on both scholasticism and spiritualism. He had a thorough education in Aristotelian philosophy, attending universities at Alcalá, Salamanca, and Paris from 1526 to 1535. But a heartfelt spirituality was already part of his thought, too, going back to 1521, when he read chivalric romances and religious texts while recuperating from a war wound. This turned him away from his previous path as an aristocratic knight, and toward becoming a so-called "soldier of Christ." If that phrasing calls to mind Erasmus' *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, Loyola's conversion experience has even more striking parallels with Teresa, who had a similar brush with death and similar reading habits. The results were similar, too. Like her, Loyola had mystical or at least intense contemplative experiences. He once told a colleague, "I was a moment ago higher than the sky," and would claim that he had enjoyed visions that conveyed to him directly all the truths about God to be found in Scripture.[4] As Teresa would do, Loyola wrote about his own life and offered detailed recommendations for the religious life.

Most significant here are the *Spiritual Exercises*, a kind of "how to" guide for those who want to make progress in the faith. It's more a text to be used than one to be read, as it lays out steps for private meditation and inward reflection, for example when facing difficult choices like whether to commit to a religious life over a worldly one. In fact, it may better be seen

as a "teacher's manual," insofar as the advice would be useful for someone offering spiritual direction to someone else,[5] as Teresa's various confessors did with her. If all goes well the process will turn the believer away from the created world and toward God. Loyola goes so far as to pray for the gift of "hatred" against the world. But in more moderate moments he sounds more like an ancient Stoic, recommending that we treat worldly things like wealth, honor, or longevity as matters of indifference. In other words, none of these things should be desired more than others. All that matters is obedience to the will of God. "Obedience" was indeed one of the Jesuits' favorite words. They were ostentatious in obeying both God and His representative on earth, the pope. All members of the order took a vow of obedience to him and were enjoined to show as little resistance to his instructions as a corpse would; if the church were to say that what seems white is in fact black, then a Jesuit should agree. This attitude of deference justifies the traditional association between the Jesuits and the Counter-Reformation. As modern-day scholar Silvia Mostaccio has put it, "the entire project of the Society as Ignatius and his first companions envisaged it is built around the constitutive tension between construction of the individual conscience and obedience to superiors."[6]

Not long after Loyola's death in 1556, he was already being hailed as Catholicism's answer to Martin Luther, and the Jesuits were indeed furious opponents of the Protestant movement. As the Jesuit Diego Laínez proclaimed, they would fervently embrace all that the Lutherans rejected—praying the rosary, confessing sins, saying prayers for the dead, and respecting the indulgences issued by the church.[7] But it would be an exaggeration to say that the Jesuits were founded specifically to combat the Reformation. Another historian of the order, John O'Malley, has pointed out that when the early group around Loyola took an oath to undertake a ministry abroad in 1534, "they set their eyes on Jerusalem, not Wittenberg."[8] Actually, the church hierarchy was at first suspicious of Loyola. His mystical, individualist, and interior approach to spirituality reminded them uncomfortably of the excesses of the *alumbrados*, an association that Loyola vigorously denied. Gradually, though, the Jesuits received the papacy's support. After the order was approved in 1540, an initial restriction was placed on the number of members, but this was lifted in 1543. Two years later they were freed from local oversight by bishops

and put directly under the authority of the pope. By the time of Loyola's death there were about one thousand members; by the end of the sixteenth century this would reach five thousand, and twenty-two thousand at the height of the order in 1640.[9] The low point would come in 1773, when the papacy would ban the order in response to widespread opposition to their political influence, among other factors.[10] But you can't keep a good brotherhood down. The Jesuits would be restored in 1814 and get back to their worldwide program of educating Christian youth.

If Loyola was, more or less literally, the patron saint of this movement as a whole, then the man who epitomized its global aspect was Francis Xavier. He opened up new territories for the order, especially in Asia, setting the stage for other Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci. Xavier arrived in India in 1542; he stopped in Kenya and Mozambique on the way, but the Jesuits really got going in Africa only later that decade. In India, Xavier extracted permission for the building of a church from the great Mughal emperor Akbar. He then moved on to Japan and was mightily impressed by what he found there, famously remarking that these were the best of the peoples yet discovered as the Europeans spread out across the globe. A similar assessment was provided by José de Acosta, another intrepid Jesuit who crossed the seas in the other direction. After years of asking to be sent to the Americas, he was finally allowed to go on mission there in 1571. Like de las Casas, he was convinced that the Amerindians could be won over to the true faith. Those who had found them mentally inadequate were themselves to blame, since "for a bad teacher, all disciples are stupid."[11]

Still, he happily conceded that the stage of civilization found in the Americas was far inferior to that in Europe, with the cultures of Asia in the middle. He offered an ingenious explanation for this supposed fact, in the context of trying to explain how human beings had wound up living in the Americas in the first place, given that all humans apart from the descendants of Noah should have been wiped out in the Biblical flood. They must, proposed Acosta, have come across a land bridge from Asia. The more advanced societies are those closer to the cradle of humanity, with civilization having degraded as it traveled from Europe and the Middle East, across Asia, and finally to the Americas. Acosta saw this as good news when it came to the Amerindians. Their inferiority was simply a matter of socialization, not an irreversible feature of their bodies or the places where they lived. As Acosta put it, "the incapacity of their minds, the

ferocity of their customs, does not derive from natural inclination or from the effect of climate, so much as from a prolonged education and customs like those of beast."[12]

Alongside the objectionable hierarchical thinking, this account is remarkable for its naturalistic, one might say "scientific," strategy of explanation. And that fits with Acosta's output more generally. He wrote a *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, which we already discussed in Chapter 57. There we looked at him in the context of the empirical research that went along with global exploration. He is certainly part of that story, but no less does he fit into the story of the Jesuits. The *History* was intended to supplement his writings on missionary work, and his approach to nature came with pious caveats. It is God who allows humankind to make new discoveries when the time comes, a prime example being the emergence of compass technology when it was foreordained that European Christians should begin to spread their religion to the "New World." Reflecting on contemporary attempts to explain the behavior of the compass needle, Acosta was skeptical: "there is not a philosopher or cosmographer who knows it."[13] As we saw, Acosta did hope to find causal explanations and even criticized authors who didn't make the effort to do so, yet he believed that human knowledge is severely limited and is achieved only when God sees fit.

More generally, it would be fair to say that the Jesuits tended to be conservative when it came to updating Aristotelian science in the light of new findings. The order's regulations stipulated that at the colleges, "the doctrine of Aristotle should be followed in logic, natural and moral philosophy, and metaphysics, as also the other liberal arts," though instructors should also warn students about Aristotelian teachings that conflicted with those of the church.[14] One member of the order put the general policy this way: "one should not be drawn to new opinions—that is, those which one has discovered—but one should adhere to the old and generally accepted opinions."[15] Particularly well known is the order's rejection of the new Copernican astronomy, which seems to go hand in hand with the church's condemnation of that theory in 1616. But before we give the Jesuits too hard a time about this, we should bear in mind that it took a long while for astronomers around Europe, regardless of religious domination, to warm up to the heliocentric system. Nor were Jesuits simply

uninterested in heliocentrism, or incapable of engaging with it scientifically.[16] Exploiting their far-flung network of missions, they made astronomical observations on a global scale, as when they recorded the sighting of the same comet in 1618 all over the world, including in India, Vietnam, and China. Rather than adhering to the ancient system of Aristotle and Ptolemy, with the Earth in the center being orbited by the visible heavenly bodies, some Jesuits agreed with the theory of Tycho Brahe, which had the Earth unmoving and the Sun going around it, but some planets then moving around the Sun. The Jesuit Cristoforo Borri even accepted the idea of a fluid heaven, which as we saw was postulated to explain how comets could move unimpeded through the realm of the planets. Borri was the exception that proved the Jesuits' conservative rules, since after this daring assertion he was disciplined by the order and sent packing to Asia.

When it came to pure mathematics, the Jesuits were somewhat more innovative. The leading figure here was Christopher Clavius, who established his name by working on calendar reform, something that of course involved considerable astronomical competence.[17] Clavius taught at Rome and set up an academy there for the study of mathematics. In the usual mode of humanizing scholasticism, they commented on classical texts, but also produced textbooks for the various mathematical subdisciplines. What Clavius did *not* do, or not much at least, was to investigate applied mathematical arts like mechanics. This may have been due to methodological scruples: he saw mathematics as a study of purely abstract quantities, not of quantities as realized in concrete things like falling bodies or projectiles. That makes for an obvious contrast with Galileo, who did such pioneering work on floating and falling bodies. Yet it has also been argued that Galileo's early writings (especially some notebooks which were not published at the time) show the impact of notes he read based on lectures by Jesuits.[18]

So the Jesuits were no slouches when it came to science. But it was in ethics that they made their most indelible mark on the history of philosophy. I have in mind the controversial doctrine called "mental reservation."[19] It was an idea they developed while pursuing the practice you may associate with the Jesuits more than anything else, namely "casuistry." As the name implies, casuistry is moral reasoning about specific "cases," which might

often be hypothetical but could have direct application, as when facing the moral quandaries that could arise in the context of taking confession. Books were written to offer guidance in such matters, like Francisco de Toledo's *Instruction for Priests*. Jesuit confessors were advised to spend an hour a day considering different cases and how they should be handled. This marks an interesting moment in the history of ethics. Certainly, earlier moral philosophers had occasionally considered difficult cases, genuine ethical dilemmas where it was simply unclear what was right. But Aristotle and many subsequent authors were mostly interested in topics like the nature of virtue and how political regimes could encourage virtue. Indeed, Aristotle himself has almost nothing to say about moral dilemmas. He seems to have thought that there is little the moral philosopher can say about hard cases; the virtuous person will simply know what to do. It's arguably only with the Jesuits and their science of casuistry that dilemmas take center stage among topics of moral theorizing. They saw that even trained moral reasoners with good intentions may be genuinely torn when they are faced with clashing ethical imperatives. Today's moral philosophers are, in this respect, heirs of the Jesuits. They like to think about things like whether you should divert a trolley to a different track to save fifty people who are about to be run over, at the cost of killing the ten people in the trolley.

The clash that led the Jesuits to devise the idea of mental reservation was more realistic than that. They were worried about situations where there is a good moral reason not to tell the truth. Of course, the dilemma arises because there is also a general moral rule against lying. Imagine that a priest has learned in confessional that a parishioner committed murder and is then asked about it by the police. He is bound by the seal of the confession, so cannot say the man is guilty; but neither would he want to say that the man is innocent since that would be a lie. (You might wonder, can't he just refuse to speak at all? Well yes, but we can assume that the police would take this to mean that the parishioner confessed the crime to the priest, making the dilemma inescapable.) What to do? The advice some Jesuits gave was to say aloud, "he did not tell me," and then continue the sentence *but only in the mind*, "…at least, not in such a way that I could report it to you." Another, all-too-real context in which mental reservation became relevant was in Protestant countries, especially England, which Jesuits were infiltrating to support the cause of Catholics. This was a covert operation, something that required a good deal of deception. Here the

strategy of mental reservation came in handy. Thus the Jesuit propagandist Robert Persons said that a Catholic hiding a priest might say to the authorities, "there is no priest in my house," and then add mentally "…who I am bound to report to you."[20] A similar, real-life case was that of an English Catholic who was being interrogated and said he was not a priest, and then thought to himself: "…of Apollo."

When Jesuits who were put on trial in England were found to have used this technique, which was also called "dissimulation," it became infamous. It helped the word "casuistry" itself to acquire the connotation of sneaky moral reasoning used to rationalize wicked actions. At the time, mental reservation was subjected to the inevitable insult that it seemed rather "Machiavellian." But philosophically speaking, mental reservation is well worth our attention. It is clearly not just lying and pretending to yourself that you are not lying. Nor should it be confused with the idea that we are allowed to lie in some circumstances, committing a smaller evil to avoid a larger one. That solution was actually proposed at the time as an alternative to mental reservation, as was the equally straightforward idea that if an evil inquisitor is questioning you, you are under no obligation to tell the truth anyway. Mental reservation is more sophisticated, and more interesting. The proposal is that an assertion is normally just whatever one says out loud. But it can be made up of more than one part, and not every part has to be spoken. A nice example that was given was this: a dying man needs to indicate who should inherit his property, and says "and to the church I leave one thousand…" Then his voice gives out, such is his weakened state. So he points to some gold coins, completing the intended meaning.[21] In the same way, a mental reservation or caveat can be part of what is stated. Now according to a standard definition given by the Jesuit Francisco de Toledo, a lie is "a false statement intended to deceive," or better, a statement intended to deceive that the speaker *believes* to be false. When the Catholic said he was not a priest and then thought "…of Apollo," that second "part" makes the statement true. It may be intended to deceive, but it is not a lie.

This is frightfully clever, but it raises obvious worries. After all, with truths like this, who needs lies? Suppose you and I are making a business agreement and I say, "I will pay you on time," with the mental caveat "…if I feel like it" or "…if I happen to win the lottery." If people started to do this regularly then the whole practice of making contracts would collapse. For this reason, some defenders of mental reservation stipulated that it

should not be used in contexts where utterances are binding, as in promises. But that seems rather ad hoc. More generally the doctrine was open to the charge that it would undermine the very purpose of language, which is to communicate. Pointing at a coin is a public act and suffices for communication, but mental additions are private and communicate nothing. So they cannot be "part" of language. That seems to me a good criticism. But it should be borne in mind that the Jesuits who defended dissimulation were not saying that anyone can add mental reservations to anything they say. The intent is still to deceive, and deception can be sinful or not, depending on whether the victim has it coming to them. Perhaps we could think of using mental reservation to deceive an unjust interrogator as being akin to committing an act of violence in self-defense. In light of this, mental reservation could be sinful; but it depends on the situation, whereas lying is *always* sinful.

The way the Jesuits approached this issue is characteristic, in that they treated it fundamentally as a question about the philosophy of language. Technical issues of logic and language had long been a mainstay of scholastic philosophy, and the Jesuits were thoroughly trained in that tradition. They looked back to one scholastic thinker in particular: Thomas Aquinas. While it was not absolutely forbidden to depart from his teachings, he was considered a "special teacher," already picked out for particular reverence by Loyola himself. In due course the order would declare that instructors at the Jesuit schools "must follow absolutely the doctrine of Saint Thomas in scholastic theology, and they must consider him one of us," and that "one is never to talk of St. Thomas without honoring him, following him willingly whenever possible; one is to depart from him with reverence and reluctance."[22] Nor were the Jesuits the only Catholic intellectuals looking to Aquinas in this period. While never less than a major figure, he was now coming to occupy the central role among medieval philosophers that he still has today.

# 62

# NOT DOUBTING THOMAS

## *The Aquinas Revival*

The University of Notre Dame, where I got my PhD, is known for (among other things) college football, the gleaming golden dome that adorns its main building, and its Catholic identity, which in philosophical terms means that Notre Dame has always been a home for teaching and research devoted to Thomas Aquinas, the most canonical philosopher of the Catholic faith. These things have stayed with me in later life. I'm very invested in football, albeit the more globally relevant version that Americans call "soccer." After extensive hair loss, I am now adorned with a gleaming dome of my very own. And I've often had the chance to teach and think about Aquinas. Indeed, if you work in medieval philosophy, you simply have to engage with Aquinas, since he is generally recognized as the most important Latin scholastic theologian and philosopher. Yet that recognition came only somewhat later. During and shortly after his own lifetime, he was certainly seen as significant, but more as one of several leading thinkers of the period, alongside Albert the Great, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus. He was also controversial, given his devotion to Aristotle and attachment to certain philosophical doctrines that were unpopular at the time. Indeed, he's thought to have been one of the targets of the condemnations handed down by the Parisian church authorities in 1277.

How, then, did he ascend to his present, exalted status? The answer has something to do with his order, the Dominicans, and something to do with

the Counter-Reformation.[1] After lobbying from the Dominicans, Aquinas was canonized in 1323, about fifty years after his death in 1274. Shortly thereafter he was absolved of any charges connected to the Paris condemnation. This still didn't entirely free him from his controversial status. Adherents of Scotus and of the nominalist philosophy pursued by Ockham, Buridan, and others criticized Aquinas on a range of topics. This provoked the Dominican John Capreolus, who taught at Paris around the turn of the fifteenth century, into writing a massive *Defense* of Thomist thought, mounting a counter-criticism against its scholastic rivals. About a hundred years later the same agenda was pursued at Paris by another Dominican, Peter of Crockaert, a student of John Mair's who defected from nominalism to Thomism and took up the project of editing Aquinas' *summa*.

Crockaert is indirectly important for the story I'll be telling over the next few chapters, because he was the teacher of Francisco de Vitoria, the leading figure of the School of Salamanca in Spain. When Vitoria came back from Paris to teach at Salamanca, he lectured on the basis of Crockaert's new edition of Aquinas. Eventually the *Summa* became the standard textbook for theology faculties across the Iberian peninsula. This explains why the major Jesuit philosopher Gabriel Vásquez, who studied under Domingo Bañez at Alcalá, went on to write a four-volume commentary on Aquinas that appeared between 1598 and 1615. In Italy yet another Dominican, Dominic of Flanders, was the leading exponent of Thomism in the late fifteenth century. Like Aquinas he wrote commentaries on Aristotle, and like Capreolus he resolutely defended Thomism against its rivals. Then there was Cardinal Cajetan, Italy's greatest exponent of Aquinas' thought; we'll be meeting him shortly.

Thomism was also flourishing in Germany, thanks initially to Henry of Gorkum at Cologne; he wrote a popular textbook based on Aquinas' masterwork, the *Summa theologiae*.[2] By the end of the fifteenth century Leipzig was emerging as a particular center for Thomism in Germany, something we can illustrate with the career of Magnus Hundt.[3] He was the vice-chancellor at the University of Leipzig in 1504 to 1505, and we have some records about the sort of intellectual activities he oversaw. There was, of course, the standard fare of disputed questions, sometimes along surprisingly entertaining lines, for, "why does the bear become fat when it sleeps, when with humans it's the reverse?" But the students at Leipzig

were also served up heaping portions of Thomist thought. Capreolus' writings were used as a basis for teaching, with a course of lectures extending over no fewer than nine years! In Hundt's own writings, especially a treatise *On the Dignity of the Human* from 1501, we can see that humanism was influencing German Thomism. Even the title is, of course, reminiscent of Pico della Mirandola's famous oration on the same topic. Hundt's anthropology was deeply optimistic. He believed that the study of philosophy in particular could help humans to restore the nature that has been corrupted by sin. Given that he was writing almost two decades before Luther would come along, this can't be understood as a response to the Reformation. Rather, it illustrates the sort of Catholic thinking that Luther would shortly be attacking with such vigor.

When the Reformation did erupt onto the scene, Aquinas would be a primary inspiration, even *the* primary inspiration, for the Catholic response. The theologians at the Council of Trent drew extensively on the *Summa* and the Pope declared Aquinas a "doctor of the Church" in 1567, shortly after the close of the council. So we might point to this period, the mid-sixteenth century, as the moment when Thomism surged ahead of its rivals. From now on the thought of Aquinas would increasingly be seen as especially authoritative, with obvious effects on the historiography of medieval philosophy. But this just shifts our focus to a different question: why did the Counter-Reformation look to him above all others? As we've just seen, Thomism had established a presence throughout the Catholic world, and one of the most prominent orders, the Dominicans, had taken him as their leading light for a good two centuries already. A more speculative, but I think plausible, explanation would be the subtle but unmistakable relevance of nominalism and voluntarism to Luther's thought. Aquinas wrote before the rise of nominalism and defended a rather intellectualist position in explaining human action, meaning that he gave the leading role to reason rather than the will. In these respects Thomism may have seemed to offer an especially good contrast to Lutheran philosophy and theology.

And then there were the Jesuits. We just saw that they considered Aquinas a "special teacher" whose views should be maintained "whenever possible." As that wording suggests, Jesuit philosophers did not follow Aquinas uncritically. Even the Dominican Vitoria explicitly taught his students not to accept Aquinas' views before thinking things over themselves (though he presumably expected them to discover that they

usually agreed). We're going to be seeing that the Spanish scholastics were innovative thinkers, and they built on or diverged from Aquinas regarding a wide variety of topics.[4] As we'll also be seeing, philosophers who took themselves to be agreeing with Aquinas often disagreed with one another, just as happened with Aristotle and other authorities. Still, Counter-Reformation scholastics knew, no less than a successful Notre Dame football coach, that the best offense is a good defense, and for the sake of tackling Protestantism there was no getting around Aquinas.

The most central exegete of this most central Catholic authority was (of course) a Dominican. His name was Thomas de Vio, but he is generally known as "Cajetan," this based on the name "Gaetanus," indicating that he hailed from the city of Gaeta in the Kingdom of Naples. He was born in 1469, meaning that he was a mature and well-established thinker by the time Luther came along. He had already written important treatises on Thomist thought, for example a commentary on Aquinas' short but important metaphysical work *On Being and Essence*, and a treatise on the concept of analogy which I'll be discussing below. Starting in 1507 Cajetan embarked on a massive commentary devoted to the *Summa*, a daunting undertaking but a predictable one too, given that the Dominicans had established the *Summa* as their main teaching text for theology. (It replaced the long-traditional choice, Peter Lombard's *Sentences*; Aquinas himself had commented on that work.) Cajetan's commentary on the *Summa* has been somewhat unkindly described as "a turgid leviathan in which the scholastic method is pushed to the extreme. Where Thomas makes one distinction, it is typical for Cajetan to make four further distinctions of his own."[5] Yet those distinctions allow him to make Aquinas' teachings more precise and to answer open questions left by his great Dominican forebear.

Alongside these scholarly projects Cajetan served the church as a diplomat, representing the Pope in Germany and Hungary. He was appointed to reach a view on Henry VIII's request for divorce, and on Scriptural grounds advised that it should not be granted. An even more famous exploit was an encounter with Luther himself, in the city of Augsburg. This was in 1518, so right around the time that Luther was becoming a threat. Cajetan debated him on topics like the sacraments and indulgences and wrote against Lutheranism until his death in 1534. His approach was fairly moderate, as shown by the fact that he chastised some of his fellow Catholics for throwing around accusations of heresy against

the Lutherans. Expressing a conciliatory attitude that stands in contrast to the later activities of the Inquisition, Cajetan warned, "we must not strike out too much…they are errors, not heresies."[6]

Cajetan devoted careful thought to the epistemological status, as well as the content, of Chirstian belief. He took from Aquinas the idea that theology is a science based on first principles that we accept through faith, for instance that God is a Trinity, or that Christ was the Incarnation of God. All the conclusions reached by theologians are contained implicitly or "virtually" in these principles; they just need to be worked out. As a theologian himself, Cajetan naturally thinks this is a worthwhile enterprise, but it is not absolutely necessary. The everyday believer who just accepts the core principles of faith has done enough to be a full member of the church and eligible for salvation. In a sense even such a believer is a "theologian" but only in that they accept the first principles that are the basis for explicit theology, the sort of thing practiced at the universities.[7] Obviously this is quite far from the Lutheran notion of a "priesthood of all believers." Regardless whether the believer is a university schoolman or a simple peasant, belief through faith is not "certain" in the way that first principles of philosophy might be. Though Christians may be extremely confident that God is a Trinity of three Persons, they do not accept this truth in the same way that they accept self-evident first principles, like the principle that triangles have three sides. Still, Cajetan does think that the Christian is accepting the principles by something more than an act of will. They have good reasons for these beliefs, and the voluntary act of faith is led by these reasons. Which means, in his scholastic terminology, that faith is an *intellectual* virtue.[8] This nicely illustrates the aforementioned Thomist tendency to give reason or intellect primacy over the will.

As for those reasons that support faith, a point Cajetan makes on this score clearly distances him from Luther. Church authority, like Scripture itself, is an *infallible* source of religious precepts. That applies to the traditional teachings of the church and also to pronouncements made by sitting popes. For Cajetan the pope is a kind of prophet, who cannot err when he is under divine influence.[9] As this already indicates, Cajetan was a stout defender of papal supremacy. He had no time for the movement known as "conciliarism," which held that church doctrine can be settled by general councils of church officials representing the whole community of

believers.[10] Cajetan was so opposed to conciliarism that he forbade Dominicans to attend a church council at Pisa in 1511. For him the pope is comparable to a monarch wielding supreme authority. Actually, papal authority is for him more supreme in the church than would be the power of a king in the secular realm, because he allows that something like a conciliarist view *could* be appropriate in worldly affairs. Since the king derives his authority from his subjects, he should be bound by their will. By contrast, the pope does not get his legitimacy from the believers of the church community; he represents Christ Himself. For Cajetan, this move is just intended to highlight the unique nature of papal authority, but the idea of a "secular conciliarism" will be taken up and developed further in the political theories of Vitoria and other scholastics.

These points about faith and church authority reveal Cajetan as an archetypal figure of the Counter-Reformation. He is no less paradigmatic when it comes to the careful engagement of Renaissance Thomists with the thought of their greatest hero. It would be worth picking out pretty well any theme from Aquinas and looking at what Cajetan has to say about it, but I'm going to talk about the aspect of his philosophy that is best studied: his theory of analogy. That it is so well studied is in part thanks to Joshua Hochschild, who as it happens is a friend of mine dating back to our time together as graduate students at Notre Dame! (I have to mention his wife, Paige Hochschild, too, who has written an excellent book on Augustine's theory of memory.) His doctoral thesis, which later appeared as a book, is about Cajetan on analogy.[11] The fundamental question here is how words apply to God. If you say something like "God is good," are you using the word "good" in just the same sense as you would if you said, "Notre Dame has a good football team"? God would presumably enjoy a greater, even infinite, goodness that would not be possible for anything in the created world to attain. But the significance of the word "good" could still be the same in both cases. This was the view of Aquinas' fellow leading medieval thinker Duns Scotus, who argued that terms are applied to God and creatures "univocally," that is, with one and the same meaning. Alternatively, you might think that since God is utterly transcendent and incomparable to worldly things, words must be applied to Him in a completely different, or "equivocal," sense. There would be no overlap between the meaning of "good" when we say, "God is good" and "the Notre

Dame football team is good" (notwithstanding the presence at Notre Dame of a mural called the "touchdown Jesus").

Aquinas' position is usually presented as a compromise between these two interpretations. He says that there is an "analogy" between words like "good," "wise," and "powerful" when applied to creatures and when applied to God. God is goodness itself, wisdom itself, and power itself, whereas creatures are denominated by these terms in a merely derivative sense. The question is how exactly we are to understand this "analogical" relationship. It is a pressing concern for Cajetan, not just for the obvious reason that we'd like to know what is going on when we talk about God, but also because the viability of theology as a science turns on having a cogent answer to the question. After all, theologians are in the business of offering arguments about God's nature, and these arguments often involve transferring features of created things to God. Here's an example: "every perfection is in God; wisdom is a perfection; therefore wisdom is in God."[12] In the second premise the word "wisdom" is presumably being used in the way applicable to a wise human, since it's by thinking about wise humans that we know wisdom to be a perfection. If the word "wisdom" is then used in a completely different sense in the conclusion ("therefore wisdom is in God"), the argument is invalid. It would be like arguing, "the fisherman is fishing from the bank; a bank is a financial institution; therefore the fisherman is fishing from a financial institution." To avoid this problem of outright equivocation we need to say that "wisdom" in some sense has the same meaning in the premises and the conclusion of the argument, and likewise for other attributes of God used in theology. On the other hand, to safeguard divine transcendence (and to avoid agreeing with Scotus instead of Aquinas!), Cajetan does not want to say that it has exactly the same meaning.

What Cajetan needs, then, is an interpretation according to which the two uses of the analogous word are "somehow the same, somehow different."[13] That's how Cajetan puts it, but I find Hochschild's explanation more illuminating: "analogy is similar to univocation (where word, concept, and thing are common) and unlike equivocation (where only the word is common)."[14] So "wisdom" when applied first to creatures and then to God would not be like "bank" applied to a riverbank and then to a financial institution, words that just happen to sound the same. They must have a meaning in common. This meaning is what Cajetan calls an "imperfect

concept." We have an imprecise or, as he says, "confused" idea of wisdom that covers both the wisdom of God and the wisdom of a wise human. The reason we can have this imperfect bridging concept is that there is a certain likeness between the two cases of wisdom, even if God's wisdom is also very unlike human wisdom (for example, by being infinite). And since we are familiar with a likeness of God's wisdom, namely cases of human wisdom, we can grasp divine wisdom, even if not fully.

A striking feature of Cajetan's treatment here is that it is so focused on the meaning of words. Indeed, as Hochschild stresses, he is thinking of the whole problem not as belonging to metaphysics but as falling under logic, in this case the part of logic we would call philosophy of language. Still, the theory has metaphysical application, as we can see by thinking about a paradigm case of the analogy theory: what happens when we use the word "being" for God and for created things? As in the other cases, God will not be just any being, but "being itself (*esse ipsum*)." Indeed, Cajetan thinks he can *prove* that all things come from being itself, as follows.[15] The existing things around us have natures that do not include their own being. Take a golden dome: by its very nature it must be gold and dome-shaped; but it does not need to exist or have being. If it does exist, it must get its being from something else, for instance the architects. If in turn that something else is like the golden dome—architects don't have their being intrinsically either—then we again have to ask how they got to exist. And so on. The only way to stop this regress, this chain of causes that provide being to their effects, is to posit something that has being intrinsically. But that could only be "being itself," the cause of all other cases of being, which we can identify with God. Using scholastic terminology that goes back to Avicenna, Cajetan says that in creatures "essence" is distinct from "being" or "existence," whereas God's essence is just the same as His being. This means that there is only an imperfect likeness between created and divine being. The two are related through an analogy, as we saw with wisdom. All this is put forward by Cajetan as an interpretation of Aquinas, of course, but also as a rebuttal of metaphysical views held by followers of Scotus, for example the holder of the chair of Scotist philosophy at Padua, Antonius Trombetta.[16]

Which is a helpful reminder that not all Catholic schoolmen in the Renaissance period were embracing Thomist positions. The theory of analogy had been subject to controversy back in the thirteenth century when

Aquinas put it forth, and it remained controversial in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Nor was that the only position associated with Aquinas that provoked opposition. His least widely accepted doctrine in his own time was perhaps his idea that each substance has only a single form. Let's take as our example Thomas Aquinas himself. Most scholastics thought that in addition to having the form that is his soul, Thomas would have had several other substantial forms, for example the form of body. This would explain why his body remained a body when his soul departed in 1274. It was *already* a body before he died, and just persisted as such through the change that was his death. Aquinas disagreed. He thought that each substance has only one form, which in the case of a plant, an animal, or a human like himself, would be its soul. This form somehow "includes" all lower forms, which are present in it only virtually or potentially.

A later Thomist from Spain, the aforementioned Domingo Bañez, devoted about fifteen thousand words to discussing and defending Aquinas' "unity of form" theory in his commentary on Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption*.[17] Here he draws extensively on other commentators and Thomist thinkers, especially Cajetan. Against the idea that there is really a form of body present in a human substance, as well as a soul or human form, Bañez says that the extended dimensionality we associate with matter is only a mental abstraction, not a real feature of things out in the world. In other words, there is nothing out there making the human's body be a body apart from the human's soul; when we distinguish between humanity and corporeality, that is just an operation of the mind. (As we'll be seeing, this kind of move is very common in Spanish scholasticism.) In a related debate, Bañez took up the question of whether all human souls are of the same type.[18] Given the unity of form theory, you might think that variations between humans can only be explained with reference to their human forms, that is, their souls. After all, there are no other, lower-level forms that a Thomist can invoke. Suppose, for instance, that we are trying to explain why some people are quicker at learning than others. A form pluralist—like pretty much anyone other than Aquinas and his followers—could say that the soul's learning activity is being impeded by lower-level forms that belong to unruly bodily elements. By contrast, a Thomist would seem obligated to say that variations between one human and another are due to the humans' different souls, these being the only forms present in the

substances. And indeed, Aquinas suggests in one passage of his works that better bodies have better souls.

From this Cajetan inferred that souls are unequal to one another. At some point while the fetus is developing, it takes on a soul of the type appropriate to its physical constitution. Cleverer people just get souls that are more potentially intelligent. This provoked a furious response from the Jesuit thinker Francisco de Toledo, who taught at Salamanca. He said that Cajetan's interpretation had implications that are "completely stupid and ridiculous." It is just obvious that every human soul must be of the same type, since we are all members of the same species. This annoyed Bañez no end. It was impertinent of de Toledo to attack the great Cajetan in this way, and in fact as far as Bañez could see, both positions had merit. One thing we can learn from these discussions is that philosophers who took themselves to be followers of Aquinas were not only apt to argue against nominalists or Scotists; they were also apt to argue with one another. Bañez explicitly speaks of "Thomists," clearly thinking of them as members of a movement or philosophical school. But he also acknowledges that there are differences of opinion between them. These might be traced back to diverging interpretations of Aquinas, or might be a matter of philosophical disagreement. Counter-Reformation thinkers, especially the Dominicans, were so committed to Aquinas' authority and so accustomed to presenting their own views in the context of commenting on Aquinas' writings, that it can be hard to tell the difference.

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# SECONDARY SCHOOLS

## *Iberian Scholasticism*

In my day job at the LMU in Munich, I often hold lectures in German for large groups of students. I always warn them at the beginning of the semester that my approach to the German language will be somewhat creative, and that in the unlikely event they are bored by the philosophy, they can keep themselves engaged by enjoying my random assignment of grammatical genders to nouns. But apart from that my teaching method is pretty traditional. In an age of PowerPoint presentations and hybrid learning environments, I stick with the good old one-page handout. My thinking here is that if the students have a written outline of the lecture's main points, they won't have to take so many notes, so they can focus better on the ideas. Just how old-fashioned is this approach? Well, the same strategy was devised in the middle of the sixteenth century. In 1561 the Jesuit Jerónimo Nadal proposed creating a series of texts that would relieve students from the need to copy out what their lecturers were saying. This would help them to engage more actively and also ensure greater unity of instruction.[1]

When this plan came to fruition, the result was a lot more impressive than a few one-page handouts. Indeed, it was among the most remarkable publishing ventures of early modern philosophy, the "Coimbra Commentaries," named for the Portuguese city of Coimbra where Jesuits taught in the College of Arts. The course of lectures that served as the basis of the commentaries was also offered at the University of Évora, run by the

Jesuits since its founding in 1551. The commentaries appeared in eight volumes from 1592 to 1606 and were devoted to the works of Aristotle. That's right: fourteen centuries after the first great Aristotelian commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisias, a millennium after the commentaries of the school of Ammonius in Alexandria, six hundred years after the Baghdad School of Christian commentators who wrote in Arabic, and three hundred years after the exegetical works of Thomas Aquinas, philosophers were *still* trying to explain what Aristotle was on about. But with a difference. This being the sixteenth century, the Coimbra commentators took a humanist approach to the text. They dealt extensively with philological questions, even though the original Greek text was published along with the main text and commentary only in some foreign editions. It doesn't sound like a project that would produce bestsellers, but the commentaries would appear in more than one hundred editions and have great resonance in the history of philosophy. To give just one particularly eyebrow-raising (or perhaps beard-stroking) example, Karl Marx consulted them when he was working on his doctoral dissertation.

The Coimbra project was the fruit of seeds planted on the Iberian peninsula over several generations. We have here yet another marriage between humanism and scholasticism, comparable to similar partnerships around Europe in this period. I've already told you about Iberian humanism and on the scholastic side we've had the foregoing discussion of the Jesuits and the Thomist revival. But there's still some background to fill in, which will prepare us to delve into what is sometimes called the "second scholastic."[2] It would make sense to start with Cardinal Jiménez Cisneros, who was the confessor to Queen Isabel and a leader of the Franciscan reform movement. He founded the University of Alcalá at the turn of the sixteenth century, establishing chairs for Scotist, nominalist, and Thomist philosophy. He was also a driving force behind humanist efforts devoted to the Bible. With its combination of scholasticism and humanism, Alcalá was an important intellectual center. Ignatius of Loyola studied there, as did such scholastic thinkers as Domingo de Soto and Gabriel Vásquez; on the teaching staff over the coming generations were impressive names like Domingo Bañez and Francisco Suárez.

But an even more important city for our story is Salamanca. As I have mentioned, the university there was home to the Dominican theologian Francisco de Vitoria. Having himself studied in Paris, where he learned

about Aquinas at the feet of Peter Crockaert, Vitoria returned to Spain. There he became the founding father of a group we call the "School of Salamanca," which is celebrated especially for its contributions to legal and political theory. This group also included de Soto, Melchor Cano, and Luis de Molina, who studied in Salamanca and then taught at Coimbra and Évora. As we'll be seeing, the intellectual achievements of this group were not inconsiderable, but they'd be worth mentioning just for the role they played in the formation of Francisco Suárez. Originally from Grenada, Suárez was another Jesuit, who studied law and theology at Salamanca. He taught at various cities in Spain, including Alcalá and Salamanca, before being called to the Jesuit college in Rome, then returning to Salamanca. Finally, he moved to Coimbra, where he taught from 1597 until his retirement in 1613. I apologize for the welter of Iberian scholastics with similar names, teaching at more or less the same cities. If you remember only one of them, it should be Suárez, who has been hailed both as a culminating figure of scholastic philosophy and as anticipating features of early modern philosophy.

Suárez's itinerary, moving back and forth between Spain, Italy, and Portugal, exemplifies a broader pattern. Just as Vitoria had imported the scholastic agenda of Paris to Salamanca, the scholastic agenda of Salamanca was exported across Europe and beyond.[3] Since Jesuits were so involved in the Portuguese colonial project, their ideas found their way to Asia. I mentioned also that Matteo Ricci studied in Coimbra before his exploits in China, and there were efforts to translate the Coimbra commentaries and Suárez's metaphysical writings into Chinese. On the other side of the world, students from Salamanca were active in the Spanish empire. Domingo de Salazar, who studied with Vitoria, de Soto, and Cano, traveled to Mexico and became the first Bishop of Manila in the Philippines. A close colleague of Vitoria's, Alonso de la Vera Cruz, went to Mexico with sixty crates of books and scientific instruments. Then there was Antonio Rubio, a Jesuit who spent time in Mexico and after his return to Spain in 1599, published a textbook called *Logica mexicana*. As a recent book on the global impact of Salamanca remarks, the city "was a hub of knowledge that continuously absorbed knowledge from other areas and integrated it into its own discussions and deliberations, thus adding to the transformation of knowledge."[4]

Closer to home, the ambitious undertakings at Coimbra also showed the impact of Salamanca. A Dominican who studied there, Martín de Ledesma, taught at Coimbra from 1540 to 1574, holding the chair that would later be occupied by Suárez. Connections like this created the perfect environment for the writing of those commentaries. But a perfect environment doesn't guarantee perfect execution. The project was at first led by Pedro da Fonseca, who has been called "the Portuguese Aristotle" for his efforts.[5] Carrying on the tradition of Italian humanists like Argyropoulos and Bessarion, Fonseca sought to bring together refined humanist Latin with Aristotelian philosophy. He would eventually produce a four-volume commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but under his leadership the project as a whole moved rather slowly. Nowadays a university might hire a consulting firm to get things back on track. But back in the sixteenth century they were more sensible, so instead a more efficient philosopher was brought in. This was Manuel de Góis, who especially prioritized natural philosophy.[6] Ever since the days of those scholars in late antique Alexandria, logic had always been the first topic of the curriculum, but the Coimbra team only got around to the logical writings of Aristotle (under the title of "dialectic") in the eighth and final volume. Instead, it was his *Physics* that appeared first in the series. The *Metaphysics* remained a striking absence, perhaps because of Fonseca's own separate commentary on the work.

That left most of the volumes, which in total stretch over three thousand pages, to deal with natural philosophy, including the theory of soul, since the commentators adhered to the traditional assignment of "psychology" to natural philosophy. The volume devoted to Aristotle's *On the Soul* was supplemented by a free-standing treatise showing, on Aristotelian grounds, that the soul can survive without the body—by now a doctrine explicitly endorsed by the church. But with that exception, the Coimbra commentaries focused heavily on the physical aspects of natural philosophy. This might have something to do with the wider context.[7] The university of Coimbra also had a medical faculty, and some of the students taking philosophy there would have been working toward a degree in medicine. Their interests could explain why the commentators did things like adding a discussion of the anatomy of the eye based on Vesalius when talking about Aristotle's remarks on the power of sight, even though Aristotle himself had almost nothing to say about the visual organ. A study devoted to these medical

aspects of the commentaries concludes that "in Jesuit commentaries, the aim was not just to interpret Aristotle's work, but also to set down a coordinate system for discussions that were of no immediate use for the understanding of the ancient source, but catered to specific systematic or encyclopaedic concerns."[8]

Which is not to say that religious motivations played no role. Explaining the importance of logic, Fonseca remarked that training in dialectic could help people to avoid falling in with the Lutherans, "the heretics of our time."[9] These Iberian schoolmen did not consider themselves to be professional scholars of Aristotelian thought. For one thing, the ideas of Aristotle were not to be considered sacrosanct. Though Fonseca did say that no one could make progress in philosophy without coming to grips with this ancient thinker, he also stated that one should not swear by the writings of any one leading author, or neglect what one could find in lesser-known authors.[10] For another thing (and speaking of texts that are "sacrosanct") these scholastics also studied, taught, and wrote about theology. This is why their greatest medieval authority was the theologian Aquinas and not, say, the arts master John Buridan, who made great show of restricting himself to logic and natural philosophy. Capturing the Counter-Reformation agenda nicely, de Soto drew a close connection between "contempt for scholastic method and the swarm of heretical errors."[11] Notwithstanding the influence of humanist techniques in Iberian scholasticism, he also associated "knowledge of languages" with these two threats, alluding to the destabilizing effects of Biblical philology practiced by Erasmus and his imitators. Likewise, Bañez insisted on the reliability of the received Latin translation of the Bible, saying that the supposedly "original" Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testament had in fact been subject to extensive corruption over the ages. Given the vagaries of textual transmission, Christians would do better to place their trust in church authority than in the study of classical languages.

So, just as with Aquinas, Scotus, or Ockham, it would be a distortion to present Vitoria or Suárez as if they were secular-minded philosophers. Yet they did write extensively on what we might call "purely philosophical" topics. As I say, we'll be looking at several of these in depth, but I want to go through some interrelated issues now just to give you a flavor. Let's first look at how they handled that central debate of medieval scholasticism, the

problem of universals.[12] The challenge had been to explain what accounts for the similarity of things of the same type, or things that share a common feature. Take, for example, the handouts that I distribute each week to my students. Each of them is printed on white paper. Is there just one thing, "whiteness," that is present in every handout? It may seem so, given that it would be natural to say that "all the handouts are *the same* color." On the other hand, it's hard to see how just a single whiteness could be in all the handouts, since it would have to be in more than one place at a time.

The "realists" were those who thought the universal *white* or *whiteness* is something real out in the world, which is somehow found in many things. Of the medieval thinkers who took up this issue, Scotus was the one most known for adopting a realist position, though his realism was of a characteristically nuanced kind.[13] Those who, like Ockham and Buridan, said "no" and denied reality to universals, are often called "nominalists," since they suggested that the universal is just a name and that everything out in the real world is a particular. In other words, what really exists is this handout, that handout, that other handout, and so on, and we use the word "white" for all of them just to register that they look like each other. Alternatively, one could say that universals are mere "concepts" in the mind. For scholastic thinkers, a chief disadvantage of these positions was Aristotle's insistence that knowledge is universal in scope. A color scientist doesn't know about this white thing or that white thing, but grasps universal truths about whiteness in general. That was a lot easier to explain for realists, since they could say that scientific knowledge targets a universal or "common" nature that is part of reality. Nominalists and conceptualists, by contrast, were in the awkward position of having to explain why science is universal in character even though reality isn't.

What's wanted here, then, is a theory that makes whiteness and other universals real enough to be objects of knowledge, without being so real that they violate our intuition that everything out in the world is an individual. This is exactly what Suárez aimed to provide. In so doing he was reacting to other scholastic thinkers, from Aquinas and Scotus right down to more recent schoolmen from Iberia. To make things relatively simple, let's just contrast him to his fellow Coimbra professor, Pedro da Fonseca. Fonseca had the idea of applying Aristotle's famous distinction between potentiality and actuality to the problem of universals. There would be a "common" whiteness that does not exist fully until it is realized

in individual white things, like my handouts. At this stage, whiteness would be merely "potential." Then it would become actual as the particular whiteness in a particular white thing. Clever, right? Not according to Suárez. Though he is too polite to mention Fonseca by name, he targets this theory for refutation, insisting that there can be no "unity" prior to the unity of particulars. He thus accepts the anti-realist view that everything real is individual. Nonetheless, we can identify what he calls "formal unity" between, say, the whiteness in this handout and in that handout. The common whiteness, the one that is formally identical in all the handouts, is nothing but the individual cases of whiteness when they are considered by our reason as being one and the same. This is fundamentally a conceptualist solution: the universal or common nature is simply in the mind. But Suárez emphasizes that our minds are, as it were, really onto something when they classify all the cases of whiteness as having formal unity. The handouts are genuinely similar to one another, which gives us a real basis for the judgment that they share something in common.

