Introduction: towards a revolution

The first work of philosophy to make an impression on me was a short book by Jean-Paul Sartre called *Existentialism and Humanism*. Much of it went over my head, but I got the main message: our knowledge will never be perfect, the world means nothing until we apply our interpretations to it, and we should dare to live our lives in freedom – like an artist facing a blank canvas rather than a functionary filling in a form. I was fourteen at the time, and this all struck me as true and exciting. (It still does.) Philosophy was about questioning received ideas, and I wanted more.

I turned first to Descartes, who according to Sartre had anticipated him with his declaration 'I think therefore I am.' I had no idea what that could mean, but the stationery shop in the London suburb where I lived had a philosophy section (this was the 1960s), and I bought myself a paperback of the essential writings of Descartes. The portrait on the cover looked grim, and Descartes's reflections on God and human knowledge seemed contrived and unbelievably dull. I could not imagine what Sartre saw in him. I needed help.

I went back to the shop and found several books on 'the history of philosophy'. They promised to cover the whole thing from its origins to the present, which sounded almost too good to be true. The first one I reached for was by Bertrand Russell, who was famous at the time for having impeccable principles and the finest brain in the world. A glance at his *History of Western Philosophy* seemed to confirm his brilliance: was there anything he had not read, any problem he could not solve? Russell's researches had led him to the conclusion that philosophy got under way in ancient Greece: 'philosophy begins with Thales,' as he put it, and he then delivered a tirade against the 'obvious errors' of Plato. Philosophy seems to have sunk into some kind of torpor in the 'Middle Ages', but it perked up with Descartes – a 'man of high philosophic capacity' who became the 'founder of modern philosophy'. Russell then continued the

story to his own time, in fact to himself. I marvelled at his mastery of the philosophical universe and the assurance with which he passed judgement on his predecessors, and I wondered if I would be able to do that sort of thing when I grew up. But he had nothing to say about Sartre or what he might have got out of Descartes, so the book went back on the shelf.

Nearby I came across a couple of books on philosophy in a series called 'Teach Yourself'. They too promised to tell the story from beginning to end, and they were short and cheap so I bought them both. In *Teach Yourself Philosophy*, C. E. M. Joad praised the 'wisdom' of Plato, but apart from that his version of history coincided with Russell's: philosophy began in ancient Greece and had to traverse the wasteland of the Middle Ages before reaching Descartes and modernity. Once again, no mention of Sartre.

The other book I bought was *Teach Yourself History of Philosophy*, in which John Lewis surveyed 'the chief rival attitudes towards life as the history of human thinking has developed them' and arrived at the same conclusion: that 'philosophy proper begins with the Greeks' and that it declined in 'the Middle Ages' before being revived by 'Descartes, the father of modern philosophy'. But Descartes was a feckless parent: he 'overlooked the empirical', and his philosophical progeny (mostly French and German) developed an obsession with the 'rational element' in knowledge which led to a feud with the 'empiricist philosophers' (mainly British) who preferred to stick to 'facts'. Hostilities continued for a century and a half, until a Prussian professor called Immanuel Kant came up with a compromise. 'Kant's solution was masterly', in Lewis's judgement: he showed that Franco-German rationalism and British empiricism were complementary rather than contradictory, and his synthesis became the foundation of all subsequent work in philosophy. Still nothing on Sartre. What was going on?

No history is just a history and nothing else. All histories have agendas, even if they pretend not to. They also suffer from inertia, in that most of what they say is drawn from previous histories rather than fresh forays into the archives. The new borrow from the old, the old from the older, and so it goes.

If this is true of histories in general, it applies particularly to discipline-histories – histories of astronomy, economics or biology, for instance, as well as histories of philosophy. Discipline-histories proceed by postulating a founding moment and a succession of great authors, classic books and crucial events leading up to the present. They stand guard over the values of their discipline, providing practitioners with a sense of shared vocation and corporate pride. They are not bare recitations of facts but – like histories of nations, regiments or football clubs – exercises in partisan propaganda.

Histories of philosophy are like other discipline-histories, only more so. Scientists are expected to have some sense of the history of science, but they won't worry if their knowledge turns out to be patchy; and while painters are likely to know something about the history of painting, they leave most of it to art historians, just as poets leave literary history to academic critics. Histories of philosophy, however, are written by philosophers, about philosophers and for philosophers (or would-be philosophers). They are part of philosophy's core business, and without them no philosophical education would be complete.

On the other hand, philosophers tend to be ambivalent about their histories. Kant, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, noted that his fellow philosophers were dividing into two tribes: those who try to think for themselves, and those who prefer to dwell in the past. Authentic philosophical thinkers were, he thought, being swamped by 'scholars whose philosophy amounts to no more than the history of philosophy' – self-appointed custodians of the canon, determined to prevent their colleagues from saying anything 'that has not been said before'.

Kant's warnings did not have much effect. As philosophy transformed itself into an academic profession – first in Germany and continental Europe, under the influence of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and then in Britain, the United States and various outposts of empire – it depended on histories of philosophy to sustain its intellectual identity. Just as every Christian was expected to know about Christ's nativity, suffering and resurrection, so every student of philosophy was expected to know that it began in ancient Greece and languished in the Middle Ages before being resuscitated by Descartes and Kant.

Professional philosophers often strike an attitude of Kantian contempt towards histories of philosophy. Genuine philosophy, they say, cares only for the truth, and just as decent scientists have better things to do than study the history of science, proper philosophers will – to use a phrase that once did the rounds in American universities – 'just say no to the history of philosophy'.

