

* Supplements from Kagan
* Literature + Philosophy "discussion" *

principle of the divine right of kings, to domesticate the French nobility by binding them to the court rituals of Versailles, and to crush religious dissent.

King by Divine Right

Reverence for the king and the personification of government in his person had been nurtured in

France since Capetian times. It was a maxim of French law and popular opinion that "the king is emperor in his realm" and the king's will is the law of the land. Building on this reverence, Louis XIV defended absolute royal authority on the grounds of divine right.

An important source for Louis's concept of royal authority was his devout tutor, the political theorist Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704).

Bishop Bossuet Defends the Divine Right of Kings

The revolutions of the seventeenth century caused many to fear anarchy far more than tyranny, among them the influential French bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), the leader of French Catholicism in the second half of the seventeenth century. Louis XIV made him court preacher and tutor to his son, for whom Bossuet wrote a celebrated Universal History. In the following excerpt, Bossuet defends the divine right and absolute power of kings. He depicts kings as embracing in their person the whole body of the state and the will of the people they govern and, as such, as being immune from judgment by any mere mortal.

♦ *Why might Bossuet have wished to make such extravagant claims for absolute royal power? How might these claims be transferred to any form of government? What are the religious bases for Bossuet's argument? How does this argument for absolute royal authority lead also to the need for a single uniform religion in France?*

The royal power is absolute. . . . The prince need render account of his acts to no one. "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight; stand not on an evil thing for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing" [Eccles. 8:2-5]. Without this absolute authority the king could neither do good nor repress evil. It is necessary that his power be such that no one can hope to escape him, and finally, the only protection of individuals against the public authority should be their innocence. This confirms the teaching of St. Paul: "Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good" [Rom. 13:3].

God is infinite, God is all. The prince, as prince, is not regarded as a private person: he is a public personage, all the state is in him; the will of all the people is included in his. As all perfection and strength are united in God, so all the powers of individuals is united in the person of the prince. What grandeur that a single man should embrace so much! . . .

Behold an immense people united in a single person; behold this holy power, paternal and absolute; behold the secret cause which governs the whole body of the state, contained in a single head: you see the image of God in the king, and you have the idea of royal majesty. God is holiness itself, goodness itself, and power itself. In these things lies the majesty of God. In the image of these things lies the majesty of the prince.

From Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture, as quoted in James Harvey Robinson, ed., Readings in European History, vol. 2 (Boston: Athenaeum, 1906), pp. 275-276.

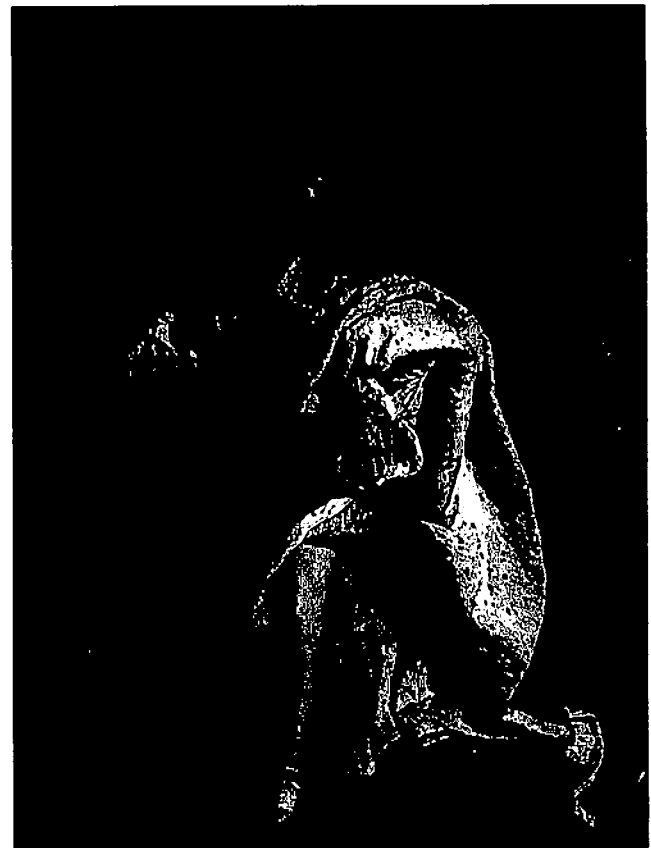
As a militant champion of the Gallican liberties—the traditional rights of the French king and church in matters of ecclesiastical appointments and taxation—Bossuet defended what he called the “divine right of kings.” In support of his claims he cited examples of Old Testament rulers divinely appointed by and answerable only to God. As medieval popes had insisted that only God could judge a pope, so Bossuet argued that none save God could judge the king. Kings may have remained duty-bound to reflect God’s will in their rule—in this sense, Bossuet considered them always subject to a higher authority. Yet as God’s regents on Earth they could not be bound to the dictates of mere princes and parliaments. Such assumptions lay behind Louis XIV’s alleged declaration: “*L’état, c’est moi*” (“I am the state”).