This account of universal or common features allows Suárez to solve to his own satisfaction another long-standing difficulty in scholasticism: the problem of individuation. Here we are asking not what accounts for the same whiteness being present in all the handouts, but what accounts for the difference between one handout and another. If I bring a stack of one hundred handouts to a class, then there are a hundred very similar individual pieces of paper in the stack, so similar that you wouldn't be able to tell them apart until the students scribble further notes on them. Something must explain why we have a hundred different things here despite their similarity, or "formal unity." A study of this question in later scholasticism praises Suárez in the following terms: his "philosophical effort in the area of individuation can be seen only as far superior to anything accomplished before him. And it is not clear that we can find subsequent writers who have surpassed it."[14]

Suárez begins from the basic observation that the individual is just what cannot be shared. It is "incommunicable," like "this human" as opposed to just "human." If there are other things of the same type, like other handouts that have the same white color, then the individual is distinct from them. But a unique thing like the Sun or Moon can also be an individual, even though it isn't "distinct" from anything else of the same kind. Now comes the key insight. As we just saw when talking about the problem of

universals, individuality is *prior* to formal unity, to universal or common features. In other words, it's not like we begin with whiteness in general and then have to divide it up to get it into a hundred different handouts. Rather, we start with a hundred different handouts and then notice that each of them is white. Some nominalists, like Ockham, thought it was just a brute, unexplained fact that each handout is an individual. Suárez, though, says that each handout is a combination of an individual form and the individual matter it is made of; the matter and form, by contrast, have nothing further that individuates them. In the case of something that has no matter, like an angel, the thing is just an individual in its own right without any further explanation.

This is, indeed, a persuasive response to our problem, if one can call it a "response." In a sense it just comes down to denying that there was any problem after all, because metaphysics must take individuals to be fundamental, rather than starting with something else and trying to explain where individuals might come from. But that leads to another difficulty. According to Aristotelian orthodoxy, the human mind does not grasp particulars. It works only with universal concepts, which we abstract from our experiences of particulars. We engage with particulars using lower powers of the soul, like sensation, imagination, and memory. A major development in Iberian scholasticism was to deny this doctrine, despite the fact that it was endorsed by that leading authority Thomas Aquinas.[15] A number of thinkers of the time, especially amongst the Jesuits, said that the mind can directly grasp individual things just like the senses can. Examples include Francisco of Toledo, Juan Maldonado, and of course Suárez. As we've seen, the intellect does also notice the similarity between particulars, thereby grasping their "formal unity." But since that unity is nothing other than the individual unity of the particular things considered from a different angle, it makes perfect sense that the mind must also be grasping the particulars. Of course, Suárez insists that he has Aristotle on his side here. When Aristotle states that the mind grasps universals, he must just mean that the mind grasps both particulars *and* universals, whereas sensation can grasp only particulars.[16] But this was still a decisive move away from the Aristotelian tradition as it came down to the thinkers of the second scholastic; and there are plenty of other innovations still to come.

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# COULD'VE, WOULD'VE, SHOULD'VE

## *Free Will in the Second Scholastic*

Some philosophers have, despite having produced extensive and nuanced bodies of work, become associated above all with just one phrase. Examples that leap to mind are Descartes ("I think therefore I am"), Leibniz ("the best of all possible worlds"), and Hannah Arendt ("the banality of evil"). From the sixteenth century the best example might be Luis de Molina. As we'll be seeing, he was a versatile thinker who, among other things, made important contributions on the subject of legal philosophy. But to speak of "Molinism" is to refer to just one of his ideas, which goes by the catchphrase "middle knowledge." This idea and the theory of which it was a part triggered a major controversy, one that gripped Catholic intellectuals around the turn of the seventeenth century. It is still what he is known for today.[1] Perhaps this is not so inappropriate, because he first became a Jesuit after a spiritual conversion brought on in part by meditating on the example of Mary Magdalen, who turned away from a life of sin to follow Christ.[2] So, though he did explore a wide range of topics in the scholasticism of the day, as a professor in Coimbra, Évora, and finally Madrid, it makes sense that philosophical work on the topic of sin and free will should make his name.

The problem he was trying to solve is a familiar one. How can it be that human actions are free, if God already knows in advance what we will do? Luther referred to this as a "thunderbolt" that undermines a belief in

human's unconstrained freedom, and the issue goes back at least as far as Aristotle, who posed a similar problem in his logical work *On Interpretation*. His discussion there is somewhat different, because it concerns *truths* about the future, not *knowledge* about the future: if it is already true now that Arsenal will win the next league title, doesn't that mean it is already necessary that it will happen? If so, then there's not much point in the other teams trying to compete, since they would only be attempting to forestall the inevitable. Posing the problem in this way, so that it is about mere truth and not knowledge, allows for an easy escape. We can just say that there is no truth of the matter about contingent future events until they happen. In fact, Aristotle is often read as having proposed this solution. But once you bring God's foreknowledge into the picture, that escape is no longer available. If He knows everything before it happens, then He must know from eternity that Arsenal will win the next title, so it must already be true that they will. After all, knowledge is always about things that are true.

There were attempts to solve the problem of divine foreknowledge long before Luther and Molina came along. Especially prominent is Boethius, whose *Consolation of Philosophy* offers a lengthy treatment. His solution appeals to God's eternal grasp of all events, which appear to Him as if they were present. Boethius influenced Thomas Aquinas, for whom God just "sees" from eternity what will happen, including what human agents will do. It's not entirely clear how Aquinas could square this with his own conviction that our actions are not *making* God know anything,[3] the way that an Arsenal striker could make you see him score a goal by scoring it. After all, nothing should be able to exert causal influence on God. Another solution came from Ockham. According to him, God's knowledge is subject to the same kind of "counterfactual" logic as contingent events. Suppose that Arsenal is going to win the league. In that case God knows now, and has always known, that they will do so. Still, some other team—Liverpool, for instance—*could* win the league, even though they won't. If they were to win it, then God's knowledge would have been different. He would always have known that Liverpool would win.

Molina doesn't like this response. To his mind, Ockham's solution is tantamount to saying that it is possible to change the past (57). After all, if Liverpool have the power to win the league even though they won't, then they must have the power to alter God's eternal knowledge retrospectively.

Molina has no hesitation in dismissing Ockham's subtle reasoning in this way, but when it comes to Aquinas he needs to tread more carefully. As we know, Jesuits like Molina preferred to have Aquinas on their side when they could, and were reluctant to criticize him openly. Indeed, Molina explicitly says that he would rather have Aquinas "as a patron than as an adversary" (114). Yet he can't accept the idea that God's knowledge of future events consists in His grasping them all at once in a single eternal vision. This would leave no possibility that things go differently, which is for Molina an absolute requirement. For him there can be no freedom unless there is a genuine possibility of acting differently; and if we are not free in acting as we do, it is unjust for God to reward and punish us for our actions.

Somehow, then, Molina needs to explain how God can know with certainty what is going to happen in the future, without making everything happen necessarily. This point is most crucial for human actions, since, as I just said, moral responsibility requires having alternative possibilities, but it also would apply to anything else that happens in the world without being necessary.[4] Molina gives examples like a rope being stretched until it breaks: while there is a cause for its breaking, it may be a matter of indifference where exactly along the rope the break will occur. In such a case God will know just where it will break, without it being impossible for the rope to break in a different spot. Now, there seem to be two ways for God to know anything. Molina calls these kinds of knowledge "natural" and "free," respectively. "Natural" knowledge concerns things that cannot be otherwise, for instance God's knowledge that humans are animals or that squares have four sides. God knows these things "in advance" of making any choices of His own about what He will create or do. Not in the literal sense that God at one time has natural knowledge, and then at some later time starts to make decisions. Rather, the point is that God's natural knowledge is conceptually prior to any of His freely taken decisions or actions (175). Those decisions and actions are the object of God's "free" knowledge. For example, when God decided He would perform a miracle by allowing Leicester City to win the league in 2016, He knew that this would happen by free knowledge.

Now we are ready for Molina's big idea, which is that freely performed human actions cannot be known by God either naturally or freely. Let's consider a sinful action you might or might not decide to perform. Suppose, for instance, that you're chatting to your boss and she casually mentions

that she hated a philosophy class she took in college. Trying to stay on her good side, you are tempted to say something like, "oh I *know*, philosophy is such a waste of time!" This would be a sinful act. For one thing you'd be lying, and for another, you'd be missing the opportunity to improve your boss's life by pointing her to an excellent book series on the history of philosophy that might give her a more enlightened attitude. If God knows "naturally" that you will lie to your boss, then your doing so is an immutable fact written into the nature of things, like squares' having four sides. Obviously this can't be the case. If, on the other hand, God chooses for you what you will do, then your action is an object of His "free" knowledge. But in that case, too, your action would be necessitated: you would be nothing more than God's puppet. Instead, concludes Molina, there must be a special, third kind of knowledge that is in the "middle" between being natural and being free (168). It is like natural knowledge in that God has the knowledge before He makes any decisions. But it is like free knowledge in that it concerns events that are contingent, that is, where it is genuinely possible for the event to occur or not to occur.

This "middle" knowledge consists in God's knowing not what we *will* do, but knowing in advance what we *would* do in any given situation. Here is how Molina puts the point: contingent things "are represented not only as being possible but also as being future. Not absolutely future, but future under the condition and on the hypothesis that God should decide to create this or that order of things and causes with these or those circumstances" (175). For example, God might know that you would be willing to lie to your boss, but only if you are in line for a big promotion. More generally, God knows what every one of His creatures would do in every situation they could be put in. Furthermore, He knows this "in advance" of knowing which situations will actually occur. That would be a matter for His free knowledge. It's only once He actually decides to create the universe, and chooses which things will happen in it, that it becomes clear whether or not you would join in the philosophy-bashing.

Often philosophers talk about Molina's solution by speaking of "counterfactuals of freedom." But strictly speaking, middle knowledge is not about what is *counter*-factual any more than it is about what is factual. Instead, it is about what would be factual under certain circumstances. Just from His middle knowledge, God does not yet know whether those circumstances will arise. Likewise, when explaining Molina's theory

philosophers naturally slip into using Leibniz's language of "possible worlds," as in that famous phrase "best of all possible worlds." But as we can see from the passage I just quoted, Molina instead talks about what would happen under a certain "hypothesis" (see also e.g. 254). He seems to be thinking much smaller, not in terms of the entire history of a given world that might or might not exist, but in terms of specific possible scenarios that might or might not come about, and what a specific person would do in them. This makes sense, because he is really just trying to get at the sense in which the person is indeed free. How does the theory of middle knowledge secure this result? Well, when God has middle knowledge, He is not knowing about something that *has* to happen. Indeed, He has infinite knowledge about things that will not wind up happening, since there is an infinity of possible scenarios that do not arise (just think about the fact that the hypothetical promotion could have come with a raise of 1000 dollars, 1001 dollars, 1002 dollars, and so on). Instead, middle knowledge is about things that *could* happen and *would* happen in the right circumstances. So, if human actions fall under middle knowledge, they are contingent and not necessary. Exactly the result we were looking for, right?

Well, maybe. We might worry that God is putting His finger on the scales in a way that does undermine human freedom. God is, after all, deciding which "hypothesis" is indeed going to become actual. God can ensure that you do something sinful by putting you in a scenario where He knows you will sin; equally, He can ensure that you remain innocent by putting you in a different scenario, one where you do not sin. So, in our example, if He wants you to sin He sees to it that you'll be up for a promotion at the moment when you are tempted to lie to your boss, whereas if He takes pity on you then He will let you speak truth to power by reducing your career advancement prospects. Doesn't that undermine your freedom? No, says Molina, because in either scenario it is you who decides what to do. Admittedly, it might seem unfair for God to put some people in circumstances where they commit horrendous sins, when they would not have done so otherwise. Consider the case of someone who decides to participate in a genocide committed by a murderous government. Under different political circumstances they would never have had the chance to engage in mass murder and so could not have elected to do so. Here Molina just admits that it is a mystery why God chooses to expose some people to temptations to which they will succumb, and why He spares others the

choice. The point is that they are indeed still choosing, which is enough to preserve human free will and thus human moral responsibility.

At the time, some of Molina's readers had the opposite worry: that he was not giving God *enough* influence over human actions. Remember, in this period theologians were caught between a rock and a hard place. The rock was determinism, depriving humans of meaningful free will entirely. Catholic theologians wanted to avoid this at costs because it seemed to them to be the view of the Protestants. The hard place was Pelagianism, the view that it is in the power of humans to avoid sin within God's help. This too was to be avoided at all costs, because ever since Augustine, Pelagianism had been deemed doctrinally unacceptable. With his theory of middle freedom, Molina could seem to be agreeing with the Pelagians, since he held that humans freely choose whether to be good or not, and that God knows in advance which they would choose depending on the circumstances. To escape this consequence, Molina says that God's grace is needed in each case where a human chooses rightly, but that grace does not determine the action. Rather, God and the human cooperate in every righteous act and every successful resisting of temptation. Recycling an example from Aristotle, he compares this to two people cooperating to pull a heavy boat onshore. Furthermore, thanks to divine mercy, grace is always on offer to those who make the effort to choose rightly, so in effect the people who choose rightly are guaranteed to act rightly, because God is always going to help out. We are like weaklings who, whenever we need to pull a boat or pick up a heavy box, find that a powerfully built friend steps in to help manage the load. This doesn't mean that any human could in theory avoid sin completely, as the Pelagians said. Even if it is possible to refrain from sin on every occasion, it isn't possible to refrain from sin on *all* occasions.[5] This might seem unconvincing. What would stop me from getting things right all the time if nothing is stopping me from getting things right at each time? But I think Molina's point is a cogent one. Consider that a darts player, even a bad one, has a chance of getting a bullseye on each throw; yet no darts player can get a bullseye on every single throw they ever take.

So this is a well thought-out theory that anticipates and responds to various objections. Under different circumstances, perhaps it would have become the unanimous position of Catholic thinkers. But the thing about circumstances is that they are never different. (As a philosopher friend of

mine remarked recently, “I don’t know about you, but I’ve never been in a counterfactual situation.”) Molina faced strenuous opposition, just as God knew he would. It was led by Domingo Bañez, whose name may sound familiar because he was one of the confessors of Teresa of Ávila, whom we saw giving guarded approval to her writings. He was less favorable about Molina and argued that God should be given a more substantive role in facilitating human action.[6] For Bañez, humans have the “possibility” to act but only in the sense of having a potentiality or power for action, one that God must actualize. In fact, no creature can ever do anything, or “operate” in the technical vocabulary favored by the scholastics, without God working in them. This does allow for humans to be free but only insofar as they have powers to “operate” in one way or another, powers that are activated by divine influence. It almost sounds as if we are instruments in God’s hands, so that our contribution to action is merely that God uses us to accomplish those actions. This obviously would not be enough for Molina, who wants humans to have an independent ability to choose between contrary possibilities.

Bañez went on the attack, too, polemicizing against the theory of middle knowledge and subjecting it to a barrage of criticisms.[7] One objection is that Molina falls into the trap I mentioned above in reference to Aquinas: it is apparently the human choice that causes God to know what the human would do, which means that humans are exercising some degree of influence over God, clearly an unacceptable conclusion. Another complaint was that Molina hadn’t really solved the problem of divine foreknowledge after all. If we are worried that an action is necessary because God knows about it in advance, then it should be just as problematic to say that God knows what we would do in a given situation. The foreknowledge guarantees that we will indeed act in just the way that God foreknows once the situation occurs. But perhaps the most interesting objection made by Bañez, one with far-reaching implications for the philosophy of contingency and counterfactuals, is this: on what grounds does God know what we “would” do in a situation that will never arise? After all, the choice will never wind up being made, so the human agent won’t in fact be deciding how things go. Nor is God deciding what we would do in the counterfactual situation; that is Molina’s whole point. So what exactly makes it true that you would, for instance, lie to your boss if the temptation to do so were sufficiently strong?

To my mind this is more a good question than a good objection. We are constantly saying things like "if I hadn't lived in London before moving to Munich, I would never have become an Arsenal fan." Such statements do seem to be true, even if it is hard to say what makes them true. Indeed, this remains a difficult problem for philosophers today. As I say, they tend to approach it using the language of "possible worlds," and might solve the problem as follows. There is an infinity of possible worlds where I never lived in London, and in some of those worlds I wound up being an Arsenal fan nonetheless. So we must understand my statement to mean something like, "in the possible worlds that are most similar to this one, apart from the fact in those worlds I didn't live in London, I did not become an Arsenal fan." This raises all kinds of further questions, for instance what makes one possible world "similar" to another one. So even if Molina had possessed the technical notion of "possible worlds" and had said this to Bañez, Bañez would have been able to press him with further objections. Which is to say that in the possible worlds most like this one, that's exactly what did happen.

In the actual world, the dispute between Bañez and Molina quickly escalated.[8] Bañez was backed by members of his order, the Dominicans, not least because they took his anti-Molinist view to be closer to that of the great Dominican theologian Aquinas. Molina's fellow Jesuits rose to his defense and built on his solution. Fellow brothers like Suárez added the notion that God bestows a special grace on those who seek to do good, which is "congruent" to their individual needs and natures. This is why grace guarantees the success of the attempt. Of course, this didn't appease the Dominicans. The Portuguese Inquisition got involved and Bañez advised them to condemn Molina's teaching. The issue then came to the attention of Pope Clement VIII, who in 1597 convened a commission that censured Molina's work, but also allowed for further discussion. The dispute was still going on when Molina died in 1600, but even that didn't calm things down. Finally, in 1607 another pope, Paul V, announced that both positions were tolerable, and that the papacy would in due course hand down a verdict as to which one was correct. That verdict still hasn't come, so God only knows what the answer will be.

# 65

# BETTER THAN NOTHING

## *Metaphysics in the Second Scholastic*

What does a metaphysician have in common with a British police inspector? When they show up to work, both demand to know, "What's all this then?" Metaphysics is, after all, the study of quite literally everything, from aardvarks to zygotes. It's tempting to say that it is the study of everything that *exists*, but even this might be too narrow. Philosophers are often very interested in things that do *not* exist, especially things that might exist but don't. If it is true that my nonexistent sister is a female human, then it is the metaphysician who could tell us why it is true. In fact, if it isn't true, it would be up to the metaphysician to explain that also. Such speculations might seem idle, but as we just saw with the case of Molina and his effort to accommodate human freedom and moral responsibility through the theory of middle knowledge, unrealized possibilities turn out to be very significant for those of us who do wind up existing. And mere possibilities aren't the only nonactual things that might interest the metaphysician. It would be worth thinking about impossible things too, like round squares or giraffes that can fly. Then there is that category of the nonexistent that we might call "absence" or "privation." If you are at the zoo and eagerly approach the giraffe enclosure, only to find it empty, it's the lack of a giraffe that explains your crushing disappointment.

One philosopher who did not confine his efforts to the really existent was Francisco Suárez. His *Metaphysical Disputations*, a masterpiece of late scholasticism, was published at the close of the sixteenth century in 1597. It

spans across fifty-four individual disputations, each of which explores a metaphysical topic at considerable length and with exquisite subtlety.[1] Following Aristotle, Suárez assumes that metaphysics is the study of being, but he also takes up things that don't really have being, creations of the mind that are conceived only in relation to genuine being. For example, once you have the notion of a giraffe you can combine it with the concept of flying, or you can consider the absence of a giraffe. These conceptions are based on real things, but do not correspond to anything that exists in reality. Thus Suárez calls them "beings of reason (*entia rationis*)." By excluding them from the official scope of metaphysics, and by discussing them nonetheless in order to clarify their relationship to genuine being, Suárez is following Pedro da Fonseca.[2] Fonseca was a major influence on his metaphysics and supplied him with material he worked into the *Disputations*. Like Fonseca, Suárez thought that there is a general concept of being that covers everything that exists, including God. But this is a vague or, in technical scholastic terminology, "confused" notion. Suárez makes being an "analogical" concept that can be divided: God is an infinite and primary being, while everything else is limited and has being in a lesser sense.[3] This obviously will remind us of Thomas Aquinas' theory of analogy and its defense by later Thomists like Cajetan. But Suárez is actually critical of the Thomists, whom he considers to have emphasized too much the gulf between divine and created being. We need to hold onto the idea that there is indeed a single idea of being that applies to both, which is simply the idea of something's existing.

Like Molina, Suárez thinks that God knows plenty about beings even before He makes any of them exist.[4] Of course He grasps that they are "apt to exist," in other words that they could possibly exist; otherwise He wouldn't know that He could create them. But beyond this, He also knows such facts as "giraffes are animals" and "squares cannot be round." To use Aristotelian jargon again, God eternally and antecedently to creation knows all the "essential truths." One way to understand this is that God knows what terms mean, before there is anything to which the terms apply. He knows what "giraffe" means and thereby knows that giraffes cannot fly but can lope gracefully across the savannah. Another way to understand this will remind us more of Molina: God understands that if He *were* to create giraffes, they *would* be creatures that can lope gracefully but not fly. This is

just what Molina called "natural knowledge" in God. What God knows naturally is not "up to" Him. Thus it was never an option for Him to create flying giraffes. The ability to fly is simply incompatible with the essence of giraffe, so flying giraffes are just as impossible as round squares and God cannot make them exist. But the essences do depend on Him in some sense; Suárez says that they "flow from the very being of God."

It may seem strange that we, with our little minds, can conjure up flying giraffes whereas God could not. But this is precisely the difference between real beings and beings of reason.[5] A being of reason is simply a mental construct, and there are more relaxed rules about what can be conceived than about what can be real. Suárez calls them "shadows of beings," because they depend on real beings the way a shadow depends on the body that throws the shadow. When you take a real being and combine it with another, incompatible real being you get a being of reason that is impossible, like a flying giraffe. When you take a real being and negate it you get an absence or privation, like the lack of the giraffe you were hoping to find at the zoo. These beings of reason are not even "apt to exist," like possible entities are. So it's mighty puzzling that we can make true statements about them. One might, for instance, rightly distinguish between the lack of a giraffe and the lack of a rhinoceros, as one does implicitly when saying, "the fact that there was no rhinoceros at the zoo didn't bother me nearly as much as the fact that there was no giraffe." Or one can distinguish between impossible things. A flying giraffe is not, say, a flying ox (believe it or not, the flying ox is an example that Suárez uses himself). Beings of reason even seem to have causal powers, as when the lack of the giraffe causes disappointment, or when a person's blindness leads to the sharpening of their other senses. How can this be? The answer is that we often treat beings of reason *as if* they were real, in order to say things about them. Thus one way that Suárez defines the being of reason is that it is something that "is thought as being, but has no entity in itself."[6]

If I may trouble you with one more bit of technical terminology, Suárez and the other scholastics say that beings of reason have merely "objective" reality. This is pretty confusing for us nowadays, because we tend to use "objective" to mean something that is real outside the mind, as when we say, "giraffes are objectively beautiful, even if some people think they aren't." The scholastics mean just the reverse. For them something is "objective" if it is only an object of the mind. Thus Suárez also defines the

being of reason as something that exists "objectively."[7] This way of thinking about the beings of reason was unconvincing to a somewhat later thinker from Salamanca, Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza. Working in the seventeenth century, he wrote a very popular textbook on metaphysics that drew on Suárez but also criticized him on some points, including this one. Hurtado was reluctant to posit a whole realm of mental or "objective" being just because we sometimes talk about absences or impossibilities. Instead, he argued that they were merely cases of the mind making a mistake, perhaps a deliberate one. You can think up a flying giraffe or talk about round squares if you want to, but that is of no more metaphysical weight than saying that two plus two equals five.

I just mentioned, though, that beings of reason seem to be able to influence the world. Absences and imaginary things, including fictional beings, affect real being all the time. In addition to the examples I've already mentioned, consider that another impossible flying animal, a large-eared elephant Dumbo, has made a lot of money for Disney over the years. The fact that beings of reason are causes might push us towards Suárez's theory that they have objective being. After all, it seems reasonable to assume that every cause is at least something, even if it is not something that exists in reality. Hurtado would have to say something more complicated here, for example that it is the making of certain mistakes that has causal influence, rather than the concepts that result from the mistakes. Even if the point is not unanswerable, it's a good illustration of why Suárez felt the need to include beings of reason in his metaphysics, despite recognizing that they are not genuine beings. This is especially because causation is another major topic in his thought, a topic on which he has sometimes been said to anticipate developments in seventeenth-century philosophy.

Which is sort of true, but only sort of (much as flying giraffes are sort of beings, but only sort of). The advance sometimes credited to Suárez is that he started the work of eliminating the various kinds of cause recognized in Aristotelian philosophy, until only the efficient cause was left.[8] This is what we'll find in Descartes, to mention only one prominent case,[9] and it is pretty much how we talk about causes today in science and in everyday language. One thing hitting another and pushing it over, or fire heating up a rock, or a giraffe tearing a luscious leaf off a tree before the flying ox can get to it: *that's* causation. Aristotle and his followers, by contrast,

acknowledged three other kinds of cause, namely form, matter, and "final" causes, which are goals or purposes toward which motion or actions strive. Because calling these "causes" sounds rather strange to the modern ear, it is sometimes suggested that we should think of Aristotle's four kinds as types of "explanation" rather than cause. After all, the matter or form of something does explain a lot about it. A bronze statue of a giraffe, raised in tribute to its unparalleled elegance, is heavy because it is made of bronze, and beautiful because of its giraffe form. As for final causes, it is the prospect of seeing giraffes that *explains* why you go to the zoo: seeing the giraffes is the purpose of your going. We might then group these three kinds of explanation together and say that, while they do help us understand features of the world around us, they are not really causes in the way that efficient causes are.

Now, Suárez does say that it is the efficient cause that is "most properly" a cause, that matter and form are causes only "by analogy," and even that final causes or purposes are causes only in a "metaphorical" sense. Yet he also insists that all four kinds do really count as causes, because all of them satisfy the general definition he gives for "cause." This definition is a bit of a mouthful: "a principle that in its own right bestows being upon something else (*principium per se influens esse in aliud*)." Of course, each part of the definition is carefully chosen. "In its own right" excludes merely accidental relationships, while the fact that the effect has to be "something else" rules out self-causation. But the most eye-catching part of the definition is the idea of "bestowing (*influens*)." This conveys that being "flows" from the cause to the effect. You can see why this is best represented by efficient causes, as in the case where the heat of fire flows into the surrounding air or into a nearby rock. The causal influence is guaranteed to occur, so long as the fire is close enough to something that can be heated up and nothing prevents it, like a heat shield wrapped around the rock. Actually, there is one further requirement, which is that God has to allow the fire to burn the rock; Suárez would say that God must "concur" with the fire or any other created cause, so that He allows all these causes to produce their effects. But, of course, God too is a cause, not just an all-powerful referee jogging along with the world and allowing play to continue without blowing His whistle. He is the creator of all things as their efficient cause, and being flows forth from Him into the world. This language of "flowing" had been used by other scholastics, for instance Domingo de Soto. But Suárez treats

causation here more explicitly as metaphysical. The cause is a source of *being* and not just motion or form, as de Soto and others said when talking about causation in the context of natural philosophy.[10]

Even if the efficient cause is our best example of a cause, forms and matter do count too. This is because they are in a relationship of mutual dependence, with each granting a kind of being to the other.[11] The form of the giraffe is its soul and the giraffe's body is its matter, and the soul keeps the body alive even as the body is that in which the soul resides. They are, says Suárez, both "incomplete" substances that come together to form the complete substance that is the giraffe. Here we see Suárez doing something a giraffe might excel at: bending over backwards, to preserve a piece of Aristotelian and scholastic doctrine. Fairly soon philosophers of the Enlightenment are going to be dispensing with the substantial form. As Helen Hattab has written, "once severed from the machinery of scholastic logic and metaphysics, the substantial form hung only by the slender thread of fit between observation and theory."[12] But like Jean Fernel, the French thinker who argued that forms are causes that lie "hidden" within things (see Chapter 27 above), Suárez defends them with great determination using fairly clever examples. He asks us to consider how water will tend to return to a moderate temperature after it is heated up or chilled. This shows that it has a form that is responsible for restoring it to its natural state between hot and cold. Or, think of milk, which has several properties that always come together, like white color and sweet taste; these features must derive from a unitary form that belongs to milk in its own right.

Of the four kinds of cause, it is the final cause that is most puzzling.[13] For one thing, a final cause doesn't need to do anything in order to exert its causal influence. The leaf can just dangle quietly on the tree, and that causes the giraffe to reach up and tear it off the branch. More perplexing, final causes don't even need to exist. Think again of the case where you go to the zoo to the giraffes, only to find that they aren't there. In this scenario, you thought that the goal you were striving toward was present, but it wasn't. Something similar happens all the time without involving such disappointment. The sculptor who sets out to make a bronze giraffe has as their final cause a statue which doesn't yet exist. This is why Suárez calls final causes "metaphorical." They exercise without exercising power, either because they do exist but remain inert, like the leaf on the tree, or because

they don't exist and thus can't do anything anyway.[14] Again, the later scholastic Hurtado will depart from Suárez on this point, saying that we can hardly credit something with being a cause if it doesn't even exist. But Suárez insists otherwise. It is precisely when something is conceived in thought, having "objective" reality in that special sense of being an object of the mind, that it can be made a goal for deliberate action. It's the fact that a bronze giraffe is in the mind, and not a bronze elephant, that explains the precise actions undertaken by our sculptor. This nice analysis could threaten to undermine the traditional Aristotelian idea that final causation can cause things to happen even without any conscious agent pursuing an end they have in mind, as when stones fall down, "striving" (as it were) to reach the center of the universe, which is the ultimate goal of the element of earth. Here we might think that Suárez is, after all, like a sculptor, chipping away at the Aristotelian causal theory: he is part of a general trend in this period whereby scholastic thinkers tend to identify final causes especially, if not exclusively, with the goals envisioned and pursued by animals, and above all humans.[15]

I was just saying that these goals cause animals and humans to pursue them despite just "sitting there" or being "inert." But there's more to it than that. Giraffes don't try to eat just anything, and not just any animal will entice me into a trip to the zoo. It is because these things are, or at least seem, *good* that they elicit deliberate actions. The same goes for only mentally existing goals. A sculptor who has decided to make a bronze statue is putting the effort into producing it because it seems like a good thing to sculpt. Final causes can operate, without being strictly speaking "operative," by being good in a wide variety of ways. Food attracts giraffes by being tasty, and giraffes attract each other by seeming like good mates. As for humans, they are motivated to pursue goals that no animal would desire, from artistic achievement to moral excellence and political stability. Here again, Suárez and his fellow scholastics are true to the Aristotelian tradition. Unlike Enlightenment thinkers like Hobbes, and even unlike some contract theorists who emerged as part of the fallout from the Reformation, the political thought of the second scholastic tends to assume that political arrangements are natural and that humans have a natural tendency to establish good states, states that are good because they serve the common good of all.

# 66

# THE PRICE IS RIGHT

## *Law and Economics in the Second Scholastic*

Back when I was a college student, I got into a dispute with my father during dinner one night, about marijuana. Not that I had been smoking pot, or even had any intention of doing so. When I was growing up, Nancy Reagan told me to "just say no!" and who was I to defy Nancy Reagan? Instead, I was trying to make a point of principle, namely that it isn't wrong to break a law that you consider unjust. If it isn't morally wrong to use marijuana, and doing so doesn't hurt anyone else, then the government has no right to tell people not to do it. Practically speaking, of course, it might still be a good idea to follow the law to avoid being arrested. But that has nothing to do with morality, it's just that it's in your interests to stay out of trouble. I seem to recall that I drew an analogy with running a red light late at night, when you can see that are definitely no cars coming: it's illegal to do so, but not wrong. My father, who is a very law-abiding person, took the contrary view. He argued that if you believe in the legitimacy of your government, then you should also accept anything the government decides. If you strongly disagree with a law, you might work to change it through activism and the democratic process. But you are still obligated to follow the law as long as it remains on the books. Our discussion became heated: I found it absurd to claim that something morally acceptable could become wrong just because the government outlaws it.

So you can imagine my chagrin upon discovering that my father has some of the best philosophers of the sixteenth century on his side. The

thinkers of the second scholastic explicitly said that a legitimate authority can make a morally indifferent action into a sin just by forbidding it or into a virtuous action by requiring it.[1] There are limits here. Even a rightful government cannot make an intrinsically unjust action right, or an intrinsically just action wrong. Thus no government, however legitimate, can make it obligatory to commit murder or make it wrong to show charity. This presupposes a deeper distinction, which I just hinted at when I wrote that some things are *intrinsically* right or wrong, while other things might *become* right or wrong at the discretion of the government. The scholastics would understand this in terms of a contrast between what they called "natural law" and what they called "human law."

This terminology goes back to their favorite medieval source, Thomas Aquinas, and Spanish schoolmen like Vitoria, Molina, and Suárez broadly follow Aquinas when they explain the basic idea.[2] Precepts of the natural law are beyond the power of any human authority to change, because they are just written into the nature of things—in particular, into human nature. To take an obvious example, murder is wrong because it deprives someone of a good that is natural to them, namely continued life. We do not need any earthly power to confirm these precepts for us. Murder would still be wrong even in the absence of all political authority, or under a government that hasn't passed a law against it. Nor do we need religious revelation to grasp that some things are right and wrong. Since murder is naturally wrong, we can know by natural reason that it is wrong. We saw that reports of cannibalism and human sacrifice in the Americas convinced many European intellectuals that the Amerindians needed to be placed under European rule. The thought here was that these peoples were violating the natural law, a law that they should have been able to grasp and follow if they were really in full possession of their rational faculties.

What exactly is the relationship between the natural law and human reason? Well, for Vitoria they are just the same. The precepts of natural law are simply the verdicts of our practical reasoning, which is why they are the same for everyone all over the world. Gabriel Vásquez took a similarly "rationalist" view. God does not *decide* that murder is wrong and charity right, but *knows* this because the wrongness and rightness are just built into the world He has made.[3] Here we might think back to Molina and his distinction between God's natural, middle, and free knowledge. The rationalist view would say that something like the wrongness of murder

belongs to God's natural knowledge, meaning that God knows murder will be wrong in any world He might choose to create. With typical nuance, Suárez objected to this picture. He complained that on the rationalist view, the natural law would not really be a *law*. Both God and humans can know that it is "bad" to murder people, but this does not yet create an *obligation* to refrain from murder. Only a command from a rightful authority can create obligation.[4] So a voluntary act of legislation on God's part is required to add obligatory force to the rational judgment. On Suárez's view, then, a murderer is infringing on two different kinds of rule at the same time: by destroying a natural good he is doing something bad, and in addition he is going against God's express command not to do bad things. We can call this position "voluntarist," because it adds a voluntarily issued divine command to the picture. This brings Suárez close to medieval voluntarists like Ockham, who thought that a divine command is needed to impose obligations on humans. A rationalist like Vásquez would instead say that the natural badness of murder is all there is to its being wrong. He puts the point like this: "if, prior to God's prohibition, we suppose badness in a free act against rational nature, then by that very fact there ought also to be supposed moral guilt."[5]

Leaving this somewhat technical debate aside, though, all our Iberian scholastics think that human law builds on the natural law and presupposes it. On the one hand it is the natural law that sets limits to human law: it's because murder is against the natural law that no government can legalize it. On the other hand, the natural law leaves plenty of room for human law to place further obligations on us, as when it tells us we aren't allowed to smoke marijuana. Now, it might seem that human law is just going to be the legislation of a given state, as when the King of Spain hands down a law. But there's more to it, because we also have to consider what we now call "international law." The scholastics had a similar concept, which went under the name *ius gentium*: "law of the nations."[6] This terminology goes all the way back to the Romans, who understood this law to regulate their relationships with non-Roman peoples. The second-century jurist Gaius defined it as "the set of rules constituted by natural reason for all and observed by all nations alike,"[7] which makes it sound like the law of nations would just be the same as the natural law. But again, there's more to it. Vitoria and the scholastics writing in his wake thought the law of nations

arose from a tacit agreement among all the peoples of the world to follow certain rules. The very fact that human societies are split into different communities and states is itself something that was laid down as part of the law of nations.

Like any human law, the law of nations must be consistent with the natural law, to which it adds further specifications and obligations. One idea, which we find in the humanist Luis de León, is that the law of nations was devised after the fall of humankind into sin; its precepts would not have been necessary otherwise.[8] The purpose of the law of nations is to allow the peoples of the world to coexist more or less peacefully even in a situation where all humans are driven by sinful motivations. A central example is property ownership. If we were all without sin we could just share everything peacefully, all of us being moved by charity and fellow feeling. But as things are, we are rapacious and greedy. So you and I need to know what belongs to me and what belongs to you, and we need some kind of legal framework to enforce these private property rights. Specifics here will be a matter for individual states to decide, but the basic idea that people can own things belongs to the law of nations. This includes owning other people. Molina explicitly says that slavery was introduced by the *ius gentium*, even though "by natural right, all are born free."[9] Slavery was introduced because people can be taken into bondage as the result of a just war, and sometimes enslave themselves voluntarily as a last resort, if it is the only way for them to survive.

Again, these points are important for understanding the scholastics' attitude toward the peoples of the "New World." All humans, including the Amerindians, fall under the law of nations. So they have property rights, just like everyone else. This was the legal basis for Vitoria's judgment that the Europeans could not just turn up in the Americas and help themselves to the Amerindians' goods and lands. Colonialism was going to need to do better than that if it was to be carried out under any legal framework. Similarly, the Europeans could not just enslave the Amerindians, at least not legally. If they were not fighting a just war against the indigenous peoples, for example in self-defense from aggression, and if those peoples were not agreeing to enslave themselves, then there would be no basis in the law of nations for the Europeans to claim ownership over them. Unfortunately, these legal niceties only went so far. Even Vitoria allowed the Spanish wide latitude for the sake of converting the Amerindians to Christianity, in what

was effectively a concession to a "higher morality" that trumped mere legality.[10] Hence the colonialists' claim that they were not really enslaving the Americans, only rounding them up and brutally exploiting them in the *encomiendo* system, on the flimsy excuse that this was necessary in order to spread the true faith. Like I said earlier in this book: all perfectly legal.

When it came to economic issues in their own society, the scholastics followed a similar path, trying to work out a rational theory that would justify common practices while curbing the most abusive behaviors. Again, it is human law that creates the possibility of private ownership, since by nature, everything would be held in common by everyone. And to own something is, among other things, to have the right to sell it. But does that mean having the right to sell it at any price? Or would demanding too much money be sinful, even if the market would bear it? On this topic as on others, the Iberian scholastics take up a long-running discussion, one that goes back to the Romans and Aristotle by way of their medieval predecessors.[11] A rule of thumb still found in the scholastics was taken from Roman law: a sale is legally invalid if the price paid is less than 50 percent of market rate, or more than 150 percent. But just at the turn of the sixteenth century, the economic theorist Conrad Summenhart had brought considerable further nuance to the topic. Among other things, he identified all the factors that can affect price: the abundance and scarcity of a good, its usefulness, the poverty or wealth of the buyers in the region, and so on. In light of this analysis the scholastics realized it would be naive to say that there is one "correct" price for a given commodity, for instance the value of the resources put into producing that commodity. As Vitoria put it, "when Peter sells wheat, the buyer need not consider the money Peter spent nor his work but, rather, the common estimation of how much wheat is worth."[12] (Not sure why he thinks I'd be selling wheat, but it's nice of him to mention me.)

One way to prevent prices from fluctuating in response to such factors would be for the government to introduce price controls. This was popular amongst buyers, of course, but it could lead to dire results for producers, as when artificially low prices were fixed for grain, immiserating Spanish farmers. The scholastics considered whether this policy was justified. Ironically, given the meaning of his name, Tomás de Mercado was against just letting the market set the price. He reasoned that if prices are indeed set by humans and not by nature, there is no reason why the government should

refrain from interfering. After all, the whole point of having human laws as well as the natural law is to foster the welfare of the community under imperfect circumstances. Why, then, shouldn't the government step in and set a price that would be maximally beneficial for society? Similarly, Mercado thought that the government should exert control over international trade, for instance by excluding foreign merchants. By contrast, Molina said that the legal price should just reflect the "natural" price, where this means whatever the market will bear given all the complex factors affecting economic decisions. If the government puts its finger on the scale, the community will do worse overall, in part because political decisions tend to show favoritism toward certain groups within the community. Price controls of grain, in particular, tend to favor more wealthy people over humble farmers, which amounts to the government forcing the poor to show charity to the rich.

All this gives us a nice example of how the distinction between natural and human law was applied in practice. These conceptual tools were put to use again when the scholastics turned to another economic debate, over the practice of usury, which means sinfully demanding interest on borrowed money. The practice had long been condemned by theologians, to limited effect.[13] Now, with the burgeoning capitalist economies of sixteenth-century Europe, a blanket ban on charging interest would clearly be unrealistic. So, as with colonialism, slavery, and price-gouging, the scholastics tried to find a middle ground between being unduly restrictive and unduly liberal. To forbid practices that were universally in use would undermine their own moral authority, since it would make the theologians look out of touch and impotent; but to give in and say that anything goes would mean not using that moral authority to prevent the worst excesses. Of course, the schoolmen did not present their teachings in such a pragmatic way, and would surely not appreciate this framing of their project. But I think it helps to explain why their carefully reasoned positions tended to issue in a balanced verdict, giving approval to seemingly moderate economic behaviors while trying to rein in immoderate ones.

In this case there was a strong Biblical argument for imposing an outright ban on charging interest. In the gospel of Luke (6:35) we read, "lend, hoping for nothing in return." Domingo de Soto, however, interpreted this as a counsel of perfection rather than as a statement of moral obligation.[14] To lend without interest would be meritorious

generosity, above and beyond the call of justice. This is because someone who lends out money is actually incurring costs, and for a couple of reasons. First, there is the risk of not getting the money back at all. Second, there is the missed opportunity to invest the money during the time it is lent out. While similar points had been made by the medievals, in this period we see an increased awareness that "present money" is worth more than "absent money."[15] Still, the interest payment should only make up that difference in value. The scholastics would not want lenders to demand more than they need to cover their risk and missed opportunity costs. Historically it had been assumed that lenders would be in the clear so long as they did not *intend* to profit from the interest they charged. The thinkers of the second scholastic, though, adopted a more "objective" criterion: in theory one could calculate the costs taken on when lending a certain amount of money, in a certain situation, for a certain amount of time. The "correct" amount of interest would be whatever balances out those costs, and asking for this amount (or less) would not count as usury.

Notice that this solution is very similar to, and in fact could be combined with, what we saw with the issue of just price. Much as the price of grain will fluctuate with things like crop yields and demand, so the interest rate will be determined by all the factors affecting the lender's decision whether to let someone borrow money. For example, if the borrower seems likely not to repay the loan, or if the lender has other excellent investment opportunities, that could justify a higher rate. Yet there remained a lingering worry about usury. The scholastics insisted that the lender should only "break even," as it were, to be fairly compensated rather than to make a healthy profit. In this sense they were indeed lagging behind the actual situation, since bankers in Italy and the Low Countries were already making fortunes off complex financial transactions. In another sense, though, the schoolmen were right up to date. They were realizing that money is *capital*, a resource that can "bear fruit" by being invested. Then, too, we should remember that these were theologians, not (or at least not primarily) economic theorists. Their project was fundamentally moral in character, as they offered advice to readers who wanted to know how to get rich while still getting into heaven.

# 67

# BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

## *Political Philosophy in the Second Scholastic*

There is a close connection between the Iberian scholastics' legal philosophy and their political philosophy. That connection lies especially in the concept of *dominium*, which modern-day scholars often don't translate, perhaps because the cognate English word "dominion" and the literal translation "lordship" would both be too narrow in meaning. For the scholastics you have *dominium* over something, and are the *dominus* over it, if it is lawfully under your control. Thus, according to Molina, humans even have natural *dominium* over their own actions, though it is God who is the *dominus* of human bodies, which is why suicide is sinful.[1] Once private property is introduced into human affairs under the law of nations, people can have *dominium* over other things, namely whatever they legally own. This is very close to, if not the same as, saying that people have a "right" to use the things they own. This is why I can't show up at your house without your permission, start eating your food, and sleeping in your bed. When Goldilocks did that to the three bears, she was infringing on their rights because they had *dominium* over the house, the bowls of porridge, and the beds. Or at least she would have been, if they weren't bears: Molina tells us that animals have no rights, because having rights and *dominium* presupposes being able to use reason.

Molina defines "right (*ius*)" as a "capacity to do something, obtain something, or demand it," and relates this to the concept of ownership as

follows: “when we say that someone has a right to something, we do not mean that anything is owed to him, but that he has a power over it, and it would cause him injury to contravene that power.”[2] Notice that he here defines “rights” positively, not negatively. In other words, a right is directed at something particular that is under your control, as opposed to your having a right to do or use whatever the law does not forbid.[3] Molina’s definition also suggests another close connection, between *dominium* and “power (*potestas*),” since if you have a right to something, or *dominium* over it, then it is under your power. This brings us to our next topic, namely political power, a context in which translating *dominium* as “lordship” or “dominion” seems more natural.

Like *dominium* over one’s possessions, political “dominion” is not simply part of the natural law. All governments, of whatever form, exist only because humans have decided to set them up, even if humans are (as Aristotle said) “political animals” and have a natural tendency to form into political communities. Much as they decided to allow certain people to own certain things, they decided to appoint certain people to exercise authority over them. Also, as with private property, this is an artificial measure we need because of humans’ fall from grace. Perfectly good people would not need laws, but would spontaneously do the right things.[4] Unfortunately we are now far from perfectly good, so state authority is created to ensure that the common welfare is promoted insofar as is possible. Just like anything else introduced through human law, political authority must be consistent with the natural law, but that leaves plenty of scope for different forms of government. Vitoria observes that a constitution doesn’t need to be perfect in order to be legitimate.[5] Unsurprisingly the Iberian scholastics, living under the kings and queens of Spain and Portugal, praised monarchy as the most perfect form of rulership. But they allowed that a commonwealth can take the form of an oligarchy or democracy.[6] What counts is the consent of the people to a government, not the type of government they consent to.