But in practice their 'no' has not meant no. Histories of philosophy are much more popular than other kinds of philosophy book, not only with members of the public, but also with students, and sometimes professors too. Philosophers often disagree about the nature and goals of their discipline, but they rely on histories of philosophy to map the territories in contention. Philosophy, you might say, is in thrall to its version of its past.

The oddest thing about histories of philosophy is that instead of praising the philosophical tradition they treat it mainly with disdain. They reduce its classics to a handful of hackneyed quotations and stereotyped arguments, and package them as expressions of pre-existing 'positions', 'movements' and 'systems' – 'Rationalism', 'the Enlightenment' or 'Idealism' for example – which are supposed to be self-explanatory. Individual idiosyncrasies are concealed behind post-hoc labels, and the great philosophers are commemorated not as creative pioneers but as cartoon characters endlessly re-enacting the parts assigned to them in the histories. Meanwhile readers rush through the canon like tourists on a tight schedule, looking out for the attractions mentioned in their guidebooks but ignoring everything else.

The habit of belittling the past may be intended to flatter the present, but it can also be discouraging, as the poet Stephen Spender discovered when he studied in Oxford in the 1920s.

> In the first lesson we were taught that J. S. Mill's Utilitarianism meant the greatest happiness of the greatest number . . . in the next tutorial we were taught that Mill was wrong . . . The next philosopher was Locke. We were told what he thought and then why he was wrong. Next please. Hume. Hume was wrong also. Then Kant. Kant was wrong, but he was also so difficult that no one could be sure of catching him out.

Spender drew the obvious conclusion – 'that it was useless to enter a field where such distinguished contestants had failed' – and kept away from philosophy for the rest of his life. Nothing has changed much since.

If the histories are depressing for aspiring philosophers, they come as a relief to the rest of us. They tell us enough about philosophy to assure us that it is a waste of time. They save us the trouble of studying the great books with close attention; in fact they save us from reading them at all. No wonder we like them.

In some ways the impudence of the histories of philosophy might appear to be justified. Philosophers, unlike natural scientists, have contributed very little to the progress of human knowledge: they are always at odds with each other, and even in their supposed areas of expertise – truth, goodness and beauty – they seem to go round and round in circles.

But there are other ways of looking at it. Perhaps philosophy is not in the business of stockpiling facts or delivering parcels of information to fallow minds. Perhaps it is about offering difficulty, doubt and disorientation to those who are willing to have their intellectual habits rearranged. 'A philosophical problem,' as Ludwig Wittgenstein put it, 'has the form:

"I don't know my way about"', and instead of mimicking the natural sciences philosophy ought to be 'written like poetry'.

Today's philosophers may like to think of themselves as the culmination of a purposeful tradition going back two and a half millennia, but the record suggests something different: their predecessors were, for the most part, making their way along unmapped forest paths, with various combinations of ingenuity, frustration, anxiety, improvisation, frivolity and braggadocio. Instead of seeing their works as candidates for inclusion in some ultimate compendium of knowledge, we might do better to treat them as individual works of art forming a tradition as intricate and unpredictable as, say, Yoruba sculpture, Chinese poetry or the classical string quartet. In that case the old histories of philosophy with their well-worn plots and set-piece battles will turn out to be systematically misleading – of all forms of history, perhaps the most tiresome, wrong-headed and sad.

There are of course many studies of philosophy's past that have escaped the aspiration to completeness, usually by focusing on a particular thinker or a specific theme. There have also been laudable campaigns to make room for various classes of philosophers – particularly women and people of colour – who have suffered unwarranted neglect. But the origins-to-the-present histories have retained their monolithic hegemony unperturbed. They have continued to reduce individual works to glib headlines, and they have gone on assuming that everything that ever happened in philosophy must fit neatly with everything else, like a perfectly choreographed dance, a well-planned military campaign or – to adopt a suggestion of Hegel's – a beautifully constructed building. Hegel acknowledged that philosophy sometimes looks like a shambles in which miscellaneous opinions 'follow each other by accident', but according to him it is nothing of the kind.

> For these thousands of years the same architect has directed the work: and that architect is the one living mind whose nature is to think, to bring to self-consciousness what it is . . . and so to reach a higher stage of its own being.

Once you have tasted the Hegelian elixir you may have difficulty weaning yourself off it. You will get used to seeing philosophers and their works as 'examples', 'embodiments' or 'representatives' of opinions you already understand. You will learn to generalize like mad, holding forth about what was believed (by everyone?) in certain nations or at particular places or times. You will get a kick out of summarizing complex works in curt phrases and handing down judgements as to what is 'great' or 'masterly'

and what is dangerous, silly or inane. You will imagine you have discovered the essential flaw of philosophy as such – intellectualism perhaps, or dualism, idealism, subjectivism or phallo-centrism – and you will expatiate cheerfully on the limits of Western rationality and where modernity went wrong. You will believe that you hold the key to global intellectual history, and you will not want to throw it away.

In what follows I have, amongst other things, tracked down various thinkers who turned their hands to philosophy without gaining admission to the conventional pantheon of great philosophers. Friends sometimes suggest that I have taken against the *anachronism* of the traditional histories, but I find the word unhelpful. If anachronism means failing to see that things were done differently in the past, then the point is too obvious to be worth making. The same applies if it refers to the mistake of presuming, when you come across a familiar word in an old text, that you already know what it means. But the idea of anachronism usually implies something else: the supposed error of evaluating past thinkers by the standards of the present. This strikes me as confused.