Versailles

More than any other monarch of the day, Louis XIV used the physical setting of his royal court to exert political control. The palace court at Versailles on the outskirts of Paris became Louis’s permanent residence after 1682. It was a true temple to royalty, architecturally designed and artistically decorated to proclaim the glory of the Sun King, as Louis was known. A spectacular estate with magnificent fountains and acres of orange groves, it became home to thousands of the more important nobles, royal officials, and servants. Although its physical maintenance and new additions, which continued throughout Louis’s lifetime, consumed over half his annual revenues, Versailles paid significant political dividends.

Because Louis ruled personally, he was the chief source of favors and patronage in France. To emphasize his prominence, he organized life at court around every aspect of his own daily routine. He encouraged nobles to approach him directly, but required them to do so through elaborate court etiquette. Polite and fawning nobles sought his attention by entering their names on waiting lists to be in his audience at especially favored moments. The king’s rising and dressing in particular were times of great intimacy, when nobles could whisper their special requests in his ear. Fortunate nobles held a light candle as they accompanied him to his

Although only five feet four inches in height, the king had presence and was always engaging in conversation. He turned his own sexuality to political



Louis XIV of France (r. 1643–1715) was the dominant European monarch in the second half of the seventeenth century. The powerful centralized monarchy he created established the prototype for the mode of government later termed absolutism. [Giraudon/Art Resource, N.Y.]

ends and encouraged the belief at court that it was an honor to lie with him. Married to the Spanish *Infanta* Marie Thérèse for political reasons in 1660, he kept many mistresses. After Marie’s death in 1683, he settled down in a secret marriage to Madame de Maintenon and apparently became much less the philanderer.

Court life was a carefully planned and successfully executed effort to domesticate and trivialize the nobility. Barred by law from high government positions, the ritual and play kept them busy and dependent so they had little time to plot revolt. Dress codes and high-stakes gambling contributed to their indebtedness and dependency on the king. Members of the court spent the afternoons hunting, riding, or strolling about the lush gardens of Versailles. Evenings were given over to planned entertainment in the large salons (plays, concerts, gambling, and the like), followed by supper at 10:00

John Milton: Puritan Poet

John Milton (1608–1674) was the son of a devout Puritan father. As a student, he avidly read the Christian and pagan classics. In 1638 he traveled to Italy, where he found in the lingering Renaissance a very congenial intellectual atmosphere. The Phlegraean Fields near Naples, a volcanic region, later became the model for hell in *Paradise Lost*, and it is suspected by some scholars that the Villa d'Este provided the model for paradise in *Paradise Regained*. Milton remained throughout his life a man more at home in the Italian Renaissance, with its high ideals and universal vision, than in the war-torn England of the seventeenth century.

A man of deep inner conviction and principle, Milton believed that standing a test of character was the most important thing in a person's life. This belief informed his own personal life and is the subject of much of his literary work.