Whatever the constitutional mechanism, people subject themselves to state power because it is rational to do so. Here we come back to another connection I have pointed out before (at the end of Chapter 65), between the scholastics’ political theory and their theory of causes. The creation of states is in a sense natural, insofar as we have a natural desire to pursue the common good as a final end, final ends being one of the four types of cause

in Aristotelianism. But in another sense the state is artificial. It is brought into being through a rational process, whereby humans discern that they will be better off living under a government than living outside of all political organization. This sounds a lot like Thomas Hobbes, who not much later will famously say that people submit to a sovereign to escape from the state of nature. It seems clear that the scholastics' theory did pave the way for Hobbes, but their way of understanding the situation is quite a bit more optimistic. It's not that there was a "war of all against all" going on, and to put an end to it people accepted political rule out of pragmatic self-interest. On the Hobbesian account, political life is the lesser of two evils: accepting subjugation meant that human lives would not be quite so nasty, brutish, and short as they had been in the state of nature. For the Iberian scholastics, by contrast, humans are creatures who naturally want to form communities and see them flourish. Political life is both the rational expression of that aspiration and the means of its fulfillment.[7]

Here it is worth considering what the scholastics have to say about another kind of social alliance, one that involves substantially fewer people: marriage.[8] Following Aristotle, the schoolmen saw the conjugal relation as being in a sense "political" and even as involving justice. Marriage goes right back to the first humans, Adam and Eve. Their union preceded their fall from grace, showing that even without sin humans would still pursue some form of community with one another. Still today, two spouses offer each other "mutual aid" and partnership. As a result, scholastic treatises on the topic, like those by Vitoria, Tomás Sánchez, and Pedro Ledesma, give women a surprisingly equal status within marriage, even if they less surprisingly also think that wives should obey their husbands. For Ledesma marriage is a "perfect society," created and sustained through voluntary cooperation. Along similar lines, Molina notes that it is shameful if a husband has to resort to punishment to get his wife to do as he wishes. It's noteworthy that community is more central to this understanding of marriage than procreation. Of course, the scholastics do think that reproduction and child-rearing are important functions of marriage, but Sánchez explicitly says that a husband and wife may without sin have sex simply out of desire and without intending to have children. Otherwise, why would we let infertile people get married? Perhaps even more surprising is that for Sánchez, marriage is not by nature permanent. He knows that outside Christianity divorce is common, so clearly it is not part of the

natural law or law of nations that the marriage bond should be unbreakable.[9] The fact that it is so in the Christian faith is simply an imitation of Christ's unbreakable bond to the church. In other words, the whole "until death do us part" thing is purely theological and has no basis in natural reason.

Thanks to romantic comedies, if not personal experience, we're all pretty familiar with the way that two people enter into the marriage bond. Two people fall in love, go out to dinner, one of them hides an engagement ring in the dessert, the other one swallows it by mistake, and so on. How, though, do we enter bonds of political union in the broader sense? Well, it depends which scholastic we ask. But since he's so frightfully clever, let's ask Francisco Suárez. We've seen him emphasizing that legal obligations can only arise through a voluntary act of will by a legislator, and that applies here too. Human reason naturally grasps the need for a state to secure general welfare, but merely understanding this is not enough. There also needs to be a voluntary decision on the part of the people to bring the state into being. By entering into a political arrangement, the people create an order and unity amongst themselves that was previously absent. In fact, it is only after this decision is made that we can speak of a "commonwealth" as opposed to a mere agglomeration of individuals, or rather of families, since by marrying and having children people had already fashioned smaller units of social order before they created the state.

This sort of theory is often described by philosophers as positing a "social contract" between the people who agree to submit to rule by a government. As in other versions of that theory, Suárez gestures toward a supposed moment, apparently shrouded in the mists of the distant past, when a decision was in fact taken to unite into a commonwealth. This may seem rather fanciful, especially when it is invoked to justify not just the existence of something as specific as the Spanish monarchy, but even the maximally general "law of nations" which prevails over the entire world. This early version of international law, too, is meant to be justified in terms of consent, but it's hard to imagine how all humans could have reached even a tacit agreement about anything, at least before the dawn of modern communications technology (not that this technology has helped us to agree with each other, either). I mean, it's not as if messengers were sent across the globe on horseback to check that everyone was happy to start letting people own private property.

Some philosophers of this period did try to put some historical meat on the bones of their contract theories. We saw this with François Hotman, whose *Francogallia* looked back to Carolingian times to justify the constraints he wanted to place on the French monarchy. But when it comes to Suárez, a more abstract question comes to the fore. Let's just assume that people really did form themselves into a commonwealth and subordinate themselves to a system of rule. Where did they get the authority to do this? It looks like there is a chicken-and-egg problem here. The community needs to have the authority, power, or "right" to make itself into a unified commonwealth, but it is only once it is a unified commonwealth that it can possess and exercise such power. Vitoria and Molina seem to say that humans just naturally have authority (*auctoritas*) over themselves, more specifically over their own bodies and their liberty. They are created by God already having this power, and are then able to transfer this power to the ruler.[10] This relates to the claim of Vitoria and Molina that slavery is unnatural; as we saw Molina putting it, "by natural right, all are born free." It is up to humans to decide what to do with that freedom, which is why one can in extreme circumstances sell oneself into slavery and have that sale be legally binding. It's also why, under normal circumstances, people may appoint a power to rule over them politically, not as a master over slaves, but as a leader over a commonwealth whose good is the leader's uppermost objective.

Suárez seems to be torn between this sort of idea and the idea that political rule can only be instituted through an act of voluntary choice.[11] In favor of the notion that humans have authority over themselves from their very creation, he points out that the people must have a power in the first place before they can grant it to a king or other authority. After all, you can't give what you don't have. On the other hand, there is his emphasis on the genesis of the political commonwealth by means of a contract among the people who are going to be members of the commonwealth. Suárez solves this problem by suggesting that authority resides in the people originally, "as if in its roots," but that God also needs to play a role. Divine action, in cooperation with the decision being made by the people, is needed to transform a group of individuals into a proper political union. I can't help noticing that this looks a lot like the Catholic position on grace, where good acts likewise result from a cooperation between God and human agents. But another scholastic, Juan de Salas, did not find the

solution so graceful. He thought that, faced with this chicken-and-egg problem, Suárez had resorted to pulling a rabbit out of a hat. If the people taken as individuals don't have sufficient authority to come together to form a commonwealth, then God must be adding the needed authority. But surely this undermines the voluntary and contractual nature of political rule, exactly what Suárez was trying to establish! Salas argued that, on the contrary, the power of authority does reside naturally in humans. God is only involved insofar as He is the one who created human nature. If we were to imagine humans existing without God in the picture, then such humans could still appoint legitimate rulers for themselves.

An alternative interpretation of Suárez's position would help him to avoid the charges made by Salas.[12] On this reading, voluntary acts of consent just are capable of pulling rabbits out of hats, or if you prefer, making chickens without eggs. We see this with the example of promising or taking oaths. To take an oath is to create a new obligation that did not exist before. If I freely undertake to cook Goldilocks some porridge tomorrow morning, so she doesn't have to go breaking into houses to have breakfast, then she can hold me to that promise. Similarly, when the people come together to form a commonwealth they thereby create a power to govern themselves, which they can then hand over to a sovereign, or retain for themselves if they choose a democratic form of government. Actually, we can say that for Suárez all political authority is originally democratic, because the first thing the people do is constitute themselves as a body with the right to self-govern.[13] Ideally, though, they will not remain a democracy but decide to appoint a monarch. Because this is how monarchies first arise, the community can never be under the obligation to accept tyrannical rule. It would never be rational to enter into a contract that allowed for abusive treatment, so we can assume that people have never consented to such an arrangement.[14]

While Suárez's theory does anticipate Hobbes and other social contract theorists in the early modern period, it is also recognizably a product of its time. In fact, it's recognizably the product of a Jesuit. Suárez and his colleagues produced political theories that conceive the state as a much larger version of the Society of Jesus.[15] You become a Jesuit by making a voluntary choice to join the order, which is much like entering the social contract, since in so doing you submit to an authoritative hierarchy. Striving

for the good of all and ultimately the glory of God, individual members humbly agree to carry out whatever tasks their leaders assigned to them. In other ways too, the consent theory was apt to be embraced by Catholic intellectuals. This may come as a surprise, because we've previously seen Protestants like Hotman pushing the idea that rulers need consent from their subjects in order to justify resistance to tyrannical rule, by which they meant tyranny exercised by Catholic monarchs. But, as so often, this was a game both sides could play. Suárez may have devised his political philosophy in part to undermine Protestant claims that their own rulers were sent by God to defend and propagate the Reformation.[16] And Catholics had another excellent reason to insist that secular rulers were *not* appointed by God, but by the will of the people, namely that this would be a clear difference between those secular rulers and the Pope, who *does* wield his power by divine dispensation. Here, then, we're seeing, not for the first time, how the religious disputes of the sixteenth century encouraged significant intellectual breakthroughs and the emergence of ideas that are often wrongly supposed to have emerged only a century or so later.

# 68

# TOUCH ME WITH YOUR MADNESS

## *Cervantes'* Don Quixote

I've lost count of the number of authors who sounded a triumphalist note in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The age of darkness was over and all of Europe was glorying in the "rebirth" of art, literature, science, and philosophy that still gives the Renaissance its name. It would have been outright insanity to look back regretfully to the glories of the medieval past, right? Well, exactly. It's this particular form of craziness that drives the plot of *Don Quixote*, the sprawling and pioneering novel that makes its author, Miguel de Cervantes, the only plausible rival to Shakespeare for the title of the greatest literary figure in Europe around the turn of the seventeenth century.[1] As if to invite us to compare them, Cervantes and Shakespeare both died in 1616, probably only eleven days apart. There are indeed resonances between them, especially due to the self-referentiality and self-awareness of both authors. Cervantes, who was a playwright as well as a novelist, echoes the "all the world's a stage" idea by comparing the world to a theatrical performance (2.12). Much as *Hamlet* contains a play within a play, *Don Quixote* embeds shorter stories within its larger story; one of those interpolated tales was turned into a play that was put on at the Globe Theatre by Shakespeare's troupe.

Despite those parallels, the Elizabethan work that is most comparable to *Don Quixote* might be Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, which like it is a narrative rather than a play, and like it reflects with ironic distance on chivalric

literature and its ambiguous relationship to Christian ethics. It is the assiduous collecting and reading of such literature, tales of noble and courageous knights who dedicate their heroic deeds to chaste and beautiful ladies, that has already driven Don Quixote mad at the beginning of Cervantes' novel. I call the *Fairie Queene* a "narrative" and *Don Quixote* a "novel" in recognition of the oft-made claim that Cervantes' work is in fact the first "modern novel" or work of "modern fiction."[2] One reason to make this claim is that it reflects certain social developments we associate with modernity, like economic ones; I'll come back to this. But the main point is the way that *Don Quixote* calls attention to its own fictionality and even to the nature of fiction itself. This is also a big part of what makes it of interest to us from a philosophical point of view.

Pioneering though it may be, the book does fit snugly within its historical context. Cervantes studied with a humanist scholar in Spain, imbibing the Erasmian spirit that had by this time come to Iberia.[3] In his twenties he went on to Italy, the home of humanism. Thus his penchant for literary gamesmanship can be connected to the same tendency in Erasmus and other humanist authors.[4] A particularly tempting comparison is to Erasmus' own *In Praise of Folly*. One might see the character of Don Quixote as embodying the message of that book, since it's his own folly that makes him such an appealing and perhaps even admirable figure. His gift of madness allows him to see quotidian things as marvelous, taking windmills for giants and a barber's shaving bowl for the priceless "Helmet of Mambrino." Throughout the book things are turned upside down and back to front. Ugly peasant girls are transformed into beautiful ladies, taverns into castles, and Quixote's faithful Sancho Panza from a lowly servant into the governor of an island, all through the alchemical magic of fervently believing one thing to be something else.

This idea is already conveyed in the very title "Don Quixote"; I mean the title of the man, not the novel. He is at first Alonso Quixada, or maybe Quesada, or as it says at the end of book Quixano. Cervantes tells us that there is some disagreement about his real original name (1.1), conveying that the novel has only imperfect access to the facts it is recounting, facts which are of course entirely invented. Having read all those tales of chivalry, Alonso decides to adopt the name "Don Quixote" even though his social status does not give him the right to style himself as a "Don," something flagged later on in the book (2.5, 2.6). He renames his old horse

"Rosinante," which means something like "former old nag." Through simple acts of rechristening both he and his steed have been turned into characters worthy of grand adventure. Quixote likewise determines that a girl in a nearby village is to be called "Dulcinea," and that she is the most beautiful woman in the world. Don't deny this or even ask to see her so you can decide for yourself, or Quixote will challenge you to a duel. In the second part of the work (published ten years after the first, in 1615), Cervantes puts a further spin on the theme by having Sancho convince Quixote that an ugly peasant is in fact Dulcinea, but that an enchanter has cast a spell preventing Quixote from seeing her as she really is (2.10). As if that weren't enough, it's later pointed out to Sancho that as far as he knows there really is such an enchantment, leading him to doubt whether he conjured the spell or is instead a victim of it (2.33). Just before that Don Quixote has praised Sancho by saying that he "doubts everything and believes everything (*duda de todo, y créelo todo*)" (2.32). Clearly, then, Cervantes gives us yet another example of an author from around the turn of the seventeenth century who was fascinated by uncertainty and the limits of human knowledge, like Shakespeare, Montaigne, Charron, and so on.

But I think we shouldn't give in to the philosopher's impulse to reduce this to a question of epistemology. In this context themes of enchantment, doubt, and arbitrary misidentification are designed to get the reader to think not so much about the nature of knowledge, as about the nature of fiction itself. It's been said that *Don Quixote* is a "book about books," a claim supported not just by the fact that Quixote's madness is triggered by reading, but by the fact that he keeps meeting other people who enjoy the same kind of chivalric literature. None of them has been driven mad, which rather undermines the apparent warning that such literature is harmful,[5] at best trivial and at worse dangerous, a message that we've seen already in the life story of Teresa of Ávila. A scene in which friends of Quixote burn his library (1.5–6) is easy to read as a mockery of the book burnings overseen by the Inquisition and other censorious institutions of Cervantes' age.

Then there is the elaborate framing of the whole story, which is deliberately confusing to the point that scholars have disputed the exact details of what we are supposedly reading.[6] The book begins with a preface which self-consciously frets about the difficulty of writing a preface. This impasse was resolved after a friend gave the advice simply to throw in

learned references to authoritative sources, including Plato and Aristotle and Italian humanists like Leone Ebreo. Then the story proper begins, but after only eight chapters the author tells us regretfully that this was all he could find of the tale. Chapter 9 resumes by announcing the discovery of another manuscript, so that things can continue after all. Yet another layer of artificiality is introduced when we are told that this manuscript was in Arabic, written by the "real" author or reporter, whose name is Cide Hamete Benengeli. So really (but of course, not *really*) we're reading a story that has been translated into Spanish from Arabic and then edited to get the version being presented to us.

Cervantes also indulges in the breathtaking and somewhat mind-bending tactic of having part 1 of *Don Quixote* exist within the world of part 2. Our heroes meet several people who have read it and are excited to encounter two such famous literary characters in "real life." In fact, you could even say that part 2 is brought into existence by part 1, because Don Quixote and Sancho set out to have further adventures only once they learn that their original adventures have already won them some renown (2.4). Characters also challenge them about certain discrepancies or dropped plotlines from part 1, like pedantic reviewers carping that Cervantes wasn't paying enough attention when he wrote the first installment of his novel. Sancho does his best to paper over the cracks but is at a loss to explain one lapse and suggests that maybe it was just a printer's error.

This second part is also animated by Cervantes' fury at an author calling himself "Avellaneda," who had been so bold as to publish his own sequel to the first part of *Don Quixote*.[7] This writer's identity remains unknown, though he seems to have been a member of the circle of Lope de Vega, another premier literary figure of Spain in this era. Avellaneda set out to tame the anarchy of his source material, turning right side up what Cervantes had turned upside down, as it were. He made both Sancho and Don Quixote into less appealing characters, treating them as upstart social rebels who needed to be put back in their place, namely a madhouse. Perhaps worst of all, he teased Cervantes for having a crippled hand, an injury he sustained when fighting at the famous Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Cervantes was infuriated, though I can't help wondering whether part of him was tickled by having an excuse to indulge in further metafictional games. In part 2 he allows his main characters to learn about Avellaneda's unauthorized novel and to condemn it as being full of falsehoods (2.54,

2.64). Cervantes goes so far as to change the plot by sending Quixote to Barcelona instead of Zaragoza, as originally planned, because that is where he goes in the rival book, just so that something else in Avellaneda's sequel can be "wrong."

Of course, the constant fuss over the truth and accuracy of Cervantes' own version serves only to highlight its fictionality. Just in case you missed the point, in part 2 Cervantes sprinkles in passages that alternately label certain chapters and passages as most likely apocryphal, or as certainly true given the reliability of Benengeli (e.g., 2.5, 2.10, 2.23, 2.24). We are also warned that some material from the supposed "original" has been omitted by the translator or editor for reasons of relevance and length, including stories about the warm friendship between Rosinante and Sancho's donkey (2.12). Again, the audience is being invited to wonder how the version of the story they are reading—in all its incompleteness and indirect transmission—might or might not correspond to events that, as the reader well knows, never happened in the first place. Within the story the characters are doing the same thing. There are many examples, but the best is perhaps the scene in part 1 in which a group of people take a vote as to whether that barber's basin is really the fabled helmet conjured by Don Quixote's fevered imagination (1.45). In part to humor him and in part to enjoy the humor of the situation, the group declares that Quixote is right and, having promised to accept the outcome of the vote, the barber is required to admit that his own basin is a magical helmet.

Scholars have sometimes spoken of a kind of "perspectivism" in reference to passages like this. Because Don Quixote sees the basin as a helmet, for him it really *is* a helmet. That's encouraged by Sancho's description of the item as a *baciyelmo* ("basin-helmet"), which suggests that it is somehow both things at the same time. But I don't think Cervantes is really making a point here about "perspectivism" in the sense we usually use that word in philosophy, to mean that the truth is determined for each person by their own beliefs. Rather, he's making a point about the extraordinary power of fiction, which allows "facts" to be summoned into "reality" by nothing more than authorial fiat. The point is made already at the very beginning of part 1, where Don Quixote addresses the "wise enchanter (*sabio encantador*), whoever you are," who is the "chronicler of this wonderful history (*cronista desta peregrina historia*)" (1.2). The word "history" here is noteworthy, given that Cervantes will toward the start of

part 2 echo the Aristotelian contrast between the poet and the historian. The poet recounts things not as they were but as they should have been, whereas the historian tells things as they are without adding anything or departing from the truth (*el poeta puede contar o cantar las cosas, no como fueron, sino como debían ser; y el historiador las ha de escribir, no como debían ser, sino como fueron, sin añadir ni quitar a la verdad cosa alguna*, 2.3). You might remember that Philip Sidney mentioned this contrast from Aristotle's *Poetics* in his *Defense of Poesy*. By repeatedly alluding to his own tale as a "history" Cervantes thus implies with heavy irony that we are reading the true account of a man with false beliefs, when in fact we are reading something that is entirely invented, just like Quixote's own fantasies.

In another context Cervantes said of himself that he was "one who surpasses many others in his powers of invention,"[8] and that is of course something he has in common with his main character. Indeed, as the real author of the tale it is Cervantes who imagines that windmills could be giants, ugly peasants beautiful women, and a barber's basin an enchanted helmet. So, much like the magic wielded by Prospero in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Don Quixote's madness seems to represent the power of the author to decide what will happen in the world he is creating. This is an insanity born of reading chivalric romances and an insanity that allows Quixote to turn the world around him into the setting of such a romance, the main character in a story he is writing as he goes along. But that's a very optimistic way of describing the plot. In fact Quixote, and poor Sancho along with him, undergo great suffering due to the refusal of reality to be rewritten. The self-proclaimed knight and squire are repeatedly beaten up and humiliated as they pursue one delusional adventure after another. Quixote's fractured mind evokes not just mirth in the people he meets, but also pity. It's frequently noted that his sanity, even wisdom, remains intact apart from his conviction that the chivalric tales are all true and that he is following in the footsteps of the glorious knights of old (e.g., at 1.30). Quixote is even sane enough to know that other people think he is crazy (2.17), but counters that anyone who questions the authenticity of the romances is the real madman (1.49).

When I say that Cervantes presents Quixote as crazy, I mean it.[9] He is not merely eccentric but suffering from a mental disorder. As scholars have noted, Cervantes draws here on medical literature of the period, especially a

treatise by Juan Huarte de San Juan. There are hints that Quixote suffers from an imbalance of the humors as a result of his excessive reading habits, which fits with Huarte's remark that people can become "choleric" if they "lose themselves in reading books of chivalry." Also relevant may be Quixote's diet and the climate of la Mancha, where he lives. It's explicitly stated that his malady is seated in his brain (2.1) and sometimes his sanity seems to return at least partially after injuries cause him to lose blood, which would help cool down his bodily mixture. So his condition has a physical basis. It's part of Quixote's malady to rationalize away evidence that would undermine his delusions, as when he suggests that some kind of enchantment may be involved, or that only knights like himself can see things as they truly are (this is why Sancho thinks the Helmet of Mambrino is only a barber's basin). An especially intriguing passage comes when he decides to imitate the way that chivalric knights sometimes went mad out of longing for the beloved. He proposes to strip naked, do somersaults, and wander aimlessly through a mountain landscape. When Sancho tries to dissuade him, Quixote tells his squire that the best kind of madness is the one that is deliberately chosen, and for no good reason (*sin ocasión*, 1.25).

Centuries after its composition, this aspect of *Don Quixote* came to seem especially resonant for philosophers in the existentialist tradition. In particular, the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno saw Cervantes' novel as anticipating ideas he valued in the work of Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard had even spoken of the "knight of faith," which seems a pretty good description of Don Quixote. Like an existentialist Christian hero, Quixote adheres unswervingly to what he sees as the truth, no matter how absurd it may be, and he cannot be dissuaded by rational arguments against this faith. Unamuno was inspired by his example, enthusing "touch me with your madness, my Don Quixote, touch me to the quick!"[10] This reading might seem rather unpersuasive, insofar as it centers on philosophical ideas that wouldn't be developed until the nineteenth century. But in Unamuno's favor, we might note that Kierkegaard was drawing out something that was genuinely present in the Protestantism of Luther and Calvin: encouragement to place one's hope and belief in things that lie beyond the limits of human understanding. Of course, Cervantes was not a Protestant, but this sort of radical "fideism," that is, reliance on faith over reason, spilled across religious and geographical boundaries in the sixteenth century.

Another objection to this reading, though, would involve pointing to more specific features of the novel that actually *contrast* Don Quixote with religious figures. In both part 1 and part 2 Quixote and Sancho consider the difference between being a "knight errant" and being a monk or saint (1.13, 2.8). In one of these passages Sancho piously attempts to convince Quixote that the best way to get to heaven is not to seek out adventures but to become a saint. Quixote admits that more saints get to paradise than knights, but then again, not very many true knights have made the effort. A defender of Unamuno could read these chapters as implicitly, and as always ironically, drawing a parallel between this "knight of faith" and the more conventionally faithful Christian. But to me they look more like a satire of attempts to compare chivalry and Christian piety, a notion we also saw being interrogated by Spenser in the *Faerie Queene*. The same would go for a chapter in which Quixote argues at length that knight errantry is the highest of the sciences, because heroic figures like himself need to know so many things in order to succeed in their quests (2.18). There's some parody of scholastic culture here: forget the metaphysician and the theologian, the greatest scholar is really a guy who puts on armor and fights giants for the honor of his lady love! But the comedy is aimed at Quixote himself, too, and at his pompous claims to comprehensive scientific knowledge. The reader need only recall that his vaunted skill with medicine, for example, has already been used to make a magic healing potion that made Sancho violently ill (1.18).

That episode is only one of many low points in the relationship between Don Quixote and his trusty squire. While the bond between them is as real as anything in this story, they get into numerous disagreements and at one point a physical altercation. Quixote observes that his underling's willingness to mouth off to his "natural lord (*señor*)" reflects badly on both of them (1.20). Elsewhere he more graciously says that he will deign to treat Sancho as an equal out of his chivalric love for all humankind (1.11). Evidently Cervantes is using the pair to comment on class relations in Spanish society. The theme becomes even more explicit with Sancho's primary motivation for following the mad Don Quixote on his increasingly ridiculous and tumultuous adventures. Quixote has offered to make Sancho the governor of an island, in imitation of literary chivalric characters who bestowed such gifts on their squires. Though Sancho knows that Quixote is crazy, he still thinks that his master might wind up making good on his

promise. Then in part 2 it actually happens. A duke and duchess, two of the many characters who entertain themselves by playing along with Quixote's delusions, set up Sancho as a governor, expecting hilarity to ensue. It does, but not in the way they expect. He turns out to be remarkably competent, so wise in his judgments that he is called a "second Solomon" (2.45). In the end his decrees are left behind as a "constitution" for the island (2.51).

This whole sequence invites interpretive speculation, and has duly received it.[11] Some scholars think that Cervantes is making fun of the tradition of utopian fiction inspired by Thomas More. Others see a more pointed message: the lowborn Sancho is a good ruler because he is a good man and a good Christian, which makes him preferable to the morally bankrupt nobles who are usually in charge. The contrast with the duplicitous and manipulative duke and duchess lends some plausibility to that proposal. But whatever political point is being made here, we can surely also take Sancho's governorship to be yet another example of the topsy-turvy reversals that are scattered throughout the whole novel. When discussing Rabelais, I referred to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who associated the perverse humor of Rabelais with the medieval tradition of the carnival, an exceptional time in which social customs are turned upside down. Bakhtin mentioned other authors of the period as illustrating the same phenomenon, among them Shakespeare and of course Cervantes, with Sancho Panza a central example. His lust for life, gluttony, and insubordination are "carnivalesque" in the best spirit. No wonder that the more conservative Avellaneda wanted to write a version of this story putting Sancho back in his proper place.

If fideism and carnivalesque reversal are core themes that make *Don Quixote* resonate with other literature of the age, historical events of the time also find an echo in the novel. Like Montaigne and Shakespeare, Cervantes could not help reacting to the discovery of the New World and the burgeoning practice of slavery.[12] Cervantes had attempted to travel to the Indies in 1582, and in another of his writings described them as "a refuge and haven for all the desperate men of Spain." This sounds quite positive, but a more ambiguous attitude may be implicit in *Don Quixote*. The gifting of the island to Sancho looks like a case of casual colonialism, and even if he winds up governing well there are disturbing elements in Sancho's earlier fantasies about having a colony to call his own. He worries that the island may have a black population and reassures himself that he

can just sell them all off as slaves (1.29). That passage comes not long after the adventure in which Don Quixote frees prisoners who are to be sent off to slavery. This is justified on grounds we have seen in the Spanish scholastics, that all humans are free by nature (1.22). But that inspiring message is somewhat undercut by the fact that the freed prisoners then go on a rampage, revealing Don Quixote's noble gesture to have been a spectacular mistake.

Speaking of the scholastics, another contemporary development that makes itself felt in the tale is economic theory.[13] The idea that the value of an object depends on its perceived, rather than its intrinsic, worth appears several times, most entertainingly in the case of the barber's basin, which might be a literally "priceless" magical artifact. It also comes up in the account of the discovery of the manuscript. Cervantes in his voice as the "editor" of the "Spanish version" tells us that when he found the Arabic book, it was just being sold as scrap paper. Cannily, he concealed his excitement at finding the work so that he could buy it for next to nothing. It's a lovely example of the dynamics noticed in the scholastics' theory of fair pricing. But it would be reductive to read it just as a nice example, because the vignette captures the broader themes of the novel as a whole. A stack of paper is one thing to the seller and another thing to the buyer, because they construe the paper in different ways: as scrap in one case, and as valuable literature in the other. So the passage suggests that fiction gets its value and reality through our conviction that it is valuable. To enjoy fiction is not merely to suspend disbelief, but actively to believe in what we know is not true, or perhaps better, to *pretend* to believe in it. As Cervantes was arguably among the first to see, or at least to explore profoundly, fiction is pleasurable because of its ambiguous relationship to reality: not straightforwardly false like a plain old lie, but not true either. This explains, among other things, why events that would be horrific in real life, like a gentleman going insane and traveling around Spain getting into violent altercations with almost everyone he meets, can be entertaining as a story. As no less a critic than Lord Byron remarked of *Don Quixote*, "of all tales 'tis the saddest—and more sad, because it makes us smile."

# 69

# TAKE YOUR MEDICINE

*Oliva Sabuco and Camilla Erculiani*

Historians who want to uncover the achievements of women intellectuals in earlier times are often faced with problems of authorship. For all we know, some surviving premodern works are in fact by women but not labeled as such. When works and ideas are explicitly ascribed to women, there is often some doubt about authenticity. There's no consensus whether Diotima, who delivers the culminating speech of Plato's *Symposium*, is based on a real person. Philosophical letters ascribed to even earlier women of the Pythagorean school are certainly not by them, as shown by the fact that the Greek language used in them dates from a later period, but maybe the authors were female nonetheless.[1] Things are usually a bit clearer for medieval women authors, but even here it has sometimes been suspected that male colleagues had a significant role in shaping the texts ascribed to figures like Hildegard of Bingen. For a sixteenth-century example, think of that debate about the sonnets ascribed to Anne Lock, whom we may or may not choose to believe when she denies her own authorship (see Chapter 48 above). In the bad old days, historians were prone to the sexist assumption that more sophisticated texts were surely not written by women, even if they were transmitted under the names of female authors. Nowadays the pendulum has swung in the other direction, since there is a healthy appetite to discover and study texts by premodern and early modern women thinkers.

If you want to know how inclined you might be to give a putative woman writer the benefit of the doubt, then you can test yourself on the case of Oliva Sabuco. For a long time no one challenged her authorship of an unorthodox treatise called *The New Philosophy of Human Nature*, first published in 1587.[2] It collects seven works in dialogue form, in which the main speaker is a shepherd named Antonio. This shepherd presents newfangled theories about nature, especially the human body and medicine, brushing away objections from more conservative interlocutors who are wedded to the authority of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen. At this point we can hardly be surprised to come across such a work. The dialogue form had become standard thanks to the humanists, and we've seen plenty of irreverent departures from ancient natural philosophy and medicine, usually coupled with disdainful remarks about those who are bound to traditional ideas. More unexpected is that this innovative scientific work was written by a woman.

Or was it? Back when the book was, as its title says, "new," it was apparently universally accepted as being Oliva Sabuco's. In the sixteenth century she was named along with figures like Isotta Nogarola and Christine de Pizan in a work in praise of women, and in the seventeenth century she was hailed as a "tenth muse" (though by my reckoning she should really be the eleventh muse, because that honorific was already assigned to Montaigne's adoptive daughter Marie de Gournay). But in the early twentieth century the scholar José Marco Hidalgo discovered archival evidence casting doubt on her authorship.[3] In several documents, including his own will, Oliva's father, Miguel, insisted that he was the true author of the *New Philosophy*. After he wrote the work, he allowed it to appear under his daughter's name and even with prefatory material emphasizing the novelty of seeing such a work come from the pen of a woman. He was at first happy to give her credit for writing it in order to "grant her honor," but then realized he didn't want to forego the kind of credit that would turn up in a bank account. Miguel went so far as to make a notarized declaration that he, not Oliva, was the author of the work, and should be the one to receive any financial proceeds from the sale of the book. Apparently this blood relationship was a good deal frostier than the adoptive one between Montaigne and de Gournay. Which is actually rather appropriate given that, as we'll see, the *New Philosophy* minimizes the importance of blood.

Whichever Sabuco wrote the work, he or she was not short on confidence. The mouthpiece character Antonio declares, "I will provide evidence showing that philosophy and medicine are wrong, that the world is deceived, and that the true philosophy and medicine are contained in this book of mine" (*TM* 93). The swaggering tone is not justified on the grounds of thorough training. On the contrary, the author admits having never studied medicine (*NP* 45) and Antonio is described by his traditionalist interlocutor as "a mere simpleton of a rustic, who did not study medicine… and with no books" (*TM* 118). This dismissive assessment provokes Antonio to reply that reading the standard authorities would only have confused him. He's spent a full eight days consulting the works of Hippocrates and Galen, which was plenty to show him that they themselves are hopelessly confused (*TM* 119). In the prefatory material and then again in the dialogues themselves, Sabuco points out that Hippocratic medicine has now been tried for two thousand years, with at best mixed success. So why not at least try out this new medicine for only one year, to see if it works (*NP* 45, 165)? Adding to this sense of a refreshingly "outsider" approach to the topic is the fact that the work is in Spanish, not Latin, though at one point the great Italian humanist Poliziano is quoted in Latin (*NP* 99). At another point, the author complains about the fact that scientific works and lawbooks are written in Latin (*TM* 99).

The vernacular language, irreverence, and self-proclaimed amateur status of the work fits with Sabuco's penchant for down-to-earth examples and topics. The first dialogue begins with an almost literal bang as a partridge falls dead at the feet of the interlocutors, having been frightened to death by a pursuing hawk (*NP* 48). Later on we get an explanation of why feet are ticklish, while the pervasiveness of spiral motion in nature is illustrated with the way dogs lie down for a nap (*NP* 86, *TM* 153). This sort of thing makes the work convincing as the product of an attentive and curious non-expert. On the other hand, the accumulation of details and examples, especially about animals (including animals neither Sabuco would have been likely to meet, like elephants), suggests that the book draws on the sort of material collected in "commonplace" books, as I discussed with reference to Jean Bodin (see Chapter 32). That impression is partially confirmed by a discovery made by the translator of part of the work, Gianna Pomata, who showed that when Sabuco refers to earlier texts the citations are usually drawn from a single earlier source, a treatise by the

Spanish physician Francisco Vallés. The *New Philosophy* may be the work of an amateur, but of an amateur who likes to read. Indeed, we know that the father, Miguel, liked to collect books, and he was also an apothecary, which fits with an interest in science. But then it's no stretch to think that his bright daughter Oliva could have picked up on these same interests living in his household. Either way we are dealing here with an autodidact, albeit one who fits well into the shifting landscape of late sixteenth-century natural philosophy.

The features of the text just mentioned may make it sound unsophisticated and unsystematic, but that is far from the case. The dialogues touch on many themes: not just medicine but self-knowledge, society, and the emotions. Yet there is a running theme throughout, namely the fundamentally physical and embodied character of human life. This is, I think, why Sabuco mentions animals so often. Though we get the standard point that humans share sensation with animals and intellect with the angels (*NP* 49), it becomes clear that for Sabuco humans are a lot more like animals. This is the point of starting with that frightened partridge: it illustrates the powerful effects of emotional reaction, which can also be lethal for humans. Much is said about apes and elephants, purportedly the most intelligent beasts. We learn that apes can play chess and enjoy dressing up, as do elephants, which give people hugs and can learn Latin and plot vengeance. Sabuco offers an anecdote about an elephant that was running riot, stopped when it saw a child in danger, calmly lifted the child to safety with its trunk, and then resumed its rampage (*NP* 64, 94, 119).

All of which is good fun, but also philosophically resonant. Though the lesson remains largely implicit, I take Sabuco to be saying that the higher animals are very much like humans because their bodies are similar to ours. Our own thoughts and emotions are grounded in, if not wholly determined by, our physical states. There are a few allusions to the idea that God sends down the soul into the body (*NP* 95), which suggests the tacit Platonist assumption that the soul is an incorporeal substance that could survive without the body. But the overwhelming sense is that all human behavior is to be understood physiologically. The capacities of understanding and reason are seated in the brain (*NP* 49, 67, *TM* 101, 125), and as a result intelligence varies with bodily constitution. The ideal physical state is not a balance between the body's humors, as asserted by ancient doctors like Galen. Rather, the more intelligent people are the ones with the drier bodies

(*TM* 123, 204). Emotions and even freedom and happiness are closely associated, if not identified, with states of the brain (*TM* 127, *NP* 65). This is a major theme of the first dialogue, which gives advice about moderating and combating excessive emotional reactions.[4] Some of this advice is genuinely good, like the suggestion of how to deal with an angry person who wants to retaliate against an enemy. Instead of arguing with them, just agree to help seek revenge, but not until tomorrow. Then change the subject. That will give the person a chance to calm down (*NP* 53).

In truth, though, the most memorable parts of the work are not those about ethics and the emotions. Instead, it is Sabuco's description of the human body that really makes the book stand out. As promised, this theory does away with Aristotelian and Galenic ideas about anatomy and anthropology. According to the classical theory, life is sustained by vital heat, which is carried by blood, the most important of the four humors. For Sabuco the crucial substance is instead "chyle," in Spanish *chilo*, from the Greek *khulos* meaning "juice." This is a milky fluid which gathers in the brain and is then sent down through the spinal column to nourish the other organs (*NP* 67 *TM* 103, 207, 223). It keeps the body cool, not warm, and is transformed into other fluids like blood, breast milk, and semen. Illnesses and death are in many cases caused by disruptions in this hydraulic system. For example, plague kills people by causing a sudden "fall" of chyle from the brain to the rest of the body (*NP* 72). On the other hand, the brain can also "check in" on the rest of the body by sending its juices out, something Sabuco compares to a worried mother sending letters to her child (*NP* 84). Complementing the brain with its ruling power is the stomach, which is of course responsible for digestion but also provides moisture to the brain to sustain the distribution of chyle. Another important factor in health is the balance between the cool brain and the warm stomach. The stomach's heat is kept in check by drawing in cooling air through respiration (*TM* 121).

If we're looking for evidence that this theory is the brainchild of a woman, then it isn't too hard to find. Remember that women were standardly thought to be cooler and moister in bodily constitution than men; and here we have an anthropology that gives the crucial role to chyle, a cool and fluid substance, and warns against the dangers of excessive heat.[5] Furthermore, Sabuco draws a link between the chyle and the Moon, which of course is symbolically feminine in contrast to the masculine Sun. The Moon is said to have a powerful effect on moisture, which is why the meat

of oysters and our own brains swell under a full moon; wounds also heal better at that time of the month (*NP* 75, 89, *TM* 144, 215). Sabuco also closely associates chyle with milk. It is milky white in appearance and, as just mentioned, is the stuff from which breast milk is made. Strikingly, the work also refers to the pains sometimes felt by nursing women (*TM* 210, cf. 226). Of course, it's not impossible to imagine a male author knowing about that. But the whole account can plausibly be read as a kind of feminist response to Aristotelian and Galenic theory. Our thoughts, emotions, health, and disease are all determined by a nurturing, one might even say "lactating," principle of cool moisture, which disseminates its benevolent juice to the rest of the body. Drawing on an old analogy, Sabuco compares the human to an upside-down tree, because the system of chyle has its roots in our heads and then branches downwards through the rest of the body (*NP* 112, 121, *TM* 226).

But is it really historically plausible that a woman could have written this remarkably innovative set of dialogues? Here the answer can only be yes. Not only were there plenty of other women writing around this same time across Europe, like the aforementioned Anne Lock. And not only were some of them writing dialogues that explore natural philosophy, like Moderate Fonte.[6] There was even an Italian female apothecary who wrote about natural philosophy around the same time as Sabuco was putting pen to paper. This was Camilla Erculiani, who most definitely was the author of several letters that were published in Krakow in 1584, with a dedication to the Queen of Poland.[7] We might also compare her to the aforementioned Isotta Nogarola, who wrote a dialogue on the relative blameworthiness of Adam and Eve, because Erculiani's letters likewise comment on a story from the Old Testament. She uses the ideas of natural philosophy to explain why the flood waters rose, forcing Noah to gather together the animals on his Ark.

The fact that Erculiani was an apothecary is certainly relevant here, as is the fact that she lived in Padua. She ran a medical dispensary there along with her husband, and her letters confirm that she was involved in the compounding of drugs following instructions found in Galen (*CE* 125). This suggests that she would have associated with doctor-philosophers in the environment of Padua's university. Padua was one of the more cutting-edge institutions in Europe. It was here that Renaissance Aristotelians pushed the boundaries of rationalist philosophy by flirting with the provocative ideas

of Averroes. Padua was also a center for groundbreaking work in anatomy and had a professorial chair devoted to the kind of *materia medica* that would have been sold at apothecaries.[8] These pharmacies became gathering places for scientifically minded freethinkers, a mindset that is certainly reflected in Erculiani's writings (and for that matter Sabuco's: as I mentioned, the father Miguel Sabuco also worked as an apothecary). All this attracted unfriendly attention from the authorities. Apothecaries frequently ran into trouble with the Inquisition, something that plays a role in the stories of both Sabuco and Erculiani. In the case of Sabuco, the *New Philosophy* was "corrected" several times by inquisitorial censors.[9] With Erculiani things got more serious, as she was actually charged with heresy. We are fortunate to have notes for the defense written by her lawyer, who states that she was only "speaking philosophically, not theologically" when she put forward her theory about Noah's Flood (*CE* 146). Of course, the lawyer reassures the judges, Erculiani does accept that the waters rose as a punishment for sin. But this need not stand in the way of trying to understand the physical mechanism by which God caused it to happen.

Erculiani's case was not passed on to the higher authorities in Rome, which suggests that the local inquisitors were satisfied with this defense. This confirms something we've found before, that church censorship was more nuanced, or just less effective, than we often suppose. As the introduction to the translation of Erculiani's letters puts it, "here was a woman who…put the heretical ideas of foreign graduates of the University of Padua in print in her published letters, and published in freethinking Krakow. The inability of the Paduan Inquisition to condemn Erculiani under these circumstances reminds us how little we still understand about how Catholic institutions grappled with defining orthodoxy" (*CE* 42). The fact that Erculiani was a woman may actually have helped her avoid punishment. Her lawyer openly suggests that readers would be less likely to take scientific proposals seriously if they come from a female author. Which brings us to those proposals, and how seriously we should take them. Erculiani's fundamental idea is that human bodies contain a large proportion of the element earth. She points to evidence in the Bible itself to show that people in the time of Noah had grown very large physically, to the point of becoming "giants" (Genesis 6:4, quoted at *CE* 144). With so much earth being incorporated into their bodies, there would have been less

under their feet. The floods were, then, caused not by rising waters but by falling earth (*CE* 114).

This is a rather outlandish theory and I have to admit that, reading it, I wondered whether it might be meant satirically. It comes off as a playful humanist parody of the ambition to use natural philosophy as a tool of Biblical exegesis. Also typically humanist is the format of the work: a set of letters between Erculiani and male correspondents, whose appreciative but tentative responses to her proposals may in fact also have been written by Erculiani herself. (So here we have the opposite situation of Sabuco, because in this case the parts supposedly written by men might be by the female author.) I have to admit, though, that Erculiani remains straight-faced throughout, and her lawyer did not suggest in his defense that she had only been kidding. So on balance I think we should take this as a sincerely meant explanation of the Flood, inspired by the methodological principle that such phenomena must have some natural explanation or other, as she explicitly says (*CE* 146). The elements are created so as to be in balance with one another, so water would not just overwhelm earth unless the earth under the seas were diminished. The idea of human bodies absorbing a lot of earth also gives Erculiani the opportunity to explore themes like those found in Sabuco. She talks about the elemental mixture of the body with reference to aging, and describes how character traits and desires arise out of our physical condition, because the body has such a powerful effect on the activities of the soul (*CE* 117–19, 142). She also shows her knowledge of philosophy, mentioning Plato's idea that the soul pre-exists the body and learns by remembering what it saw before its embodiment (*CE* 117).

Perhaps, then, the larger goal of Erculiani's letters is not satire, but to prove a point that would be undercut by her lawyer's defense: women too can do natural philosophy, and even use it to understand Scripture. This is borne out by the opening remarks in her book, which say that she wrote it to "shed glory on women" and "through my studies, to let the world know that we, like men, are capable in all areas of knowledge" (*CE* 110). Unwittingly echoing the self-presentation of Sabuco as an unlearned woman, Erculiani emphasizes that she was able to devise her theory "without the chance to study books" and while burdened with child-rearing duties (*CE* 112). Both Sabuco and Erculiani wear their amateur status as a badge of pride, in tune with the Renaissance trend of valuing ideas developed outside the sclerotic and hidebound scholastic tradition. Just how far outside, we'll see next, as

we consider a pioneering work of scholarship on philosophy amongst the peasant population of Counter-Reformation Italy. I should warn you that this book bears the unappetizing title *The Cheese and the Worms*; but hey, you have to get earth into your body somehow.

# 70

# OUTSIDER PHILOSOPHY

## The Cheese and the Worms

If you have read the part of this book series on Africana philosophy, which I wrote together with Chike Jeffers, then you'll know that one of the major topics we covered is philosophy in oral traditions. The idea here is that cultures with no tradition of writing may nonetheless be studied from a philosophical point of view, by looking at their sayings, folktales, and even the languages they speak. This endeavor, which is sometimes given the label of "ethnophilosophy," sparked intense controversy among African philosophers. Some insisted that philosophy can exist only in a context of writing, others defended and refined the ethnophilosophical project, and still others suggested alternative approaches, like the "sage philosophy" paradigm of Henry Odera Oruka, which involved interviewing people from traditional communities who were locally admired for their wisdom. If you have ever encountered this debate, you may have wondered why no one has applied the idea to European cultures. Couldn't we look at the oral traditions of, say, Scandinavia, England, Italy, or Poland and extract philosophical insights from them, just as has been done with the Yoruba, the Akan, and various Bantu peoples?