For one thing it threatens to isolate past thinkers in a world of their own, beyond the reach of criticism. If we can criticize our contemporaries, however, why not our predecessors too? What is *the present*, after all, and when did it start? And what is *the past*, and when did it end?

In any case we do not have a choice. Thoughts and practices are not self-sufficient or complete in themselves: they always need to be interpreted. But you cannot interpret what you don't understand; and your understanding belongs to the present rather than the past. When a passage from a centuries-old work catches your eye – for its brilliance, say, or folly or drop-dead conclusiveness – then it lives for you (and you for it) as much as if it had been written two minutes ago. You cannot get off the hook by deciding to interpret old authors by the standards of their time, since you will still need to work out, from your current standpoint, what those standards were, what they meant and to whom, and whether your authors understood them, agreed with them or lived up to them. Anachronism is built into historical inquiry, in short, and there is nothing you can do to avoid it.

As well as taking a more inclusive attitude to philosophy's past, I have tried to find new ways of describing it. Here I pick up another lesson from Sartre, who argued that philosophy has much to learn from experiments in literary form. Modernist writers like Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner had, he thought, thrown light on subjectivity and self-knowledge

not by proposing new theories but by shifting attention to themes previously regarded as peripheral, and developing methods of story-telling that dispense with omniscient narrators, continuous plot-lines and final chapters where everything is resolved. He also admired the proto-modernist Leo Tolstoy, who in *War and Peace* described Napoleon's Russian campaign through the consciousness of individuals who were caught up in it but had no idea what it meant or how it was going to end.

Sartre himself experimented with such techniques, in order to remind us that what we look back on as the inert reality of the past was once a myriad of possible futures, to be determined by choices that had not yet been made; and they have since been taken up by historians in fields like structural history, history of mentalities, women's history, working-class history, history of sexualities, post-colonial history, resistance history and history from below.

But the historians of philosophy have carried on as before, repeating familiar stories about the little band of philosophers who have become mainstays of modern textbooks, lectures and exams. They have continued to ignore all the other people who have tried to understand the world in the light of philosophy and who were, as often as not, transformed by the experience. Philosophy taught them that notions they had always taken for granted might not be valid after all. It gave them the courage to ask their own questions about how the world works and how they should lead their lives. It opened their minds and set them free.

There is not much room for that kind of thing in the traditional histories. One reason, it seems to me, is that they have always side-lined the question of linguistic difference. They are of course obliged, at a minimum, to cover works originally written in Greek and Latin, and French and German and English too; but they simplify their task by assuming that philosophical concepts slip easily between languages, like birds flying over borders. They ignore the fact that philosophy has always thrived on linguistic friction, and that it might never have come into existence without it: Greek rubbing against Egyptian; Latin and Arabic against Greek; dozens of modern languages against Greek and Latin and Arabic, against each other, and against the languages of logic and mathematics; and indeed each language against itself. (Intra-lingual translation is one of the elementary techniques of philosophy.)

Most branches of culture – from poetry and prose to music, politics, law and unreflective forms of thought – are deeply imprinted with the distinctions, concepts, rhythms, strategies and styles of the language they inhabit. But philosophy is different. It stands in a refractory relationship

to all the languages in which it is practised, and it has always been linguistically promiscuous.

You would be hard pressed to find a work of philosophy that is completely monolingual. No other discipline is so dependent on translations, and every philosophical library contains an impressive proportion of works by foreigners. A history of philosophy that aimed to be comprehensive would have to deal with a dozen or more linguistic traditions, each reverberating in its own way with words and works that are foreign to it. Even a history which focuses on philosophy in one language will have to be a history of philosophy in other languages too.

I hope to persuade you that philosophy in English contains far more variety, invention, originality and oddity than it is usually credited with. But that does not mean I want to celebrate some essence of philosophical Englishness. I am in fact quite sure there is no such thing. Philosophy in English is as multi-lingual as philosophy in any other language. It has always been fascinated – repelled as well as attracted – by foreign philosophy, and philosophical terms such as *idea*, *logic*, *nature*, *politics*, *virtue*, *science* and *spirit*, which now pass as linguistic natives, used to be seen as exotic outsiders. Nor is there any evidence for the commonplace that philosophy in English has an innate affinity with – to use another imported word – something called *empiricism*. Meanwhile arguments that were first formulated in English – about 'complex ideas', for instance, or 'personal identity', or 'conjectural history' – have often flourished best in other languages.

As well as shifting linguistic difference from the margin to the centre, I have chosen to present my material as a series of sketches and stories rather than a single continuous narrative. Each of my chapters describes the landscape of philosophy in English at some arbitrary date, and they are spaced at arbitrary intervals of fifty years. At first I planned to begin at the turn of the nineteenth century, but I slowly worked my way back to the sixteenth – to a time when people all round Europe were growing accustomed to using vernaculars for purposes that had previously been the province of Latin, and innovators in theology, politics, architecture, theatre and the fine arts were hankering after a history rather than merely a past. They saw themselves as revivalists, reaching back through an age of darkness and stagnation to a lost golden age: either the pristine piety of the first Christians, or the robust republicanism of ancient Rome, or the controlled passion of classical Greece. Philosophical authors then followed suit, turning their backs on a long tradition in which philosophy had (as they supposed) subsisted on interminable commentaries on

Aristotle, and hoping to refresh themselves at the pure springs of pre-Aristotelian wisdom.