In 1639 Milton joined the Puritan struggle against Charles I and Archbishop Laud. Employing his writing talent, he defended the Presbyterian form of church government against the episcopacy and supported other Puritan reforms. After a month-long unsuccessful marriage in 1642 (a marriage later reconciled), he wrote several tracts in defense of the right to divorce. These writings became targets of a Parliamentary censorship law in 1643, against which Milton wrote an eloquent defense of freedom of the press entitled *Areopagitica* (1644).

Until the upheavals of the civil war moderated his views, Milton believed that government should have the least possible control over the private lives of individuals. When Parliament divided into Presbyterians and Independents, he took the side of the latter, who wanted to dissolve the national church altogether in favor of the local autonomy of individual congregations. He also defended the execution of Charles I in a tract entitled *On the Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. After his intense labor on this tract, his eyesight failed. Milton was totally blind when he wrote his masterpieces.

Paradise Lost, completed in 1665 and published in 1667, is a study of the destructive qualities of pride and the redeeming possibilities of humility. It elaborates in traditional Christian language and concept the revolt of Satan in heaven and the fall of Adam on Earth. The motives of Satan and all who rebel against God intrigued Milton. His proud but



John Milton (1608–1674). [Courtesy of the Prints Division, Library of Congress]

tragic Satan, who preferred to reign in hell than to serve in heaven, is one of the great figures in world literature and represented for Milton the absolute corruption of potential greatness.

Milton wanted *Paradise Lost* to be for England what Homer's *Iliad* was for Greece and Vergil's *Aeneid* for Rome. In choosing biblical subject matter, he revealed the great influence of contemporary theology on his mind. Milton tended to agree with the Arminians, followers of the Dutch Protestant theologian Arminius (1560–1609), who, unlike the extreme Calvinists, did not believe that all worldly events, including the Fall of Man, were immutably fixed in the eternal decree of God. Milton shared the Arminian belief that human beings must take responsibility for their fate and that human efforts to improve character could, with God's grace, bring salvation.

Perhaps his own blindness, joined with the hope of making the best of the failed Puritan revolution, inclined Milton to sympathize with those who urged people to make the most of what they had, even in the face of defeat. That is a manifest concern of his last works, *Samson Agonistes*, which

John Milton Defends Freedom to Print Books

During the English Civil War, the Parliament passed a very strict censorship measure. In *Areopagitica* (1644), John Milton attacked this law and contributed one of the major defenses for the freedom of the press in the history of Western culture. In the following passage, he compares the life of a book with the life of a human being.

♦ Why does Milton think that it may be more dangerous and harmful to attack a book than to attack a person? Was life cheaper and intelligence rarer in his time? Does he have particular kinds of books in mind? What can a book do for society that people cannot?

deny not but that it is of greatest concern in the Church and Commonwealth to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as [if they were criminals], for books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay, they do present as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. . . . He who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's Image, but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself; kills the Image of God, as it were. . . . Many a man lives [as] a burden to the earth, but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up

on purpose to a life beyond life. It is true, no age can restore a life, whereof, perhaps there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse. We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books, since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom; and if it extends to the whole impression, a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at that ethereal . . . essence, the breath of reason itself; slays an immortality rather than a life.

J. A. St. John, ed., *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1843-1853), 2:8-9.

recounts the biblical story of Samson, and *Paradise Regained*, the story of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, both published in 1671.

John Bunyan: *Visions of Christian Piety*

Bunyan (1628-1688) was the English author of two books of sectarian Puritan spirituality: *Grace Abounding* (1666) and *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). A tinker, his works speak especially for the seventeenth-century working people and popular culture. He received only the most basic education before taking up his father's craft, and he served as a soldier in Oliver Cromwell's revolutionary army for several years. The visionary fervor of the New Model

Army influenced his work, which is filled with the language of battle.