There are several answers one might give to this question. First and most obviously, less need has been felt to explore oral traditions in cultures that do have plenty of written philosophy, whether in Europe, China, or India. Second and less obviously, the study of written philosophy often turns out to be an exploration of oral culture anyway. Texts like the Confucian

*Analects* and the early Upaniṣads originated within an oral context and were only later written down. As for Europe, those debating oral philosophy in Africa have often mentioned that Socrates himself never wrote anything, but pursued philosophy exclusively in the form of conversations, albeit conversations that then inspired the writings of Plato and Xenophon. In later periods, too, written texts were shaped by the oral encounters that gave rise to them. Just consider the centrality of the "disputation" in scholastic culture, a live debating format that was imitated in such texts as Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. Many scholastic "writings" are in fact just records of lectures or disputations that took place orally. A third and final answer to the question would be that some scholars have indeed tried to investigate the ideas that existed within an oral context in Europe. One of the most famous attempts is a book published by Carlo Ginzburg in 1976, originally in Italian. Its title, in English translation, is *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*.[1]

As Ginzburg explains in his preface, the book had its origins in research he carried out in the early 1960s while exploring the meticulous records kept by the Inquisition. At this point he was looking into a group of villagers in the Italian province of Friuli, who called themselves the *benandanti*, literally "do-gooders."[2] They came to the attention of the Inquisition because they used magic to protect their crops and towns from sorcery. As Ginzburg later commented, the Inquisition had to decide whether the *benandanti* were well-meaning but religiously confused anti-witches, or themselves witches.[3] The written accounts of the trials provided Ginzburg with the chance to reconstruct the *benandanti*'s ideas. This was a marriage of anthropology and history, much as ethnophilosophy was a marriage of anthropology and philosophy. Ginzburg wanted to look through the window the Inquisition had inadvertently opened onto the beliefs and practices of simple, unlettered folk, what he sometimes calls "popular culture" or simply "peasant" culture. This allowed him to go beyond a reductive understanding of the "world views of the lower classes as nothing but an incoherent fragmentary mass of theories that had been originally worked out by the dominant classes perhaps many centuries before" (xiv). Instead, he would seek to understand a popular worldview in its own terms, ironically enough by using written texts that were produced by the most oppressive arm of the dominant class.

While looking through the archives, he came across material regarding another inquisitorial process. The defendant was Domenico Scandella, a miller and handyman from the small town of Monterale in Friuli, who went by the nickname "Menocchio." The records of his two trials, which were held in 1583 to 1584 and 1598 to 1599, revealed that this humble peasant adhered to an extraordinarily bold set of ideas. He saw the church as hypocritical and oppressive, dismissing most of the sacraments as a mere money-making scheme (10). The one sacrament he believed in was the Eucharist, but even this he understood in a deviant fashion: it was the Holy Spirit that came into the consecrated host, not the Son, so that from the point of view of the church, Menocchio thought the wrong person of the Trinity was involved (11). Since divinity is found within every creature, he argued, the uppermost rule in life is to love one's neighbor, this taking precedence even over the commandment to love God (38). Blasphemy is no sin, because it harms only oneself and not one's neighbor (39). Indeed, Menocchio supposedly admitted, "everyone has his calling, some to plow, some to hoe, and I have mine, which is to blaspheme" (4).

Alongside these theological doctrines, Menocchio had devised a personal cosmology that was based loosely on the book of Genesis. He told his inquisitors: "in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed—just as cheese is made out of milk—and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels" (6). This passage gave Ginzburg the title for his book. Menocchio draws a parallel between the spontaneous generation of vermin and the first emergence of living beings in the cosmos. Neither they nor the world are created by God, but simply arise out of inchoate matter. The whole universe is like fermenting cheese, and the angels are like worms that generate in that cheese as it ages. His materialism applies to humans also, and implies that we have no immaterial or immortal souls. Thus witnesses in the village stated that he had told them, "when man dies he is like an animal, like a fly" (69). He did allow that there is a "spirit" in us distinct from the soul, which returns to God upon our death. But it seems that for him even God is a material being, who previously existed within the chaos of matter and then became self-aware only once the cosmos was spontaneously generated from that matter (54). Even at that point, God had no detailed knowledge of what would exist later on. Like a peasant version of Avicenna, Menocchio denied that there is divine knowledge of particulars (55). Ginzburg reaches for a

different comparison, calling him a "peasant Heraclitus" for his teaching that the world consists of earth, water, and air, but is pervaded through and through by fire (105).

This is breathtaking stuff, and you can see why Ginzburg was inspired to write a book about it, even if it was the sort of thing that most scholars would relegate to a footnote,[4] and even if the story of Menocchio was a tragic one. He was pronounced a heretic in his first trial and imprisoned. After enduring two years in jail, he was released under the stipulation that he wear a cross at all times to mark his deviance. Yet he couldn't help himself from continuing to express his daring ideas. As Menocchio said himself, "I have an artful mind, and I have wanted to seek out higher things about which I did not know" (12). His reward was to be reported to the Inquisition a second time. The inquisitors deemed him a relapsed heretic and had him put to death. This grim tale is told with verve and style by Ginzburg, whose admiring description of another scholar captures a feature of his own writing: "the tension…between the warmth of the narrator's intimate gaze and the coldness of the scientist's detached observation."[5] His goal was to go beyond documenting the story of Menocchio by "narrating" it. Among his inspirations were not just anthropologists and other historians, but novelists like Tolstoy, whose monumental *War and Peace* was animated by the "conviction that a historical phenomenon can become comprehensible only by reconstructing the activities of all the persons who participated in it."[6] Ginzburg was motivated by more than just a quest for historical understanding, though. He felt that historians are usually trapped within the perspective of historical elites, bound as they are to work with materials produced by the educated classes. His explicit goal was thus to use some of those materials to uncover the "collective mentality" of the less educated, or, to use the term he preferred precisely because of its class connotations, the "popular culture" of this period on the cusp of modernity (xxiv).

But, as Ginzburg readily admitted, his choice of Menocchio as a representative of that culture was by no means a straightforward one. This miller was no "typical" peasant, as already shown by the bewilderment and discomfiture he provoked in his fellow villagers (xx). For one thing, he was literate, a decisive factor in the development of his ideas. The trial records mention eleven books that he had managed to get hold of, the majority by borrowing them from other people (29). These included a vernacular

translation of the Bible, which one might take as confirmation for the church's idea that it was dangerous to let commoners consult this text themselves, lest they come up with their own theological opinions! Another influential book for Menocchio was an anthology of religious literature called *Il fioretto della Bibblia*, in which Ginzburg finds several parallels for his ideas. The parallels are always rather imprecise, though, showing that Menocchio had reflected on his reading and, as he admitted (or rather boasted), devised ideas of his own that came out of his own head. He thus described himself as a "philosopher, astrologer, and prophet" (107), which makes me think that he'd be very pleased to find himself included in a book on the history of philosophy.

Like any philosopher, Menocchio was shaped by his historical context. As Ginzburg notes, his access to books was made possible by the spread of printing, and his irreverent attitude was in tune with the Reformation (xxiv). One of the witnesses at his trial even compared Menocchio to the Lutherans (3). The anti-clerical polemic that runs throughout his comments certainly strikes a Protestant note. But we are clearly not dealing here with a rural version of Philip Melanchthon. Yes, Menocchio could read, and he even produced writings of his own, something we know only from a note in the records that these were found in his house and confiscated (110). But owing to his lack of education he was often flummoxed by the questions put to him at his trials, as when he failed to understand such standard theological vocabulary as "justification" and "predestination" (20). Along with the stray bits of theological material he had read, the most powerful instigation to his philosophy seems to have been, of all things, a travel narrative by John Mandeville. This told of encounters with other cultures and religions, including Islam. Reading it seems to have brought home to Menocchio the contingency of the Christian faith in which he had been raised. He told the inquisitors that "every person considers his faith to be right, and we do not know which is the right one," and said he wanted to remain a Christian simply because he had grown up that way (49). This inspired him to take distance from the teachings of his own place and time, as we can see from his admission that reading Mandeville had shifted his views about the afterlife: "from there I got my opinion that when the body dies, the soul dies too, since out of many different kinds of nations, some believe in one way, some in another" (47).

The upshot is that Menocchio cannot be used simply as a mouthpiece for peasant, popular, or oral culture. Ginzburg himself remarks that his philosophy was shaped by "the encounter between the printed page and the oral culture, of which he was one embodiment" (33). Still, as that same quotation shows, Ginzburg insisted that Menocchio could be seen as "embodying" a culture that remains largely lost to us, because it was passed on in the form of stories and oral teachings. He was also impressed by the parallels he thought he could detect between oral cultures of different places and times, from ancient India to medieval Europe. This includes the recurring idea that the cosmos arises through spontaneous generation. It has been commented that, "as a historian of European popular culture, Ginzburg had not only crossed the elusive disciplinary boundary that divides history from the history of religions or from historical folklore, he had done so in such a way that his hypotheses remained unproven and perhaps unprovable."[7] As so often, we have here an appeal to oral cultures to support a thesis that would be very difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate by looking at written records: that there are resonances among folkloric traditions around the world, so that "popular culture" forms a body of shared beliefs and shared wisdom, even if the outlines of that body are hard to make out through the mists of time.

You will probably not be surprised to learn that Ginzburg's project met with critique as well as admiration, often from the same people. One of the more sophisticated responses came from Paola Zambelli, another Italian scholar who was not convinced by the attempt to use Menocchio as a window into the precepts of a long-standing popular belief system.[8] Instead, she saw him as an "autodidact" who had done enough reading to come across echoes of doctrines being put forward in Renaissance Italy, especially by Ficino and other Platonists down in Florence and by the daring Aristotelian thinkers of Padua, which is not far from Menocchio's region of Friuli.[9] In particular, the Paduans were flirting with materialist ideas about the soul, and like plenty of other philosophers of the era they were fascinated by the topic of spontaneous generation. Of course, this humble miller would hardly have been attending lectures by a man like Agostino Nifo at the University of Padua, but that does not rule out that —"with however much mediation as you like," as Zambelli puts it—the ideas of Nifo could have filtered down to a literate peasant like

Menocchio.[10] So there was no need to cast around for parallels to ancient India. Menocchio could, thought Zambelli, have "appropriated from the Paduan and Venetian circles not only their theory of the soul, but also their conception of the physical world."[11] In his preface to *The Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg had referred to the way some elite authors of this period, like Rabelais, can be used as indirect evidence for the practices and concerns of peasant society (xvi–xvii). Zambelli wondered if Menocchio was a reverse Rabelais, expressing elite ideas in the popular setting of his village, rather than putting the lives of villagers into a literary text written by and for the elite.[12]

Because Zambelli's critique already appeared before the English translation of *The Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg was able to add a note to this version responding to her (154–55 n. 58). Here he conceded that contemporary scholastic discussions of spontaneous generation might be an important context, but he was skeptical that talking points from the rarefied atmosphere of the universities could have reached Menocchio. This "presupposes an extreme permeability, which would have to be demonstrated, between upper class culture and peasant culture." Even if one could find parallels to Menocchio's remarks in elite culture, it would be unfair to assume that these parallels are of more significance than those Ginzburg was finding in other popular cultures. Depending on how sympathetic you are to Ginzburg, you might see his position here as nuanced or as conflicted. On the one hand, he himself devoted significant effort to exploring the books that influenced Menocchio and tracing the further sources of those books. In this sense, he actually anticipated Zambelli by positing that elite culture was a crucial part of the story. On the other hand, he was convinced that Menocchio was a witness, however imperfect, to popular oral culture. Ginzburg's goal was, as he later put it himself, "the reconstruction of the relationship (about which we know so little) between individual lives and the contexts in which they unfold."[13] If he saw no contradiction "between the printed page and the oral culture" when it came to Menocchio, it was because both of these were genuinely part of the context in which Menocchio lived.

In a 1993 article, winningly entitled "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," Ginzburg placed himself within his own context. Here he sketches the background development of his brand of

"microhistory," which investigates small-scale phenomena in hopes of revealing large-scale patterns. Like the partisans of studying oral traditions in Africa, his method borrows from ethnology or ethnography, because it explores the mentalities of entire peoples.[14] Of course, in *The Cheese and the Worms* he had been looking at the ideas and story of just one man, but because he thought Menocchio was rooted in popular culture he found far broader significance in the tale. Typically historians, including historians of ideas and politics, focus on the new developments, conceptions, and events that drive history forward. By contrast, the microhistorian is interested in what Ginzburg calls "repetitive" culture, meaning culture that does *not* change, even across long periods of time.[15] If we assume that, for all his daring, Menocchio was in part simply expressing notions rooted deeply in the soil of his society, then microhistory would be the ideal tool for digging into that soil. Ginzburg thus says that "any document, even the most anomalous, can be inserted into a series," and that his book shows how such a series could be revealed through "the minute analysis of a circumscribed documentation, tied to a person who was otherwise unknown."[16]

As you might expect, I have some sympathy with Ginzburg's method. As I've already said, it resonates with the approach taken by those who research oral philosophy in Africa. Besides which, it could be seen as the ultimate application of the "without any gaps" approach. Philosophy is not found only in great books and not only put forward by great minds. Minor figures reward our attention too, in part because they tell us so much about larger trends and about the broader social and historical context in which philosophical ideas emerge. And it doesn't get much more minor than Menocchio! On the other hand, I find Zambelli's critique fairly convincing too. Even the least bright lights in the firmament of philosophy's history, though they may be so dim as to be almost invisible, are still part of the history of philosophy. Their value does not need to consist in their representation of some subterranean, timeless culture of the oppressed. It could lie precisely in their interpretation of the ideas circulating amongst a more privileged, educated elite.

In fact, I would question a presupposition that seems to be shared by both Zambelli and Ginzburg, namely that we can more or less straightforwardly distinguish between an "elite" and a "popular" culture, which correlate to rigidly defined "upper" and "lower" classes. The case of Menocchio itself shows that this dichotomy is too simplistic. The trial

records preserve a telling exchange, in which another villager told the inquisitors, “he will argue with anyone…I said to him, ‘I am a shoemaker and you a miller, and you are not an educated man, so what’s the use of talking about it?’” (2). The shoemaker was effectively telling Menocchio that he was putting on airs. The inquisitors, looking down from their greater social height, would have agreed. So Menocchio’s crime was in part that he wandered into a dangerous no man’s land between the peasants and the educated elite. This is not to say that he was a member of Italy’s emerging middle class. He was not a merchant, but a miller who picked up extra money doing carpentry. Still, he was literate, unusually well-informed, and curious, neither a trained intellectual nor a spokesman for the “folk.” Societies are complicated, and both people and ideas can move between many different contexts, not just a low popular context and a high elite context. This is something that both the historian and the historian of philosophy would do well to bear in mind.

# 71

# CARDINAL RULE

## *Robert Bellarmine*

In the first book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle enters into a discussion of the adage that we should "call no one happy so long as he still lives" (1100a10). What he has in mind is that even a flourishing, successful person could toward the end of life experience a shattering calamity, as happened to Priam in the *Iliad*, already an old man when his son Hector was killed by Achilles and his city defeated by the Greeks. Aristotle observes that even after death we are still not safe. Some disaster might befall a man's descendants, retroactively making him seem cursed rather than blessed. Something along these lines happened to Robert Bellarmine. He rose to the rank of cardinal in the Catholic Church and devoted his entire life to the defense of his faith, becoming one of the leading intellectuals of the Counter-Reformation. As his death approached in 1621, Bellarmine might well have indulged in the thought that he had led a good and successful life, even without knowing that he would eventually be canonized as a saint. He would surely have been horrified and flabbergasted to learn that he would go down in history for a very different reason.

Because, if you know just one thing about Bellarmine, it's almost certainly that he was involved in the persecution of Galileo. From his point of view this would have been quite a minor episode in his own biography, one that paled in significance alongside the other tasks he carried out for the church, his indefatigable career of polemical writing against Protestantism, and his development of a nuanced view of the relationship between church

and state. Bellarmine, or his modern-day defenders, might also hasten to point out that his role in the affair had been a relatively moderate one. In fact, when he was put on trial in 1633 Galileo produced a memorandum Bellarmine had written back in 1616 and made it fundamental to his own defense. So it is somewhat unfair that Bellarmine's name has become so closely linked to the church's misguided efforts at thought control. But not entirely unfair. He served for many years as a censor and inquisitor, argued explicitly in favor of burning both heretical books and the men who wrote them, and drew up an index of forbidden works in 1592 that called for the banning of books by Calvin, Luther, Machiavelli, Marsilius of Padua, Hus, Abelard, and Wyclif. He once said, with a jocularity that hasn't aged very well, "I hardly ever read a book without feeling in the mood to give it a good censoring."[1]

So there's no getting away from seeing Bellarmine as part of one of the stories we've been following, the inquisitorial procedures of the Counter-Reformation church and their effect on science and philosophy. But he belongs to a couple of other stories we've been following, too, including that of the Jesuits. Born in 1542, he joined the Society in 1560 and studied at the Roman College under, among others, Francisco de Toledo. After a spell at Louvain, he returned to Rome in 1576, where he assumed the tellingly named "chair of controversies." Despite that title, he resisted the tendency of some Jesuits to reduce Catholic intellectual activity to casuistry and controversial argumentation. Those who elected to specialize in casuistical exercises were, to his mind, showing a "most vile wit." He wrote, "it is not enough to hear controversies and cases of conscience, because controversies presuppose philosophy and scholastic theology, and to form mere controversialists is to put them in a great confusion, as from experience we see that the mere controversialists whom we have now understand almost nothing."[2] Instead, dialectical encounters with opponents both inside and outside the church needed to be built on a firm foundation. This meant looking back via the canonical medieval thinkers to the church fathers and Scripture itself, with the latter understood in the light of traditional interpretations.

His lectures at Rome were nonetheless published under the title *Controversies*, appearing in three installments, in 1585, 1588, and 1593, and a final complete edition in 1596.[3] The result was a veritable monument of anti-Reformation theology, which cites Protestants no fewer than 7135

times, referring to eighty-three different authors in order to refute them. Perhaps surprisingly, Luther is not the leading target: that would be Calvin, followed even more surprisingly by the now relatively obscure Martin Chemnitz. The more technical and doctrinal theological writings of these authors made them a useful foil, and Bellarmine would in due course play the same role for his own opponents. Within a century of its publication the *Controversies* provoked almost two hundred refutations from Protestant authors. Bellarmine wound up being pretty controversial within the confines of Catholicism, too. In an ironic twist, his *Controversies* was denounced to the Pope and submitted for consideration by the Congregation of the Index. The sitting pope, Sixtus V, was no friend of the Jesuits, and moved to put Bellarmine on the list of censored authors, but fortunately (at least from Bellarmine's point of view) Sixtus died shortly thereafter. The irony twisted back the other way as Bellarmine censored the censoring, critiquing this most recent Index as containing measures that were "superfluous, useless, harmful, and too rigid."[4]

Pope Sixtus was motivated by more than just animosity to Bellarmine's religious order; he was also perturbed by Bellarmine's views on political order. The provocative teaching concerned another story we've been following, about the relationship between church and state. It's a tribute to Bellarmine's subtlety that he managed to devise a new position within this long-running debate, which goes by the name of "indirect papal authority." He sums up his signature idea as follows: "the pontiff as pontiff does not have any temporal authority directly and immediately, but only a spiritual authority; however in virtue of this spiritual authority he does have a certain indirect authority, and that a supreme one, in temporal matters."[5] This doesn't exactly speak for itself, so let's figure out what he means. We can start with his understanding of "temporal" or secular political authority, which is conveniently set out in a treatise he wrote called *On Secular People*.[6] Like Suárez and other Jesuits, Bellarmine inclines to the view that governmental structures are put in place by the consent of the community that will be governed by them. The power to create a political order is created in us by God and belongs to the natural law. Indeed, by nature humanity as a whole "must be a perfect commonwealth" (22). It is, however, advantageous to create smaller polities, in which the God-given power of humans to rule over their own affairs is transferred to a recognized

authority, like a king. But it doesn't have to be a king; again like Suárez, he recognizes that different kinds of government can be legitimate.

For Bellarmine it is typical of the reformist tradition, going all the way back to Wyclif and Hus in the medieval period, to think that divine grace is needed to establish rightful political rule (30). He rejects this, arguing that humans are entirely competent within the natural law to arrange their political affairs. Otherwise pagans and non-Christians could never have legitimate governments, which seems obviously absurd. Besides, as the Protestants themselves never tired of saying, the workings of divine grace remain a mystery to humankind, so we could never know whether rulers are legitimate if that legitimacy depended on divine favor (32). It's worth noting that in offering these and other arguments, he distinguishes between Scriptural or theological points and those drawn from reason. Typically, he provides several considerations of a religious nature and then a final rational argument to clinch his case. This has several effects. First, it shows that the teaching of the church is in harmony with reason. Second, it gives support to Bellarmine's way of interpreting Scripture. Third, in a context like this it helps him to lay down a political theory that can work entirely within a secular setting. Because political life is natural, we don't need God to tell us how it should work, any more than we need Him to designate some specific person as our king.

This doesn't mean, however, that the worldly political sphere is entirely separate from spiritual concerns; indeed, that's going to be the whole point of the theory of indirect authority. For starters, as we've seen other scholastics arguing, it is a sin to defy rightful authority. So even if a law has been established in a purely secular fashion, your immortal soul is still on the line when it comes to obeying it (45). Conversely, secular rulers have a duty to defend true religion (81). So just as thinkers like Wyclif and Hus erred by making secular rule dependent on divine grace, so other thinkers have erred in the other direction, by claiming that secular rulers operate in complete independence of religious concerns. To take a not at all hypothetical case, the church would be entirely within its rights to step in if a king should start requiring his subjects to adhere to heretical teachings. Thus all theologians (by which Bellarmine of course means all right-thinking, Catholic theologians) "agree that the Supreme Pontiff has the right to depose heretical princes and to free their subjects from their obedience."[7] The reason a pope can do this is that his authority is higher, in keeping with

the superiority of spiritual concerns over worldly ones. Bellarmine here appeals to a traditional analogy: the church is like the soul, the secular state like the body, and the soul rules over the body.[8]

So far none of this is especially novel. Already Molina had argued that the pope has power over princes "precisely to the degree demanded by the supernatural end for which the spiritual power is ordained. If this supernatural end demands it, the Supreme Pontiff can depose kings and deprive them of their kingdoms."[9] Where Bellarmine innovates is in his stress on the fact that the pope does not, at least by virtue of his papal office, have any secular power whatsoever. The pope is not a "prince," because he is representative of the power of Christ on Earth, and when Christ was himself on Earth he never assumed any secular power. This is why the pope exercises no "direct" authority over worldly affairs. Whereas other Counter-Reformation theorists like Vitoria, Molina, and Suárez ascribed temporal power to the papacy in some fashion, Bellarmine controversially denied that the pope wields any such authority. That might sound like a significant concession, coming from a Catholic. You can see why Pope Sixtus was not best pleased.

But in fact Bellarmine removes papal authority from the secular sphere precisely in order to safeguard its absolute superiority and transcendence. To ascribe worldly authority to the pope would be the equivalent of damning him with faint praise. His authority is purely spiritual, but by that very fact, outranks any merely secular authority. The upshot is that the pope should generally stay out of the business of kings, who "rule over men insofar as they are men." But the pope rules over those same men "insofar as they are Christians."[10] So the moment that policy questions arise that bear on salvation or other spiritual concerns, the pope can literally "over-rule" a king. This is why he does have authority over the secular realm, though this authority is "indirect": he can intervene in temporal affairs, but only for spiritual reasons. Here's an analogy. A referee has absolute authority over those playing a football game, just insofar as the players are playing football. If he penalizes a player, there is no higher authority to whom the player can appeal. For instance, if the police are watching, they cannot come in and overturn the referee's decision. But suppose that a fight breaks out between some players during the game and one of them is killed. Now the higher concerns of criminal law come into play. The referee has no standing to get in the way of the police when they show up and start

arresting people. So a king is like the referee, supreme within his limited sphere, but subject to outside interference by a superior power on those rare occasions when more profound concerns arise.

Bellarmine called foul when the monarchs of his own day failed to understand their limited role. He blamed Henry VIII for having confused the secular and spiritual spheres by declaring himself the head of the church in England. That had happened decades ago, but the problem was ongoing in Bellarmine's day. In 1606 King James of England and Scotland demanded that Catholic subjects swear allegiance to him and affirm that it would be "heretical" to say that he could be deposed by the pope. Bellarmine declared this a "heretical stratagem" designed to transfer spiritual authority from its rightful holder, the pope, to James, a mere worldly ruler.[11] There would be no grounds for objection if James had simply told his subjects to swear loyalty to him concerning non-spiritual matters. But he had no right to tell them what is or is not heretical. In part this can be seen as a tactical move on Bellarmine's part. Back in the time of Elizabeth, it had proved counterproductive for the church to suggest that Catholics were all potential insurgents, because they could not live under a Protestant ruler. Far better to reassure such monarchs that they could expect nothing but obedience from Catholics so long as those monarchs stayed in their lane. Hence the concession that Catholics in Britain did owe properly *political* allegiance to James. Yet Bellarmine also insisted upon a more provocative point of principle, namely that James did indeed have to stay in his lane, without straying into the spiritual territory overseen by the pope and the church.

Of course, the legitimate functions of the church were not, for Bellarmine, limited to preventing rulers from interfering with religious matters, and in extreme cases, excommunicating them and stripping them of their authority. After all, this is only an exercise of "indirect" authority, so it can hardly be the definitive role of the pope or the priestly hierarchy over which he presides. A far more central task would be the "defending and expounding" of Scripture.[12] The Protestants kept insisting that the meaning of the sacred text is crystal clear, so that theological experts were not required to discover it. Against this, Bellarmine wryly noted that these same Protestants kept churning out commentaries on the Bible, suggesting that they thought it might stand in need of elaborate explanation after all. Pointedly, he mentioned the example of Christ holding up bread at the Last

Supper and saying, “this is my body,” a statement whose true significance was a matter of violent disagreement amongst the Protestants themselves (remember the debates between Luther and Zwingli on this point). In fact, human ingenuity is not sufficient to interpret Scripture with full confidence, which is why we instead have the divinely guided tradition of exegesis and teachings going back to the fathers of the church.

Which brings us, finally, back to censorship and Bellarmine’s role in the suppression of Galileo and his Copernican teaching that the Earth goes around the Sun instead of vice versa. You might think that the church could simply remain neutral on this point. Indeed, Galileo did think precisely that: it’s not as if our salvation turns on the question. But Bellarmine explicitly rejected this easy way out. There were passages in the Bible that seemed to presuppose a geocentric, rather than heliocentric, arrangement of the cosmos. For example, the book of Joshua (10:12) recounts a miracle in which the Sun stops moving, which would hardly be miraculous if the Sun never moves in the first place. Similarly, we read in the Psalms (104:5) that God “laid the foundations of the Earth, that it should not be removed forever,” and in Ecclesiastes (1:5) that the Sun rises over the Earth. Given that no one had questioned the geocentrism of such passages through the history of Biblical interpretation, it would take nothing short of a watertight proof to convince Bellarmine that the passages should be read differently. “I cannot believe,” he said, “that there is such a demonstration until someone shows it to me.”[13]

As I’ve said, this dispute looms much larger in our memory of Bellarmine than it did in Bellarmine’s own career. As a censor and inquisitor he was involved in the revision, or worse, of many authors; for example, he said when censoring Jean Bodin’s work on the method of history that Bodin was clearly “either a heretic or an atheist.”[14] In 1587, he also censored the medical treatise of Juan Huarte, rejecting the naturalist tendencies that we’ve also seen in fellow Spanish medical author Oliva Sabuco. In fairness, a book devoted to Bellarmine’s activities as a censor concludes that he “inclined neither to severity nor to indulgence.”[15] I mentioned how he complained about the exaggerations of Sixtus V’s Index, and that was not an isolated example. About another church censor, he complained, “if he goes on like this, no one will dare to write anything.”[16] But as I also mentioned, Bellarmine explicitly endorsed the burning of

books and execution of those deemed to be heretics. Thus in that political treatise *On Secular People*, he says that the fathers of the church must already have destroyed heretical texts, which is why so few survive (95). He also argues that it does a favor to everyone to kill heretics. Other people are thereby protected from insidious influence, while the heretics themselves are saved from stubbornly prolonging their error (109). As a trained scholastic, Bellarmine is always ready to consider possible objections. So here he confronts the counterargument put by Castellio and other supporters of religious toleration, that it is impossible to compel sincere belief. Quite true, says Bellarmine. But we can't compel men to want to be faithful to their wives, either, yet we still punish adultery (116–17). Bellarmine saw heresy as a profound threat, corrosive to the harmony and authority of the church, something dramatically illustrated by the past decades of Protestant-led schism. In an ideal community, he said, people "should all think the same thing."[17] Like all censors both then and now, Bellarmine assumed that this should be whatever he himself thought.

# 72

# TRIAL AND ERROR

## *Galileo and the Inquisition*

They say that history is written by the victors, and that goes double for the history of science. Doctors who believed in the four humors and used cupping or leeches to drain blood; biologists who believed in spontaneous generation; cosmologists who believed in a pervasive substance called phlogiston; anatomists who tried to divine personality traits based on the shape of the head: all are routinely considered to have been backward and ignorant, holding fast to theories that had insufficient empirical support and stubborn in the face of evidence that would have undermined those theories. The verdict is even more severe when it comes to those who actively tried to suppress ideas that turned out to be true. No example leaps to mind more readily than the Catholic Church's decision to move against Copernicanism. Copernicus himself came nowhere close to seeing his theory condemned, dying some decades too early for that. So it was left to Galileo Galilei to become a martyr for heliocentrism.[1] He was born in 1564, twenty-one years after Copernicus' death, and was a fairly old man by the time he was placed on trial by the Inquisition in 1633. A lot of time had passed between the first proposal of heliocentrism and the church's most dramatic attempt to stamp it out.

As I've mentioned in previous chapters, this was in part because Copernicus' astronomy won relatively few adherents in the decades following the publication of his pathbreaking work *On the Revolutions*. It

was not just counterintuitive—do *you* feel like the Earth is spinning under your feet?—but subject to technical objections, like the lack of perceivable parallax in the fixed stars. There were also plausible rival models, like that of Tycho Brahe, which was in fact consistent with various findings by Galileo. Then there was the lure of a compromise position suggested already by Andreas Osiander in the preface that he added to Copernicus' treatise. One could treat heliocentrism as a merely hypothetical construction that is compatible with astronomical observations, rather than as a claim about the actual physical structure of the universe. This is exactly what Robert Bellarmine wanted to Galileo to say. In a letter of 1615, Bellarmine wrote as follows:

> There is no danger in saying that, by assuming the earth moves and the sun stands still, one saves all the appearances better than by postulating eccentrics and epicycles; and that is sufficient for the mathematician. However, it is different to want to affirm that in reality the sun is at the center of the world and only turns on itself without moving from east to west… this is a very dangerous thing, likely not only to irritate all scholastic philosophers and theologians, but also to harm the Holy Faith by rendering Holy Scripture false.[2]

Copernicanism would "render Holy Scripture false" because of the aforementioned Biblical passages that suggest the Sun's motion around the Earth. If there were definitive proof that the Earth goes around the Sun instead, that would be one thing. But in the absence of such proof it was up to the church and its tradition to determine the meaning of Scripture.

It's worth emphasizing that it was this, and not really the motion of the Earth as such, that was really at stake for a man like Bellarmine. The church's rejection of heliocentrism must be understood within the context of the Counter-Reformation. Not because that movement was somehow anti-scientific or anti-intellectual. After all, scholastic thinkers of the Counter-Reformation were among the leading intellectuals of Europe. Rather, because the rise of Protestantism had made it vital to insist on the church's unchallenged authority in the interpretation of Scripture. As so often seeing himself as a moderate, Bellarmine was nonetheless happy for Galileo and other "mathematicians" to consider Copernicanism as a useful hypothesis. So when Galileo was first investigated by the Inquisition after a complaint brought by the Dominican Niccolò Lorini in 1615, Bellarmine simply instructed him not to defend heliocentrism as a proven physical theory.

This put Galileo in an awkward situation, since he was convinced that the theory was in fact proven. He had at first been attracted by heliocentrism without being totally convinced. Thus he spoke favorably of the Copernican account in a letter to Kepler in 1597, but stopped short of fully committing himself.[3] What changed his mind was the telescope. After hearing reports about the telescope, which had been invented in Holland in 1608, he built his own instrument and then worked to improve its magnifying power. Soon he was able to see that there are moons orbiting around Jupiter, laying to rest the notion that all heavenly bodies go around the Earth. He observed sunspots, whose motion across the Sun showed that it too is probably revolving. Also visible were the phases of Venus, that is, the incomplete illumination of this planet as it orbits the Sun and is lit up from different angles. Mars could be seen to vary in apparent size as its distance from the Earth varied, again in keeping with what Copernicus' theory would predict.[4] So quite literally in light of all this, Galileo was saying by 1611 that there is "certain demonstration" that the planets go around the Sun, and by 1615 that Copernicus' opinion was "certain."[5]

When he requested that Galileo be investigated, Lorini complained that the heliocentrists not only disagree with traditional readings of the Bible, but also "trample underfoot all of Aristotle's philosophy, which is so useful to scholastic theology" (*DH* 135). Yet Galileo insisted that if Aristotle had been shown the telescopic observations, he would have been the first to adopt Copernicanism. Following the dictates of empirical observation is a deeper commitment of Aristotelianism than any particular idea about the structure of the cosmos. Given the new empirical findings it would be against the spirit of Aristotle's methodology to continue upholding his cosmology.[6] Speaking of methodology, Galileo rejected out of hand the notion that Copernicus' account had been put forward only as a useful hypothesis. He rightly pronounced Osiander's preface to be an extraneous addition, and one foreign to Copernicus' own thought. In fact, the whole point of *On the Revolutions* had been to establish heliocentrism as a physical reality. Thus Galileo said that Copernicus "must either be wholly condemned, or left alone" (*DH* 62).

Even though Galileo felt he had proof on his side, he recognized the need to respond to counterarguments. First, there was the familiar concern that if Copernicus were right, then things wouldn't fall straight down when

dropped from a height, but would land far away as the Earth rotates underneath. Yet if we let a stone fall from a tower or a ship's mast, it lands right next to the bottom. Not a problem, argued Galileo. If the Earth *started* to move after being at rest, everything might lurch to the side.[7] But since the Earth is already rotating, a stone is already rotating along with everything else when it is dropped. That rotation simply continues as it falls, meaning that it moves together with the tower or mast. Showing his penchant for rhetorically powerful thought experiments, Galileo asks us to imagine a ship moving quickly at sea. In its hold butterflies are fluttering about, and there is a tank full of fish. From the perspective of someone watching them down in the hold, the butterflies and fish would seem to move just as they do when the boat is standing still in port, even though they are in fact being carried along with the boat (*DH* 186). It's worth emphasizing here that these really are *thought* experiments, not real ones. Though Galileo did depend on empirical observation when he used the telescope, in this case he thought that one could simply reflect and see that the motion of the Earth would not cause lateral movement of the things on the Earth.[8]

When it came to the objection that some Scriptural passages imply geocentrism, Galileo was dismissive. He discusses the issue in various writings from around 1615, including a letter addressed to the Grand Duchess Christina, a member of the Medici clan. While he of course admits that Scripture is always true, it is often difficult to interpret (*DH* 92), a tactically astute premise given that Catholic theologians like Bellarmine were insisting against Protestant rivals that the Bible does require expert exegesis. Since the Bible is aimed at a common readership and concerns itself primarily with spiritual and moral matters, we can hardly expect that it would use precise language when it comes to recondite matters of astronomy (*DH* 84, *EG* 106). On such matters mathematics and physics tell us what is true, and we must understand Scripture in the light of these dictates (*EG* 105). Galileo is scathing about theologians who reach for the "irresistible and terrible weapon" of condemnation when they find that they have no good arguments on their side (*DH* 52). They should just keep their noses out of the business of astronomy, a field in which they have no special expertise (*DH* 100). They don't even realize that to ban Copernicanism would mean banning astronomy as a whole, since with the

advent of the telescope anyone who knows what they are doing will have to accept heliocentrism (*DH* 102).

Galileo was not alone in this fight. Tommaso Campanella wrote a *Defense* of his fellow Italian in 1622, which suggested that if anything Galileo's "manner of philosophizing" was more compatible with Scripture than Aristotelianism.[9] But in any case Galileo should be excused, given that he had never argued "from a theological point of view."[10] Here Campanella echoes the strategy used by Camilla Erculani's lawyer: you may recall that he used almost the same phrase to defend her physical inquiries into the causes of Noah's Flood. Campanella also predicted that in the long run it would bring the church into disgrace to suppress scientific inquiry. This concern does seem to have carried some weight with the church authorities. When Galileo was brought to trial in 1633 the inquisitors at first tried to work out a kind of plea bargain. Showing lenience toward an aged and celebrated mathematician would help to maintain the reputation of their own tribunal.[11] Besides, during the initial hearings Galileo triumphantly produced a written record of his exchange with Bellarmine from almost twenty years earlier, when he had simply been warned to teach heliocentrism as a fruitful hypothesis and not an established fact. This, he said, is exactly what he had been doing ever since; he had never, to his recollection, been told not to discuss the topic in any way whatsoever.

Unfortunately for all concerned, other figures in the Holy Office undermined the plea bargain. In a modern study of the trial, this has been called a "miscarriage of justice."[12] The church didn't just condemn Galileo for upholding the truth, it violated its own legal procedures to do so! What moved them to employ such underhanded techniques against Galileo? Well, Galileo had in fact been incautious and provocative. Feeling relatively secure after being let off with that warning from Bellarmine, he published his famous *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems* in 1632, a text that makes his sympathy for Copernicanism all too evident. The sitting pope, Urban VIII, had been an admirer of Galileo but turned against him, perhaps in part because he found it useful to have an ideological scapegoat in unsettled political times.[13] It surely didn't help that Galileo allowed the plodding Aristotelian spokesman of his *Dialogue*, who bears the belittling name "Simplicio," to repeat an argument the Pope himself had raised. Urban had pointed out to Galileo that an omnipotent God could surely

create either a heliocentric or geocentric universe, so that one should simply keep an open mind. "We must not," he reportedly told Galileo, "bind divine power and wisdom."[14]

Unlike God, Galileo had shown rather limited wisdom by putting the Pope's argument into the mouth of "Simplicio," whose very name indicates that he is a simpleton. He perhaps thought he was covered by what he said about this character in the preface to the *Dialogue*: the Aristotelian spokesman is in fact named after the late ancient commentator Simplicius (*EG* 192). But presumably neither Pope Urban nor anyone else was buying that, any more than they believed Galileo's claim that his *Dialogue* treats Copernicanism only as a hypothesis. In fact, the work makes a sustained case for heliocentrism and is not shy about emphasizing how convincing that case is. From the modern-day vantage point, though, the problematic thing about the *Dialogue* is of course not its overall conclusion, but what Galileo called the "principal argument" for that conclusion.[15] This argument is based on the rise and fall of the tides, a topic to which Galileo had also dedicated a separate treatise. His idea is that the tides are caused by the double motion of the Earth, as it spins on its axis and orbits the Sun. He explains how this is meant to work with another thought experiment, asking us to imagine a moving tank full of water, and explaining that the water will oscillate along with the motion of the tank. Of course, Galileo was wrong about this, and compounding the error, he mocked a proposal made by others including Kepler, according to which the tides are caused by the attractive force of the Moon.[16] This is, of course, perfectly true, though it would take Newton's theory of gravity to explain the phenomenon fully.

This should perhaps give us pause in assessing the epistemological clash between Galileo and the church. Though Galileo was in the right, and had powerful empirical arguments on his side, one of those arguments was completely wrong. Though this is unlikely to make us more sympathetic to the inquisitors, Urban, or even Bellarmine, it might make us reflect on the standards of proof being invoked on both sides. Scholars actually disagree about this point and, in particular, whether Galileo was still wedded to the Aristotelian scientific methodology he had encountered at the University of Padua. Certainly, Galileo did not feel any need to follow Aristotle as an authority. In one of his most eloquent expressions of this independence, he wrote, "Aristotle was a man, saw with his eyes, heard with his ears, and reasoned with his brain. I am a man and see with my eyes much more than

he did; as regards reasoning, I believe he reasoned about more things than I, but whether he reasoned better than I about those things which we have both examined will be shown by our arguments and not by our authorities" (*DH* 178).

Yet we've seen already that he claimed to be following Aristotle's lead by depending on empirical evidence. Some interpreters argue that he was also trying to employ a broadly Aristotelian method of proof, and to show that his arguments rose to the standards for demonstration set out in that method. What would later be called the "scientific method," in which a hypothesis is set out and then verified by experiment, would not count as a demonstration within Aristotelian logic.[17] Instead, Galileo seems to have thought that in some cases empirical observation simply makes something immediately evident.[18] This is why an experiment can establish a proposition "as if it had been demonstrated."[19] This is what happened when he saw the phases of Venus through his telescope. He wasn't so much confirming the hypothesis that Venus is going around the Sun as seeing directly that it does. It was in this spirit that he pronounced the new astronomy to be "certain" relative to other scientific endeavors that were merely probable, for example astrology.[20]

This should again give us pause, in this case before leaping to identify Galileo as a forerunner of the scientific and philosophical developments that would come with the Enlightenment. As I say, he was born in 1564, and he died in 1642, meaning that he lived about half his life in the sixteenth century and half in the seventeenth. That chronological happenstance underscores his status as a transitional figure. Sometimes he does seem to belong to the seventeenth century, as when he argues that bodies in themselves have "primary qualities" like extension and shape, but not the sensory features we ascribe to them, like taste, odor, or color. These are, he says, "nothing but empty names…if one removes the [one sensing them], then all these qualities are taken away and annihilated" (*EG* 185). This will become a standard distinction in early modern philosophy. Yet Galileo can also seem a creature of the Renaissance, sounding not unlike a Ficino or a Telesio when he compares the Sun to the heart of an animal, suffusing as it does the whole cosmos with heat much as the heart sends out heat to the animal's limbs. "This philosophical view," he insists, "is perhaps one of the principal doors by which one may enter the contemplation of

nature" (*DH* 65). The lesson we should take from Galileo is one we have already learned from discussing other scientists working around the turn of the seventeenth century, like Sennert, Gilbert, and Dee. Namely, that the study of philosophy in the Renaissance and Reformation is not just the ideal preparation for understanding early modern philosophy. It is already part of the study of early modern philosophy, especially if that topic is treated without any gaps.

# ENDNOTES

## Preface

1. A. Koyré, *The Astronomical Revolution: Copernicus, Kepler, Borelli*, trans. R.E.W. Maddison (Ithaca: 1973), 77.
2. B. Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: 2002), 6.

# Chapter 1

1. As discussed in *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 31.
2. B. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: 2012).
3. On premonitions of the movement see M.D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus* (London: 1977); H.A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (Philadelphia: 1981); B. Bolton, *The Medieval Reformation* (London: 1983).
4. C.G. Nauert, "Humanism as Method: Roots of Conflict with the Scholastics," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998), 427–38, at 428.
5. E. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: 1995), 184–85.
6. A.R. Perreiah, "Humanist Critiques of Scholastic Dialectic," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13 (1982), 3–22, at 4.
7. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate*, 82 (quoting Melchior Cano) and 49 (quoting John Mair).
8. See also J.H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: 1983); A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church: A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Aldershot: 2007).
9. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate*, 104.
10. Nauert, "Humanism as Method," 436.
11. On the topic see L.W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge: 1963); B. Moeller, "The German Humanists and the Beginnings of the Reformation," in his *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, trans. H.C.E. Midelfort and M.U. Edwards Jr. (Philadelphia: 1972); R.P. Becker (ed.), *German Humanism and Reformation* (New York: 1982); P. Matheson, "Humanism and Reform Movements," in A. Goodwin and A. MacKay (eds), *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (London: 1990), 23–42; L.W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism* (Aldershot: 1996); E. Rummel (ed.), *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (Leiden: 2008).
12. Cited from H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Routledge Companion to Sixteenth Century Philosophy* (London: 2017), 193.
13. I take this point from P. Kärkkäinen in Lagerlund, *Routledge Companion*, 193, who is in turn following T. Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (Berlin: 2001).
14. See A. Goodman and A. MacKay (eds), *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (New York: 1990); H.A. Oberman and T.A. Brady (eds), *Itinerarium Italicum: The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of its European Transformations* (Leiden: 1975).
15. A point made by J.M. Kittelson, "Humanism and the Reformation in Germany," *Central European History* 9 (1976), 303–22, at 314.
16. As noted by J. Spaans, "Reform in the Low Countries," in R. Po-chia Hsia (ed.), *A Companion to the Reformation World* (Malden: 2004), 118–34, at 121.
17. R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Edinburgh: 1972); P. Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: 1998).
18. This hypothesis is defended by A.E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: 1988), 266.

19. Quoted from M.T. Mjaaland, *The Reformation of Philosophy: The Philosophical Legacy of the Reformation Reconsidered* (Tübingen: 2020), at 83; the studies in this volume explore several possible effects of the Reformation on the "continental" philosophical tradition.