I started work on each chapter by looking for occurrences of the word *philosophy* at my chosen date, and references to canonical themes and thinkers. I tried to find out what people were reading by way of philosophy at the time (which might well be foreign works, possibly dating from decades, centuries or millennia before) and what they were writing (though it might not yet be published), and I investigated the educational, commercial and political institutions in which philosophy was being nurtured. My materials varied from one epoch to the next, and grew progressively larger, giving rise to chapters that differ in focus, method, scope and length; but in each case I tried, on the basis of sources that spark a response in me now, to describe what people actually did when they thought they were doing philosophy. Philosophy's past started to look like a meadow full of flowers rather than a majestic solitary oak, let alone a stately Hegelian edifice. A *meanwhile* often came closer to the truth than a *therefore*, and when I encountered discrepancies, gaps and ambiguities I tried to resist the temptation to smooth them over, fill them in, or tidy them up.

My self-imposed constraints have obliged me to pass over several works that I admire or even love, and to present texts not in convenient rational sequences but in the fitful and sporadic ways in which they were written and received. But I hope they have enabled me to break away from the condescending complacency of traditional histories. I hope my stories will bring out the ordinariness of philosophy, as well as its magnificence and its power to change people's lives. And I hope you will end up seeing it as a carnival rather than a museum: an unruly parade of free spirits, inviting you to join in and make something new.

1601
Philosophy learns English

'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophie.' Hamlet's remark has been greeted with knowing smiles for hundreds of years: surely we all have friends like Horatio, whose views are rather limited compared to our own. But that cannot be what the words meant to audiences in London in 1601, when Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was first performed. Hamlet's jibe at *your philosophie* was meant in the same way as the grave-digger's declaration that 'your water is a sore decayer of your whorson dead body', or Hamlet's comments on 'your fat King', 'your leane begger' and 'your worme . . . your only Emperour for dyet'. The reference to *your philosophie* implies doleful familiarity rather than personal ownership: the target of Hamlet's disdain is not Horatio's personal world view, but philosophy in general – not *your* philosophy, Horatio, but your *philosophy*.[1]

ARTS-COURSE PHILOSOPHY AND THE HUMANIST REVOLT

What would *philosophy* have meant to ordinary Londoners in Shakespeare's time? They might not have known much about it, but most of them would have been aware that it was the main subject of study in the universities. Universities too were a bit mysterious, not least because they conducted their business in Latin, but they were thriving. There were now more than 200 of them across Europe, from Dublin, Aberdeen and St Andrews, to Copenhagen, Seville, Vienna and Frankfurt, and of course Wittenberg, where Hamlet and Horatio were studying. They were closed to girls and Jews, but open to any Christian boy who could read a little Latin and pay his way. London did not have a university of its own, but Oxford and Cambridge took about 800 new students a year (roughly one boy in fifty), around half of them sons of tradesmen such as clothmakers,

tailors, drapers or glovers. Shakespeare could therefore count on his audience having some sense of what universities did and where they stood in the social order.[2]

Speake by the card

The education offered by universities was based on structures devised in twelfth-century Paris by a band of teachers who had won recognition from the pope as a *universitas*, a self-governing corporation with the right to train and license their successors. In theory, a university comprised three senior faculties, responsible for training in the learned professions of Divinity, Medicine and Law, together with a lower or junior faculty, the faculty of Arts, which taught a seven-year preparatory course for those aspiring to enter a higher faculty. But in reality most students dropped out before finishing the Arts course, let alone graduating as bachelors or masters or doctors, and very few moved on to Divinity, Medicine or Law. The universities were thus bottom-heavy, with nine tenths of their work concentrated in their lower faculty.

Students would embark on the Arts course around the age of fourteen, and in most cases their aim was simply to improve their Latin, both written and spoken. Latin was, however, a very peculiar institution: it was the currency of religion, administration, education and scholarship throughout Europe, but it was no longer anyone's first language. It was not picked up by children at their mother's knee, but studied methodically in monasteries, private houses and 'grammar schools', usually under masters who had themselves studied at university. It was also overwhelmingly masculine – perhaps the most masculine language in history – and practically inseparable from literacy: anyone who could read could understand Latin, and anyone who spoke Latin could also read. It was still a living language, but it could not have survived without the faculties of Arts.

The subjects studied in the lower faculty were called Arts by reference to the ancient doctrine of Seven Liberal Arts, which divided elementary education into two stages: the *trivium*, comprising the three sciences of words (Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic or Dialectic), and the *quadrivium*, comprising the four sciences of things (Music, Arithmetic, Geometry and Astronomy). But the curriculum was defined by texts rather than topics, and around the middle of the thirteenth century the University of Paris started to base its entire Arts course on the works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, in Latin translation. Other universities followed, and throughout Europe the study of Aristotle – sometimes referred to as 'the philosopher' – became the main business of their largest faculty.[3]

Students would start with Rhetoric, listening to lectures based on Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica*, learning about *topica* or *loci communes* ('commonplaces'), and testing their skills in classroom exercises. After a year or two they would move on to the six Aristotelian works on logic and ontology known as the *Organon*, mastering their *categoriae*, *praedicamenta*, *syllogismae* and *sophismata*, learning to draw their *distinctiones* and marshal their *argumenta*, *pro* and *contra*, as well as taking part in rowdy logic games known as *disputationes*. Those who stayed on beyond the *trivium* would then follow lectures on Aristotle's 'three philosophies' – *Physica*, *Ethica* and *Metaphysica* – while adding further *exempla* and *sententiae* to their collection in order to enhance the *gravitas* of their discourse.[4]