After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Bunyan went to prison for his fiery preaching and remained there for twelve years. During these years, he wrote his famous autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, both a very personal statement and a model for the faithful. Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan's later masterpiece, *Grace Abounding* is Puritan piety at its most fervent. Puritans believed that individuals could do absolutely nothing to save themselves, and this made them extremely restless and introspective. People could only trust that God had placed them among the elect and try each day to live a life that reflected such favored status. So long

Major Works of Seventeenth-Century Literature and Philosophy

- 1605 *King Lear* (Shakespeare)
- 1605 *Don Quixote, Part I* (Cervantes)
- 1651 *Leviathan* (Hobbes)
- 1656-1657 *Provincial Letters* (Pascal)
- 1667 *Paradise Lost* (Milton)
- 1677 *Ethics* (Spinoza)
- 1678 *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Bunyan)
- 1690 *Treatises of Government* (Locke)
- 1690 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke)

as men and women struggled successfully against the flesh and the world, they had presumptive evidence that they were among God's elect. To falter or to become complacent in the face of temptation was to cast doubt on one's faith and salvation and even to raise the specter of eternal damnation.

This anxious questing for salvation is the subject of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a work unique in its contribution to Western religious symbolism and imagery. It is the story of the journey of Christian and his friends Hopeful and Faithful to the Celestial City. It teaches that one must deny spouse, children, and all Earthly security and go in search of "Life, life, eternal life." During the long journey, the travelers must resist the temptations of Worldly-Wiseman and Vanity Fair, pass through the Slough of Despond, and endure a long dark night in Doubting Castle, their faith being tested at every turn. Bunyan later wrote a work tracing the progress of Christian's opposite, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), which told the story of a man so addicted to the bad habits of Restoration society, of which Bunyan strongly disapproved, that he journeyed steadfastly not to heaven but to hell.

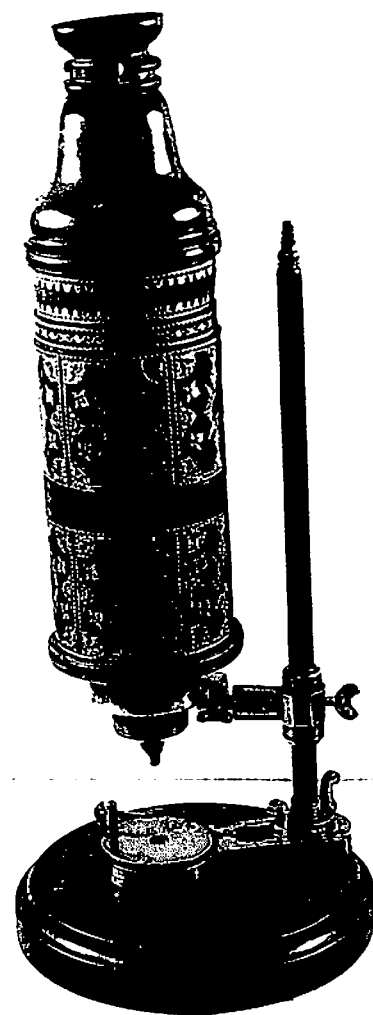
Philosophy in the Wake of Changing Science

By the end of the sixteenth century, many people, weary of religious strife, no longer embraced either the old Catholic or the new Protestant absolutes. The century that followed was a period of intellectual as well as political transition. The thinkers of

the Renaissance, reacting against the dogmatic thinking of medieval Scholasticism, had laid the groundwork for this change.

The revolution in scientific thought contributed directly to a major reconsideration of Western philosophy. Several of the most important figures in the Scientific Revolution, such as Descartes and

The microscope of Robert Hooke (1635-1703). The microscope became the telescope's companion as a major optical instrument in the seventeenth century. Several scientists, including Galileo, had a hand in its development, but the Englishman Hooke and the Dutchman Anton von Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) did the most to perfect it. [Historical Collections, National Museum of Health and Medicine, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology]



Bacon Attacks the Idols That Harm Human Understanding

Francis Bacon wanted the men and women of his era to have the courage to change the way they thought about physical nature. In this famous passage from the *Novum Organum* (1620), he attempted to explain why it is so difficult to ask new questions and seek new answers.