# Chapter 2

1. For an overview of the birth of printing see A. Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven: 2010), ch. 2.
2. For what follows I draw on E.L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: 2005), which is a revised edition of E.L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: 1979).
3. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Philosophy in Byzantium and the Renaissance*, ch. 45.
4. A. Coroleu, *Printing and Reading Italian Latin Humanism in Renaissance Europe (ca. 1470–ca. 1540)* (Newcastle: 2014), 2 and 81.
5. Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance*, 182.
6. See J.-F. Gilmont and K. Maag (eds), *The Reformation and the Book* (Aldershot: 1998) for a survey of the impact of printing in different parts of Reformation-era Europe.
7. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution*, 48 and 231–32.
8. Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance*, 94.
9. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution*, 11.
10. Coroleu, *Printing and Reading Italian Latin Humanism*, 22.
11. E.P Goldschmidt, *The Printed Book of the Renaissance: Three Lectures on Type, Illustration, Ornament* (Cambridge: 1950).
12. Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance*, 101.
13. M.U. Edwards Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: 1994), 39.
14. Cited by A. Grafton, in his review of Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, "The Importance of Bring Printed," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (1980), 265–86, at 270. This review criticizes some of Eisenstein's findings, among other things on the basis that print and scribal cultures continued to exist alongside one another, a point we'll be seeing later in this book. See also the pieces by Grafton, Eisenstein, and others in *American Historical Review* 107.1 (2002).
15. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 122.
16. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 62–63 and 67.
17. For what follows I draw on J.D. Fudge, *Commerce and Print in the Early Reformation* (Leiden: 2007).
18. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 14.
19. For what follows see A.N. Burnett, *Debating the Sacraments: Print and Authority in the Early Reformation* (Oxford: 2019).
20. For the philosophical underpinnings of this teaching see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 47.
21. Burnett, *Debating the Sacraments*, 26.
22. Burnett, *Debating the Sacraments*, 13, and 45 for the issue of genre.
23. Fudge, *Commerce and Print*, 57.
24. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution*, 186. For the general issue see also W.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: 1982).

# Chapter 3

1. Quotes taken from ch. 21 of S. Butler, *Erewhon, or Over the Range* (London: 1920).
2. A.R. Perreiah, "Humanist Critiques of Scholastic Dialectic," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13 (1982), 3–22, at 9.
3. E. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: 1995), 70–71.
4. Quoted by J.H. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany* (Princeton: 1984), 231.
5. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism*, 301.
6. Cited by page number from the translation in R. Guerlac (trans.), *Juan Luis Vives: Against the Pseudodialecticians* (Boston: 1979).
7. As pointed out in A. Goodwin and A. MacKay (eds), *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (London: 1990), 25.
8. On him see N. Holzberg, *Willibald Pirckheimer: Griechischer Humanismus in Deutschland* (Munich: 1981).
9. On his life and the various aspects of his thought see C. Fantazzi, *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives* (Leiden: 2008).
10. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism*, 65–67.
11. On him see F. Akkerman and A. Vanderjagt (eds), *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius* (*1444–1485*) (Leiden: 1988); W. Kühlman (ed.), *Rudolf Agricola 1444–1485: Protagonist des nordeuropäischen Humanismus zum 550. Geburtstag* (Bern: 1994); P. Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden: 1993), on which I especially draw in what follows.
12. Goodwin and MacKay, *Impact of Humanism*, 210. On Erasmus' use of Agricola see also L. Jardine, "Inventing Rudolph Agricola: Cultural Transmission, Renaissance Dialectic, and the Emerging Humanities," in A. Grafton and A. Blair (eds), *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: 1990), 39–86.
13. Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 168.
14. Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 171.
15. Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 314.
16. L. Casini, "*Quid sit anima*: Juan Luis Vives on the Soul and its Relation to the Body," *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010), 496–517, at 498 and 502.
17. As noted by L. Casini, "Juan Luis Vives' Conception of Freedom of the Will and its Scholastic Background," *Vivarium* 44 (2006), 396–417, at 401.
18. L. Nauta, "The Order of Knowing: Juan Luis Vives on Language, Thought, and the Topics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76 (2015), 325–45, at 334. See also V. Del Nero, *Linguaggio e filosofia in Vives: L'organizzazione del sapere nel De disciplinis (1531)* (Bologna: 1991).
19. As noted by Perreiah, "Humanist Critiques," 20, and A. Moss, *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn* (Oxford: 2003), 137.
20. Fantazzi, *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, 199.
21. Fantazzi, *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, 225.
22. C.G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives and the Emotions* (Carbondale: 1989); C.G. Noreña, *The Passions of the Soul: The Third Book of "De anima et vita"* (Lewiston: 1990); L. Casini, "Emotions in Renaissance Humanism: Juan Luis Vives's *De anima et vita*," in H. Lagerlund and M. Yrjönsuuri (eds), *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes* (Dordrecht: 2002), 205–28;

L. Casini, "Aristotelianism and Anti-Stoicism in Juan Luis Vives's Conception of the Emotions," in J. Kraye and R. Saarinen (eds), *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity* (Dordrecht: 2005), 283–305.

23. Goodwin and MacKay, *Impact of Humanism*, 206.
24. On this see Fantazzi's own contribution in Fantazzi, *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, which also discusses the treatise on poverty; and for a skeptical assessment G. Kaufmann, "Juan Luis Vives on the Education of Women," *Signs* 3 (1978), 891–96.
25. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate*, 22; Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism*, 156.
26. Overviews of the "Reuchlin affair" include C.G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: 2006), ch. 5, and Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism*, ch. 7; I follow Overfield's interpretation in what follows.
27. For Jewish thought in the Italian Renaissance see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 34.
28. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism*, 257.
29. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism*, 94–95.
30. Moss, *Renaissance Truth*, 146.

# Chapter 4

1. I have described this argumentation, and mentioned the parallel to Anselm, in P. Adamson, "From the Necessary Existent to God," in P. Adamson (ed.), *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: 2013), 170–89.
2. I cite by section numbers, using the Latin editions and English translations provided in a series of publications by Jasper Hopkins: *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: 1978), which includes *De Possest*; *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia* (Minneapolis: 1981); *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other* (Minneapolis: 1999). These and many other works are collected in J. Hopkins (trans.), *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, 2 vols (Minneapolis: 2001). I use the following abbreviations: *On Learned Ignorance*: *Ign.*, *On "Possest"*: *Poss.*, *On Not-Other*: *N-O*, *On Conjectures*: *Conj.*, *On the Hidden God*: *Hid.*, *On Seeking God*: *Seeking*, *On the Peace of Faith*: *Peace*.
3. On this see E. Brient, "How Can the Infinite Be the Measure of the Infinite? Three Mathematical Metaphors from *De docta ignorantia*," in P.J. Casarella (ed.), *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance* (Washington, DC: 2006), 210–25; D. Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* (New York: 2014).
4. T. McTighe, "*Contingentia* and *Alteritas* in Cusa's Metaphysics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (1990), 55–71.
5. N.J. Hudson, *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa* (Washington, DC: 2007), 71.
6. On which see C.L. Miller, "God as *li Non-Aliud*: Nicholas of Cusa's Unique Designation for God," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41 (2015), 24–40.
7. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 25.
8. On this topic see K. Harries, "Cusanus and the Platonic Idea," *New Scholasticism* 37 (1963), 188–203; P. Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man* (Leiden: 1982), 69–72; and for his epistemology A. Eisenkopf, *Zahl und Erkenntnis bei Nikolaus von Kues* (Regensburg: 2007).
9. This interpretation is followed by Hudson, *Becoming God*, 111, against the reading of Hopkins.
10. T. Lai, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Finite Universe," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11 (1973), 161–67, at 164.
11. D. Koenigsberger, "Universality, the Universe and Nicholas of Cusa's Untastable Foretaste of Wisdom," *European History Quarterly* 17 (1987), 3–33, at 21.
12. P. Sigmund, *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: 1963); H.L. Bond and G. Christianson (eds), *Reform, Representation and Theology in Nicholas of Cusa and His Age* (Burlington, VT: 2011); T. Frank and N. Winkler, *Renovatio et unitas: Nikolaus von Kues als Reformer* (Göttingen: 2012). For the relevant primary texts see T.M. Izbicki (trans.), *Nicholas of Cusa: Writings on Church and Reform* (Cambridge, MA: 2008).
13. P.L. McDermott, "Nicholas of Cusa: Continuity and Conciliation at the Council of Basel," *Church History* 67 (1998), 254–73, at 261. I follow McDermott's view of his conciliarism in what follows.
14. S.F. Aikin and J. Aleksander, "Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei* and the Meta-Exclusivism of Religious Pluralism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 74 (2013), 219–35.
15. For a nice example from back in the early thirteenth century see L. Schuhmacher, *Early Franciscan Theology: Between Authority and Innovation* (Cambridge: 2019), 83.

16. As quoted by the famous film director Andrei Tarkovsky.

# Chapter 5

1. C.G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: 2006), 164.
2. J.D. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries* (Berkeley: 1997) is my source for the following sketch of his life. For other intellectual biographies see R.J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: 1990 and 1993); C. Augustijn, *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence* (Toronto: 1992); E. Rummel, *Erasmus* (London: 2004). For humanism in his environment see J. Ijsewijn, "The Coming of Humanism to the Low Countries," in H.A. Oberman and T.A. Brady (eds), *Itinerarium Italicum* (Leiden: 1975), 193–304.
3. This at least is how the *Ciceronianus* is read by B. Bradshaw, "The Christian Humanism of Erasmus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982), 411–47, at 432.
4. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries*, 31.
5. L. Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: 1993).
6. For what follows see J. Krans, *Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament* (Leiden: 2006). See further A. Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of a Christian Humanist* (San Antonio: 1972); J.H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: 1983).
7. J.H. Bentley, "Erasmus, Jean Le Clerc, and the Principle of the Harder Reading," *Renaissance Quarterly* 31 (1978), 309–21.
8. Krans, *Beyond What Is Written*, 21.
9. Quoted in E. Rummel, "The Theology of Erasmus," in D. Bagchi and D.C. Steinmetz (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: 2004), 28–38, at 30.
10. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries*, 119.
11. E. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: 1995), 22; the "wrestling-schools" image is from the prefatory letter to his *Enchiridion*.
12. Bradshaw, "The Christian Humanism of Erasmus," 412–13. See also J.D. Tracy, "Against the 'Barbarians': The Young Erasmus and His Humanist Contemporaries," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 11 (1980), 3–22. The work is translated in C.R. Thomson (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Vol. 23 (Toronto: 1974).
13. Cited by page number from the translation in A.H.T. Levi (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Vol. 27 (Toronto: 1986). Abbreviated as *PF*.
14. J.C. Olin, *Six Essays on Erasmus* (New York: 1979), 52.
15. Olin, *Six Essays*, 10.
16. Cited from the translation in J.W. O'Malley (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Vol. 66: *Spiritualia* (Toronto: 1988), abbreviated as *Ench*.
17. See further J. Monfasani, "Erasmus and the Philosophers," *Erasmus Studies* 32 (2012), 47–68.
18. Cited from P. Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus: Erasmus' Work as a Source of Radical Thought in Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: 2009), 83. For his pacifism see also J.D. Tracy, *The Politics of Erasmus: A Pacifist Intellectual and His Political Milieu* (Toronto: 1978); P.C. Dust, *Three Renaissance Pacifists: Essays in the Theories of Erasmus, More, and Vives* (Bern: 1987).
19. Also cited from *Collected Works*, Vol. 27. Abbreviated as *Plea* and *Inst*.
20. Olin, *Six Essays*, 19.
21. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate*, 127. See further D.M. Whitford, "Erasmus Openeth the Way before Luther: Revisiting Humanism's Influence on *The Ninety-Five Theses* and the Early Luther," *Church History and Religious Culture* 96 (2016), 516–40.

22. Rummel, “The Theology of Erasmus,” 28.
23. J.D. Tracy, “Two Erasmuses, Two Luthers: Erasmus’ Strategy in Defense of *De libero arbitrio*,” *Archive for Reformation History* (1987), 37–60, at 41 n. 20.
24. For the limits of his tolerance see N. Ron, *Erasmus and the “Other”: On Turks, Jews, and Indigenous Peoples* (Cham: 2019).
25. J.H. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany* (Princeton: 1984), 286. See further S. Markish, *Erasmus and the Jews*, trans. A. Olcott (Chicago: 1986); H.A. Oberman, *The Roots of Antisemitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, trans. J.I. Porter (Philadelphia: 1984).

# Chapter 6

1. A. Moss, *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn* (Oxford: 2003), 137.
2. Both quotations from E. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: 1995), 7.
3. For this confrontation see Moss, *Renaissance Truth*, 131–34; J.H. Overfield, "Scholastic Opposition to Humanism in Pre-Reformation Germany," *Viator* 7 (1976), 391–420, at 399.
4. Overfield, "Scholastic Opposition," 413.
5. For this as a background to the Reformation see H.A. Oberman, "*Via antiqua* and *via moderna*: Late Medieval Prolegomena to Early Reformation Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987), 23–40.
6. *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, especially chs 9, 51, 58, and 60.
7. For what follows see M.J.F.M. Hoenen, "*Via Antiqua* and *Via Moderna* in the Fifteenth Century: Doctrinal, Institutional, and Church Political Factors in the Wegestreit," in R.L. Friedman and L.O. Nielsen (eds), *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400–1700* (Dordrecht: 2003), 9–36.
8. For the story of Ockham's conflict with the papacy see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 57.
9. Hoenen, "*Via Antiqua* and *Via Moderna*," 29; M.J.F.M. Hoenen, "Philosophie und Theologie im 15. Jahrhundert: Die Universität Freiburg und der Wegestreit," in D. Mertens and H. Smolinski (eds), *Von der hohen Schule zur Universität der Neuzeit* (Freiburg: 2007), 67–91, at 72.
10. A.L. Gabriel, "*Via antiqua* and *via moderna* and the Migration of Paris Students and Masters to the German Universities in the Fifteenth Century," in A. Zimmermann (ed.), *Antiqui und Moderni: Traditionsbewusstsein und Fortschrittbewusstsein im späten Mittelalter* (Berlin: 1974), 439–83, at 447.
11. P.F. Grendler, "The Universities of the Renaissance and Reformation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57 (2004), 1–42, at 6. On this university see also P.O. Kristeller, "Scholastik und Humanismus an der Universität Heidelberg," in G. Keil et al. (eds), *Der Humanismus an die oberen Fakultäten* (Weinheim: 1987).
12. Gabriel, "*Via antiqua* and *via moderna*," 476.
13. M.J.F.M. Hoenen, "*Secundum vocem concordare, sensu tamen discrepare*: Der Streit um die Deutung des Aristoteles an der Universität Ingolstadt im späten 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhundert," in A. Fidora et al. (eds), *Politischer Aristotelismus und Religion in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Berlin: 2007), 67–87.
14. For what follows see P. Kärkkäinen: "On the Semantics of 'Human Being' and 'Animal' in Early 16th Century Erfurt," *Vivarium* 42 (2004), 237–56, and "Theology, Philosophy, and Immortality of the Soul in the Late Via Moderna of Erfurt," *Vivarium* 43 (2005), 337–60.
15. It's worth noting that this is a distant echo of the doctrine of soul put forward in the first chapter of Avicenna's treatise on the soul in his *Healing*. On this see T. Alpina, *Subject, Definition, Activity: Framing Avicenna's Science of the Soul* (Berlin: 2021).
16. On Krakow see the contributions of Markowski and Kuksewicz in Zimmermann, *Antiqui und Moderni*.
17. For what follows see H.A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: 1963).
18. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 177.

19. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 107, and 53 for the example of the kidnapped child.
20. Grendler, “The Universities of the Renaissance,” 14, and 18 for the point about lectures.

# Chapter 7

1. Biographical introductions to Luther include M. Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3 vols (Philadelphia: 1985–1993); W. von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work* (Minneapolis: 1986); B. Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Writings* (Philadelphia: 1986); D.C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Bloomington, IN: 1986); J.M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Leicester: 1989); G. Brendler, *Martin Luther: Theology and Revolution* (New York: 1991); and R. Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: 2009).
2. The list of theses is included in T.F. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Philadelphia: 1989), which is cited by page throughout this chapter. Another selection of his writings in English is J. Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (Garden City: 1961); and for those with more time on their hands, there is also the fifty-five-volume series *Luther's Works* under the general editorship of J. Pelikan and H.T. Lehmann.
3. E.L. Saak, *Luther and the Reformation of the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: 2017).
4. As noted by A. Beutel in D. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: 2003), 18.
5. Presentations of Luther's theology include P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: 1966); G. Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (Philadelphia: 1970); H.A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: 1989); O. Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: 2008); and A.E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: 2011). For his use of earlier theologians and philosophers see C. Helmer, *The Medieval Luther* (Tübingen: 2020).
6. Quoted by J. Strobl in McKim, *The Cambridge Companion*, 157.
7. W.D.J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton: 1984).
8. On him see R. Sider, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt: The Development of His Thought* (Leiden: 1974).
9. See Lindberg's discussion in McKim, *The Cambridge Companion*, and C. Lindberg, "Luther on Poverty," *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001), 85–101.
10. On this see the sources gathered in S. Karant-Nunn and M. Weisner-Hanks (trans.), *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: 2003), as well as S. Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000), 335–50.
11. Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 107.
12. Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 28, 30, 108, 197.
13. Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 106–107.
14. A point made by L.A. Kennedy, "Martin Luther and Scholasticism," *Augustiniana* 42 (1992), 339–49, at 344. On his response to scholasticism see also G. White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of their Medieval Background* (Helsinki: 1994); T. Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (Berlin: 2001); M. Schmidt, "Martin Luthers nominalistische Wurzeln," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 139 (2017), 178–90.
15. Quoted at B.D. Marshall, "Faith and Reason Reconsidered: Aquinas and Luther on Deciding What Is True," *The Thomist* 63 (1999), 1–48, at 24, 30.
16. Marshall, "Faith and Reason Reconsidered."

17. Quoted by W. van't Spijker, "Early Reformation and Scholasticism," *Dutch Review of Church History* 81 (2001), 290–305, at 296.
18. See V. Leppin, "Transformationen spätmittelalterlicher Mystik bei Luther," in B. Hamm and V. Leppin (eds), *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar erfahren: Mystik im Mittelalter und bei Martin Luther* (Tübingen: 2007), 165–85.
19. For this comparison see S.E. Ozment, "Homo Viator: Luther and Late Medieval Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 62 (1969), 275–87.
20. For Luther's lack of interest in this approach to the Trinity see Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 60.
21. Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 8.

# Chapter 8

1. See M. Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: 2011).
2. Quoted by L. Urban, "Was Luther a Thoroughgoing Determinist?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), 113–39, at 122–23.
3. D.M. Whitford, "Erasmus Openeth the Way before Luther: Revisiting Humanism's Influence on *The Ninety-Five Theses* and the Early Luther," *Church History and Religious Culture* 96 (2016), 516–40, at 518.
4. I cite throughout this chapter from the translations of Erasmus and Luther in E.G. Rupp and P.S. Watson (trans.), *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Louisville: 1969). There is also a full translation of the treatise by Erasmus, and a partial one of Luther's, in E.F. Winter, *Erasmus–Luther: Discourse on Free Will* (New York: 2002). On the dispute see G. Krodel, "Erasmus–Luther: One Theology, One Method, Two Results," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 41 (1970); B. Hägglund, "Die Frage der Willensfreiheit in der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Erasmus und Luther," in A. Buck (ed.), *Renaissance—Reformation: Gegensätze und Gemeinsamkeiten* (Wiesbaden: 1984); and J.F. Tinkler, "Erasmus' Conversation with Luther," *Archive for Reformation History* 82 (1991), 59–81.
5. On this work see K. Schwarzwäller, *Shibboleth: Die Interpretation von Luthers Schrift De servo arbitrio seit Theodosius Harnack* (Munich: 1969); E. Herms, "Gewißheit in Martin Luthers *De Servo Arbitrio*," *Luther Jahrbuch* 67 (2000), 23–50; and R. Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord* (Grand Rapids: 2005).
6. On Erasmus' non-polemical stance see R.R. McCutcheon, "The Missing Dialogue Concerning the Will between Erasmus and Luther," *Renaissance and Reformation* 21 (1997), 35–47, at 40–41.
7. J.D. Tracy, "Two Erasmuses, Two Luthers: Erasmus' Strategy in Defense of *De libero Arbitrio*," *Archive for Reformation History* (1987), 37–60, at 38.
8. Tracy, "Two Erasmuses," 51.
9. For discussion of this point see K. Alfsvåg, "Luther on Necessity," *Harvard Theological Review* 108 (2015), 52–69, at 56, and A. Kraal, "Valla-Style Determinism and the Intellectual Background of Luther's *De servo arbitrio*," *Harvard Theological Review* 108 (2015), 402–22, at 417–20.
10. Urban, "Was Luther a Thoroughgoing Determinist?" 127–28.
11. For the Latin of this and other passages I have used the edition in *Dr Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 18 (Weimar: 1908), with this passage at 638.
12. Alfsvåg, "Luther on Necessity," 59.

# Chapter 9

1. Quoted by A. Hayum, "Dürer's Portrait of Erasmus and the *Ars Typographorum*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985), 650–87, at 656 n. 15.
2. Quoted in Hayum, "Dürer's Portrait," 654–55.
3. Quoted in Hayum, "Dürer's Portrait," 686–87.
4. Quoted by C. Schleif, "Albrecht Dürer between Agnes Frey and Willibald Pirckheimer," in L. Silver and J. Chipps-Smith (eds), *The Essential Dürer* (Philadelphia: 2010), 185–205, at 188.
5. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 48.
6. Quoted by J.L. Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: 1996), at 156.
7. P. Doorly, "Dürer's *Melencolia I*: Plato's Abandoned Search for the Beautiful," *Art Bulletin* 86 (2004), 255–76.
8. Quoted in Hayum, "Dürer's Portrait," 663.
9. J.L. Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: 1996), 67.
10. C. Andresson and L. Silver, "Dürer's Drawings," in L. Silver and J. Chipps-Smith (eds), *The Essential Dürer* (Philadelphia: 2010), 12–34, at 15.
11. M.A. Sullivan, "Alter Apelles: Dürer's 1500 Self-Portrait," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68 (2015), 1161–91.
12. Discussed by Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 120.
13. R. Smith, "Dürer as Christ?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 6 (1975), 26–36.
14. Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 127.
15. Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 163.
16. J.C. Bondanella and P. Bondanella (trans.), *Giorgio Vasari: Lives of the Artists* (Oxford: 1998), 439.
17. *Lives of the Artists*, 443.
18. C. Gilbert, *Michelangelo: On and Off the Sistine Ceiling* (Princeton: 1994), 64.
19. For an overview see M. Bull, "The Iconography of the Sistine Chapel Ceiling," *Burlington Magazine* 130 (1988), 597–605, who connects the imagery to the thought of Joachim of Fiore. Accessible introductions to the ceiling are R. King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* (London: 2002) and A. Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel* (New York: 2009).
20. E. Panovsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: 1967), 181. An earlier "Neoplatonic" reading of the ceiling was given by C. De Tolnay, *Michelangelo II: The Sistine Ceiling* (Princeton: 1949).
21. Gilbert, *Michelangelo*, 32.
22. J. Hall, *Michelangelo and the Reinvention of the Human Body* (London: 2005).
23. R. Cuir, *The Development of the Study of Anatomy from the Renaissance to Cartesianism: Da Carpi, Vesalius, Estienne, Bidloo* (Lewiston: 2009), 47.
24. C. Seymour (ed.), *Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel Ceiling* (London: 1972), 93–95.
25. King, *Michelangelo*, 229.
26. M.B. Hall, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*: Resurrection of the Body and Predestination," *Art Bulletin* 58 (1976), 85–92, at 89. See also J.A. Connor, *The Last Judgment: Michelangelo and the Death of the Renaissance* (New York: 2009).
27. *Lives of the Artists*, 463. For the importance of Dante see also J.W. Dixon Jr., "The Christology of Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987),

503–33, at 519.

28. Panovsky, *Studies in Iconology*, 179.
29. *Lives of the Artists*, 465.
30. V. Shrimplin-Evangelidis, "Sun-Symbolism and Cosmology in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1990), 607–44, at 620. While this article's stress on the centrality of Christ is important, I am less persuaded of the connection drawn to Copernican heliocentrism.

# Chapter 10

1. General studies include A. Sperl, *Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation* (Munich: 1959); C.L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (New York: 1958); W. Maurer, *Der jungen Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*, 2 vols (Göttingen: 1967 and 1969); G. Frank, *Die theologische Philosophie Philipp Melanchthons (1497–1560)* (Leipzig: 1995); N. Kuropka, *Philipp Melanchthon: Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft: Ein Gelehrter im Dienst der Kirche (1526–1532)* (Tübingen: 2002).
2. Q. Breen, "The Subordination of Philosophy to Rhetoric in Melanchthon: A Study of his Reply to G. Pico della Mirandola," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 43 (1952), 13–27. For the ascription see E. Rummel, "*Epistola Hermolai nova ac subditicia*: A Declamation Falsely Ascribed to Melanchthon," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 83 (1992) 302–305. On Pico's letter see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 35.
3. As pointed out by R. Keen, "Political Authority and Ecclesiology in Melanchthon's *De Ecclesiae Autoritate*," *Church History* 65 (1996), 1–14, at 11.
4. On his impact see K. Maag (ed.), *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence beyond Wittenberg* (Grand Rapids: 1999).
5. W.P. Weaver, "*Triplex Est Copia*: Philip Melanchthon's Invention of the Rhetorical Figures," *Rhetorica* 29 (2011), 367–402, at 378.
6. B. Pitkin, "The Protestant Zeno: Calvin and the Development of Melanchthon's Anthropology," *Journal of Religion* 84 (2004), 345–78, at 351.
7. Translated in S. Kusukawa (trans.), *Philip Melanchthon: Orations on Philosophy and Education* (Cambridge: 1999), hereafter cited by page as *Or*.
8. Here I follow M. Leiner, "Die Anfänge der protestantischen Hermeneutik bei Philipp Melanchthon: Ein Kapitel zum Verhältnis von Rhetorik und Hermeneutik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 94 (1997), 468–87. See also K. Meerhoff, "The Significance of Philip Melanchthon's Rhetoric in the Renaissance," in P. Mack (ed.), *Renaissance Rhetoric* (New York: 1994), 46–62, which at 48 notes the "essentially rhetorical orientation" Melanchthon sees in Scripture.
9. G. Frank, "Melanchthon: Der 'Ethiker der Reformation,'" in G. Frank and F. Mundt (eds), *Der Philosoph Melanchthon* (Berlin: 2012), 45–75. For the tradition of commentaries on this work see M. Svensson, "Aristotelian Practical Philosophy from Melanchthon to Eisenhart: Protestant Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1529–1682," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 21 (2019), 218–38.
10. S. Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: 1995), 42.
11. C. Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen: Stimulus to a Theological Mathematics* (Aldershot: 1998), 72.
12. Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy*, 103.
13. C. Methuen, "The Role of the Heavens in the Thought of Philip Melanchthon," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996), 385–403.
14. Cited by page from the translation in W. Pauck (trans.), *Library of Christian Classics: Melanchthon and Bucer* (Louisville: 1969), abbreviated as *CP*.
15. T.J. Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philip Melanchthon's Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam* (Oxford: 1998); W. Matz, *Der Befreite Mensch: Die Willenslehre in der Theologie Philipp Melanchthons* (Göttingen: 2001).

16. Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy*, 89.
17. For this and what follows see Pitkin, "The Protestant Zeno."
18. A. Eusterschulte, "*Assensio*: Wahlfreiheit in Melanchthons theologischer Grundlegung einer philosophischen Ethik," in Frank and Mundt, *Der Philosoph Melanchthon*, 11–43, at 35.
19. O. Bayer, "Freedom? The Anthropological Concepts in Luther and Melanchthon Compared," *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998), 373–87.
20. Eusterschulte, "*Assensio*," 15; Frank, "Melanchthon," 75.
21. For this topic see M.L. Jensen, "By Convention or By Nature: Melanchthon's Criticism of Late Medieval Ockhamist Political Thought in the *Commentarii in aliquot politicos libros Aristoteles*," *History of Political Thought* 35 (2014), 1–28; M.L. Jensen, *A Humanist in Reformation Politics: Philipp Melanchthon on Political Philosophy and Natural Law* (Leiden: 2020).
22. Quoted at Jensen, "By Convention or By Nature," 19.
23. J.M. Estes, "The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church: Melanchthon as Luther's Interpreter and Collaborator," *Church History* 67 (1998), 463–83.
24. Cited at J. Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon 1518–1559* (Leiden: 2005), 152.
25. Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy*, 81.
26. My thanks to Michiel Hoeckx for comments on a draft of this chapter.

# Chapter 11

1. Important studies of this event include G. Franz, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg 1525* (Berlin: 1926) and P. Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525* (Baltimore: 1981). In this chapter I emphasize its connection to the Reformation, but it should be noted that there are other approaches, notably from a Marxist perspective; this goes back to Friedrich Engels himself, who wrote a study of the peasants' revolt in 1850.
2. Quoted from M.G. Baylor, *The German Reformation and the Peasants' War: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: 2012), 138.
3. Baylor, *The German Reformation*, 4.
4. J.M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: 1991), 42.
5. For several such lists of demands see the appendices in M.G. Baylor (ed. and trans.), *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: 1991), which is cited throughout this chapter by page number.
6. As noted by Stayer, *The German Peasants' War*, 39, 50–51.
7. For his theory of republican government see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 40.
8. See also R.N. Crossley, *Luther and the Peasants' War: Luther's Actions and Reactions* (New York: 1974), 30–31.
9. I here follow the argument of Stayer, *The German Peasants' War*, 73.
10. For his works see P. Matheson (ed. and trans.), *Collected Letters and Writings of Thomas Müntzer* (Edinburgh: 1988), and on him see H.-J. Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer: Mystiker, Apolalyptiker, Revolutionät* (Munich: 1989); T. Scott, *Thomas Müntzer: Theology and Revolution in the German Reformation* (London: 1989); S. Bräuer and G. Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer: Neu Ordnung machen in der Welt* (Gütersloh: 2016).
11. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War*, 53.
12. See further G. Wolf (ed.), *Luther und die Obrigkeit* (Darmstadt: 1972).
13. Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 2: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: 1978), 64.
14. See H. Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of His Theology*, trans. K.H. Hertz (Philadelphia: 1966) and more generally W.D.J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton: 1984).
15. T.F. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Philadelphia: 1989), 682.
16. Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 686.
17. Baylor, *The German Reformation*, 111–12.
18. J. Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon 1518–1559* (Leiden: 2005), 191.
19. I take the example from Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 26.
20. Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 103.
21. G. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: 1976), 348.

# Chapter 12

1. C. Augustijn, "Zwingli als Humanist," *Dutch Review of Church History* 67 (1987), 120–42.
2. Cited from G. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: 1976), 76 n. 4
3. Cited from R.C. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy* (Toronto: 1967), 76.
4. On which see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 3.
5. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy*, 218.
6. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy*, 162.
7. Treatises by Zwingli are cited by page number from G.W. Bromiley (trans.), *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Louisville: 1953).
8. T. Scott, "The Problem of Nationalism in the Early Reformation," *Renaissance and Reformation* 30 (2017), 161–77, at 176.
9. Potter, *Zwingli*, 111.
10. H. Amirav and H.-M. Kirn, "Notes on the Reformation, Humanism, and the Study of Hebrew in the Sixteenth Century: The Case of Theodore Bibliander (1505–64)," *Church History and Religious Culture* 87 (2007), 161–71.
11. For a concise overview of his polemic see W.P. Stephens, *Zwingli: Eine Einführung in sein Denken* (Zürich: 1997), 115–17. As Stephens notes, Zwingli's position was that Scripture neither requires nor forbids infant baptism.
12. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 47.
13. T. Osborne, "Faith, Philosophy, and the Nominalist Background to Luther's Defense of the Real Presence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002), 63–82, at 65.
14. Potter, *Zwingli*, 310.
15. Potter, *Zwingli*, 173.
16. For these analogies see T.F. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Philadelphia: 1989), 318–20, and 323 for the following quote.
17. D. Bolliger, *Infiniti contemplatio: Grundzüge der Scotus- und Scotismusrezeption im Werk Huldrych Zwinglis* (Leiden: 2003), 432–33.
18. Cited from K. Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: 1995), 77.
19. On "Entzauberung" see Bolliger, *Infiniti contemplatio*, 515 ff., and more generally B.S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: 2012).

# Chapter 13

1. A. Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" *Nous* 15 (1981), 41–51.
2. Cited by section from J.T. McNeill (ed.), *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: 2016).
3. A. Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (eds), *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame: 1983), 16–93, at 67. See also A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: 2000).
4. Here I am in agreement with P. Helm, *Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: 2004), 244. See also D. Jeffreys, "How Reformed Is Reformed Epistemology? Alvin Plantinga and Calvin's '*Sensus Divinitatis*,'" *Religious Studies* 33 (1997), 419–31.
5. H. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: 1982), 181.
6. D. Vandrunen, "The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Journal of Church and State* 46 (2004), 503–25.
7. On his life see e.g. W.J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: 1988); A. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: 1990).
8. See further Q. Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism* (Hamden: 1968).
9. On him see E. Iserloh, *Johannes Eck (1486–1543): Scholastiker, Humanist, Kontroverstheologe* (Aschendorff: 1981).
10. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity*, 199.
11. For an overview of Servetus' positions see R.W. Holder (ed.), *John Calvin in Context* (Cambridge: 2019), 259–60.
12. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity*, 215.
13. D.K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: 2004), 49.
14. On his reaction to the Stoics and other ancient philosophical schools see C. Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: 1977).
15. As explained at Helm, *Calvin's Ideas*, 120–21, this makes for a contrast with Zwingli, who denied that created things are truly causes.
16. From Calvin's commentary on Isaiah, cited at Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, 131.
17. J.K.S. Reid, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination* (London: 1961), 123.
18. On which see e.g. F. Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (Durham: 1963); P. Jacobs, *Prädestination und Verantworklichkeit bei Calvin* (Neukirchen: 1968); R. Muller, *Christ and Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham: 1986); J.H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross: An Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of Limited Redemption* (Allison Park: 1990); W.R. Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace: the Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: 1999); P. Helm, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: 2009).
19. This is the position taken by J.B. King Jr., *Predestination in Light of the Cross: A Critical Exposition of Luther's Theology* (Vallecita: 2003).
20. C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: 1944), 43.
21. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 3.
22. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Africana Philosophy from Ancient Egypt to the Nineteenth Century*, ch. 51.

23. My thanks to Shaun Blanchard for comments on this chapter.

# Chapter 14

1. As pointed out by D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: 1995), 247, and C. Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: 1977), 99, respectively.
2. R.A. Miller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism: A Review," in W.J. van Asselt and E. Dekker (eds), *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: 2001), 45–64, at 45. For another general overview see W.J. van Asselt, "Protestant Scholasticism: Some Methodological Considerations in the Study of its Development," *Dutch Review of Church History* 81 (2001), 265–74.
3. On him see W. Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodor Beza: Zum Problem des Verhältnisses von Theologie, Philosophie und Staat* (Neukirchen: 1967); J.S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop: 1975); R. Lethem, "Theodore Beza: A Reassessment," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1978), 25–40; J. Mallinson, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation in Theodore Beza (1519–1605)* (Oxford: 2003).
4. Mallinson, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation*, 3.
5. Mallinson, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation*, 58, and 78 for the contrast between reason and reasoning.
6. For instance J.P. Donnelly, "Calvinist Thomism," *Viator* 7 (1976), 441–55, at 452.
7. Lethem, "Theodore Beza: A Reassessment," 28; Mallinson, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation*, 213.
8. P.F. Grendler, "The Universities of the Renaissance and Reformation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57 (2004), 1–42, at 22.
9. For this I draw on several studies by J.S. Freedman: "Aristotle and the Content of Philosophy Instruction at Central European Schools and Universities during the Reformation Era (1500–1650)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 137 (1993), 213–53; "Encyclopedic Philosophical Writings in Central Europe during the High and Late Renaissance (ca. 1500–ca. 1700)," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 37 (1994), 212–56; and " 'Professionalization' and 'Confessionalization': The Place of Physics, Philosophy, and Arts Instruction at Central European Academic Institutions during the Reformation Era," *Early Science and Medicine* 6 (2001), 334–52.
10. This holistic approach is well illustrated by Gregor Reisch's epitome of the sciences, aimed at students and printed throughout the sixteenth century. For an overview of its purposes and contents see the introduction to A. Cunningham and S. Kusukawa (trans.), *Natural Philosophy Epitomised: Books 8–11 of Gregor Reisch's Philosophical Pearl (1503)* (Abingdon: 2016).
11. Latin at Freedman, "Encyclopedic Philosophical Writings," 226, n. 44; my translation.
12. J.S. Freedman, "The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann (d. 1609)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141 (1997), 305–64.
13. Quoted in M. Feingold, *The Mathematician's Apprenticeship: Science, Universities and Society in England 1560–1640* (Cambridge: 1984), 12.
14. R.A. Muller, "*Vera Philosophia cum sacra Theologia nusquam pugnat*: Keckermann on Philosophy, Theology, and the Problem of Double Truth," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984), 341–65, at 356.
15. M. Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Theologie, Philosophie und gelehrte Konflikte am Beispiel des Helmstedter Hofmannstreits und seiner Wirkungen auf das Luthertum um 1600* (Göttingen: 2004).
16. Muller, "*Vera Philosophia*," 352.
17. Muller, "*Vera Philosophia*," 355.

18. M. Svensson, "Aristotelian Practical Philosophy from Melanchthon to Eisenhart: Protestant Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1529–1682," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* (2019), 218–38; A. Herreros, "A Case Study of the Reception of Aristotle in Early Protestantism: The Platonic Idea of the Good in the Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 43 (2020), 41–69; M. Svensson, *The Aristotelian Tradition in Early Modern Protestantism: Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Commentaries on the Ethics and the Politics* (Oxford: 2024).
19. E. Campi and J.C. McLelland, *Peter Martyr Vermigli: Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Kirksville: 2006); see further L. Baschera, "Aristotle and Scholasticism," in T. Kirby, E. Campi, and F.A. James (eds), *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli* (Leiden: 2009), 133–59. On him see also J.P. Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: 1976); J.C. McLelland (ed.), *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Italian Reform* (Waterloo: 1980); F.A. James (ed.), *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations: Semper Reformanda* (Leiden: 2004).
20. See Donnelly, "Calvinist Thomism," as well as J.P. Donnelly, "Italian Influences on the Development of Calvinist Scholasticism," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 7 (1976), 81–101; D.S. Systma, "Sixteenth-Century Reformed Reception of Aquinas," in M. Levering and M. Plested (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas* (Oxford: 2021), 121–43.
21. Donnelly, "Italian Influences," 94.
22. Quoted from C.J. Burchill, "Girolamo Zanchi: Portrait of a Reformed Theologian and His Work," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984), 185–207, at 189–90.
23. R.A. Muller, "*Duplex cognitio dei* in the Theology of Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10 (1979), 51–62.
24. Donnelly, "Italian Influences," 89. For Aquinas' view see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 36.
25. Baschera, "Aristotle and Scholasticism," 157.
26. D. Neelands, "Predestination and the *Thirty-Nine Articles*," in Kirby et al., *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli*, 355–74.
27. Donnelly, "Italian Influences," 98.
28. For him I draw on J. Zovko, "Die Bibelinterpretation bei Flacius (1520–1575) und ihre Bedeutung für die moderne Hermeneutik," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 132 (2007), 1169–80.
29. See T. Head, "A Propagandist for the Reform: Marie Dentière," in K. Wilson (ed.), *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Athens, GA: 1987), 260–83; I. Backus, "Marie Dentière: Un cas de féminisme théologique à l'époque de la Réforme?" *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* (1991), 177–95; C. Skenazi, "Marie Dentière et la prédication des femmes," *Renaissance and Reformation* 21 (1997), 5–18; M.B. McKinley, "Marie Dentière: An Outspoken Reformer Enters the French Literary Canon," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 37 (2006), 401–12.
30. Skenazi, "Marie Dentière," 11–12; my translation.
31. S. Halbach, *Argula von Grumibach als Verfasserin reformatorischer Flugschriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1992); P. Matheson, "Breaking the Silence: Women, Censorship, and the Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996), 97–109; P. Matheson, "A Life in Letters: Argula von Grumbach (1492–1556/7)," *Early Modern Women* 4 (2009), 27–60; and for a translation of her writings P. Matheson (trans.), *Argula von Grumbach: A Woman's Voice in the Reformation* (Edinburgh: 1995), with both of the following quotes at 89.

# Chapter 15

1. Cited by page from A. Rabil Jr. (ed. and trans.), *Henricus Cornelius Agrippa: Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (Chicago: 1996).
2. M. Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa, the Humanist Theologian and His Declamations* (Leiden: 1997), 187.
3. B. Newman, "Renaissance Feminism and Esoteric Theology: The Case of Cornelius Agrippa," *Viator* 24 (1993), 337–56, at 350.
4. Newman, "Renaissance Feminism," 339; see also Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 97 and 192.
5. M.H. Keefer, "Agrippa's Dilemma: Hermetic Rebirth and the Ambivalences of *De Vanitate* and *De Occulta Philosophia*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988), 614–53, at 617.
6. For the latter there is a widely available early modern English translation, *The Vanity of Arts and Sciences by Henry Cornelius Agrippa* (London: 1676). See also B.C. Bowen, "Cornelius Agrippa's *De Vanitate*: Polemic or Paradox?" *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 34 (1972), 251–56.
7. *Doctor Faustus*, Act 1.1, quoted by P. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance* (Leiden: 2007), 115.
8. C.I. Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy* (Leiden: 2003), 56.
9. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, 64.
10. See P. Zambelli, "Il problema della magia naturale nel rinascimento," *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 28 (1973), 271–96, and *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 52.
11. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, 132.
12. For discussion see H.F.W. Kuhlow, *Die Imitatio Christi und ihre kosmologische Überfremdung: Die theologischen Grundlagen des Agrippa von Nettenheim* (Berlin: 1967), 19.
13. Latin quoted at Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 44; my translation.
14. Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 102–103, and 125 for the following quote about number.
15. P. Zambelli, "Magic and Radical Reformation in Agrippa of Nettesheim," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976), 69–103, at 71.
16. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, 120.
17. Cited from Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 130.
18. C.G. Nauert, "Magic and Skepticism in Agrippa's Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 18 (1957), 161–82, at 173. For the intellectual biography see C.G. Nauert, *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana: 1965).
19. Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 67.
20. Backus, "Agrippa on Human Knowledge," 151–52.
21. Keefer, "Agrippa's Dilemma," 642 and 644.
22. V. Hoorens and H. Renders, "Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Witchcraft: A Reappraisal," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 43 (2012), 3–18.
23. Nauert, "Magic and Skepticism," 165.
24. Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 84.
25. V. Perrone Compagni, "*Dispersa intentio*: Alchemy, Magic and Scepticism in Agrippa," *Early Science and Medicine* 5 (2000), 160–77, at 173.

26. Quoting from Agrippa's self-defense against accusations of heresy, at Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 167–68.
27. Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 181.
28. Backus, "Agrippa on Human Knowledge," 156.
29. Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 183.
30. Perrone Compagni, "*Dispersa intentio*," 170.
31. Kuhlow, *Die Imitatio Christi*, 67.
32. Zambelli, "Magic and Radical Reformation," 74.
33. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, 127.

# Chapter 16

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2. For overviews see e.g. O. Hannaway, *The Chemists and the Word: The Didactic Origins of Chemistry* (Baltimore: 1975); J. Read, *From Alchemy to Chemistry* (New York: 1995); B.T. Moran, *Distilling Knowledge: Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: 2005).
3. A. Sayılı, "Fârâbî'nin simyanin lüzûmu hakkındaki risâlesi," *Türk Tarih Kurumu: Belleten* 15 (1951), 65–79, Arabic edition at 75–79.
4. P. Kraus, *Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān*, 2 vols (Cairo: 1942–43).
5. P. Adamson, *Al-Rāzī* (New York: 2021), 91–98.
6. Read, *From Alchemy*, 36.
7. For the relation of astrology to alchemy see W.R. Newman and A. Grafton (eds), *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: 2001).
8. General studies include W. Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: 1958); A. Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* (New York: 1997); O.P. Grell (ed.), *Paracelsus: The Man and His Reputation, His Ideas and Their Transformation* (Leiden: 1998). For an English version of some works see J. Jacobi, *Paracelsus Selected Writings* (Princeton: 1951).
9. Weeks, *Paracelsus*, 1.
10. A. Sparling, "Paracelsus, a Transmutational Alchemist," *Ambix* 67 (2020), 62–87.
11. A.G. Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2 vols (New York: 1977); C. Webster, "Alchemical and Paracelsian Medicine," in C. Webster (ed.), *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: 1979), 301–34; H. Trevor-Roper, "The Paracelsian Movement," in H. Trevor-Roper, *Renaissance Essays* (London: 1986), 149–99.
12. Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 178–80. See also C.D. Gunnoe Jr, "Paracelsus, the Plague, and *De Pestilitate*," in D. Kahn and H. Hirai (eds), *Pseudo-Paracelsus: Forgery and Early Modern Alchemy, Medicine and Natural Philosophy* (Leiden: 2022), 92–114.
13. Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 140.
14. H. Hirai, *Le concept de semence dans les théories de la matière à la Renaissance: De Marsile Ficin à Pierre Gassendi* (Turnhout: 2005), 183; J.A. Norris, "Early Theories of Aqueous Mineral Genesis in the Sixteenth Century," *Ambix* 54 (2007), 69–86.
15. D.T. Daniel, "Invisible Wombs: Rethinking Paracelsus's Concept of Body and Matter," *Ambix* 53 (2006), 129–42; the following quote is from Hirai, *Le concept de semence*, 188, my translation.
16. Weeks, *Paracelsus*, 172; M.L. Bianchi, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Alchemy to Paracelsus," in P. Rattansi and A. Clericuzio (eds), *Alchemy and Chemistry in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Dordrecht: 1994), 17–50, at 17.
17. W.R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: 2004).
18. A point emphasized by Weeks, *Paracelsus*, 42.
19. N.L. Brann, "Was Paracelsus a Disciple of Trithemius?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10 (1979), 70–82; see also E. Jaeckle, "Paracelsus und Agrippa von Nettesheim," *Nova Acta Paracelsiana* (1945), 83–109.