In its higher reaches, the Arts course could be intellectually ambitious, and Aristotle was sometimes used to frame debates rather than close them down; but most students were not interested in anything apart from learning enough Latin to launch themselves on a career. They would practise jotting down topics or *loci* that might serve some future turn – 'My tables,' as Hamlet says after learning of his uncle's treachery: 'meet it is I set it downe That one may smile, and smile, and be a villaine.' They would learn to identify a range of fallacies – the *aequivocatio* or play on words, for instance, or the *petitio principii* or begging of the *quaestio* – and train themselves to avoid them. ('We must speake by the card,' as Hamlet says to the grave-digger, 'or equivocation will undoe us.') They would also develop their skill in resolving any *quaestio* into a choice between two *propositiones*, and finally between being or non-being, *esse* or *non esse*, or 'to be or not to be'.[5]

Any potter knows better than him

Arts-course philosophy was an easy target for jokes: students were receptive to the idea that it was a waste of time, and everyone else was happy to hear it disparaged as a childish toy. Shakespeare had already lampooned it in *Love's Labours Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Hamlet's philosophical mannerisms and his teasing of Horatio could no doubt be expected to raise a smile.

The masters who taught the Arts course – *artisti*, or 'artists', as they were sometimes called – had never commanded much respect. Most of them were barely older than their students, and their work consisted mainly in delivering 'lectures', which meant reading out sentences from a Latin text, and explaining them in Latin at dictation speed. It was not much of a life – at best a step towards a different job with more pay and

prestige – and no one would want to stick with it for long. But the landscape was rapidly changing.

Traditional methods of instruction were growing obsolete. Thanks to cheap paper and movable-type printing, books were available as never before, and the scene of scholarship was moving from manuscripts and lectures to printed books and private reading. The intellectual universe was expanding, and it no longer revolved round Aristotle.[6]

Some masters were appalled by these changes, but others were elated. Around the middle of the fifteenth century, a few teachers at various Italian universities had started trying to turn the Arts course into a *studia humanitatis* covering a range of 'humane' (as opposed to sacred) texts passed down from ancient Greece and Rome. The aim of these reformers – *umanisti* or 'humanists', as they were known – was to fight philosophy with philosophy: to replace a philosophy that sought to understand the world through Aristotle with a philosophy committed to human dignity and the care of the soul.[7]

In practice their main battles were fought in the field of language. As far as the humanists were concerned, the Arts faculties had adulterated pure classical Latin with terms clumsily transliterated from Greek, such as *aristocratia*, *categoria*, *cosmologia*, *criterion*, *hypothesis*, *idea*, *metaphysica*, *methodos*, *oligarchia*, *ontologia* and *syncategorema*; they had also introduced Latinate neologisms such as *abstractus*, *alter*, *concretus*, *existentia*, *idealis*, *immediate*, *mens*, *obiective*, *speculatio* and *subiective*; and they had created a host of pointless abstractions ending in *-itas*, like *haecceitas* – for Aristotle's τόδε τι (*tode ti*), meaning 'thisness' – *activitas*, *identitas*, *possibilitas*, *quidditas*, *realitas* and *supernaturalitas*. Latin had become bloated and ungainly, according to the humanists, and the blame lay with the faculties of Arts.[8]

The humanists proposed a return to the undefiled Latin of ancient Rome – especially the versatile, economical prose perfected by the philosopher-statesman Cicero in the century before Christ. Cicero had himself been a translator, appropriating Greek thought for the benefit of his compatriots and, as he put it, 'teaching philosophy to speak Latin'. He had introduced a limited number of Greek-based terms such as *criticus*, *dialectica*, *differentia*, *logica*, *metaphora*, *physica*, *poesis*, *politicus*, *problema*, *thesis* and of course *philosophia*; but on the whole he 'strove to speak Latin', as opposed to Latinized Greek, devising a range of new words with clear Latin roots, such as *argumentum*, *conclusio*, *essentia*, *forma*, *intellectus*, *moralia*, *natura*, *naturalis*, *propositio*, *ratio*, *species*, *quaestio* and *qualitas*. Cicero had, according to the humanists, set a standard in philosophical Latin that the Arts faculties had thoughtlessly betrayed.[9]

Then there was the question of classical Greek. Most masters knew no Greek: even a supreme Aristotelian like the thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas depended on Latin translations. When they struggled with philosophical terms they had no way of telling whether their difficulties were due to Aristotle or his translators, and they might not realize that a proliferation of Latin words such as *ratio*, *oratio*, *definitio*, *ratiocinatio*, *sermo*, *disputatio*, *argumentatio*, *verbum* and *proportio* could all represent the single Greek word λόγος (*logos*). Latin texts might include a few phrases of the original Greek, but most readers would skip over them: *graecum est*, and *non legitur* – it was 'unreadable', they said, and 'Greek to me'.[10]

One of the boasts of the Italian reformers was that, thanks to a gradual influx of scholars from the East, particularly Constantinople, they had mastered classical Greek. They hunted for old manuscripts and studied the classics of philosophy in the original language, producing Greek editions and new Latin translations which left the Aristotle of the Arts course looking garbled, inauthentic and outdated.[11]

Humanist challenges to the Aristotelian monolith also revived some thorny old questions about relations between the Arts course and Christianity. Universities had always been Christian institutions, but they did not permit theological discussions outside their faculties of Divinity. The Arts faculties might hope to keep out of trouble by confining themselves to the pre-Christian discipline of philosophy; but many of Aristotle's doctrines – that the world has existed from eternity, for example – were not so much independent of Christianity as flatly incompatible with it.