◆ Is Bacon's view of human nature pessimistic? Are people hopelessly trapped in overlapping worlds of self-interest and fantasy imposed by their nature and cultural traditions? How did Bacon expect people to overcome such formidable barriers?

The idols and false notions which are now in possession of the human understanding and have taken deep root therein . . . so beset men's minds that truth can hardly find entrance. . . . There are four classes of Idols which beset men's minds. To these for distinction's sake I have assigned names,—calling the first class *Idols of the Tribe*; the second, *Idols of the Cave*; the third, *Idols of the Marketplace*; the fourth, *Idols of the Theatre*.

The Idols of the Tribe have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. For it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things. On the contrary, all perceptions as well as the sense as of the mind are according to the measure of the universe. And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolours the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.

The Idols of the Cave are the idols of the individual man. For every one (besides the errors common to human nature in general) has

a cave or den of his own, which refracts and discolours the light of nature, owing either to his own proper and peculiar nature, or to his education and conversation with others, or to his reading of books, and the authority of those whom he esteems and admires.

There are also Idols formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other, which I call Idols of the Marketplace, on account of the commerce and consort of men there. For it is by discourse that men associate, and words are imposed according to the apprehension of the vulgar. And therefore the ill and unfit choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding.

Lastly, there are Idols which have immigrated into men's minds from the various dogmas of philosophies, and also from wrong laws of demonstration. These I call Idols of the Theatre, because in my judgment all the received systems are but so many stage-plays representing worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion.

Francis Bacon, *Essays, Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis, and Other Pieces*, ed. by Richard Foster Jones (New York: Odyssey, 1937), pp. 278–280.

“men of experiment and men of dogmas.” He observed:

The men of experiment are like the ant, they only collect and use; the reasoners resemble spiders, who make cobwebs out of their own substance. But the bee takes a

middle course: it gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and of the field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own. Not unlike this is the truthfulness of philosophy.⁶

⁶Quoted in Baumer, p. 288.

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directing scientists toward an examination of empirical evidence, Bacon hoped that they would discover new knowledge and thus new capabilities for humankind.

Bacon compared himself with Columbus, plotting a new route to intellectual discovery. The comparison is significant, because it displays the consciousness of a changing world that appears so often in the waters of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They were rejecting the past not from simple hatred but rather from a firm understanding that the world was much more complicated than their medieval forebears had thought.

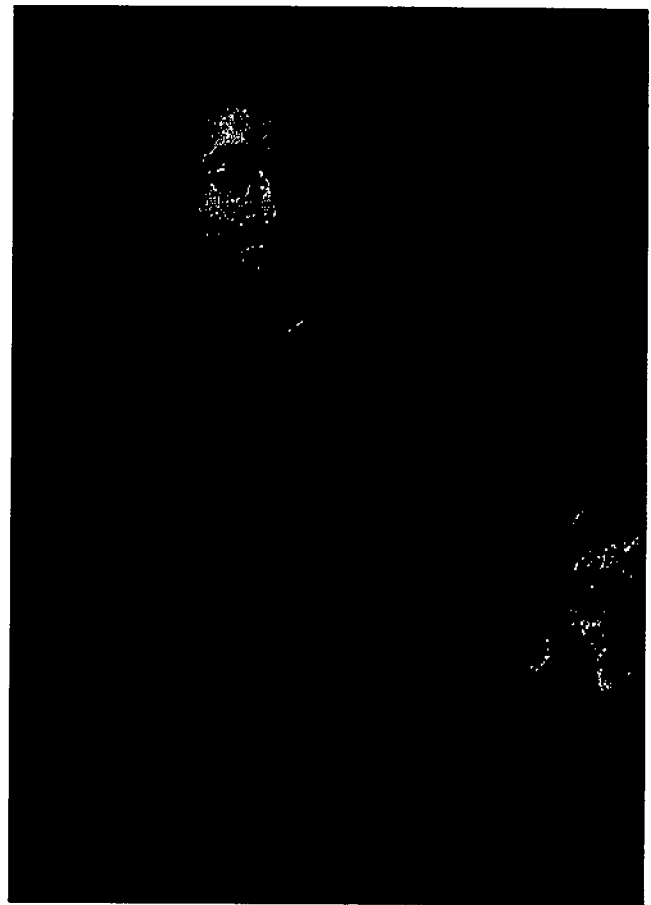
Neither Europe nor European thought could contain itself. Like the new worlds on the horizon, new worlds of the mind were also emerging. Most of the people in Bacon's day, including the intellectuals, thought that the best era of human history lay in antiquity. Bacon dissented vigorously from that view. He looked to a future of material improvement achieved through the empirical examination of nature. His own theory of induction from empirical evidence was quite unsystematic, but his insistence on appeal to experience influenced others. His methods were more productive.