20. Sparling, “Paracelsus,” 78.
21. For this I draw on P.J. Forshaw, “Cabala Chymica or Chemia Cabalistica: Early Modern Alchemists and Cabala,” *Ambix* 60 (2013), 361–89.
22. H. Schott, writing in Grell, *Paracelsus*, 321.
23. Forshaw, “Cabala Chymica,” 380.
24. O.P. Grell, “The Reception of Paracelsianism in Early Modem Lutheran Denmark: From Peter Severinus, the Dane, to Ole Worm,” *Medical History* 39 (1995), 78–94. See further J. Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine: The Ideas, Intellectual Context, and Influence of Petrus Severinus: 1540–1602* (Copenhagen: 2004).
25. Mentioned by H. Trevor-Roper at Grell, *Paracelsus*, 242. See further M. Shefer, “An Ottoman Physician and His Social and Intellectual Milieu: The Case of Salih bin Nasrallah Ibn Sallum,” *Studia Islamica* 106 (2011), 102–23; N. Bachour, *Oswaldus Crollius und Daniel Sennert im frühneuzeitlichen Istanbul: Studien zur Rezeption des Paracelsismus im Werk des osmanischen Arztes Ṣāliḥ b. Naṣrullāh Ibn Sallūm al-Ḥalabī* (Freiburg im Breisgau: 2012).
26. P.J. Forshaw, “ ‘Paradoxes, Absurdities, and Madness’: Conflict over Alchemy, Magic and Medicine in the Works of Andreas Libavius and Heinrich Khunrath,” *Early Science and Medicine* 13 (2008), 53–81.
27. W. R. Newman, *Atoms and Alchemy: Chymistry and the Experimental Origins of the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: 2006), 57. See also T. Walter, “New Light on Antiparacelsianism (c. 1570–1610): The Medical Republic of Letters and the Idea of Progress in Science,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 43 (2012), 701–25.

# Chapter 17

1. I borrow from R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274–1671* (Oxford: 2011), 88–89 the insight that the key philosophical and scientific question is hylomorphism vs corpuscularianism, not whether the corpuscles are divisible or not.
2. W.R. Newman, "The Significance of 'Chymical Atomism,'" *Early Science and Medicine* 14 (2009), 248–64, at 255.
3. For what follows I draw on W.R. Newman, *Atoms and Alchemy: Chymistry and the Experimental Origins of the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: 2006).
4. E. Michael, "Sennert's Sea Change: Atoms and Causes," in C. Lüthy, J.E. Murdoch, and W.R. Newman (eds), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories* (Leiden: 2001), 331–62, at 353.
5. Newman, *Atoms and Alchemy*, 49, 52.
6. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 37.
7. Michael, "Sennert's Sea Change," 353.
8. Aristotle, *On the Soul* 405a; Plato, *Timaeus* 56a.
9. Newman, *Atoms and Alchemy*, 86.
10. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 80.
11. For instance at *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.33–4, where the world itself is called "sower (*seminator*)" of all natural things. For the Stoic background see also H. Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy: Renaissance Debates on Matter, Life and the Soul* (Leiden: 2011), 83.
12. S. Kusukawa, "Lutheran Uses of Aristotle: A Comparison between Jacob Schegk and Philip Melanchthon," in C. Blackwell and S. Kusukawa (eds), *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle* (Aldershot: 1999), 169–88, at 171.
13. C. Methuen, "The Teaching of Aristotle in Late Sixteenth-Century Tübingen," in Blackwell and Kusukawa, *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 189–205, at 192.
14. H. Hirai, "The Invisible Hand of God in Seeds: Jacob Schegk's Theory of Plastic Faculty," *Early Science and Medicine* 12 (2007), 377–404, at 380–81; Hirai, *Medical Humanism*, 89.
15. Hirai, *Medical Humanism*, 162.
16. Hirai, *Medical Humanism*, 152, 170.
17. For the following, including the quotations from Taurellus, I draw on A. Blank, "Nicolaus Taurellus on Forms and Elements," *Science in Context*, 27 (2014), 659–82.
18. For him see H. Hattab, "Aristotelianism and Atomism Combined: Gorlaeus on Knowledge of Universals," *Perspectives on Science* 24 (2016), 285–304; C. Lüthy, "David Gorlaeus' Atomism, or the Marriage of Protestant Metaphysics with Italian Natural Philosophy," in C. Lüthy, J.E. Murdoch, and W.R. Newman (eds), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories* (Leiden: 2001), 245–90; C. Lüthy, *David Gorlaeus (1591–1612): An Enigmatic Figure in the History of Philosophy and Science* (Amsterdam: 2012).
19. Lüthy, *David Gorlaeus*, 58. For Taurellus and Gorlaeus in relation to later figures see also C. Lüthy, "The Metaphysical Roots of Physics, and the Alleged Link between Taurellus, Gorlaeus, Regius, and Descartes," in D. Antoine-Mahut and S. Roux (eds), *Physics and Metaphysics in Descartes and in His Reception* (London: 2018), 85–116; for a comparison to Sennert see T. Gregory, "Studi sull'atomismo del Seicento. II. David van Goorle e Daniel Sennert," *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 45 (1966), 44–63.

# Chapter 18

1. E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink (eds), *Texts Concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands* (Cambridge: 1974); P. Mack Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands 1544–1569* (Cambridge: 1978); M. Van Gelderen (ed.), *The Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge: 1992).
2. M. Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt 1555–1590* (Cambridge: 1992), 24, 29.
3. Van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 136. See further G. Griffiths, "Democratic Ideas in the Revolt of the Netherlands," *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte* 50 (1959), 50–63.
4. B.J. Kaplan, " 'Dutch' Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision," in R. Po-chia Hsia and H. van Nierop (eds), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: 2002), 8–26, at 11. See also G. Güldner, *Das Toleranz-Problem in den Niederlanden im Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Lübeck: 1968).
5. The following examples are drawn from Van Gelderen, *Political Thought*; the quotation is from the 1581 *True Warning to the Good Men of Antwerp*, cited at 148.
6. Po-chia Hsia and van Nierop, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*, 2.
7. As pointed out by M. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree: The Public Disputations between Reformed Ministers and Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert as Instruments of Religion* (Leiden: 2010), 59–60.
8. On Arminius see C. Bangs, "Arminius and the Reformation," *Church History* 30 (1961), 155–70; C. Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: 1982); R.A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: 1991); K.D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603–1609* (Leiden: 2007).
9. J.P.N. Land, "Philosophy in the Dutch Universities," *Mind* 3 (1878), 87–104.
10. C. Lüthy, "David Gorlaeus' Atomism, or the Marriage of Protestant Metaphysics with Italian Natural Philosophy," in C. Lüthy, J.E. Murdoch, and W.R. Newman (eds), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories* (Leiden: 2001), 245–90.
11. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 97.
12. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 223.
13. E. Dekker, "Jacob Arminius and His Logic: Analysis of a Letter," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993), 118–42. See also E. Dekker, "Was Arminius a Molinist?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996), 337–52.
14. Extensive discussion in Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*; on the issue in general see J.R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: 1991).
15. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 230.
16. M.G.K. van Veen, " 'No One Born of God Commits Sin': Coornhert's Perfectionism," *Dutch Review of Church History* 84 (2004), 338–57.
17. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 19.
18. On Erasmus as a role model for Dutch toleration see Kaplan, "Dutch Religious Tolerance," 15.
19. Cited by page number from G. Voogt (trans.), *D.V. Coornhert: Synod on the Freedom of Conscience* (Amsterdam: 2008). On him see also H. Bonger, *Leven en werk van D.V. Coornhert* (Amsterdam: 1978).

20. Gamaliel was also discussed in the polemic between Calvin and Castellio: see R. Bainton (trans.), *Castellio: Concerning Heretics, Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated* (New York: 1965), 279.
21. Van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 244.
22. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 34 and 41.
23. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 53.
24. Van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 194.
25. For the following see G. Voogt, "Primacy of Individual Consciousness or Primacy of the State? The Clash between Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert and Justus Lipsius," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997), 1231–49.

# Chapter 19

1. M. Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton: 2017).
2. *A History of Philosophy Without any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, chs 26–27.
3. On the revival of Stoicism in general see J.M. Cooper, "Justus Lipsius and the Revival of Stoicism in Late-Sixteenth-Century Europe," in N. Brender and L. Krasnoff (eds), *New Essays on the History of Autonomy* (Cambridge: 2004), 7–29; J. Lagrée, *Le néostoïcisme* (Paris: 2010); J. Sellars (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition* (Abingdon: 2016); A.A. Long, "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler," in J. Miller and B. Inwood (eds), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: 2003), 7–29.
4. For a modern edition of the 1595 English version, see J. Stradling (trans.), J. Sellars (ed.), *Justus Lipsius: On Constancy* (Exeter: 2006). I cite by book and chapter number with the abbreviation *Const*. For brief excerpts from his introduction to Stoicism see J. Kraye (ed.), *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, Vol. 1: *Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: 1997), 200–209.
5. A good overview of his biography can be found in J.L. Saunders, *Justus Lipsius: The Philosophy of Renaissance Stoicism* (New York: 1955).
6. J. Wasinck (ed. and trans.), *Justus Lipsius: Politica, Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction* (Assen: 2004), cited by book and chapter number as *Pol*. Wasinck discusses the history of church censorship of the *Politica* at 121f., 173f. On Lipsius as a political thinker see also G. Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: 1982); G. Oestreich, *Antiker Geist und moderner Staat bei Justus Lipsius, 1547–1606: Der Neustoizismus als politische Bewegung* (Gottingen: 1989).
7. J. Lagrée, "Justus Lipsius and Neostoicism," in Sellars, *Routledge Handbook*, 160–73, at 168, suggests that in his introductions to Stoicism Lipsius may have blurred the distinction between the preferred indifferent and the truly valuable, but in *On Constancy* he seems to keep the contrast clearly in mind.
8. J. Sellars, "Stoic Fate in Justus Lipsius's *De Constantia* and *Physiologia Stoicorum*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52 (2014), 653–74.
9. Cited at Saunders, *Justus Lipsius*, 23; for the following examples see 55, 128, 201.
10. As pointed out by H. Hirai, "Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* in Justus Lipsius' *Physiologia Stoicorum*: The World-Soul, Providence and Eschatology," in M. Beretta et al. (eds), *Seneca e le scienze* (Florence: 2012), 117–40, at 118. For Lipsius on Stoic physics see also H. Hirai and J. Papy (eds), *Justus Lipsius and Natural Philosophy* (Brussels: 2011).
11. Wasinck, *Politica*, 86.
12. *Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, chs 39–40.
13. For this work I draw on the studies in E. De Bom et al. (eds), *(Un)masking the Realities of Power: Justus Lipsius and the Dynamics of Political Writing in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: 2010). On his use of history see also D. Halsted, "Distance, Dissolution, and Neo-Stoic Ideals: History and Self-Definition in Lipsius," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 40 (1991), 262–74.
14. R. Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince: Anti-Machiavellianism or Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe* (Chapel Hill: 1990), ch. 4. See also C. Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton: 2012), ch. 1.
15. The passage is noted by Jan Papy in De Bom, *(Un)masking the Realities*, 202.
16. For discussion of this tension in his thought see Wasinck, *Politica*, 140–42: reacting critically to the work of Morford, Wasinck sees the theoretical life as Lipsius' clear preference.

# Chapter 20

1. A. Goddu, *Copernicus and the Aristotelian Tradition: Education, Reading, and Philosophy in Copernicus's Path to Heliocentrism* (Leiden: 2010), 359.
2. I cite by page number from J. Dobrzycki (ed.), E. Rosen (trans.), *Nicholas Copernicus: On the Revolutions* (London: 1978). A useful introductory overview of Copernicus' life and work may be found in O. Gingerich and J. MacLachlan, *Nicholas Copernicus: Making the Earth a Planet* (New York: 2005).
3. It might be added that earlier figures, notably Nicole Oresme in the fourteenth century, had already investigated the possibility that the earth may be rotating. See D.A. Di Liscia and A. Szapiro, "Nicolás de Oresme y la rotación de la Tierra," *Epistemología e Historia de la Ciencia* 4 (2020), 73–90.
4. This is in the *Narratio prima*, quoted and discussed by P.D. Omodeo, *Copernicus in the Cultural Debates of the Renaissance: Reception, Legacy, Transformation* (Leiden: 2014), 70.
5. A. Goddu, "The Realism that Duhem Rejected in Copernicus," *Synthese* 83 (1990), 301–15, at 310.
6. For the cosmos as an ordered whole see A. Goddu, "Copernicus's Mereological Vision of the Universe," *Early Science and Medicine* 14 (2009), 316–39. On the commitment to spheres see N. Jardine, "The Significance of the Copernican Orbs," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 13 (1982), 168–94.
7. See among other sources cited in this chapter P. Barker, "Copernicus, the Orbs, and the Equant," *Synthese* 83 (1990), 317–23; B. Goldstein, "Copernicus and the Origin of His Heliocentric System," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 33 (2002), 219–35.
8. R. Westman, *The Copernican Question: Prognostication, Skepticism, and Celestial Order* (Berkeley: 2011), 49–50, 101.
9. On which see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 52.
10. H. Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. R.M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: 1987), 338.
11. This is the proposal of Noel Swerdlow, co-author of an important study of Copernicus: N.M. Swerdlow and O. Neugebauer, *Mathematical Astronomy in Copernicus' De Revolutionibus* (Berlin: 1984).
12. As mentioned in *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 60.
13. D. Knox, "Copernicus's Doctrine of Gravity and the Natural Circular Motion of the Elements," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 68 (2005), 157–212.
14. D. Knox, "Ficino and Copernicus," in M.J.B. Allen and V. Rees (eds), *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy* (Leiden: 2002), 399–418, at 416. While Ficino also entertained the idea that the Earth is moving under the surface, this does not seem to have been Copernicus' direct source. See also D. Knox, "Ficino, Copernicus, and Bruno on the Motion of the Earth," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 5 (1999), 333–66.
15. Quoted by Omodeo, *Copernicus in the Cultural Debates*, 161. For Cusanus as a background to Copernicus see also Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, 206–207, 239.
16. Goddu, *Copernicus and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 227.
17. *Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 47.
18. Goddu, *Copernicus and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 291.

19. A.D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (Buffalo: 1993, originally published 1896), 123.
20. For this see B. Wrightsman, "Andreas Osiander's Contribution to the Copernican Achievement," in R.S. Westman (ed.), *The Copernican Achievement* (Berkeley: 1975), 285–345.
21. For discussion of the passage see Goddu, *Copernicus and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 364.
22. See Goddu, "The Realism that Duhem Rejected," discussing among other works P. Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, trans. P. Wiener (Princeton: 1954).
23. Many thanks to Thony Christie and Karl Galle for their helpful comments on this and the next two chapters.

# Chapter 21

1. For reactions to Copernicus see J. Dobrzycki (ed.), *The Reception of Copernicus' Heliocentric Theory* (Dordrecht: 1972); O. Gingerich, *The Book Nobody Read: Chasing the Revolutions of Nicolaus Copernicus* (New York: 2004); P.D. Omodeo, *Copernicus in the Cultural Debates of the Renaissance: Reception, Legacy, Transformation* (Leiden: 2014).
2. V.E. Thoren and J.R. Christianson, *The Lord of Uraniborg: A Biography of Tycho Brahe* (Cambridge: 1990), 11.
3. H. Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. R.M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: 1987), 318.
4. C. Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen: Stimulus to a Theological Mathematics* (Aldershot: 1998), 91.
5. R.S. Westman, "The Melanchthon Circle, Rheticus, and the Wittenberg Interpretation of the Copernican Theory," *Isis* 66 (1975), 165–93.
6. P. Barker and B.R. Goldstein, "Realism and Instrumentalism in Sixteenth Century Astronomy: A Reappraisal," *Perspectives on Science* 6 (1999), 232–58, at 234–35.
7. Omodeo, *Copernicus in the Cultural Debates of the Renaissance*, 89.
8. Barker and Goldstein, "Realism and Instrumentalism," 248; I am in this paragraph summarizing the argument of their paper.
9. See further P. Barker, "The Role of Religion in the Lutheran Response to Copernicus," in M.J. Osler (ed.), *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: 2000), 59–88.
10. Barker and Goldstein, "Realism and Instrumentalism," 249.
11. C.D. Hellman, *The Comet of 1577: Its Place in the History of Astronomy* (New York: 1944).
12. C. Methuen, "The Teaching of Aristotle in Late Sixteenth-Century Tübingen," in C. Blackwell and S. Kusukawa (eds), *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle* (Aldershot: 1999), 189–205, at 199–200. See also R.S. Westman, "Three Responses to the Copernican theory: Johannes Praetorius, Tycho Brahe and Michael Maestlin," in R.S. Westman (ed.), The Copernican Achievement (Berkeley: 1975), 285–345.
13. Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen*, 193.
14. His life story is told in great detail in Thoren and Christianson, *The Lord of Uraniborg*; K. Ferguson, *Tycho and Kepler: The Unlikely Partnership That Forever Changed Our Understanding of the Heavens* (New York: 2002) is a more entertaining read but largely provides the same information, paired with a portrait of Tycho's assistant and successor Kepler. See also A. Mosley, *Bearing the Heavens: Tycho Brahe and the Astronomical Community of the Late Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: 2011); J.R. Christianson, *Tycho Brahe and the Measure of the Heavens* (London: 2020).
15. Thoren and Christianson, *The Lord of Uraniborg*, 211.
16. A. Blair, "Tycho Brahe's Critique of Copernicus," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51 (1990), 355–77, at 371.
17. For this and the next statistic see Thoren and Christianson, *The Lord of Uraniborg*, 220, 296.
18. Thoren and Christianson, *The Lord of Uraniborg*, 239. On his attempts to use measurements of the movements of Mars to decide between Ptolemy and Copernicus see A. Gingerich and J.R. Voelkel, "Tycho Brahe's Copernican Campaign," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 29 (1998), 1–34.
19. Blair, "Tycho Brahe's Critique," 361.
20. Westman, "Three Responses," 329.

21. K.J. Howell, "The Role of Biblical Interpretation in the Cosmology of Tycho Brahe," *Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Science* 29 (1998), 515–37, at 531–32.
22. As discussed in Howell, "The Role of Biblical Interpretation"; M.A. Granada, "Tycho Brahe, Caspar Peucer, and Christoph Rothmann on Cosmology and the Bible," in S. Mandelbrote and J. van der Meer (eds), *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700*, 2 vols (Leiden: 2008), 563–83.
23. Granada, "Tycho Brahe, Caspar Peucer, and Christoph Rothmann," 573.
24. Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen*, 76–77.
25. H. Håkansson, "Tycho the Prophet: History, Astrology, and the Apocalypse in Early Modern Science," in K. Killeen and P.J. Forshaw (eds), *The Word and the World: Biblical Exegesis and Early Modern Science* (Basingstoke: 2007), 137–56, at 140.

# Chapter 22

1. I cite this work by page from the translation in E.J. Aiton, A.M. Duncan, and J.V. Field, *The Harmony of the World by Johannes Kepler* (Philadelphia: 1997), abbreviated as *HW*.
2. For this background see C. Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen: Stimulus to a Theological Mathematics* (Aldershot: 1998).
3. N. Jardine and A. Segonds, "Kepler as Reader and Translator of Aristotle," in C. Blackwell and S. Kusukawa (eds), *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle* (Aldershot: 1999), 206–33.
4. Quoted at R. Martens, *Kepler's Philosophy and the New Astronomy* (Princeton: 2000), 14. For his religious thought see J. Hübner, *Die Theologie Johannes Keplers zwischen Orthodoxie und Naturwissenschaft* (Tübingen: 1975).
5. Quoted at J.V. Field, "A Lutheran Astrologer: Johannes Kepler," *Archive for the History of Exact Sciences* 31 (1984), 189–272, at 220.
6. Quoted at P.J. Boner, *Kepler's Cosmological Synthesis: Astrology, Mechanism and the Soul* (Leiden: 2013), 87.
7. P.J. Boner, "Kepler vs the Epicureans: Causality, Coincidence and the Origins of the New Star of 1604," *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 38 (2007), 207–21, at 209.
8. J.R. Voelkel, *Johannes Kepler and the New Astronomy* (Oxford: 1999), 117.
9. For the whole story see the introduction to N. Jardine, *The Birth of History and Philosophy of Science: Kepler's A Defence of Tycho against Ursus* (Cambridge: 1984), with examples of Ursus' invective at 35–36. I quote from Kepler's treatise *Against Ursus* by page number from Jardine's translation, abbreviated *AU*.
10. *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 50.
11. As pointed out by Jardine, *The Birth of History*, 33.
12. See the material from Ursus quoted in Jardine, *The Birth of History*, 41–53.
13. Quoted at Jardine and Segonds, "Kepler as Reader," 231.
14. Martens, *Kepler's Philosophy*, 44.
15. *Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 53.
16. M.A. Granada, "Kepler and Bruno on the Infinity of the Universe and of Solar Systems," *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 39 (2008), 469–95, at 479–81.
17. Quoted at Martens, *Kepler's Philosophy*, 102.
18. Boner, *Kepler's Cosmological Synthesis*, 27.
19. Jardine, *The Birth of History*, 153.
20. For this illustration of the points see Martens, *Kepler's Philosophy*, 108.
21. For discussion see J.V. Field, *Kepler's Geometrical Cosmology* (Chicago: 1988), 111.

# Chapter 23

1. W.L. Gundersheimer (ed.), *French Humanism 1470–1600* (London: 1969); A.H.T. Levi (ed.), *Humanism in France at the End of the Middle Ages and in the Early Renaissance* (Manchester: 1970); J.-C. Margolin, "Humanism in France," in A. Goodman and A. MacKay (eds), *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (London: 2014), 164–201; I. De Smet, "Humanist Culture in Renaissance France," in M. Moriarty and J. Jennings (eds), *The Cambridge History of French Thought* (Cambridge: 2020), 33–40.
2. Cited by book and chapter number from R. Helgerson (trans.), *Joachim du Bellay: The Regrets, with The Antiquities of Rome, Three Latin Elegies, and The Defense and Enrichment of the French Language* (Philadelphia: 2006), abbreviated as *Defense*. The remark about the *Rose* is at 2.2.
3. As pointed out by M.W. Ferguson, "The Exile's Defense: Du Bellay's *La Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse*," *PMLA* 93 (1987), 275–89.
4. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 75.
5. R. Foltz-Amable, "Les arts de seconde rhétorique de la fin du XIVe siècle à la première moitié du XVIe siècle: Une *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse* avant l'heure," *Questes* 33 (2016), 45–62.
6. Andreas Alicato, quoted at D. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: 1970), 93.
7. On their relationship see D.O. McNeil, *Guillaume Budé and Humanism in the Reign of Francis I* (Geneva: 1975), ch. 6.
8. McNeil, *Guillaume Budé and Humanism*, 26.
9. W. Heubi, *François 1er et le mouvement intellectuel en France* (Lausanne: 1913).
10. L.C. Stevens, "A Re-Evaluation of Hellenism in the French Renaissance," in Gundersheimer, *French Humanism*, 181–96, at 181.
11. J.H.M. Salmon, *Renaissance and Revolt: Essays in the Intellectual and Social History of Early Modern France* (Cambridge: 1987), 43.
12. R.R. Bolgar, "Humanism as a Value System without Reference to Budé and Vives," in Levi, *Humanism in France*, 199–215, at 199 and 201.
13. Quoted at Salmon, *Renaissance and Revolt*, 31.
14. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*, 53. I draw on this study in what follows. For the idea of historical change in law see also McNeil, *Guillaume Budé*, 18.
15. For the work see E. Dolet et al., *Quatre traités de grammaire* (Geneva: 1972), 1–40.
16. On the topic see R. Hirsch, "Printing in France and Humanism, 1470–80," in Gundersheimer, *French Humanism*, 113–30.
17. For the poems of du Bellay and Ronsard, I cite by page from N.R. Shapiro, *Lyrics of the French Renaissance: Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard* (New Haven: 2002), abbreviated as *Lyrics*.
18. Du Bellay, *Regrets*, sonnet 131, quoted by Ferguson, "The Exile's Defense," 277.
19. J. Fujitani, "Stoicism and History in Joachim Du Bellay's *Antiquitéz de Rome*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 33 (2010), 72.
20. R.V. Merrill and R.J. Clements, *Platonism in French Renaissance Poetry* (New York: 1957), 12–13. The study of Platonism in this phase of French literature goes back to A. Lefrance, "Le platonisme et la littérature en France à l'époque de la renaissance" (1896) printed in his *Grands écrivains français de la renaissance* (Paris: 1914), 63–137.

21. I. Silver, “Ronsard’s Ethical Thought,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 24 (1962), 88–117 and 339–74, at 113; I. Silver, “Ronsard’s Reflections on Cosmology and Nature,” *PMLA* 79 (1964), 219–33, at 222. For the Italian discourse on love see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 33 and (for Leone Ebreo) ch. 34.
22. See also Merrill and Clements, *Platonism in French Renaissance Poetry*, 110–11; R.V. Merrill, “The Pléiade and the Androgyne,” *Comparative Literature* (1949), 97–112.
23. Silver, “Ronsard’s Reflections on Cosmology,” 223.
24. See also Merrill and Clements, *Platonism in French Renaissance Poetry*, 85.
25. Silver, “Ronsard’s Ethical Thought,” 340.
26. I take the passage from Silver, “Ronsard’s Reflections on Cosmology,” 220; this is my translation.

# Chapter 24

1. P.F. Cholakian and R.C. Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* (New York: 2006), 25.
2. I. Silver, "Marguerite de Navarre and Ronsard," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 55 (1993), 527–46 and 56 (1994), 7–25.
3. I cite this work by page number from R.C. Cholakian and M. Skemp (trans.), *Marguerite de Navarre: Selected Writings* (Chicago: 2008), abbreviated as *SW*. See also G. Ferguson, *Mirroring Belief: Marguerite de Navarre's Devotional Poetry* (Edinburgh: 1992).
4. I here follow the reading of P. Jourda, *Marguerite d'Angoulême, duchesse d'Alençon, reine de Navarre (1492–1549): Etude biographique et littéraire*, 2 vols (Geneva: 1978, originally published 1930), which is rejected on unconvincing grounds by Cholakian and Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre*, 246.
5. *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 53.
6. The identification with Marguerite Porete has been suggested by C. Thysell, *The Pleasure of Discernment: Marguerite de Navarre as Theologian* (Oxford: 2000), 21–22.
7. Which is studied in B. Stephenson, *The Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (Burlington, VT: 2004). See further J.A. Reid, *King's Sister—Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549) and Her Evangelical Network*, 2 vols (Leiden: 2009). For Meaux as the "cradle of French reformation" see chapter 2 of H. Heller, *The Conquest of Poverty: The Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth Century France* (Leiden: 1986).
8. See Thysell, *The Pleasure of Discernment*, 49–51.
9. Quoted by Cholakian and Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre*, 296.
10. Albeit that we find this in Marguerite too: "Our human reason proves that there can be no comparison between an infinite and a finite thing. But when by love one is brought into union, the small amount of the infinite so fills the finite that one is not able to perceive its limits" (*SW* 143).
11. Translated in P.A. Chilton, *Margaret of Navarre: The Heptameron* (Harmondsworth: 1984); number of the story given in brackets. Studies include A.J. Krailsheimer, "The *Heptaméron* Reconsidered," in D.R. Haggis et al. (eds), *The French Renaissance and Its Heritage* (London: 1968), 75–92; M. Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron: Themes, Language, and Structure* (Durham: 1973); B.J. Davis, *The Storytellers in Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron* (Lexington, KY: 1978); J.D. Lyons and M.B. McKinley (eds), *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptaméron and Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: 1993); D. Bertrand (ed.), *Lire L'Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre* (Clermont: 2005).
12. T.W. Reeser (trans.), *Symphorien Champier: The Ship of Virtuous Ladies* (Toronto: 2018).
13. On the multiplicity of perspectives in the work see Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*.
14. I discuss this with reference to medieval literature in P. Adamson, *Don't Think for Yourself: Authority and Belief in Medieval Philosophy* (Notre Dame: 2022), ch. 6.
15. Quoted by Cholakian and Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre*, 282.
16. Thysell, *The Pleasure of Discernment*, 13.
17. Thysell, *The Pleasure of Discernment*, 29. I follow Thysell in seeing this as relevant context for the *Heptameron*.
18. Cholakian and Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre*, 307.

# Chapter 25

1. For English editions see J.M. Cohen (trans.), *Rabelais: Gargantua and Pantagruel* (Harmondsworth: 1962); D.M. Frame (trans.), *Rabelais: The Complete Works* (Berkeley: 1991). I cite by book and chapter number. For overviews of the five books see M.J. Heath, *Rabelais* (Tempe, AZ: 1996) and chs 10–14 of B. Renner (ed.), *A Companion to François Rabelais* (Leiden: 2021), and in more detail, the series of studies on the "design" of the books by Edwin Duval.
2. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: 1984), 3.
3. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 97.
4. L. Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. B. Gottlieb (Cambridge, MA: 1982), 97, 176.
5. Montaigne, *Essays*, 1.39, 2.10.
6. For his medical career and contributions, see C. La Charité, "Rabelais and Medicine," in Renner, *A Companion to François Rabelais*, 49–74.
7. T. Haglund, *Rabelais' Contempt for Fortune: Pantagruelism, Politics, and Philosophy* (Lanham: 2019), 1.
8. See further F.M. Higman, *Censorship and the Sorbonne* (Geneva: 1979)
9. Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief*, 254.
10. A.P. Pouey-Mounou, "Rabelais and Religion," in Renner, *A Companion to François Rabelais*, 75–98, at 82; see also E. Duval, "Putting Religion in iIs Place," in J. O'Brien (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rabelais* (Cambridge: 2011), 93–106, at 99.
11. N.O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton: 1980), 91.
12. Heath, *Rabelais*, 34.
13. Discussed in *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 43.
14. Haglund, *Rabelais' Contempt for Fortune*, 85.
15. F. Gray, *Gender, Rhetoric, and Print Culture in French Renaissance Writing* (Cambridge: 2004), 23.
16. M.A. Screech, *The Rabelaisian Marriage: Aspects of Rabelais's Religion, Ethics and Comic Philosophy* (London: 1958).
17. Gray, *Gender, Rhetoric, and Print Culture*, 27, following Screech.
18. As argued by Haglund, *Rabelais' Contempt for Fortune*, 96.
19. Heath, *Rabelais*, 81.

# Chapter 26

1. On him see J.K. Farge, "Noël Beda and the Defense of the Tradition," in E. Rummel (ed.), *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (Leiden: 2008), 143–64. For further context see J.K. Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France: The Faculty of Theology of Paris, 1500–1543* (Leiden: 1985).
2. R.M. Cameron, "The Charges of Lutheranism Brought against Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970), 119–49, at 148.
3. M. Crane, "A Scholastic Response to Biblical Humanism: Noël Beda against Lefèvre D'Étaples and Erasmus," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 59 (2010), 55–81, at 67.
4. R.J. Oosterhoff, "Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples," on the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the best brief overview of Lefèvre's career and philosophical interests. See also J.-F. Pernot, *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (1450?–1536)* (Paris: 1995).
5. E.F. Rice Jr, "Humanist Aristotelianism in France: Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and His Circle," in A.H.T. Levi (ed.), *Humanism in France at the End of the Middle Ages and in the Early Renaissance* (Manchester: 1970), 132–49, at 132; R. Oosterhoff, *Making Mathematical Culture: University and Print in the Circle of Lefèvre d'Étaples* (Oxford: 2018), 9.
6. On these two figures see J.F. D'Amico, *Theory and Practice in Renaissance Textual Criticism: Beatus Rhenanus between Conjecture and History* (Berkeley: 1988); J.M. Victor, *Charles de Bovelles, 1479–1553: An Intellectual Biography* (Geneva: 1978).
7. As discussed in depth in Oosterhoff, *Making Mathematical Culture*.
8. Quoted from Oosterhoff, "Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples."
9. For this see E.J. Ashworth, *Language and Logic in the Post-Medieval Period* (Dordrecht: 1974), 106. She calls Clichtove's commentary on the logical introduction of Lefèvre "one of the most elegant expositions of [Renaisssance logical] doctrines available to us" (10). For logic in this period see also W. Risse, *Die Logik der Neuzeit*, Vol. 1: *1500–1640* (Stuttgart: 1964).
10. On this see again Oosterhoff, "Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples."
11. B.P. Copenhaver, "Lefèvre d'Étaples, Symphorien Champier, and the Secret Names of God," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977), 189–211.
12. Oosterhoff, *Making Mathematical Culture*, 46, cf. E.F. Rice Jr, "The Humanist Idea of Christian Antiquity: Lefèvre d'Étaples and his Circle," in W.L. Gundersheimer (ed.), *French Humanism 1470–1600* (London: 1969), 163–80, at 163.
13. Farge, "Noël Beda," 155, 160.
14. R. Stauffer, "Lefèvre d'Étaples, artisan ou spectateur de la Réforme?" in *Interprètes de la Bible* (Paris: 1980), 11–29.
15. G. Bedouelle, "Attacks on the Biblical Humanism of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples," in Rummel, *Biblical Humanism*, 117–41, at 132.
16. A. Hufstader, "Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Magdalen," *Studies in the Renaissance* 16 (1969), 31–60; S.M. Porrer, *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates* (Geneva: 2009).
17. A. Moss, *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn* (Oxford: 2003), 105.
18. H. Heller, "The Evangelicism of Lefèvre d'Étaples," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972), 42–77.
19. V. Hall, Jr., "Life of Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558)," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 40 (1950), 85–170, at 125. A more skeptical view is taken by K. Jensen, *Rhetorical Philosophy and Philosophical Grammar: Julius Caesar Scaliger's Theory of Language* (Munich: 1990), 29.

20. Hall, “Life of Julius Caesar Scaliger,” 101–103.
21. Jensen, *Rhetorical Philosophy*, 130.
22. Jensen, *Rhetorical Philosophy*, 111–15.
23. B. Weinberg, “Scaliger versus Aristotle on Poetics,” *Modern Philology* 39 (1942), 337–60; M. Bizer, “The Genealogy of Poetry According to Ronsard and Julius Caesar Scaliger,” *Humanistica Lovaniensa* 43 (1994), 304–18.
24. Quoted at Hall, “Life of Julius Caesar Scaliger,” 153.
25. Bizer, “The Genealogy of Poetry,” 318.
26. On this work see G. Giglioni, “Scaliger versus Cardano versus Scaliger,” in D.A. Lines et al. (eds), *Forms of Conflict and Rivalries in Renaissance Europe* (Bonn: 2015), 109–30; K. Sakamoto, *Julius Caesar Scaliger, Renaissance Reformer of Aristotelianism: A Study of His Exotericae Exercitationes* (Leiden: 2016). I quote from 7 and 64 of this book below.

# Chapter 27

1. K. Hutchinson, "Dormitive Virtues, Scholastic Qualities, and the New Philosophies," *History of Science* 29 (1991), 245–78.
2. S. Klerk, "The Trouble with Opium: Taste, Reason and Experience in Late Galenic Pharmacology with Special Regard to the University of Leiden (1575–1625)," *Early Science and Medicine* 19 (2014), 287–316.
3. Cited by page from the translation in J.M. Forrester and J. Henry (trans.), *Jean Fernel's On the Hidden Causes of Things: Forms, Souls, and Occult Diseases in Renaissance Medicine* (Leiden: 2005).
4. L. Deer Richardson, "The Generation of Disease: Occult Causes and Diseases of the Total Substance," in A. Wear, R.K. French, and I.M. Lonie (eds), *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: 1985), 175–94.
5. H. Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy: Renaissance Debates on Matter, Life and the Soul* (Leiden: 2011), 59. The whole of the second chapter is on Fernel.
6. A.G. Debus, *The French Paracelsians: The Chemical Challenge to Medical and Scientific Tradition in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: 1991), 21. I draw on this book for what follows.
7. On him see G. Baader, "Jacques Dubois as a Practitioner," in Wear et al., *The Medical Renaissance*, 146–54. For what follows I also draw on I.M. Lonie, "The 'Paris Hippocratics': Teaching and Research in Paris in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century," 155–74 in the same volume.
8. Lonie, "The Paris Hippocratics," 171.
9. B. Copenhaver, *Symphorien Champier and the Reception of the Occultist Tradition in Renaissance France* (The Hague: 1979), 56.
10. Copenhaver, *Symphorien Champier*, 67, 79; G. Giglioni, "Symphorien Champier on Medicine, Theology, and Politics," in S. Gersh (ed.), *Plotinus' Legacy: The Transformation of Platonism from the Renaissance to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: 2019), 96–124, at 106.
11. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 52.
12. *Montaigne, Essays*, 2.12.

# Chapter 28

1. W.J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: 1958), 8, 24, 192.
2. N.W. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York: 1960), 129.
3. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, 45–46.
4. See e.g. C. Newlands (trans.), *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian: Translation and Text of Peter Ramus's Rhetoricae distinctiones in Quintilianum* (De Kalb: 1986), 80.
5. On his life F.P. Graves, *Peter Ramus and the Educational Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: 1912) is still worth consulting. More recent general studies include P. Mack, "Peter Ramus as Humanist and Philosophe," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 61 (1998), 111–41; J.V. Skalnick, *Ramus and Reform: University and Church at the End of the Renaissance* (Kirksville, MO: 2002).
6. On this scene see J. Guillory, "Marlowe, Ramus, and the Reformation of Philosophy," *English Literary History* 81 (2014), 693–732.
7. For the laws and their reception see P.R. Anstey, "Francis Bacon and the Laws of Ramus," *HOPOS* 5 (2015), 1–23.
8. Quoted at Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, 42.
9. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts*, 147.
10. I take this from the introduction to Newlands, *Arguments in Rhetoric*, 14.
11. H. Hotson, *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and Its German Ramifications, 1543–1630* (Oxford: 2007), 40.
12. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, 276. See also P. Mack, "Ramus and Ramism: Rhetoric and Dialectic," in S.J. Reid and E.A. Wilson (eds), *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts: Ramism in Britain and the Wider World* (Farnham: 2011), 7–23, at 8.
13. For this I draw on R. Goulding, "Pythagoras in Paris: Petrus Ramus Imagines the Prehistory of Mathematics," *Configurations* 17 (2009), 51–86.
14. The point and example are from Mack, "Ramus and Ramism," 17.
15. N. Jardine and A. Segonds, "A Challenge to the Reader: Ramus on *Astrologia* without Hypotheses," in M. Feingold, J.S. Freedman, and W. Rother (eds), *The Influence of Petrus Ramus: Studies in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Philosophy and Sciences* (Basel: 2001), 248–66, with the following quotation at 249.

# Chapter 29

1. Reproduced in J.S. Freedman, "The Diffusion of the Writings of Petrus Ramus in Central Europe, c.1570–c.1630," *Renaissance Quarterly* 46 (1993), 98–152, at 102.
2. For examples of a Ramist approach to natural philosophy in Scribonius and Freigius, see A. Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: 1997), 33–34.
3. I. Maclean, "Ramus in the Context of Legal and Medical Writing," in M. Feingold, J.S. Freedman, and W. Rother (eds), *The Influence of Petrus Ramus: Studies in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Philosophy and Sciences* (Basel: 2001), 228–47, at 235.
4. F. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: 1966), 278.
5. Cited at R. Hallett, "Ramus, Printed *Loci*, and the Re-Invention of Knowledge," in S.J. Reid and E.A. Wilson (eds), *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts: Ramism in Britain and the Wider World* (Farnham: 2011), 89–112, at 111. This is also my source for the quotation from Yates.
6. W.J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: 1958), 280.
7. H. Hotson, *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and its German Ramifications, 1543–1630* (Oxford: 2007), 34. The findings of this study are summarized in H. Hotson, *The Reformation of Common Learning* (Oxford: 2020).
8. Hotson, *Commonplace Learning*, 94.
9. N.W. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York: 1960), 73.
10. For these quotations see A. Grafton and L. Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: 1986), 167; Hotson, *Commonplace Learning*, 63; Feingold et al., *The Influence of Petrus Ramus*, 101 and 171.
11. For this see E. Sellberg, "The Usefulness of Ramism," in Feingold et al., *The Influence of Petrus Ramus*, 107–26.
12. Cited by K. Meerhoff, "Ramus and the Vernacular," in Reid and Wilson, *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts*, 133–52, at 138.
13. J.S. Freedman, "Melanchthon's Opinion of Ramus and the Utilization of Their Writings in Central Europe," in Feingold et al., *The Influence of Petrus Ramus*, 68–91, at 71.
14. C. Methuen, "The Teaching of Aristotle in Late Sixteenth-Century Tübingen," in C. Blackwell and S. Kusukawa (eds), *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle* (Aldershot: 1999), 189–205, at 194.
15. Hotson, *Commonplace Learning*, 57.
16. Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, 197.
17. I take this illustration from Maclean, "Ramus in the Context," at 242.
18. Pozzo, "Ramus' Metaphysics and Its Criticism by the Helmstedt Aristotelians," in Feingold et al., *The Influence of Petrus Ramus*, 92–106.
19. Hotson, *Commonplace Learning*, 109.
20. M. Feingold, "English Ramism: A Reinterpretation," in Feingold et al., *The Influence of Petrus Ramus*, 127–76, at 132–33.
21. J. Kirk, " 'Melvillian' Reform in the Scottish Universities," in A.A. MacDonald et al. (eds), *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, Religion, History and Culture* (Leiden: 1994), 276–300; J. Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism: Andrew Melville and the Universities of Scotland, 1560–1625* (Farnham: 2011).

22. J.S. Freedman, “Encyclopedic Philosophical Writings in Central Europe during the High and Late Renaissance (ca. 1500–ca. 1700),” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 37 (1994), 212–56, at 228.
23. A. Robinet, *Aux sources de l’esprit cartésien: L’axe La Ramée-Descartes* (Paris: 1996).
24. For this see J. Guillory, “Marlowe, Ramus, and the Reformation of Philosophy,” *English Literary History* 81 (2014), 693–732.

# Chapter 30

1. For the historical context see e.g. J. Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 2 vols (London: 1960, originally published as *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme*, 1955); H. Heller, *The Conquest of Poverty: The Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth Century France* (Leiden: 1986); B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York: 1991); K. Cameron (ed.), *The Adventure of Religious Pluralism in Early Modern France* (Oxford: 2000).
2. This theory is considered along with others in J.G. Gray, "The Origin of the Word Huguenot," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983), 349–59.
3. R.L. Goodbar (ed.), *The Edict of Nantes: Five Essays and a New Translation* (Bloomington, MN: 1998); R. Whelan and C. Baxter (eds), *Toleration and Religious Identity: The Edict of Nantes and Its Implications in France, Britain and Ireland* (Dublin: 2003).
4. M. Turchetti, "Religious Concord and Political Tolerance in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991), 15–25, at 17 and 19.
5. H. Huseman, "The Expression of the Idea of Toleration in French during the Sixteenth Century," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984), 293–310.
6. R.M. Kingdon, *Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres, 1572–1576* (Cambridge: 1988).
7. E.M. Beame, "The Limits of Toleration in Sixteenth-Century France," *Studies in the Renaissance* 13 (1966), 250–65; M.C. Smith, "Early French Advocates of Religious Freedom," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994), 29–51.
8. P. Benedict, "*Un roi, une loi, deux fois*: Parameters for the History of Catholic-Reformed Co-Existence in France, 1555–1685," in O.P. Grell and B. Scribner (eds), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: 1996), 65–93.
9. Here I follow Turchetti, "Religious Concord," 21.
10. This treatise and Castellio's other works are cited by page from R. Bainton (trans.), *Castellio: Concerning Heretics, Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated* (New York: 1965). On him see F. Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre*, 2 vols (Paris: 1892).
11. G.B. Wegemer and S.W. Smith (eds), *The Essential Works of Thomas More* (New Haven: 2020), 515.
12. As noted by E. Curley, "Sebastian Castellio's Erasmian Liberalism," *Philosophical Topics* 31 (2003), 47–73, at 52.
13. Cited at J.C. Laursen and C.J. Nederman (eds), *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: 1997), 97.
14. Bainton, *Castellio*, 74.
15. B. Gordon, "To Kill a Heretic: Sebastian Castellio against John Calvin," in G. Kemp (ed.), *Censorship Moments: Reading Texts in the History of Censorship and Freedom of Expression* (London: 2014), 55–61, at 57.
16. Bainton, *Castellio*, 102.
17. M. van Veen, "*Stoica paradoxa*: Sebastian Castellio's Polemic against Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 77 (2015), 325–50, at 326.
18. Grell and Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance*, 99.
19. M. Hillar, "Sebastian Castellio and the Struggle for the Freedom of Conscience," in D.R. Finch and M. Hillar (eds), *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, 10 (2002), 31–56.

20. This explanation is disputed by R. White, “Castellio against Calvin: The Turk in the Toleration Controversy of the Sixteenth Century,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 46 (1984), 573–86.
21. On this see van Veen, “*Stoica paradoxa*.”
22. Quoted at F. Rigolot, “Tolérance et condescendence dans la littérature française du XVIe siècle,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 62 (2000), 25–47, at 27–28.
23. See Curley, “Sebastian Castellio’s Erasmian Liberalism”; Hillar, “Sebastian Castellio.”
24. Bainton, *Castellio*, 112.
25. S. Zweig, *Castellio gegen Calvin oder ein Gewissen gegen die Gewalt* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1936).