The problem should have been obvious all along. The apostle Paul had told the faithful to stick to Christ and shun the blandishments of 'philosophy and vain deceit', and Tertullian – one of the founders of Christian theology – dismissed the *miserum Aristotelem* by asking: 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' The wisdom of Solomon and the Jews outshone that of Aristotle and the philosophers, according to Tertullian, and 'Once we have Jesus Christ, curiosity is at an end; once we have the gospels, questioning has no further use; and when we believe, we need nothing except belief.'[12]

Some humanists dallied with paganism or even atheism, but most professed a simple Christian faith, free of the taint of Aristotle, and some went so far as to advocate a notion of *philosophia Christi*, or Christian philosophy, that would have struck their predecessors as a *contradictio in terminis*, mixing the holy with the humane. In any case they stimulated an interest in the original texts of the Bible and New Testament that led

in turn to demands for reform and eventually to schisms and the formation of Protestant sects. Martin Luther, for example, was a humanist who taught at Wittenberg from 1508 until his death in 1546; he was famous not only for expounding the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek and preaching against clerical corruption, but also for his tirades against Aristotle. 'Any potter knows more than him,' Luther said; and Aristotelian influences on the universities and the church were surely the work of the devil.[13]

Nothing either good or bad

Shakespeare sent Hamlet and Horatio to Wittenberg, perhaps to study with Luther, and he seems to have expected his audience to realize that Hamlet's contempt for 'your philosophie' arose not from an aversion to philosophy as such, but from humanist disgust at the dry routines of the Arts course, and a relish for well-turned Ciceronian expositions of *sapientia* or moral wisdom.[14]

Moral philosophy had traditionally been dominated by Aristotle's *Ethics*, which Luther denounced as 'the worst of all books' and an affront to 'divine grace and Christian virtues'. But contempt for Aristotle was offset by admiration for his teacher Plato, who, for Luther and other humanists, was the prince of moral philosophy, and therefore of philosophy as such. Some of them started referring to him as *Plato divinus*, and called their schools *academies* after the groves of Akademos on the outskirts of Athens where Plato used to teach. Some went still further, subordinating Plato to his teacher Socrates – a shambolic figure who became a paragon of philosophical virtue not for propagating true doctrine, but for using jokes and irony to prove that true wisdom consists in a frank confession of ignorance. The humanists, it seems, were more interested in loveliness than logic – in Plato's tales about the lost island of Atlantis, for instance, or his comparison between Socrates and a doll in the shape of the ugly satyr Silenus, which opens to reveal small figurines of the gods. For them, the whole lesson of philosophy could be summed up in the Socratic maxim *nosce teipsum*, or 'know thyself'.[15]

Humanists like Hamlet would speak disdainfully of Aristotle, though they might never have read him, and they would find ways of demonstrating their love for Plato and Socrates, perhaps walking round with a miniature volume of moral philosophy, such as Plato's *Phaedo* in the original Greek. They would marvel at its portrayal of Socrates jesting with his grief-stricken friends after being condemned to death for corrupting the youth of Athens: he praises his jailer ('a charming man'), drinks poison

('it would be ridiculous to cling to life'), gives thanks to the god of medicine ('we must offer a cock to Asclepius'), remaining jovially indifferent as a mortal chill spreads up from his feet, through his legs and past his waist, till at last it reaches his heart.[16]

The pantheon of humanist moral philosophers included Romans as well as Greeks: especially Cicero, who boasted of being the first to have 'expounded the ancient philosophy, as it originated in Socrates, in the Latin tongue'. For Cicero, the word *philosophus* was not so much a description as an accolade, conferred on wise old men who had spent their lives cultivating the noble attributes that distinguish humans from beasts – namely reason and discourse (*ratio et oratio*), and a capacity to 'connect things present to things future' within the horizon of 'an entire lifetime'.[17]

The classics as Cicero saw them were not so much treasuries of timeless wisdom as enactments of fundamental questions in ethics, or – to use his own coinage – *moralia*. He divided the philosophers into four 'sects' (meaning successions of disciples), beginning with the Epicureans, who combined helpless passivity about the natural world with the brutal pleasure-seeking of the *voluptarius*. Then there were the followers of Zeno of Citium – 'Stoics', as they were called, after the colonnade, or *stoa*, where Zeno taught – who maintained that nothing is good or bad in itself and that happiness consists in rational self-discipline rather than worldly success. The Stoics were preferable to the Epicureans, according to Cicero, but both sects were 'too fond of their own way', and he preferred the Aristotelians, or 'peripatetics' (so called because Aristotle walked up and down while teaching), who made it a principle to 'discuss both sides of every question'. But the Aristotelians were not as wise as the 'academics' or 'academic Sceptics', in other words the followers of Plato who devoted themselves to irony and quizzical detachment. In the end, however, Cicero would not commit himself to any of the sects, but only to Socrates, the first philosopher and the wisest, who taught that wisdom is a matter of 'refraining from definitive judgements', and that philosophy is about rhetorical power and moral edification rather than mere theoretical truth.[18]

The humanists rated Cicero's moral and rhetorical conception of philosophy far higher than the logic-chopping of the Arts-course Aristotelians; but some of them preferred the work of Seneca – another Roman philosopher-statesman who, a century after Cicero, taught an uncompromising version of Stoicism in marvellously terse language. 'Nothing is harder', according to Seneca, 'than knowing how to live.' We busy ourselves with trifles, but 'it takes an entire lifetime to learn how to live;

and . . . an entire lifetime to learn how to die.' We should train ourselves to see death not as the termination of life but a 'consummation' – for what can it signify except release from sickness, servitude and *contumelia*, or the arrogance of power? There was nothing to fear, according to Seneca, 'apart from fear itself', and death was 'so little to be feared that, thanks to it, nothing need hold any fear at all'.[19]