Bacon believed that science had a practical purpose and its goal was human improvement. Some scientific investigation does have this character. Much pure research does not. Bacon, however, believed science and material progress in the public mind. This was a powerful idea and has continued to influence Western civilization to the present day. It has made science and those who can appeal to the authority of science major forces for change and innovation. Thus, though not making any major scientific contribution himself, Bacon directed investigators of nature to a new method and a new purpose.

René Descartes: The Method of Rational Deduction

Descartes (1596–1650) was a gifted mathematician who invented analytic geometry. His most important contribution, however, was to develop a scientific method that relied more on deduction than on empirical observation and induction.

In 1637 he published his *Discourse on Method*, in which he attempted to provide a basis for all thinking founded on a mathematical model. The work appeared in French rather than in Latin because he wanted it to have wide circulation and



René Descartes (1596–1650) believed that because the material world operated according to mathematical laws, it could be accurately understood by the exercise of human reason. [Erich Lessing/Art Resource, N.Y.]

application. He began by saying that he would doubt everything except those propositions about which he could have clear and distinct ideas. This approach rejected all forms of intellectual authority except the conviction of his own reason. He concluded that he could not doubt his own act of thinking and his own existence. From this base he proceeded to deduce the existence of God. The presence of God was important to Descartes because God guaranteed the correctness of clear and distinct ideas. Because God was not a deceiver, the ideas of God-given reason could not be false.

On the basis of such assumptions, Descartes concluded that human reason could fully comprehend the world. He divided existing things into two basic categories: things thought and things occupying space—mind and body. Thinking was characteristic of the mind, and extension (things occupying space) was characteristic of the body. Within the

material world, the world of extension, mathematical laws reigned supreme and could be grasped by reason. Because they were mathematical, they could be deduced from each other and constituted a complete system. The world of extension was the world of the scientist. It had no place for spirits, divinity, or anything nonmaterial. Descartes separated mind from body to banish such things from the realm of scientific speculation. Reason was to be applied only to the mechanical and mathematical realm of matter.

Descartes's emphasis on deduction and speculation exercised broad influence. His positive methodology, however, eventually lost to scientific induction, in which the scientist generalizes from data derived from empirical observations.

Blaise Pascal: Reason and Faith

Pascal (1623–1662) was a French mathematician and a physical scientist who surrendered

Pascal Meditates on Human Beings as Thinking Creatures

*Pascal was both a religious and a scientific writer. Unlike other scientific thinkers of the seventeenth century, he was not overly optimistic about the ability of science to improve the human condition. But science and philosophy might help human beings to understand their situation better. In these passages from his *Pensées* (Thoughts), he ponders the uniqueness of human beings as thinking creatures.*

◆ *Is this an intellectual's view of human nature? Does the idea that man is a rational creature come from the belief that human reason is more noble than the universe? Does Pascal ignore human will and emotion, selfishness, and destructiveness?*

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I can well conceive a man without hands, feet, head (for it is only experience which teaches us that the head is more necessary than feet). But I cannot conceive man without thought; he would be a stone or a brute.

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Reason commands us far more imperiously than a master, for in disobeying the one we are unfortunate, and in disobeying the other we are fools.