# Chapter 31

1. As Chike Jeffers pointed out to me, the idea is actually older than Plato: the comparison of a ruler to a shepherd also appears in a philosophical text from ancient Egypt, the *Instruction to King Merikare*.
2. On Marsilius see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 56.
3. D.R. Kelley (trans.), *Claude de Seyssel: The Monarchy of France* (New Haven: 1981). On him see R.A. Boone, *War, Domination, and the Monarchy of France: Claude de Seyssel and the Language of Politics in the Renaissance* (Leiden: 2007). For the general issue see W.F. Church, *Constitutional Thought in Sixteenth-Century France: A Study in the Evolution of Ideas* (Cambridge: 1941); S. Hanley, "The French Constitution Revised: Representative Assemblies and Resistance Right in the Sixteenth Century," in M.P. Holt (ed.), *Society and Institutions in Early Modern France* (Athens, GA: 1991), 36–50.
4. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 40.
5. N.O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton: 1980), 35.
6. Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 2: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: 1978), 262, with the quote from Du Moulin at 263.
7. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 60.
8. J. Witte Jr, "Rights, Resistance, and Revolution in the Western Tradition: Early Protestant Foundations," *Law and History Review* 26 (2008), 545–70, at 549.
9. All three editions, as well as posthumous versions, are considered in R.E. Giesey (ed.) and J.H.H. Salmon (trans.), *Francogallia by François Hotman* (Cambridge: 1972), cited here by page number. For an intellectual biography see D. Kelley, *François Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal* (Princeton: 1973).
10. For Italian uses of history see *Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 41.
11. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 51.
12. Quoted at the introduction to Giesey and Salmon, *Francogallia*, 76.
13. R.E. Giesey, "When and Why Hotman Wrote the *Francogallia*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 29 (1967), 581–611, at 610.
14. Skinner, *The Foundations*, 310.
15. Giesey and Salmon, *Francogallia*, 80–81.
16. Skinner, *The Foundations*, 323.
17. For this see Giesey, "When and Why Hotman Wrote the *Francogallia*."
18. As noted by Witte, "Rights, Resistance, and Revolution," 556. I cite by page from the translation in Beza's *Rights of Magistrates* in J.H. Franklin, *Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century: Three Treatises by Hotman, Beza, and Mornay* (New York: 1969). Abbreviated as *RM*.
19. Cited by page from G. Garnett (trans.), *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos* (Cambridge: 1994), abbreviated as *VCT*.
20. Skinner, *The Foundations*, 333.
21. K.A. Parrow, "From Defense to Resistance: Justification of Violence during the French Wars of Religion," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 83 (1993) 1–79, at 54, and 57 for the following quote.
22. Cited by page from H. Kurz (trans.), *Etienne de La Boétie: The Politics of Obedience. The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* (Auburn, AL: 2008).

23. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, 94–95.

# Chapter 32

1. English version in M.J. Tooley (trans.), *Jean Bodin: Six Books of the Commonwealth* (Oxford: 1955); cited by book and chapter number.
2. Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 2: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: 1978), 284.
3. For this shift see J.H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Rise of Absolutist Theory* (Cambridge: 2009), 23–53, reprinted in J.H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin* (Aldershot: 2006).
4. J.H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-Century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History* (London: 1963), 137.
5. Here I follow D. Engster, "Jean Bodin, Scepticism and Absolute Sovereignty," *History of Political Thought* 17 (1996), 469–99, at 470.
6. As noted by H.A. Lloyd, *Jean Bodin: "This Pre-Eminent Man of France," an Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: 2017), 24.
7. K. McRae, "Ramist Tendencies in the Thought of Jean Bodin," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (1955).
8. D. Lee, *The Right of Sovereignty: Jean Bodin on the Sovereign State* (Oxford: 2021), 116.
9. H. Heller, "Bodin on Slavery and Primitive Accumulation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994), 53–65.
10. Lee, *The Right of Sovereignty*, 18, 20, 68, 107.
11. J.U. Lewis, "Jean Bodin's 'Logic of Sovereignty,'" *Political Studies* 16 (1968), 206–22, reprinted in Franklin, *Jean Bodin*. See also D. Parker, "Law, Society, and the State in the Thought of Jean Bodin," *Political Thought* 2 (1981), 253–85.
12. Lee, *The Right of Sovereignty*, 23–25, 150.
13. Lee, *The Right of Sovereignty*, 96.
14. See Skinner, *Foundations*, 297, and M. Wolfe, "Jean Bodin on Taxes: The Sovereignty-Taxes Paradox," *Political Science Quarterly* 83 (1968), 268–84, reprinted in Franklin, *Jean Bodin*.
15. J.H.M. Salmon, *Renaissance and Revolt: Essays in the Intellectual and Social History of Early Modern France* (Cambridge: 1987), 122. For the episode at Blois see Lloyd, *Jean Bodin*, 160.
16. Lee, *The Right of Sovereignty*, 174–75.
17. I. Creppell, *Toleration and Identity: Foundations in Early Modern Thought* (London: 2002), 56.
18. M.L. Kuntz, "The Concept of Toleration in the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* of Jean Bodin," in J.C. Laursen and C.J. Nederman (eds), *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: 1997), 125–44.
19. Lee, *The Right of Sovereignty*, 135.
20. Franklin, *Jean Bodin*, 35–37. See more generally J.H.M. Salmon, "The Legacy of Jean Bodin: Absolutism, Populism or Constitutionalism?" *History of Political Thought* 17 (1996), 500–22.
21. E. Claussen, *Politics and "Politiques" in Sixteenth-Century France: A Conceptual History* (Cambridge: 2021), 93.
22. On this see D.P. O'Brien, "Bodin's Analysis of Inflation," *History of Political Economy* 32 (2000), 267–92, reprinted in Franklin, *Jean Bodin*, and the summary in Lloyd, *Jean Bodin*, ch. 5.
23. A. Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: 1997). See also her "Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992), 541–55 and "La philosophie naturelle dans l'oeuvre de Jean Bodin,"

in G.-A. Pérouse et al. (eds), *L'oeuvre de Jean Bodin, Actes du colloque tenu à Lyon à l'occasion du quatrième centenaire de sa mort* (Paris: 2004), 355–65.

24. Lloyd, *Jean Bodin*, 88.
25. Blair, *The Theater of Nature*, 96.
26. This connection is noted by Engster, "Jean Bodin, Scepticism," 478.

# Chapter 33

1. For the passage see D. van Miert, "Language and Communication in the Republic of Letters: The Uses of Latin and French in the Correspondence of Joseph Scaliger," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 72 (2019), 7–34, at 7, and 14 for the figures on his correspondence.
2. A. Grafton and J. Weinberg, *I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue: Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: 2011), 4. On Casaubon generally see e.g. H. Parenty, *Isaac Casaubon helléniste: Des studia humanitatis à la philologie* (Geneva: 2009).
3. I have consulted the online list "Scaliger's Correspondents" made available by the Warburg Institute in London.
4. For the story and its debunking see A. Grafton, "Close Encounters of the Learned Kind: Joseph Scaliger's Table Talk," *The American Scholar* 57 (1988), 581–88.
5. A. Hamilton, "Isaac Casaubon the Arabist: '*Video longum esse iter*,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 72 (2009), 143–68.
6. See N. Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: 1987), and D.N. Hasse, *Success and Suppression: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: 2016).
7. A. Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2 vols (Oxford: 1983, 1993), Vol. 1, 120.
8. Grafton and Weinberg, *I Have Always Loved*, on which I draw for what follows.
9. Grafton and Weinberg, *I Have Always Loved*, 87.
10. A. Grafton, "Protestant versus Prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983), 78–93.
11. Grafton and Weinberg, *I Have Always Loved*, 31.
12. See Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study*, and for briefer overviews A. Grafton, "Dating History: The Renaissance and the Reformation of Chronology," *Daedalus* 132 (2003), 74–85 and A. Grafton, "Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology: The Rise and Fall of a Discipline," *History and Theory* 14 (1975), 156–85, from which I take the following quote (at 164).
13. Grafton and Weinberg, *I Have Always Loved*, 100.
14. Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study*, Vol. 1, 217.
15. H. Hotson, *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and Its German Ramifications, 1543–1630* (Oxford: 2007), 59.
16. On him see R. Radouant, *Guillaume Du Vair* (Paris: 1970); B. Petey-Girard (ed.), *Guillaume du Vair: Parlementaire et écrivain (1556–1621)* (Geneva: 2005).
17. G. Abel, *Stoizismus und Frühe Neuzeit: Zur Entstehungsgeschichte modernen Denkens im Felde von Ethik und Politik* (Berlin: 1977), 126.
18. J. Lagrée, "Constancy and Coherence," in S.K. Strange and J. Zupko (eds), *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations* (Cambridge: 2004), 148–76, at 160.
19. Abel, *Stoizismus und Frühe Neuzeit*, 140.
20. P. Rocques, "La *Philosophie morale de Stoiques* de Guillaume du Vair," *Archives de Philosophie* 20 (1957), 226–39 and 379–91, at 379.

# Chapter 34

1. I quote from M.A. Screech (trans.), *Montaigne: The Complete Essays* (London: 1993). For another translation, with further works, see D.M. Frame (trans.), *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Works* (Stanford: 1976).
2. For monograph studies of the *Essays* see M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: 1983); M. Conche, *Montaigne et la philosophie* (Paris: 1996); J. Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion* (Chicago: 2009); F. Green, *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom* (Cambridge: 2012). Useful collections of essays of themes in his life and work include U. Langer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge: 2005) and P. Desan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne* (Oxford: 2016).
3. E.L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: 2005), 62.
4. For biographies see G. Hoffmann, *Montaigne's Career* (Oxford: 1998); P. Desan, *Montaigne: A Life* (Princeton: 2017).
5. On his attitude toward politics see B. Fontana, *Montaigne's Politics: Authority and Governance in the Essays* (Geneva: 2008), D. Thompson, *Montaigne and the Tolerance of Politics* (Oxford: 2018).
6. For varieties of ancient skepticism see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, chs 15–18.
7. For this project see M. Habert, "Montaigne, Translator of Raymond Sebond," in Desan, *Oxford Handbook*, 78–96.

# Chapter 35

1. R. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: 2003), 26; this book is a revised version of *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: 1960).
2. See further A. Tournon, *Images du pyrrhonisme selon quelques écrivains de la Renaissance* (Paris: 1987); L. Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford: 2002). For the reception of Cicero see C.B. Schmitt, *Cicero scepticus*: *A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: 1972).
3. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 31.
4. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 54. On skepticism in Montaigne see also F. Brahami, *Le scepticisme de Montaine* (Paris: 1997); M.-L. Demonet and A. Legros (eds), *L'écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne* (Geneva: 2004).
5. As argued by Z.S. Schiffman, "Montaigne and the Rise of Skepticism in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984), 499–516.
6. C. Walton, "Montaigne on the Art of Judgment: The Trial of Montaigne," in R.A. Watson and J.E. Force (eds), *The Skeptical Mode in Modern Philosophy* (Dordrecht: 1988), 87–102.
7. This is subtly different from an interpretation defended by some scholars, whereby Montaigne is expressing a "probabilism" like that found in Academic skepticism. See for instance J.R. Maia Neto, "Academic Skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997), 199–220. On either reading, Montaigne accepts that his judgments lack certainty.
8. I take this connection from N. Panichi, "Montaigne and Plutarch: A Scepticism that Conquers the Mind," in G. Paganini and J.R. Maia Neto (eds), *Renaissance Scepticisms* (Dordrecht: 2009), 183–211, at 210.
9. A. Soman, "Pierre Charron: A Revaluation," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 32 (1970), 57–79.
10. P. Charron, *De la Sagesse trois livres* (Paris: 1986, based on 1604 edition).
11. As noted by J.B. Sabrié, *De l'humanisme au rationalisme: Pierre Charron (1541–1603)* (Paris: 1913), 277; J.R. Maia Neto, "Charron's Academic Sceptical Wisdom," in Paganini and Maia Neto (eds), *Renaissance Scepticisms*, 213–27, at 223–24, gives an example of how thoroughly he adapts Montaigne. See also T. Gontier, "Charron face à Montaigne: Stratégies du scepticisme," in M.-L. Demonet (ed.), *Montaigne et la question de l'homme* (Paris: 1999), 103–43.
12. Sabrié, *De l'humanisme au rationalisme*, 188–90.
13. M.C. Horowitz, "Pierre Charron's View of the Source of Wisdom," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971), 443–57; for a critical reaction suggesting that this reading fails to take account of the historical context, see A. Soman, "Methodology in the History of Ideas: The Case of Pierre Charron," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974), 495–501.
14. Quoted by Maia Neto, "Charron's Academic Sceptical Wisdom," 226–27.
15. Sabrié, *De l'humanisme au rationalisme*, 291; Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 59.
16. D.F.S. Thomson (ed. and trans.), *Francisco Sanches: That Nothing Is Known* (*Quod Nihil Scitur*) (Cambridge: 1988), cited by page number in what follows. The introduction by E. Limbrick is a very useful source for his life and thought. See also A. Lupoli, "*Humanus animus nusquam consistit*: Doctor Sanchez's Diagnosis of the Incurable Human Unrest and Ignorance," in Paganini and Neto (eds), *Renaissance Scepticisms*, 149–81; D. Caluori, "The Scepticism of Francisco Sanchez," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 89 (2007), 30–46.
17. Caluori, "The Scepticism of Francisco Sanchez," 40.

# Chapter 36

1. M. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: 2009), 47.
2. F. Rigolot (ed.), R. Hillman and C. Quesnel (trans.), *Preface to the Essays of Michel de Montaigne by His Adoptive Daughter, Marie le Jars de Gournay* (Tempe: 1998), 35; R. Hillman and C. Quesnel (trans.), *Marie le Jars de Gournay: Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works* (Chicago: 2002), 101. In the following I refer to these books as *Pref*. (citing the pages from the English translation) and *MG*.
3. On which see C.M. Bauschatz, "Imitation, Writing, and Self-Study in Marie de Gournay's 1595 *Préface* to Montaigne's *Essais*," in M.-R. Logan and P.L. Rudnytsky (eds), *Contending Kingdoms: Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France* (Detroit: 1991), 346–64; M. McKinley, "An Editorial Revival: Gournay's 1617 *Preface* to the *Essais*," *Montaigne Studies* 8 (1996), 193–201.
4. M.C. Horowitz, "Marie de Gournay, Editor of the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne: A Case-Study in Mentor-Protégée Friendship," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986), 271–84, at 281.
5. See also M. Tetel (ed.), "Montaigne and Marie de Gournay," special issue of *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1995); M. Tetel (ed.), *Montaigne et Marie de Gournay* (Paris: 1997). And, more generally on Gournay's life and work: M.H. Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance: Marie le Jars de Gournay, Her Life and Works* (The Hague: 1963); G. Devincenzo, *Marie de Gournay: Un cas littéraire* (Paris: 2002); M. Fogel, *Marie de Gournay: Itinéraires d'une femme savante* (Paris: 2004).
6. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 29 (and ch. 12 for Macrina).
7. Quoted at Horowitz, "Marie de Gournay," 274–75.
8. F. Gray, *Gender, Rhetoric, and Print Culture in French Renaissance Writing* (Cambridge: 2004), 108, and 123–24 for her edition of Ronsard.
9. I. Krier, "Souvenirs sceptiques de Marie de Gournay dans l'*Égalité des hommes et des femmes*," *Clio* 29 (2009), 243–57.
10. On women and gender in French culture of this period see e.g. L. McDowell Richardson, *The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance from Christine of Pisa to Marie de Gournay* (Baltimore: 1929); L. Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture (1598–1715)* (Paris: 1993).
11. As noted by Krier, "Souvenirs sceptiques," 248.
12. R. Hillman, "Les intellectuelles et l'amour: Marie de Gournay et Marguerite de Valois," *Renaissance and Reformation* 24 (2000), 115–28.
13. A.R. Larsen, "A Women's Republic of Letters: Anna Maria van Schurman, Marie de Gournay, and Female Self-Representation in Relation to the Public Sphere," *Early Modern Women* 3 (2008), 105–26.
14. Larsen, "A Women's Republic," 110–11.

# Chapter 37

1. General works on the Reformation in England are numerous. I draw especially on D. MacCullough, *The Later Reformation in England 1547–1603* (New York: 1990) and P. Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (New Haven: 2017). See also e.g. A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: 1964); E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: 1992); G.R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation 1509–1558* (London: 1977); C. Haigh, *English Reformations* (Oxford: 1993); W.P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: 1968); W.K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: 1932–40); P. Marshall, *Reformation England 1480–1642* (London: 2012); N. Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation 1500–1800* (London: 1998).
2. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 76.
3. K. Campbell, *The Call to Read: Reginald Pecock's Books and Textual Communities* (Notre Dame: 2010), 15.
4. J. Guy and J. Fox, *Hunting the Falcon: Henry VII, Anne Boleyn and the Marriage that Shook Europe* (London: 2023).
5. Quoted at Marshall, *Heretics and Believers*, 395.
6. P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: 1967); W. Hunt, *The Puritan Movement* (Cambridge, MA: 1983); P. Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: 1988).
7. A. Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity: English Neighborhoods 1500–1640* (Cambridge: 2020), 164–65.
8. On whom see C. Buchanan, *What Did Cranmer Think He Was Doing?* (Nottingham: 1976); D. MacCullough, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven: 1996); J. Dean (ed.), *God Truly Worshipped: Thomas Cranmer and His Writings* (Norwich: 2012). I cite the latter by page in what follows.
9. For more on this see J.D. Fudge, *Commerce and Print in the Early Reformation* (Leiden: 2007), 79. And on Tyndale see D. Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: 1994); R.S. Werrell, *The Roots of William Tyndale's Theology* (Cambridge: 2013).
10. B. Hall, "Martin Bucer in England," in D.F. Wright, *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community* (Cambridge: 1994), 144–60. See also M. Greschat, *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and His Times* (Louisville: 2004).
11. See P.N. Brooks, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of the Eucharist* (London: 1965); P. Newman Brooks, "The Theology of Thomas Cranmer," in D. Bagchi and D.C. Steinmetz (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: 2004), 150–60.
12. E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: 1992), 464.
13. For the significance of this episode see C.R. Trueman, "The Theology of the English Reformers," in D. Bagchi and D.C. Steinmetz (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: 2004), 161–73, at 170; MacCullough, *The Later Reformation*, 34.
14. R. O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (Manchester: 2014), 267.
15. Haigh, *English Reformations*, 290.
16. I here follow the introduction to Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation*, especially at 4; see also J. Gregory's essay in the same volume.
17. Quoted at Marshall, *Heretics and Believers*, 518.
18. Quoted at Marshall, *Heretics and Believers*, 465.
19. Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation*, 43, and 322 for the case of Bunny.

20. Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, from which the following passage is drawn (157). On a similar theme see K. Barclay, *Caritas: Neighbourly Love and the Early Modern Self* (Oxford: 2021).

# Chapter 38

1. For what follows I draw especially on W.I.P. Hazlett (ed.), *A Companion to the Reformation in Scotland, ca. 1525–1638: Frameworks of Change and Development* (Leiden: 2022), with quotations taken from pages 30, 89, and 607. On the topic in general see also M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: 2002); J. Wormald, "Reformed and Godly Scotland," in T. Devine and J. Wormald (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* (Oxford: 2012), 191–204; J. McCallum (ed.), *Scotland's Long Reformation: New Perspectives on Scottish Religion, c.1500–c.1660* (Leiden: 2016). The period is also covered in A. Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh: 2008).
2. For his works see N. Rhodes, J. Richards, and J. Marshall (eds), *James VI and I: Selected Writings* (Aldershot: 2003).
3. On Knox see J. Dawson, "John Knox and the Scottish Protestant Reformation," in Hazlett, *A Companion to the Reformation in Scotland*, 105–27, as well as R.G. Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox* (Lawrence: 1984); R.G. Kyle, *God's Watchman: John Knox's Faith and Vocation* (Eugene: 2014), which mentions the cannon at 20; R.G. Kyle, *John Knox: An Introduction to His Life and Works* (Eugene: 2009); J. Dawson, *John Knox* (New Haven: 2015); R.A. Mason (ed.), *John Knox and the British Reformations* (Aldershot: 1998).
4. I cite his works by page from R.A. Mason (ed.), *John Knox: On Rebellion* (Cambridge: 1994). See also M.A. Breslow (ed.), *The Political Writings of John Knox* (Washington: 1985).
5. Quoted in C.R. Trueman, "The Theology of the English Reformers," in D. Bagchi and D.C. Steinmetz (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: 2004), 161–73, at 171.
6. On this question in the period as a whole see A. Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England* (Keele: 1994); C. Jordan, "Woman's Rule in Sixteenth Century British Political Thought," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (1987), 421–51.
7. As emphasized by S.A. Chavura, *Tudor Protestant Political Thought 1547–1603* (Leiden: 2011), 116–18.
8. On Knox's correspondence with a range of women see S.M. Felch, "The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority: John Knox and the Question of Women," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26 (1995), 805–22.
9. Quoted from Dawson, "John Knox and the Scottish Protestant Reformation," 112.
10. Nonetheless his political views have received extensive treatment. See R.L. Greaves, "John Knox, the Reformed Tradition, and the Development of Resistance Theory," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1976), 1–31; J.H. Burns, "John Knox and Revolution 1558," *History Today* 8 (1958), 565–73; R.A. Mason, "Knox, Resistance and the Moral Imperative," *History of Political Thought* 1 (1980–81), 411–36; J. Dawson, "The Two John Knoxes: England, Scotland and the 1558 Tracts," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991), 555–76; J. Dawson, "Trumpeting Resistance: John Knox and Christopher Goodman," in Mason (ed.), *John Knox and the British Reformations*, 130–53.
11. For him I draw especially on C. Erskine and R.A. Mason, *George Buchanan: Political Thought in Early Modern Britain and Europe* (2012). See also D. Macmillan, *George Buchanan: A Biography* (London: 1906); I.D. McFarlane, *George Buchanan (1506–1582)* (London: 1980); P.J. Ford, *George Buchanan: Prince of Poets* (Aberdeen: 1982); J.R. Baxter, *George Buchanan: Scotland's Renaissance Man* (Stirling: 2006); P. Ford and E. Buszewicz (eds), *George Buchanan: Poet and Dramatist* (Swansea: 2009).

12. M.S. Sweetnam, "Literature, Church, and Theology," in Hazlett, *A Companion to the Reformation in Scotland*, 443–67, at 449.
13. Quoted from R.A. Mason and M.S. Smith (ed. and trans.), *George Buchanan: A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots* (Burlington, VT: 2004), lxix.
14. I cite by page from Mason and Smith, *George Buchanan: A Dialogue*, which also has an extensive and illuminating introduction. On Buchanan's view on opposing tyranny see further Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 2: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: 1978), 340–45; Q. Skinner, "The Origins of the Calvinist Theory of Revolution," in B. Malament (ed.), *After the Reformation: Essays in Honour of J.H. Hexter* (Manchester: 1980), 309–30; J.H. Burns, "George Buchanan and the Anti-Monarchomachs," in R.A. Mason (ed.), *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge: 1994), 138–58. More generally see D. Lewis, *Against the Tyrant: The Tradition and Theory of Tyrannicide* (Glencoe, IL: 1957).
15. Cited by M. Dzelzainis, "The Ciceronian Theory of Tyrannicide from Buchanan to Milton," in Erskine and Mason, *George Buchanan*, 173–87.
16. Cited by A.R. MacDonald, "Church and State in Scotland from the Reformation to the Covenanting Revolution," in Hazlett, *A Companion to the Reformation in Scotland*, 607–29, at 619.
17. Dzelzainis, "The Ciceronian Theory," 186.

# Chapter 39

1. D. Rundle, "Humanism before the Tudors: On Nobility and the Reception of the *studia humanitatis* in Fifteenth-Century England," in J. Woolfson (ed.), *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (Houndmills: 2002), 22–42, at 30. For this earlier period see also R. Weiss, *Humanism in England during the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: 1967); D. Hay, "England and the Humanities in the Fifteenth Century," in D. Hay, *Renaissance Essays* (London: 1988), 169–231.
2. Quoted by A. McLean, *Humanism and the Rise of Science in Tudor England* (London: 1972), 32 n. 2.
3. So argues Rundle, "Humanism before the Tudors," 26, 29.
4. For this see Weiss, *Humanism in England*, chs 6–7.
5. R. Mitchell, *John Free* (London: 1955).
6. Faithful readers of this book series may recall that the work on baldness by Synesius was already mentioned in *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, at 193.
7. L. Miles, *John Colet and the Platonic Tradition* (Lasalle: 1961); S. Jayne, *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino* (Oxford: 1963); J.B. Gleason, *John Colet* (Berkeley: 1989).
8. D. MacCullough, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven: 1996), 207.
9. McLean, *Humanism and the Rise of Science*, 68.
10. J. McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford: 1965). For Tudor humanism see also McLean, *Humanism and the Rise of Science*; Woolfson, *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*; M. Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII* (Beckenham: 1986); R.J. Schoeck, "Humanism in England," in A. Rabil, Jr. (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism*, Vol. 2: *Foundations, Forms, and Legacy* (Philadelphia: 1988), 5–38; J.B. Trapp, *Erasmus, Colet and More: The Early Tudor Humanists and Their Books* (London: 1991).
11. Quoted by McLean, *Humanism and the Rise of Science*, 38.
12. C. Curtis, "Richard Pace's *De fructu* and Early Tudor Pedagogy," in Woolfson, *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*, 43–77.
13. I cite it by page from H.H.S. Croft (ed.), *The Boke Named The Gouernour Deuised by Sir Thomas Elyot, Knight*, 2 vols (London: 1883). On him see S.E. Lehmberg, *Sir Thomas Elyot, Tudor Humanist* (Austin: 1960).
14. For the following I draw on H.-A. Kim, *Humanism and the Reform of Sacred Music in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: 2008). See also P. Le Huray, *Music and the Reformation in England 1549–1660* (London: 1967).
15. Cited by Kim, *Humanism and the Reform of Sacred Music*, 116.
16. M. Pincombe, *Elizabethan Humanism: Literature and Learning in the Later Sixteenth Century* (Harlow: 2001).
17. McConica, *English Humanists*, 263. On him see L.V. Ryan, *Roger Ascham* (Stanford: 1963).
18. Quoted by McConica, *English Humanists*, 231–32.
19. R. Brackmann, *The Elizabethan Invention of Anglo-Saxon England: Laurence Nowell, William Lambarde, and the Study of Old English* (Cambridge: 2012). See also R.M. Warnicke, *William Lambarde: English Antiquary, 1536–1601* (Chichester: 1973).
20. Brackmann, *The Elizabethan Invention*, 19.
21. For him I draw on E.R. Holloway, *Andrew Melville and Humanism in Renaissance Scotland 1545–1622* (Leiden: 2011); S.J. Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism: Andrew Melville and the Universities of Scotland, 1560–1625* (Farnham: 2011); and E.R. Holloway, "Andrew Melville

and European Humanism," in W.I.P. Hazlett (ed.), *A Companion to the Reformation in Scotland, ca. 1525–1638: Frameworks of Change and Development* (Leiden: 2022), 343–66. See also D. McOmish and S.J. Reid (eds), *Neo-Latin Literature and Literary Culture in Early Modern Scotland* (Leiden: 2016).

22. Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism*, 92. See also S.J. Reid, "Andrew Melville and Scottish Ramism: A Re-Interpretation," in S.J. Reid and E.A. Wilson (eds), *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts: Ramism in Britain and the Wider World* (Farnham: 2011), 25–45.
23. Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism*, 77.
24. Cited by G.R. Elton, "Humanism in England," in A. Goodwin and A. MacKay (eds), *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (London: 1990), 259–78, at 277.

# Chapter 40

1. I cite by page number from G.M. Logan and R.M. Adams (ed. and trans.), *Thomas More: Utopia* (Cambridge: 2002). Studies of *Utopia* include G.M. Logan, *The Meaning of More's "Utopia"* (Princeton: 1983); E. McCutcheon, *My Dear Peter: The "Arts Poetica" and Hermeneutics for More's "Utopia"* (Angers: 1983); J.C. Olin, *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia* (New York: 1989); D. Baker-Smith, *More's "Utopia"* (London: 1991); A. Fox, *"Utopia": An Elusive Vision* (New York: 1993); C. Shrank and P. Withington (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Thomas More's Utopia* (Oxford: 2023).
2. As emphasized in R. Dealy, *Before Utopia: The Making of Thomas More's Mind* (Toronto: 2020). For More's life see also R. Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (New York: 1984); P. Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (London: 1998); J. Guy, *Thomas More* (London: 2000); and the relevant chapters of G.M. Logan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More* (Cambridge: 2011).
3. Quoted in A.D. Cousins and D. Grace (eds), *Companion to Thomas More* (Madison: 2009), 152.
4. Cited at Logan (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, 169.
5. As emphasized in H. Yoran, *Between Utopia and Dystopia: Erasmus, Thomas More, and the Humanist Republic of Letters* (Lanham: 2010), ch. 5.
6. Logan (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, 107 and 191 for the word count of the anti-heretical works. On this topic see also R. Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics* (Bloomington: 1968).
7. Olin, *Interpreting*, 43.
8. For the Platonic inspiration see e.g. T.I. White, "Pride and the Public Good: Thomas More's Use of Plato in *Utopia*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 20 (1982), 329–54; A. Hobbs, "More and the Republics of Plato," in the *Oxford Handbook of Thomas More's Utopia*. My thanks to Prof. Hobbs for sending me a pre-publication copy.
9. M.N. Raitiere, "More's Utopia and *The City of God*," *Studies in the Renaissance* 20 (1973), 144–68; G. Wegemer, "The *City of God* in Thomas More's *Utopia*," *Renascence* 44 (1992), 115–35; I. Bejczy, "More's Utopia: The City of God on Earth?" *Saeculum* 46 (1995), 17–30.
10. See e.g. Logan and Adams, *Thomas More: Utopia*, xxiii; Olin, *Interpreting*, 20.
11. *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 42.
12. For what follows I draw on C. Houston, *The Renaissance Utopia: Dialogue, Travel and the Ideal Society* (Farnham: 2014). See also F.E. Manuel and F.P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge: 1979); J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516–1700* (Cambridge: 1983); K. Thomas, "The Utopian Impulse in Seventeenth-Century England," in D. Baker-Smith and C.C. Barfoot (eds), *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia* (Amsterdam: 1987), 20–46; M. Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca, NY: 1998); D.W. Baker, *Divulging Utopia: Radical Humanism in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: 1999).

# Chapter 41

1. I take this from *London Review of Books*, Feb. 2, 2023, 24.
2. S.A. Chavura, *Tudor Protestant Political Thought 1547–1603* (Leiden: 2011), 154.
3. For this early period I draw on S.B. Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: 1936).
4. D.M. Brodie (ed.), *Edmund Dudley: Tree of Commonwealth* (Cambridge: 2014).
5. I cite this and Fortescue's *The Governance of England* by page from S. Lockwood (trans.), *Sir John Fortescue: On the Laws and Governance of England* (Cambridge: 1997), with the abbreviation *Fort*.
6. For discussion see also Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas*, 309.
7. F.W. Conrad, "The Problem of Counsel Reconsidered: The Case of Thomas Elyot," in P.A. Fideler and T.F. Mayer (eds), *Political Thought and the Tudor Commonwealth: Deep Structure, Discourse and Disguise* (London: 1992), 77–109.
8. Cited from T.F. Mayer (ed.), *Thomas Starkey: A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset* (London: 1989), abbreviated as *Stark*. For the context of Pole's circle see T.F. Mayer, "Nursery of Resistance: Reginald Pole and His Friends," in Fideler and Mayer (eds), *Political Thought*, 51–75.
9. T.F. Mayer, *Thomas Starkey and the Commonweal: Humanist Politics and Religion in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: 1989), 3.
10. Mayer, *Thomas Starkey and the Commonweal*, 117, and 159 for possible influence from Fortescue.
11. For the comparison between Starkey and Seyssel, see Mayer, *Thomas Starkey and the Commonweal*, 87.
12. J. Woolfson, "Between Bruni and Hobbes: Aristotle's *Politics* in Tudor Intellectual Culture," in J. Woolfson (ed.), *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (Houndmills: 2002), 197–222.
13. Woolfson, "Between Bruni and Hobbes," 211.
14. N. Wood, "Foundations of Political Economy: The New Moral Philosophy of Sir Thomas Smith," in Fideler and Mayer (eds), *Political Thought*, 143–71.
15. Wood, "Foundations of Political Economy," 149.
16. See in general S.A. Chavura, *Tudor Protestant Political Thought 1547–1603* (Leiden: 2011), ch. 3, and for the following examples 106 and 135.

# Chapter 42

1. For the following I draw on S.A. Chavura, *Tudor Protestant Political Thought 1547–1603* (Leiden: 2011), ch. 5.
2. I cite by book and chapter; the modern edition is to be found in vols 1–3 of W. Speed Hill (ed.), *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, 7 vols (Binghamton, NY: 1977–98). Earlier doubts about the authenticity of some of these books have now largely been laid to rest.
3. For his biography see P.B. Secor, *Richard Hooker: Prophet of Anglicanism* (Tunbridge Wells: 1999).
4. For what follows see R. Ingalls, "Sin and Grace," in W.J.T. Kirby (ed.), *A Companion to Richard Hooker* (Leiden: 2008), 151–83, and A. Russell, *Richard Hooker, Beyond Certainty* (Abingdon: 2017). For his place in the religious disputes of the time see also N. Voak, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Theology* (Oxford: 2003); C. Miller, *Richard Hooker and the Vision of God: Exploring the Origins of "Anglicanism"* (Cambridge: 2013); and W.B. Littlejohn and N. Kindred-Barnes, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy* (Göttingen: 2017).
5. Quoted from Russell, *Richard Hooker*, 130; the following quotation is from 170.
6. As noted by D. Eppey at *Companion to Richard Hooker*, 511.
7. P.A. Dominiak, *Richard Hooker: The Architecture of Participation* (London: 2020).
8. Dominiak, *Richard Hooker*, 56.
9. S.P. Kennedy, "Richard Hooker as Political Naturalist," *The Historical Journal* 62 (2019), 331–48. See also P. Munz, *The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought* (London: 1952); A.S. McGrade, "The Coherence of Hooker's Polity: The Books on Power," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963), 163–82; R.K. Faulkner, *Richard Hooker and the Politics of a Christian England* (Berkeley: 1981); W.B. Littlejohn, *The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: 2017).
10. Russell, *Richard Hooker*, 63.
11. In *Companion to Richard Hooker*, 570.
12. For instance in W.J.T. Kirby, *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden: 1990), W.J.T. Kirby, *Richard Hooker, Reformer and Platonist* (Aldershot: 2005).
13. Kirby, *Richard Hooker's Doctrine*, 84.
14. The *Christian Letter* can be found in Vol. 4 of *The Folger Library Edition*.
15. Dominiak, *Richard Hooker*, 167.

# Chapter 43

1. See for instance ch. 7 of A.F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: 1986). More generally see A. Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England, 1560–1660* (London: 1983).
2. Quoted in the introduction to G. Alexander (ed.), *Sidney's The Defence of Poesy and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: 2004), which contains a text of the *Defense*.
3. E.I. Berry, *The Making of Sir Philip Sidney* (Toronto: 1998), 152.
4. On this see R.E. Stillman, *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism* (Aldershot: 2008).
5. Cited from J. Buxton, *Sir Philip Sidney and the English Renaissance* (London: 1954), 2.
6. W. Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture and Identity* (Basingstoke: 1997), 99. For more on Spenser and Ireland see P. Coughlan (ed.), *Spenser and Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Cork: 1989); A. Hadfield, *Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruyt and Salvage Soyl* (Oxford: 1997); W. Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture and Identity* (Basingstoke: 1997); R.A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: 2002).
7. Maley, *Salvaging Spenser*, 55.
8. On this see R.A. McCabe, "Ireland: Policy, Poetics, and Parody," in A. Hadfield (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Spenser* (Cambridge: 2001), 60–78, at 66.
9. A. Hadfield and W. Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser: A View of the State of Ireland* (Oxford: 1997).
10. On this see J. Walters, "Human, All Too Human: Spenser and the Dangers of Irish Civilization," *Spenser Studies* 30 (2015), 151–65.
11. I have used C.V. Kaske et al. (ed.), *Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Queene*, 5 vols (Indianapolis: 2006–7), and cite by book, canto, and verse number.
12. S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: 2005), 186.
13. M. Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY: 1979), 233, cited by P. Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene* (Woodbridge: 2006), 32. See also I.G. MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination* (Princeton: 1976).
14. Quoted by Suttie, *Self-Interpretation*, 77.
15. A problem noted by A. Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England, 1560–1660* (London: 1983), 72.
16. As argued by A. Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: 1984), 67.
17. P. Suttie, "The Lost Cause of Platonism in *The Faerie Queene*," *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 413–30, at 414.
18. J. Waters Bennett, "Spenser's Garden of Adonis," *PMLA* 47 (1932), 46–80, with skeptical response by B. Stirling, "The Philosophy of Spenser's Garden of Adonis," *PMLA* 49 (1934), 501–38. Later studies on the topic include R. Ellrodt, *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser* (Geneva: 1960); a special issue of *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009); and K. Borris, *Visionary Spenser and the Poetics of Early Modern Platonism* (Oxford: 2017).
19. As observed by J.A. Quitslund, *Spenser's Supreme Fiction: Platonic Natural History and the Faerie Queene* (Toronto: 2001), 201.
20. V. Rees, "Ficinian Ideas in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser," *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 73–134, at 81.

21. C.G. Martin, “Spenser’s Neoplatonic Geography of the Passions: Mapping Allegory in the ‘Legend of Temperance,’ *Faerie Queene*, Book II,” *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 269–307.
22. Suttie, “The Lost Cause of Platonism,” 415.
23. Suttie, “The Lost Cause of Platonism,” 418.

# Chapter 44

1. C. Bourne and E. Caddick Bourne (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy* (London: 2019).
2. E.g. P. Gray and J.D. Cox, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics* (Cambridge: 2014); A. Raspa, *Shakespeare the Renaissance Humanist: Moral Philosophy and His Plays* (New York: 2016); J.R. Lupton and D. Sherman (eds), *Shakespeare and Virtue: A Handbook* (Cambridge: 2023).
3. E.g. L.H. Craig, *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear* (Toronto: 2001); A. Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: 2005); D. Armitage et al. (eds), *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: 2009); A. Schulman, *Rethinking Shakespeare's Political Philosophy: From Lear to Leviathan* (Edinburgh: 2014); P. Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism and Civil War* (Edinburgh: 2019).
4. A. Heller, *The Time Is out of Joint: Shakespeare as Philosopher of History* (Lanham: 2002).
5. G. Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Skepticism* (Ithaca, NY: 1987); S. Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: 2003); W.M. Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare's England* (Basingstoke: 2005); J.D. Cox, *Seeming Knowledge: Shakespeare and Skeptical Faith* (Waco: 2007); A. Gilman Sherman, *Skepticism and Memory in Shakespeare and Donne* (New York: 2007); R. McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare* (Oxford: 2013); J. Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness* (New York: 2013).
6. A.D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven: 2007).
7. A. Grimshaw (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford: 1992), 145.
8. W.R. Elton, "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997), 331–37. I cite the plays by act and scene number.
9. P. Holbrook in Gray and Cox, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, 272. On Shakespeare and Montaigne see F. Parker, "Shakespeare's Argument with Montaigne," *Cambridge Quarterly* 28 (1999), 1–18; W.H. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day* (Oxford: 2013).
10. P. Gray, "Shakespeare versus Aristotle: *Anagnorisis*, Repentance, and Acknowledgement," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 49 (2019), 85–111, at 91.
11. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 278–80.
12. As argued by Craig, *Of Philosophers and Kings*, 119.
13. Schulman, *Rethinking Shakespeare's Political Philosophy*, 106.
14. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 171. For more on Shakespeare and antiquity see G. Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford: 1996); C. Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: 2013); C. Crosbie, *Revenge Tragedy and Classical Philosophy on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: 2022).
15. One could also pursue this theme with respect to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, which depicts the founding of the Tudor dynasty through the apparently justified overthrow of a tyrant. This pro-Tudor reading, found in a classic study by E.M.W. Tillyard, has however been complicated by subsequent interpreters who see the plays more through the lens of political anxieties of the late Elizabethan era.
16. Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, 176.
17. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 177; Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall*, Part I.
18. Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall*, 63.

19. As documented in S. Stewart, *Shakespeare and Philosophy* (London: 2010), from whom the following quotes are taken (30, 40).

# Chapter 45

1. This is the reading offered in W. Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare* (Cambridge: 1986).
2. My thanks to Patrick Gray for discussion of this point; see further his essay " 'Hide Thy Self': Hamlet, Montaigne, and Epicurean Ethics," in P. Gray and J.D. Cox (eds), *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics* (Cambridge: 2014), 213–36.
3. H. Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: 2002), 251. For a similar reading see P.A. Kottman, "Self-Uncertainty as Self-Realization," in T. Zamir (ed.), *Shakespeare's Hamlet: Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford: 2018), 105–29, at 119.
4. J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore, 2 vols (New York: 1958), Vol. 1, 143. See the discussion of Burckhardt and civic humanism in *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 38.
5. A. Russell, *Richard Hooker, Beyond Certainty* (Abingdon: 2017), 132.
6. See e.g. D. Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists," in D. Aers, *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing* (London: 1992), 177–202.
7. J.J. Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Houndmills: 2004), 130–31.
8. E. Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: 1998).
9. Hanson, *Discovering the Subject*, 27, 33, 48.
10. S.J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: 1980).
11. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 236, 253.
12. L.H. Craig, *Philosophy and the Puzzles of Hamlet: A Study of Shakespeare's Method* (London: 2014), 95.
13. Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare*, 88.
14. P. Holbrook, *Shakespeare's Individualism* (Cambridge: 2010), 52.
15. G. Baldwin, "Individual and Self in the Late Renaissance," *Historical Journal* 44 (2001), 341–64, at 358.

# Chapter 46

1. For this and what follows see A. Hadfield, *Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance, 1545–1625* (Oxford: 2001).
2. A. Gallay, *Walter Ralegh: Architect of Empire* (New York: 2019); P.C. Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America* (New Haven: 2007); D.A. Sacks, "Discourses of Western Planting: Richard Hakluyt and the Making of the Atlantic World," in P.C. Mancall (ed.), *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624* (Chapel Hill: 2007), 410–53.
3. For the parallel in attitudes between the English poor and New World natives see Hadfield, *Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing*, 249.
4. S. Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: 2016), 188.
5. Literature on this approach includes C. Frey, "The *Tempest* and the New World," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30 (1979), 29–41; T.R. Griffiths, " 'This Island's Mine': Caliban and Colonialism," *Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983), 159–80; P. Brown, " 'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine': The *Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism," in J. Dollimore and A. Sinfield (eds), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca, NY: 1985), 48–71; A.T. Vaughan, "Shakespeare's Indian: The Americanization of Caliban," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988), 137–53; M.A. Skura, "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989) 42–69; D. Willis, "Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism," *Studies in English Literature* 29 (1989), 277–89.
6. Both points are made by Skura, "Discourse and the Individual," 58.
7. On this connection see K. Go, "Montaigne's *Cannibals* and *The Tempest* Revisited," *Studies in Philology* 109 (2012), 455–73. For more on the relation between the two authors see F. Parker, "Shakespeare's Argument with Montaigne," *Cambridge Quarterly* 28 (1999), 1–18; A.A. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day* (Oxford: 2013); T. Cave, "When Shakespeare Met Montaigne," in A. Poole and R. Scholar (eds), *Thinking with Shakespeare: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Essays* (Abingdon: 2017), 115–19; L. Engle, P. Gray, and A.M. Hamlin (eds), *Shakespeare and Montaigne* (Edinburgh: 2022).
8. Here I am influenced by the reading offered by Emma Smith in her Oxford lectures "Approaching Shakespeare," which are available as a podcast.

# Chapter 47

1. See H. Cooper, "The Afterlife of Personification," in R. Morse, H. Cooper, and P. Holland (eds), *Medieval Shakespeare: Past and Presents* (Cambridge: 2013), 98–116.
2. My thanks to Patrick Gray for suggesting this approach to the play and further discussion.
3. Statistics for the various regions are reported in the relevant chapters of B.P. Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: 2013). For the general phenomenon see regional studies, for instance H. Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in H. Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London: 1967), 90–192; C. Larner, *Enemies of God* (Oxford: 1983); C. Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford: 1984); B.P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: 1987); S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: 1999); G.K. Waite, *Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: 2003); M.D. Brock, R. Raiswell, and D.R. Winter (eds), *Knowing Demons, Knowing Spirits in the Early Modern Period* (Cham: 2018). On Germany see e.g. L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: 1994); and J.B. Durrant, *Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden: 2007). For Scotland see J. Goodare, L. Martin, and J. Miller (eds), *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland* (Houndmills: 2008). Studies on England include A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: 1970); K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: 1971); J. Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550–1750* (London: 1996); and C.-R. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (London: 2017).
4. See e.g. P. Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: 2016).
5. For more on witchcraft in Africa and its philosophical significance see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Africana Philosophy from Ancient Egypt to the Nineteenth Century*, ch. 17.
6. For this sort of explanation see Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.
7. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 442, and 459 for the case of Wales.
8. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 236, 240.
9. For him I draw on P.C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and "The Discoverie of Witchcraft"* (London: 2011), with quotations at 11, 23, 63, 134.
10. As noted by M. Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence in Early Modern England," *Past and Present* 198 (2008), 33–70, at 61. See further O.A. Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch: Evidentiary Dilemmas in Early Modern England* (Farnham: 2011).
11. Almond, *England's First Demonologist*, 146.
12. S. Greenblatt, "Shakespeare Bewitched," in J.N. Cox and L.J. Reynolds (eds), *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History* (Princeton: 1993), 108–35.
13. A.D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven: 2007), 285.
14. As explored in S. Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: 2007), ch. 7.
15. G. Wills, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth* (New York: 1995), 78–79.
16. L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: 1994), 210.

17. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 113.
18. Almond, *England's First Demonologist*, 63.
19. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 107–108.
20. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*.

# Chapter 48

1. V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: 1935), 70–74.
2. Woolf, *A Room*, 62.
3. A. Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity: English Neighborhoods 1500–1640* (Cambridge: 2020), 183.
4. For this sort of correction see also M.J.M. Ezell, "The Myth of Judith Shakespeare: Creating the Canon of Women's Literature," *New Literary History* 21 (1990), 579–92.
5. Cited by chapter from A. Bale (trans.), *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Oxford: 2015); the references are from book 1, which takes up most of the work.
6. Cited by K. Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: 1991), 108.
7. L. Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: 2004), 179, 185.
8. A. Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (Edinburgh: 2002), 121.
9. J.H. Arnold, "Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy, and Dissent," in J.H. Arnold and K.J. Lewis (eds), *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: 2004), 75–93, at 92.
10. I. Davis, "Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy," in Arnold and Lewis, *A Companion to the Book*, 35–54 at 42.
11. I here draw on the ideas in D.B. Mahoney, "Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language," in S.J. McEntire, *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays* (London: 1992), 37–50.
12. Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, 8. For the history of the text see J.A. Chappell, *Perilous Passages: The Book of Margery Kempe 1534–1934* (New York: 2013).
13. Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, 101.
14. On women in England in this period see e.g. S.W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475–1640* (San Marino: 1982); E.A. Nist, "Tattle's Well's Faire: English Women Authors of the Sixteenth Century," *College English* 46 (1984), 702–16; K. Usher Henderson and B.F. McManus (eds), *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England 1540–1640* (Urbana: 1985); E.V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: 1987); J.L. Klein (ed.), *Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500–1640* (Urbana: 1992); W. Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: 1993).
15. See J. Mueller (ed.), *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence* (Chicago: 2014), cited by page with the abbreviation *KP*, and for discussion W.P. Haugaard, "Katherine Parr: The Religious Convictions of a Renaissance Queen," *Renaissance Quarterly* 22 (1969), 346–59 and S.E. James, *Kateryn Parr: The Making of a Queen* (Aldershot: 1999).
16. Haugaard, "Katherine Parr," 349.
17. S.W. May, "Anne Lock and Thomas Norton's *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*," *Modern Philology* 114 (2017), 793–819, at 801.
18. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve*, 21.
19. Nist, "Tattle's Well's Faire," 704.
20. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve*, 39–40.
21. M. White, "Renaissance Englishwomen and Religious Translations: The Case of Anne Lock's *Of the Markes of the Children of God* (1590)," *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999), 375–400, at 377.
22. White, "Renaissance Englishwomen and Religious Translations," 380.

23. S. Felch (ed.), *The Collected Works of Anne Vaughan Lock* (Tempe: 1999).
24. M. White, "Women Writers and Literary Religious Circles in the Elizabethan West Country: Anne Dowriche, Anne Lock Prowse, Anne Lock Moyle, Ursula Fulford, and Elizabeth Rous," *Modern Philology* 103 (2005), 187–214.
25. As pointed out by C.A. Huttar, "Translating French Proverbs and Idioms: Anne Locke's Renderings from Calvin," *Modern Philology* 96 (1998), 158–83, at 159–60.
26. T. Lanpher Nugent, "Anne Locke's Poetics of Spiritual Abjection," *English Literary Renaissance* 39 (2009), 3–23, at 3.
27. The case for this attribution is made in May, "Anne Lock and Thomas Norton's *Meditation*."

# Chapter 49

1. For the evolution of Oxford and Cambridge in this period see M.H. Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in Transition, 1558–1642* (Oxford: 1959); J.M. Fletcher, "The Teaching of Arts at Oxford, 1400–1520," *Paedagogica Historica* 7 (1967), 417–54; L. Jardine, "The Place of Dialectic Teaching in Sixteenth-Century Cambridge," *Studies in the Renaissance* 21 (1974), 31–62; L. Jardine, "Humanism and the Sixteenth Century Cambridge Arts Course," *History of Education* 4 (1975), 16–31; J.K. McConica, "Humanism and Aristotle in Tudor Oxford," *English Historical Review* 94 (1979), 291–317; J.M. Fletcher, "Change and Resistance to Change: A Consideration of the Development of English and German Universities during the Sixteenth Century," *History of Universities* 1 (1981), 1–36.
2. For the general trends I draw on C.B. Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England* (Kingston: 1983), E.J. Ashworth, "Logic in Late Sixteenth-Century England: Humanist Dialectic and the New Aristotelianism," *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991), 224–36, and E.J. Ashworth, "Changes in British Logic Teaching during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *History and Philosophy of Logic* 41 (2020), 309–30. For Scotland in particular see also G. Gellera, "Sixteenth-Century Philosophy and Theology after John Mair," in D. Fergusson and M.W. Elliott (eds), *A History of Scottish Theology*, Vol. 1: *Celtic Origins to Reformed Orthodoxy* (Oxford: 2019), 109–23.
3. A. Broadie, *The Circle of John Mair: Logic and Logicians in Pre-Reformation Scotland* (Oxford: 1985); A. Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh: 2009), ch. 4.
4. Ashworth, "Logic in Late Sixteenth-Century England," 226.
5. Broadie, *The Circle of John Mair*, 26, 122.
6. Broadie, *The Circle of John Mair*, 78, 85, 87.
7. Broadie, *The Circle of John Mair*, 146.
8. Quoted by J.K. Farge, "John Mair: An Historical Introduction," in J.T. Slotemaker and J.C. Witt (eds), *A Companion to the Theology of John Mair* (Leiden: 2015), 13–22, at 20.
9. P. Kärkkäinen, "Conscience and Synderesis in John Mair's Philosophical Theology," in Slotemaker and Witt (eds), *A Companion*, 175–93.
10. J.F. Keenan, "The Casuistry of John Major: Nominalist Professor of Paris (1506–1531)," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 13 (1993), 205–21.
11. On this see Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy*, 52; J.C. Witt, "Acquired Faith and Mair's Theological Project," in Slotemaker and Witt (eds), *A Companion*, 41–73.
12. Here I draw on J.H. Burns, "*Politia regalis et optima*: The Political Ideas of John Mair," *History of Political Thought* 2 (1981), 31–61.
13. Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy*, 55.
14. Quoted from W.S. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700* (Princeton: 1956), 13, from which I also draw the following examples (at 24–26).
15. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric*, 61.
16. Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism*, 19. My discussion of Case is drawn mostly from this study, with quotations from 115–16, 150, 159–60, 181, 201.
17. M. Feingold, "English Ramism: A Reinterpretation," in M. Feingold et al. (eds), *The Influence of Petrus Ramus: Studies in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Philosophy and Sciences* (Basel: 2001), 127–76; Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric*, ch. 4.
18. Quoted at W.H. Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance* (London: 1988), 12.

19. R.S. Knapp, " 'Is It Appropriate for a Man to Fear His Wife?' John Case on Marriage," *English Literary Renaissance* 28 (1998), 387–415, at 401.

# Chapter 50

1. For these figures and what follows see P. French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: 1972), especially ch. 3 on the library and ch. 6 on links to the Sidney circle, as well as W. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the Renaissance* (Amherst: 1995).
2. F. Yates, *Theatre of the World* (London: 1969), 12. See also her *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: 1979).
3. J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps et al. (eds), *John Dee's Diary, Catalogue of Manuscripts and Selected Letters* (Cambridge: 2014).
4. For this and many other anecdotes see B. Wooley, *The Queen's Conjurer: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Adviser to Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: 2001); Dee's career is also covered in N. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (Cambridge: 1988). Clulee's book is more scholarly; Wooley's is more fun.
5. D.E. Harkness, "Managing an Experimental Household: The Dees of Mortlake and the Practice of Natural Philosophy," *Isis* 88 (1997), 247–62.
6. W.H. Sherman, "John Dee's Columbian Encounter," in S. Clucas (ed.), *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought* (Dordrecht: 2006), 131–40, at 134.
7. On which see J. Rampling, "The Elizabethan Mathematics of Everything: John Dee's *Mathematicall Praeface* to Euclid's *Elements*," *BSHM Bulletin: Journal of the British Society for the History of Mathematics* 26 (2011), 135–46.
8. Quoted at Wooley, *The Queen's Conjurer*, 150.
9. S. Johnston, "Like Father, Like Son? John Dee, Thomas Digges and the Identity of the Mathematician," in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 65–84, at 70.
10. R. Baldwin, "John Dee's Interest in the Application of Nautical Science, Mathematics and Law to English Naval Affairs," in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 97–130, at 100.
11. R. Goulding, "Wings (or Stairs) to the Heavens: The Parallactic Treatises of John Dee and Thomas Digges," in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 41–63, at 48.
12. See the discussion in R. Dunn, "John Dee and Astrology in Elizabethan England," in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 85–94.
13. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, 57.
14. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, 106. See also N.H. Clulee, "The *Monas Hieroglyphica* and the Alchemical Thread of John Dee's Career," *Ambix* 52 (2005), 197–215.
15. F. Cavallaro, "The Alchemical Significance of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*," in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 159–76, at 164. See further N.H. Clulee, "John Dee and the Paracelsians," in A.G. Debus and M. Walton (eds), *Reading the Book of Nature: The Other Side of the Scientific Revolution* (Kirkville: 1997), 111–32; U. Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light: Geometry and Optics in Late Renaissance Alchemical Illustration* (Leiden: 2000).
16. G.E. Szönyi, "Paracelsus, Scrying, and the *Lingua Adamica*: Contexts for John Dee's Angel Magic," in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 207–29, at 210.
17. D.E. Harkness, "The Nexus of Angelology, Eschatology, and Natural Philosophy in John Dee's Angel Conversations and Library," in Clucas (ed.), *John Dee*, 275–82, at 279.
18. J. Rampling, "John Dee and the Alchemists: Practising and Promoting English Alchemy in the Holy Roman Empire," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 43 (2012), 498–508.
19. See also D.E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels* (Cambridge: 1999).
20. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, 197, 216.

21. Here I am especially influenced by Szönyi, “Paracelsus, Scrying, and the *Lingua Adamica*.”

# Chapter 51

1. A good place to start reading about him is the engaging R. Arianrhod, *Thomas Harriot: A Life in Science* (Oxford: 2019); an earlier intellectual biography is J.W. Shirley, *Thomas Harriot: A Biography* (Oxford: 1983). Other overviews of his work and its context include R. Fox (ed.), *Thomas Harriot: An Elizabethan Man of Science* (Aldershot: 2000); R. Fox (ed.), *Thomas Harriot and His World: Mathematics, Exploration, and Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England* (London: 2012); J.W. Shirley (ed.), *Thomas Harriot: Renaissance Scientist* (Oxford: 1974); see also J.W. Shirley, *A Source Book for the Study of Thomas Harriot* (New York: 1981).
2. See J.V. Pepper, "Thomas Harriot and the Great Mathematical Tradition," in Fox (ed.), *Thomas Harriot and His World*, 11–26, at 12; M. Schemmel, *The English Galileo: Thomas Harriot's Work on Motion as an Example of Preclassical Mechanics* (London: 2012), 22. On the significance of patronage see also S. Pumfrey and F. Dawbarn, "Science and Patronage in England, 1570–1625: A Preliminary Study," *History of Science* 42 (2004), 137–88.
3. F. Maddison et al. (eds), *Linacre Studies: Essays on the Life and Works of Thomas Linacre, c. 1460–1534* (Oxford: 1977), xiv.
4. For discussion see D.A. Seger, *The Practical Renaissance* (London: 2022), 23–24.
5. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 48.
6. Quoted in M. Feingold, *The Mathematician's Apprenticeship: Science, Universities and Society in England 1560–1640* (Cambridge: 1984), 29–30.
7. J. Stedall (ed.), *The Greate Invention of Algebra: Thomas Harriot's Treatise on Equations* (New York: 2003), 5–6.
8. R. Goulding, "Humanism and Science in the Elizabethan Universities," in J. Woolfson (ed.), *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (Houndmills: 2002), 223–42, at 225.
9. Quoted in R.H. Kargon, *Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton* (Oxford: 1966), 12.
10. As shown in detail by Feingold, *The Mathematician's Apprenticeship*.
11. For a nuanced correction of Feingold's more rosy presentation, see Goulding, "Humanism and Science."
12. Arianrhod, *Thomas Harriot*, 53.
13. Pepper, "Thomas Harriot," 12.
14. For this topic see Schemmel, *The English Galileo* and, more briefly, Schemmel's contribution to Fox (ed.), *Thomas Harriot and His World*.
15. S. Clucas, " 'The Curious Ways to Observe Weight in Water': Thomas Harriot and His Experiments on Specific Gravity," *Early Science and Medicine* 25 (2020), 302–27.
16. J. Henry, "Why Thomas Harriot Was *Not* the English Galileo," in Fox (ed.), *Thomas Harriot and His World*, 113–37.
17. Though this too has been doubted by Henry, in "Thomas Harriot and Atomism: A Reappraisal," *History of Science* 20 (1982), 267–303. But the scholarly consensus is that Harriot shared the atomist views of his colleagues; see Kargon, *Atomism in England*; S. Clucas, "Corpuscular Matter Theory in the Northumberland Circle," in C. Lüthy et al. (eds), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories* (Leiden: 2001), 181–207.
18. Clucas, "Corpuscular Matter Theory," 188.
19. My thanks to Robert Goulding for comments and corrections on this and the next chapter.

# Chapter 52

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3. Goulding, "Chymicorum in morem," 43.
4. R.H. Kargon, *Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton* (Oxford: 1966), 34.
5. On this see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Philosophy in the Islamic World*, ch. 11.
6. For what follows I draw on R. Chen-Morris, *Measuring Shadows: Kepler's Optics of Invisibility* (University Park: 2016), with quotations taken from 32, 53–54, 87.
7. O. Gal and R. Chen-Morris, "Baroque Optics and the Disappearance of the Observer: From Kepler's Optics to Descartes' Doubt," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (2010), 191–217, at 192.
8. S. Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: 2007). Quotations in what follows are taken from 10, 30, 161, 180.
9. Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 187–91.
10. R. Chen-Morris, "Shadows of Instruction: Optics and Classical Authorities in Kepler's *Somnium*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66 (2005), 223–43, at 238.
11. As Robert Goulding points out to me, this is not unprecedented and goes back all the way to Euclid by way of figures like Ibn al-Haytham. See further S. Berryman, "Euclid and the Sceptic: A Paper on Vision, Doubt, Geometry, Light and Drunkenness," *Phronesis* 43 (1998), 176–96.

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1. Translations in S.P. Thompson (trans.), *William Gilbert: On the Magnet* (London: 1900), P.F. Mottelay (trans.), *William Gilbert: De Magnete* (New York: 1958).
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3. J.M. Forrester and J. Henry (trans.), *Jean Fernel's On the Hidden Causes of Things: Forms, Souls, and Occult Diseases in Renaissance Medicine* (Leiden: 2005), 419.
4. For this I draw on G. Freudenthal, "Theory of Matter and Cosmology in William Gilbert's *De magnete*," *Isis* 74 (1983), 22–37.
5. S. Pumfrey, "Mechanising Magnetism in Restoration England: The Decline of Magnetic Philosophy," *Annals of Science* 44 (1987), 1–22, at 3.
6. As observed by L. Georgescu, *Devising Magnetism: Concepts and Investigative Practices* (PhD thesis, Ghent, 2017), 42. My thanks to Dr Georgescu for making this thesis available to me and for help with this chapter.
7. S. Pumfrey, "*O tempora, O magnes!* A Sociological Analysis of the Discovery of Secular Magnetic Variation in 1634," *British Journal for the History of Science* 22 (1989), 181–214.
8. J. Henry, "Animism and Empiricism: Copernican Physics and the Origins of William Gilbert's Experimental Method," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001), 99–119, at 106.
9. Freudenthal, "Theory of Matter," 30.
10. As emphasized in J. Luggin, " 'Trust No One But Yourself': William Gilbert's Use of Experiment and Rejection of Authority, Reconsidered," *Perspectives on Science* 30 (2022), 925–49.
11. E. Zilsel, "The Origins of William Gilbert's Scientific Method," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (1941), 1–32.
12. Henry, "Animism and Empiricism."
13. Freudenthal, "Theory of Matter," 27–28.
14. C. Sander, "Magnetism in an Aristotelian World (1550–1700): Dozens of University Disputations, Kasper van Baerle's Eclecticism, and Nikolaus Andreas Granius's Marginalia," in H. Beyer et al. (eds), *Alte und neue Philosophie: Aristotelismus und protestantische Gelehrsamkeit in Helmstedt und Europa (1600–1700)* (Wolfenbüttel: 2023), 69–105.

# Chapter 54

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2. His writings are cited by page from W.H. Huffman (ed.), *Robert Fludd* (Berkeley: 2001).
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4. On Fludd's Paracelsan chemistry see A.G. Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy* (Mineola: 1977), ch. 4.
5. A.G. Debus, "Key to Two Worlds: Robert Fludd's Weather-Glass," *Annali dell'Istituto e Museo di storia della scienza di Firenze* 7 (1982), 109–44; L. Guariento, "From the Divine Monochord to the Weather-Glass: Changing Perspectives in Robert Fludd's Philosophy," in J.A.T. Lancaster and R. Raiswell (eds), *Evidence in the Age of the New Sciences* (Dordrecht: 2018), 151–76.
6. C.H. Josten, "Robert Fludd's *Philosophical Key* and His Alchemical Experiment on Wheat," *Ambix* 11 (1963), 1–26.
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9. Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance*, 62.
10. P.J. Boner, *Kepler's Cosmological Synthesis: Astrology, Mechanism and the Soul* (Leiden: 2013), 140.
11. Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance*, 173.

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4. For introductions to this event see M. Mullet, *The Catholic Reformation* (London: 1999), ch. 2, and J.W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: 2013).
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15. Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 107.
16. Quoted at J.J. Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Houndmills: 2004), 30.
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19. F. Malta Romeiras, "Putting the *Indices* into Practice: Censoring Science in Early Modern Portugal," *Annals of Science* 77 (2020), 71–95, at 77.
20. H. Marcus, *Forbidden Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and Censorship in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago: 2020), 194.

21. Malta Romeiras, “Putting the *Indices* into Practice,” 81.
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24. Marcus, *Forbidden Knowledge*, 37; Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 138.
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27. Marcus, *Forbidden Knowledge*, 72.

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5. D. Goodman, "Science, Medicine, and Technology in Colonial Spanish America: New Interpretations, New Approaches," in Bleichmar (ed.), *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires*, 9–34, at 12.
6. Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, 104.
7. O.T. Almeida, "Portugal en los albores de la modernidad científia (siglo XVI)," *Abriu* 8 (2019), 137–52, at 142.
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16. R. Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism 1450–1700* (Basingstoke: 1999), 161.
17. Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 169. See further D.E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Wiesbaden: 1985); P.A. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney: 1986).
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# Chapter 58

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4. A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: 1982), 33–34.
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6. M. Heath, "Aristotle on Natural Slavery," *Phronesis* 53 (2008), 243–70.
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13. Schäfer, "Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda," 257.
14. S. Davis, "Humanist Ethics and Political Justice: Soto, Sepúlveda, and the 'Affair of the Indies,'" *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 19 (1999), 193–212, at 198.
15. Brunstetter, "Sepúlveda, Las Casas, and the Other," 418.
16. X. Tubau, "Canon Law in Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's *Democrates Secundus*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 73 (2011), 265–77.
17. In addition to sources already cited, see L. Hanke, *Bartolomé de las Casas: An Interpretation of His Life and Writings* (The Hague: 1951); L. Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study of Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington: 1959); J. Friede and B. Keen (eds), *Bartolomé de las Casas in History: Toward an Understanding of the Man and His Work* (DeKalb: 1971); S. Poole, *Bartolomé de las Casas: In Defense of the Indians* (DeKalb: 1974); L. Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé De Las Casas and Juan Ginés De Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the*

*American Indians* (De Kalb: 1994); M. Beuchot, *Los fundamentos de los derechos humanos en Bartolomé de las Casas* (Barcelona: 1994); D. Castro, *Another Face of Empire: Bartolomé de Las Casas, Indigenous Rights, and Ecclesiastical Imperialism* (Durham, NC: 2007); L.A. Clayton, *Bartolomé de las Casas and the Conquest of the Americas* (Chichester: 2011); L.A. Clayton, *Bartolomé de las Casas: A Biography* (Cambridge: 2012).

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19. N. Griffin (trans.), *Bartolomé de las Casas: A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (Penguin: 1992).
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21. Clayton, *Bartolomé de las Casas: A Biography*, 30, 35.
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25. Brunstetter, "Sepúlveda, Las Casas, and the Other," 417.

# Chapter 59

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3. J.N.H. Lawrance, "Humanism in the Iberian Peninsula," in A. Goodwin and A. MacKay (eds), *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (London: 1990), 220–58, at 225.
4. I discussed the episode in *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 45.
5. Lawrance, "Humanism in the Iberian Peninsula," 225.
6. K.E. van Liere, "Humanism and Scholasticism in Sixteenth-Century Academe: Five Student Orations from the University of Salamanca," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000), 57–107.
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21. Discussed in O'Reilly, *Humanism and Religion*, ch. 19, and at Thompson, *The Strife of Tongues*, 17 and 191. See also E.L. Rivers, *Fray Luis de León: The Original Poems* (London: 1983). The Neoplatonic themes of the work are discussed by L. Schwartz and S. Byrne, "Intellectual Life," in H. Kallendorf (ed.), *A Companion to the Spanish Renaissance* (Leiden: 2019), 317–39, at 326–27.
22. Thompson, *The Strife of Tongues*, 211.

Thompson, *The Strife of Tongues*, 203. See further K. Kottmann, *Law and Apocalypse: The*
23. *Moral Thought of Luis de León (1527?–1591)* (The Hague: 1972).
24. Noreña, *Studies in Spanish Renaissance Thought*, 165.

# Chapter 60

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2. See A. Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism in Sixteenth-Century Spain: The Alumbrados* (Cambridge: 1992), and for mysticism in the period A.M. Martín, *Los recogidos: Nueva visión de la mística española (1500–1700)* (Madrid: 1976).
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5. Eire, *The Life*, 38.
6. On this and her other authorial strategies see G.T.W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, NY: 1996); A. Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton: 1990).
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8. On parallels between the works see B. McGinn, “Augustine and Teresa of Avila on the Mystical Self,” in P. Tyler and E. Howells (eds), *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition* (Abingdon: 2017), 17–37.
9. Cited at Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila*, 50.
10. Cited at Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila*, 70.
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13. Cited by page from K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (trans.), *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross* (Washington DC: 1991).
14. See E.W. Howells, “Negative Theology and Desire in Spiritual Transformation According to John of the Cross,” *Religions* 14 (2022), 1–15, and for background L.M. Girón-Negron, “Dionysian Thought in Sixteenth-Century Spanish Mystical Theology,” in S. Coakley and C.M. Stang (eds), *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Oxford: 2009), 163–76.
15. The image is discussed by Hole, *John of the Cross*, 142.

# Chapter 61

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3. As already suggested by C. Mercer, "Descartes' Debt to Teresa of Ávila, or Why We Should Work on Women in the History of Philosophy," *Philosophical Studies* 174 (2017), 2539–55.
4. For Loyola and the early Jesuits I draw on J.W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: 1993); T. Worcester (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits* (Cambridge: 2008), and I.G. Županov (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits* (Oxford: 2019).
5. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 37.
6. S. Mostaccio, "Spiritual Exercises: Obedience, Conscience, Conquest," in Županov (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook*, 75–104, at 77.
7. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 278.
8. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 16.
9. M. Mullet, *The Catholic Reformation* (London: 1999), 90.
10. See J. Wright, "The Suppression and Restoration," in Worcester (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, 263–77.
11. A.I. Prieto, *Missionary Scientists: Jesuit Science in Spanish South America, 1570–1810* (Nashville: 2011), 23.
12. Quoted at A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: 1982), 160.
13. Prieto, *Missionary Scientists*, 154.
14. In L. Caruana, "The Jesuits and the Quiet Side of the Scientific Revolution," in Worcester (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion*, 243–60, at 245.
15. Cited by M. Feingold, "Jesuits: Savants," in M. Feingold (ed.), *Jesuit Science and the Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: 2003), 1–45, at 18.
16. Here I draw on L.M. Carolino, "Astronomy, Cosmology, and Jesuit Discipline, 1540–1758," in Županov (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook*, 670–707. See also *Early Science and Medicine* 3 (1996), a special volume on "Jesuits and the Knowledge of Nature."
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18. W.A. Wallace, "Galileo's Jesuit Connections and Their Influence on His Science," in Feingold (ed.), *Jesuit Science*, 99–126. See also A. Carugo and A.C. Crombie, "The Jesuits and Galileo's Ideas of Science and of Nature," *Annali dell'Instituto e Museo di storia delle scienza di Firenze* 8 (1983), 3–68.
19. For this I draw on S. Tutino, "Jesuit Accommodation, Dissimulation, Mental Reservation," in Županov (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook*, 216–39; J.P. Sommerville, "The 'New Art of Lying': Equivocation, Mental Reservation, and Casuistry," in E. Leites (ed.), *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: 1988), 159–84. See also P. Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: 1990); L. Gallagher, *Medusa's Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: 1991); J.R. Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*

(Berkeley: 2009); S. Mostaccio, *Early Modern Jesuits between Obedience and Conscience during the Generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615)* (Farnham: 2014).

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21. Sommerville, "The New Art of Lying," 173.
22. Cited at Prieto, *Missionary Scientists*, 161; Caruana, "The Jesuits and the Quiet Side," 247.

# Chapter 62

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3. My thanks to Karsten Engel for advice on Hundt. For a brief overview of his career see the entry on him in F.J. Worstbrock (ed.), *Deutscher Humanismus 1480–1520* (Berlin: 2008), 1176–85.
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5. D. Janz, "Cajetan: A Thomist Reformer?" *Renaissance and Reformation* 6 (1982), 94–102, at 95.
6. Quoted at M. O'Connor, *Cajetan's Biblical Commentaries: Motive and Method* (Leiden: 2017), 47.
7. H.G. Hrynkiw, *Cajetan on Sacred Doctrine* (Washington DC: 2020), 28, 71.
8. Hrynkiw, *Cajetan on Sacred Doctrine*, 34.
9. Hrynkiw, *Cajetan on Sacred Doctrine*, 56–61.
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12. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 41–42.
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14. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 145.
15. For this see J.P. Reilly, *Cajetan's Notion of Existence* (The Hague: 1971), 33.
16. Reilly, *Cajetan's Notion of Existence*, 52.
17. See R.L. Friedman, "Late Scholastic Thomism into Pieces: Hylomorphism and Indeterminate Dimensions in Domingo Báñez's Commentary on *De generatione et corruptione*," in N. Polloni and S. Roudaut (eds), *Hylomorphism into Pieces: Elements, Atoms, and Corpuscles in Natural Philosophy and Medicine, 1400–1600* (Dordrecht: 2024), 205–45. My thanks to Prof. Friedman for sharing a pre-publication copy.
18. R.L. Friedman, "Domingo Báñez (1528–1604) and the *novus philosophus*: Cajetan, Franciscus Toletus, and the (In)equality of Human Rational Souls," *Mediterranea* 8 (2023), 595–634.

# Chapter 63

1. A.M. Martins, "The Conimbricenses," in M.C. Pacheco and J. Meirinhos (eds), *Intellect et imagination dans la philosophie médiévale* (Turnhout: 2006), 101–17, at 101; M.S. de Carvalho, "Manuel de Góis: The Coimbra Course and the Definition of an Early Jesuit Philosophy," in C. Casalini (ed.), *Jesuit Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden: 2019), 347–72, at 348.
2. For a general overview see J.P. Doyle, "Hispanic Scholastic Philosophy," in J. Hankins (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: 2007), 250–69; many aspects of the movement are treated in H.E. Braun, E. De Bom, and P. Astorri (eds), *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics* (Leiden: 2022). For a discussion of the term "second scholastic" in relation to other options see D.D. Novotny, *Ens rationis from Suarez to Caramuel: A Study in Scholasticism of the Baroque Era* (New York: 2013), 6.
3. As explored in T. Duve, C. Birr, and J.L. Egío García (eds), *The School of Salamanca: A Case of Global Knowledge Production* (Leiden: 2021).
4. Duve writing in *The School of Salamanca*, 30.
5. On him see S. Guidi and M.A. Santiago de Carvalho (eds), *Pedro Da Fonseca: Humanism and Metaphysics* (Turnhout: 2023).
6. Carvalho, "Manuel de Góis."
7. For this hypothesis see C. Sander, "Medical Topics in the *De anima* Commentary of Coimbra (1598) and the Jesuits' Attitude towards Medicine in Education and Natural Philosophy," *Early Science and Medicine* 19 (2014), 76–101. See also D. Des Chene, "An Aristotle for the Universities: Natural Philosophy in the Coimbra Commentaries," in S. Gaukroger et al. (eds), *Descartes' Natural Philosophy* (London: 2000), 29–45; M.S. de Carvalho, "Beyond Psychology: The Philosophical Horizon of the *Coimbra Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima* (1598)," in D. Heider (ed.), *Cognitive Psychology in Early Jesuit Scholasticism* (London: 2016), 67–95.
8. Sander, "Medical Topics," 101.
9. M.S. de Carvalho, "Reading Philosophy from a Dialectical Point of View: Pedro da Fonseca's and Sebastião do Couto's Philosophical Stance on Aristotle's *Organon*," in C. Casalini (ed.), *Jesuit Logic and Late Ming China: Lectures on the Cursus conimbricensis* (Chestnut Hill: 2019), 19–39, at 28.
10. Quoted at C. Casalini (ed.), *Jesuit Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden: 2019), 332–33.
11. Quoted in F.D. Reboiras, "Biblical Criticism," in Braun et al. (eds), *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics*, 165–98, at 179. See 182 for Bañez on the Latin Bible.
12. For the following topics see J. Ross, "Suárez on Universals," *Journal of Philosophy* 59 (1962), 736–47; C.G. Noreña, "Ockham and Suárez on the Ontological Status of Universal Concepts," *The New Scholasticism* 4 (1981) 348–62; J.J.E. Gracia, *Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-reformation (1150–1650)* (Albany: 1994); M.S. de Carvalho, "The Coimbra Jesuits' Doctrine on Universals (1577–1606)," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 18 (2007), 531–43; D. Heider, *Universals in the Second Scholasticism* (Bochum: 2014); H.T. Adriaenssen, "Suárez's Argument against Real Universals," *Mind* 133 (2023), 323–45.
13. See *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 51 for Scotus, and chs 9, 16, 58, and 60 for other aspects of the medieval debate over universals.
14. Gracia, *Individuation in Scholasticism*, 475.

15. See J.B. South, "Singular and Universal in Suárez's Account of Cognition," *Review of Metaphysics* 55 (2002), 785–823; A. Tropia, "Three Jesuit Accounts of Cognition: Differences and Common Ground in the *De anima* Commentaries by Maldonado, Toledo and Dandini (1564–1610)," in B. Decaix and A.M. Mora-Márquez (eds), *Active Cognition: Challenges to an Aristotelian Tradition* (Dordrecht: 2020), 103–31.
16. Heider, *Universals in the Second Scholasticism*, 74.

# Chapter 64

1. For contemporary engagements with Molina's position see e.g. R.M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977), 109–17; T.P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinistic Account* (Ithaca, NY: 2006); K. Perszyk (ed.), *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford: 2012).
2. For his life story see K.R. MacGregor, *Luís de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of the Middle Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: 2015).
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4. As pointed out by Freddoso in his introduction, 29.
5. A. Aichele, "The Real Possibility of Freedom: Luis de Molina's Theory of Absolute Willpower in *Concordia* I," in M. Kaufmann and A. Aichele (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina* (Leiden: 2014), 3–54, at 18.
6. R.J. Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Báñez, Physical Premotion, and the Controversy de Auxiliis Revisited* (Leiden: 2016), 49.
7. Matava, *Divine Causality*, 130–31.
8. For a summary of the events see Matava, *Divine Causality*, ch. 1.

# Chapter 65

1. The *Disputations* are not fully available in English but some parts have been translated, especially from Marquette University Press and Catholic University Press. See the full list at www.sydneypenner.ca.
2. V. Salas, "Pedro da Fonseca on the Scope and Unity of Metaphysics," in S. Guidi and M.A. Santiago de Carvalho (eds), *Pedro Da Fonseca: Humanism and Metaphysics* (Turnhout: 2023), 107–23, at 117; see also A.M. Martins, "Pedro da Fonseca's Unfinished Metaphysics: The First Systematic Jesuit Metaphysics before Suárez," in C. Casalini (ed.), *Jesuit Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden: 2019), 327–46.
3. J.P. Doyle, "Suárez on the Analogy of Being," *Modern Schoolman* 46 (1969), 29–40 and 219–49; V. Salas, "Francisco Suárez, the Analogy of Being, and Its Tensions," in L. Novák (ed.), *Suárez's Metaphysics in Its Historical and Systematic Context* (Berlin: 2014), 87–104.
4. For this see A.D. Karofsky, "Suárez' Doctrine of Eternal Truths," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39 (2001), 23–47.
5. For beings of reason see J.P. Doyle, "Suárez on Beings of Reason and Truth," *Vivarium* 25 (1987), 47–75; 26 (1988), 51–72; C. Shields, "Shadows of Beings: Francisco Suárez's *entia rationis*," in B. Hill and H. Lagerlund (eds), *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez* (Oxford: 2012), 57–74; D.D. Novotny, *Ens rationis from Suarez to Caramuel: A Study in Scholasticism of the Baroque Era* (New York: 2013).
6. Quoted at Doyle, "Suárez on Beings of Reason," 53.
7. Novotny, *Ens rationis*, 27 and 50. I also draw on Novotny for the contrast with Hurtado.
8. For causation in Suárez I draw on the essays in J.L. Fink (ed.), *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality* (Leiden: 2015). On efficient causes see D. Des Chene, "Suárez on Propinquity and the Efficient Cause," in Hill and Lagerlund (eds), *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez*, 89–100.
9. T. Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation* (Oxford: 2008).
10. S. Di Liso, "The Efficient Cause in Domingo de Soto," in Novák (ed.), *Suárez's Metaphysics*, 237–57.
11. On formal causes in Suárez see Richardson's piece in Fink (ed.), *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality*, as well as H. Hattab, "Suárez's Last Stand for the Substantial Form," in Hill and Lagerlund (eds), *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez*, 101–18; C. Shields, "The Reality of Substantial Form: Suárez, *Metaphysical Disputations* xv," in D. Schwarz (ed.), *Interpreting Suárez: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: 2012), 39–61.
12. Hattab, "Suárez's Last Stand," 110.
13. On final causes see Penner's piece in Fink (ed.), *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality*, as well as S. Schmid, "Suárez and the Problem of Final Causation," in Novák (ed.), *Suárez's Metaphysics* 293–308; S. Schmid, "Finality without Final Causes? Suárez's Account of Natural Teleology," *Ergo* 2 (2015); and T. Pink, "Final Causation," in H.E. Braun, E. De Bom, and P. Astorri (eds), *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics* (Leiden: 2022), 277–305.
14. Pink, "Final Causation," 281.
15. D. des Chene, *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought* (New York: 1996), 169: later Aristotelians increasingly restrict final causation to actions of rational agents.

# Chapter 66

1. A. Brett, "Individual and Community in the 'Second Scholastic': Subjective Rights in Domingo de Soto and Francisco Suárez," in C. Blackwell and S. Kusukawa (eds), *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle* (Aldershot: 1999), 146–68, at 167.
2. See e.g. J. Fernández-Santamaría, *Natural Law, Constitutionalism, Reason of State, and War: Counter-Reformation Spanish Political Thought* (New York: 2005); J. Gordley, "Suárez and Natural Law," in B. Hill and H. Lagerlund, *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez* (Oxford: 2012), 209–29; M. Scattola, "Natural Law and Natural Right in the Spanish Scholasticism," in J.A. Tellkamp (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Spanish Imperial Political and Social Thought* (Leiden: 2020), 128–48.
3. I. Mandrella, "Gabriel Vásquez über das Naturrecht," 129–49, and A. Spindler, "Law, Natural Law, and the Foundation of Morality in Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez," 172–97, both in K. Bunge et al. (eds), *The Concept of Law (lex) in the Moral and Political Thought of the School of Salamanca* (Leiden: 2016).
4. T.H. Irwin, "Obligation, Rightness, and Natural Law: Suárez and Some Critics," in D. Schwarz (ed.), *Interpreting Suárez: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: 2012), 142–62. See also H. Lagerlund, "Francisco Suárez on Natural Law," in R. Domingo et al. (eds), *Great Christian Jurists in Spanish History* (Cambridge: 2018), 210–24.
5. Quoted by T. Pink, "Reason and Obligation in Suárez," in Hill and Lagerlund (eds), *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez*, 175–208, at 188.
6. See e.g. M. Koskenniemi, *To the Uttermost Parts of the Earth: Legal Imagination and International Power 1300–1870* (Cambridge: 2021); D.M. Lantigua, *Infidels and Empires in a New World Order: Early Modern Spanish Contributions to International Legal Thought* (Cambridge: 2020); P. Oliveira e Silva, "The Concept of *ius gentium*: Some Aspects of Its Doctrinal Development from the 'School of Salamanca' to the Universities of Coimbra and Évora," in Bunge et al. (eds), *The Concept of Law*, 106–25; I. de la Rasilla del Moral, *In the Shadow of Vitoria: A History of International Law in Spain (1770–1953)* (Leiden: 2018); A. Wagner, "International Law," in H.E. Braun, E. De Bom, and P. Astorri (eds), *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics* (Leiden: 2022), 413–31.
7. Scattola, "Natural Law," 140.
8. Oliveira e Silva, "The Concept of *ius gentium*," 114–15.
9. C. Mäkinen, "Dominion Rights: Their Development and Meaning in the History of Human Rights," in Tellkamp (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern*, 149–71, at 168; J.A. Tellkamp, "Rights and *Dominium*," in M. Kaufmann and A. Aichele (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina* (Leiden: 2014), 125–53, at 145.
10. T.-F. Tung, "Vitoria's Ideas of Supernatural and Natural Sovereignty: Adam and Eve's Marriage, the Uncivil Amerindians, and the Global Christian Nation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75 (2014), 45–68, at 48.
11. For what follows see A.A. Chafuen, "Just Pricing," in Braun et al. (eds), *Companion*, 498–521; R. Schüssler, "The Economic Thought of Luis de Molina," in Kaufmann and Aichele (eds), *Companion to Luis de Molina*, 257–88; W. Decock, "Princes and Prices: Regulating the Grain Market in Scholastic Economic Thought," in Tellkamp (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern*, 172–96.
12. Chafuen, "Just Pricing," 502.

13. For the medieval debate over usury see *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Medieval Philosophy*, ch. 67.
14. T. Van Houdt and F. Monsalve, "Usury and Interest," in Braun et al. (eds), *Companion*, 475–97, at 482.
15. Van Houdt and Monsalve, "Usury and Interest," 492.

# Chapter 67

1. R. Schüssler, "The Economic Thought of Luis de Molina," in M. Kaufmann and A. Aichele (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina* (Leiden: 2014), 257–88, at 266. See also in the same volume J.A. Tellkamp, "Rights and *Dominium*," 125–53.
2. H. Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540–1630* (Cambridge: 2004), 187; C. Mäkinen, "Dominion Rights: Their Development and Meaning in the History of Human Rights," in J.A. Tellkamp (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Spanish Imperial Political and Social Thought* (Leiden: 2020), 149–71, at 159; I have modified the second translation slightly for comprehensibility.
3. As observed by A. Brett, "Individual and Community in the 'Second Scholastic': Subjective Rights in Domingo de Soto and Francisco Suárez," in C. Blackwell and S. Kusukawa (eds), *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle* (Aldershot: 1999), 146–68, at 163, with reference to Suárez but the point applies to Molina's definition also.
4. Brett, "Individual and Community," 159.
5. A. Wagner, "International Law," in H.E. Braun, E. De Bom, and P. Astorri (eds), *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics* (Leiden: 2022), 413–31, at 416.
6. A. Brett, "Luis de Molina on Law and Power," in Kaufmann and Aichele (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina*, 155–81, at 170.
7. T. Pink, "Final Causation," in Braun, De Bom, and Astorri (eds), *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics*, 277–305, at 295 for the contrast to Hobbes.
8. C.P. Haar, "Tomás Sánchez and Late Scholastic Thought on Marriage and Political Virtue," in K. Bunge et al. (eds), *The Concept of Law (lex) in the Moral and Political Thought of the School of Salamanca* (Leiden: 2016), 81–105; T.-F. Tung, "Vitoria's Ideas of Supernatural and Natural Sovereignty: Adam and Eve's Marriage, the Uncivil Amerindians, and the Global Christian Nation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75 (2014), 45–68.
9. Haar, "Tomás Sánchez," 99–101; Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 196.
10. J.A. Tellkamp, "Francisco de Vitoria and Luis de Molina on the Origin of Political Power," in A.S. Culleton and R.H. Pich (eds), *Right and Nature in the First and Second Scholasticism* (Turnhout: 2014), 231–47.
11. For what follows see B. Slingo, "Salas contra Suárez on the Origins of Political Power," in Bunge et al. (eds), *The Concept of Law*, 58–80.
12. For this see D. Schwarz, "Francisco Suárez on Consent and Political Obligation," *Vivarium* 46 (2008), 59–81.
13. H. Höpfl, "Church and State," in Braun (ed.), *Companion*, 363–89, at 375–76.
14. Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 257; C. Zeron, "Political Theories and Jesuit Politics," in I.G. Županov (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits* (Oxford: 2019), 193–215, at 196.
15. A point made by both Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 214, 25, and Schwarz, "Francisco Suárez on Consent," 67.
16. Slingo, "Salas contra Suárez," 61.

# Chapter 68

1. For translations see C. Jarvis (trans.), *Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra: Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Oxford: 1992), E. Grossman (trans.), *Cervantes: Don Quixote* (New York: 2003). I cite by chapter number from each part (so "1.2" means "part 1, chapter 2").
2. Hence the titles of studies like S. Gilman, *The Novel According to Cervantes* (Berkeley: 1989); D. De Armas Wilson, *Cervantes, the Novel, and the New World* (Oxford: 2001); D. Quint, *Cervantes's Novel of Modern Times: A New Reading of Don Quijote* (Princeton: 2003); and W. Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World* (New York: 2017).
3. For his biography see D. McCrory, *No Ordinary Man: The Life and Times of Miguel de Cervantes* (London: 2002).
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9. Zambelli, "Uno, due, tre, mille Menocchio," 71.
10. Zambelli, "Uno, due, tre, mille Menocchio," 72, 79.
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13. C. Ginzburg, "Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), 79–92, at 90.
14. Ginzburg, "Microhistory," 18.
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12. For what follows see C.D. Washburn, "St. Robert Bellarmine on the Authoritative Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," *Gregorianum* 94 (2013), 55–77.
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14. Godman, *Saint as Censor*, 123.
15. Godman, *Saint as Censor*, 117.
16. Godman, *Saint as Censor*, 61.
17. Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 286.

# Chapter 72

1. There are, of course, many studies of the event, especially by M.A. Finocchiaro; see his *Galileo and the Art of Reasoning: Rhetorical Foundations of Logic and Scientific Method* (Dordrecht: 1980); *Defending Copernicus and Galileo: Critical Reasoning in the Two Affairs* (Dordrecht: 2010); and *On Trial for Reason: Science, Religion, and Culture in the Galileo Affair* (Oxford: 2019). Other examples include W.R. Shea, "Galileo and the Church," in C. Lindberg and R.L. Numbers (eds), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley: 1987), 114–35; R.S. Westfall, *Essays on the Trial of Galileo* (Notre Dame: 1989); R. Feldhay, *Galileo and the Church: Political Inquisition or Critical Dialogue?* (Cambridge: 1995); R.J. Blackwell, *Behind the Scenes at Galileo's Trial* (Notre Dame: 2006); T.F. Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition: Trying Galileo* (Philadelphia: 2015). On Galileo more generally see W.R. Shea, *Galileo's Intellectual Revolution* (New York: 1977); S. Drake, *Galileo at Work: His Scientific Biography* (Chicago: 1978); P. Machamer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Galileo* (Cambridge: 1998); M. Sharratt, *Galilei: Decisive Innovator* (Cambridge: 1999); S. Drake, *Galileo: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: 2001); W.R. Shea and M. Artigas, *Galileo in Rome: the Rise and Fall of a Troublesome Genius* (Oxford: 2003); J. Heilbron, *Galileo* (Oxford: 2010). Galileo's earlier scientific work has already been discussed in this book series in *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Byzantine and Renaissance Philosophy*, ch. 54. There I also briefly touch on some of the issues discussed in what follows, for instance the compatibility of Scripture with Copernicanism.
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3. Finocchiaro, *On Trial for Reason*, 72.
4. Finocchiaro, *Defending Copernicus and Galileo*, 130.
5. Finocchiaro, *On Trial for Reason*, 82, 86.
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