Seneca was a dramatist as well as a philosopher, and his tragedies – which were revived in the sixteenth century and sometimes performed by students in the original Latin – supplied humanists with a stock of fine adages: that 'We give voice to our trivial cares, but suffer enormities in silence', that 'A worthy mind is secure in its own kingdom', and that 'Death lies heavy on those who live a life of worldly fame only to die without self-knowledge.' Seneca also had the distinction of falling out with the Emperor Nero and calmly taking his own life surrounded by his students, thus achieving the status of a second Socrates.[20]

When Hamlet compares his mother to 'a beast that wants discourse of reason', and rebukes himself for not 'Looking before and after', he is thus demonstrating his familiarity with Cicero, and when he gets annoyed with Polonius for prattling about his exploits as a student actor, he is displaying his familiarity with classical tragedy. His attempts to rise above 'this world' – to see death as a 'consummation', and a release from 'hart-ake', 'contumelie' and 'the insolence of office' – are exercises in Senecan self-discipline, and his histrionic hesitations, together with his suggestion that 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so', express an aspiration to the refined indifference of a Stoic. Shakespeare seems to have given his audience enough clues to figure out that, if Horatio was an Arts-course dullard, Prince Hamlet was a humanist philosopher.[21]

WE ENGLISH MEN HAVE WITS

Hamlet's use of Latinate words like *question, discourse*, *reason*, *contumely*, *equivocation*, *consummation*, *paradox* and indeed *philosophy* demonstrates the difficulties a philosopher might have in sticking to the plain vernacular. But the linguistic predicament of philosophy was not unique. Christianity too was deeply entwined with Latin: its sacred text was the *Biblia Vulgata* – a fourth-century Latin translation of the Hebrew 'Old Testament' and the Greek 'New Testament' – which was generally accepted as authoritative and perhaps divinely inspired. Preachers were accustomed to translating passages of the Vulgate and interpreting them in vernacular sermons, but their versions could be controversial, and the

systematic English translations that started appearing in the fourteenth century provoked fierce arguments about, for example, whether 'church' meant the same as the Latin *congregatio*, or whether *baptismata* could be referred to as 'washings'. Everyone seems to have accepted, however, that the Bible should 'bee understood even of the very vulgar' and that translations were needed to 'let in the light'. Following a royal decree of 1538 every parish in England was expected to possess a complete English Bible; and if holy scriptures were now available in English, why not humane ones too?[22]

Either a yeasay or a naysay

In the first half of the sixteenth century a new reading public came into existence throughout Europe: workers at trades, mostly men but sometimes women, who did not know Latin, but used the Latin alphabet to read and write their own language. Enterprising printers were quick to offer them vernacular introductions to the world of learning, and in 1551 a Cambridge graduate called Thomas Wilson brought out a book on *The Rule of Reason* which promised to put Arts-course logic into English for the first time.

> Pondering that diverse learned men of other countreis have heretofore for the furtheraunce of knowledge, not suffred any of the Sciences liberal to be hidden in the Greke, or Latine tongue, but have with most earnest travaile made every of them familiar to their vulgare people, I thought that Logique among all other beyng an Arte as apte for the English wittes . . . as any the other Sciences are, might with as good grace be sette forth in Thenglishe.

Wilson proceeded by presenting lists of technical terms followed by homely definitions: thus *logique* itself, otherwise known as *dialecte*, was 'an Arte to try the corne from the chaffe, the truthe from every falshed', or 'an art to reason probably on both partes, of all matters that be put furth'. Aristotle's five 'predicables', or 'common words', were defined as follows:

Genus	The general worde
Species	The kinde
Differentia	The difference
Proprium	The properte
Accidens	The thing chauncing or cleving to the substance.

Wilson continued with a bilingual list of the ten 'predicamentes' or 'general words'.

Substantia	The Substance
Quantitas	The Quantite
Qualitas	The Qualitee
Relative	The Relacion
Actio	The maner of doing
Passio	The Suffring
Quando	When
Ubi	Where
Situs	The Settelling
Habitus	The appareiling.

He went on to define *enthimema* as 'halfe argument', and *dilemma* as 'horned argument', before turning to the notorious stumbling-block of Arts-course logic: the three-step argument known as *syllogismus*, such as *All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal.* Wilson explained that such arguments pivot on what Latin textbooks called the *medium* (in this case *man* or *men*) and suggested that in plain English it could be called 'the reason that shall prove', or – because it occurs in the first two steps but not the conclusion – 'the double repete'.[23]

Readers must have been bemused. Wilson said he was inspired by earlier attempts to translate the principles of logic into Italian, French and Spanish; but these languages are direct descendants of Latin, and they could assimilate Arts-course terminology in a way that English could not. In 1573 a clergyman called Ralph Lever tried to improve on Wilson by presenting logic in English without recourse to what he called 'inckhorne termes' or 'wordes that no mere English man can understande'. We must 'consider the case as it is', Lever said: 'an arte is to be taughte in that tongue, in which it was never written afore.'

> Nowe the question lyeth, whether it were better to borrowe terms of some other tongue . . . and by a little chaunge of pronouncing, to seeke to make them Englishe wordes, which are none in deede; or else of simple usual wordes, to make compounded termes.