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Thought constitutes the greatness of man.

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Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need

not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, and water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows why he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of itself.

All our dignity consists, then, in thought. We must elevate ourselves, and not by space, time which we cannot fill. Let us endeavour to think well; this is the principle of morality.

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A thinking reed—It is not from space that I seek my dignity, but from the government of my thought. I shall have no more if I possess space. By space the universe encompasses and sweeps me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world.

*Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and The Provincial Letters* (New York: Modern Library, 1941), pp. 115–116.*

weakness of reason itself in resolving the problems of human nature and destiny. Reason properly drove those who truly heed it to faith in God and reliance on divine grace.

Pascal made a famous wager with the skeptics. It is a better bet, he argued, to believe that God exists and to stake everything on his promised mercy than not to do so. This is because if God does exist, everything will be gained by the believer, whereas, should he prove not to exist, the loss incurred by having believed in him is by comparison very slight.

Convinced that belief in God improved life psychologically and disciplined it morally (regardless of whether God proved in the end to exist), Pascal worked to strengthen traditional religious belief. He urged his contemporaries to seek self-understanding by "learned ignorance" and to discover humankind's greatness by recognizing its misery. He hoped thereby to counter what he believed to be the false optimism of the new rationalism and science.

Baruch Spinoza: The World as Divine Substance

The most controversial thinker of the seventeenth century may have been Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), the son of a Jewish merchant of Amsterdam. His philosophy caused his excommunication by his own synagogue in 1656. During his lifetime, both Jews and Protestants attacked him as an atheist.

Spinoza's most influential writing, the *Ethics*, appeared after his death in 1677. Religious leaders universally condemned it for its apparent espousal of pantheism (a doctrine equating God and nature). Spinoza so closely identified God and nature that little room seemed left either for divine revelation in scripture or for the personal immortality of the soul—a position equally repugnant to Jews and to Christians. The *Ethics* was written, in the spirit of the new science, as a geometrical system of definitions, axioms, and propositions. Spinoza divided the work into five parts, which dealt with God, the mind, emotions, human bondage, and human freedom.

The most controversial part of the *Ethics* deals with the nature of substance and of God. According to Spinoza, there is only one substance, which is self-caused, free, and infinite, and that substance is God. From this definition it follows that everything that exists is in God and cannot even be conceived

of apart from him. Such a doctrine was not literally pantheistic because God was still seen to be more than the created world that he, as primal substance, embraced. But in Spinoza's view, statements about the natural world were also statements about divine nature. Mind and matter are thus seen to be extensions of the infinite substance of God; what transpires in the world of people and nature is also an expression of the divine.

Such teaching seemed to portray the world and human actions as unfree and inevitable. Jews and Christians had traditionally condemned such teachings because they deny the creation of the world by God in time and destroy any voluntary basis for personal reward and punishment.

Although his contemporaries condemned him, Spinoza found enthusiastic supporters among many nineteenth-century thinkers who, unable to accept traditional religious language and doctrines, found in his teaching a congenial rational religion.

Thomas Hobbes: Apologist for Absolutism

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was the most original political philosopher of the seventeenth century. Although he never broke with the Church of England, he embraced basic Calvinist beliefs, particularly their low view of human nature and the idea of a commonwealth based on a divine-human covenant.

An urbane and much-traveled man, Hobbes enthusiastically supported the new scientific movement. During the 1630s, he visited Paris, where he came to know Descartes, and he spent time with Galileo in Italy as well. He took special interest in the works of William Harvey (1578-1657), famous for his discovery of the circulation of blood through the body. Hobbes was also a superb classicist. His first published work was a translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, the first English translation of this work, still reprinted today.

The English civil war made Hobbes a political philosopher and inspired his *Leviathan* (1651). Written as the concluding part of a broad philosophical system that analyzed physical bodies and human nature, the work established Hobbes as a major European thinker.

Hobbes viewed people and society in a thoroughly materialistic and mechanical way. All psychological processes begin with and are derived