Lever preferred natural English to bastard Latin, and suggested that Aristotle's *praedicamenta* should become 'storehouses' instead of 'predicaments', while *accidentes* would be 'inbeers' or 'indwellers' rather than 'accidents'. In the same way, *relativa* became 'yokefellows', *animales* were 'wights', *subiecta* were 'foresets', and *praedicata* 'backsettes'. *Conclusiones* became 'endsays', and *propositiones conditionales* were 'ifsayes'. Instead of the hideous half-Latin maxim 'every proposition is either an affirmation or a negation', we could now say that *every simple shewsay* . . .

is either a yeasay or a naysay. The words might sound uncouth, but according to Lever they had a noble pedigree.

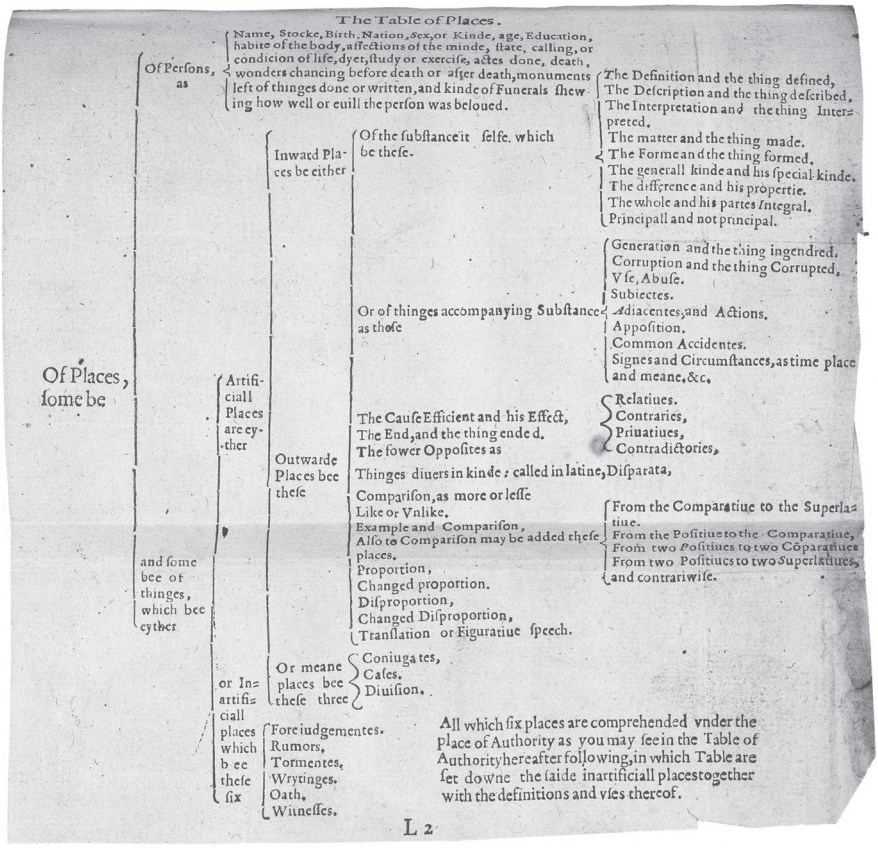
> We . . . that devise understandable termes, compounded of true and auncient English words, do rather maintain and continue the antiquity of our mother tongue: than they, that with inkhorne termes doe change and corrupt the same, making a mingle mangle of their native speache, and not observing the properties thereof.

'We English men have wits,' as Lever put it, and 'we have also framed unto ourselves a language.' He therefore proposed that *logique* and *dialect* should be known by the self-explanatory term *Witcraft*, which also served as the title of his book.[24]

Lever's *Witcraft* did not catch on any better than Wilson's *Rule of Reason*, but in 1599 a country gentleman called Thomas Blundeville returned to the task with an *Art of Logike* addressed, as he put it, to 'those of my countrymen that are not learned in forreyne tongs', and in particular to those parish priests who had not been 'brought up in any Universitie' or trained to 'find out . . . the truth in any doubtful speech'. Their sermons were now liable to be interrupted by half-educated lads – 'subtill sophisters and caveling Schismatics' – who tried to spin heresies 'out of the very wordes of holy scripture'. Blundeville was sure that beleaguered ministers would be grateful for a new exposition of logic 'in our vulgar tongue', but he did not propose to 'fayne new words . . . as some of late have done'. Unlike the author of *Witcraft*, he considered it 'no shame nor robberie to borrowe tearmes . . . from the Latines, as well as they did from the Greekes', and when he explained the 'many good uses' of Aristotle's *praedicamenta* he sought a compromise between Latin and English:

> First if you will define any thing you shall be sure in some of these predicaments to finde out the generall kynde thereof, together with all the differences . . . Secondly, if you would divide any thing, here you shall find both the general kyndes, special kyndes, yea and divers examples of the Individuums comprehended under the same kyndes . . . Thirdly, out of these predicaments you may gather matter apt to prove any question, eyther generall or particular.

Topica or *loci* went straight into English as 'places', near or far, from which appropriate arguments might be 'fetched', while *quantitas* became a Latinate 'quantitie', whose two varieties were either 'whole' or 'broken'. Unluckily for Blundeville, however – and for Wilson and Lever before him – old-style logic was going out of fashion, regardless of how it was translated.[25]


The Table of Places.

Of Places, some be
- Of Persons, as
  - Name, Stocke, Birth, Nation, Sex, or Kinde, age, Education, habite of the body, affections of the minde, state, calling, or condicion of life, dyet, study or exercise, actes done, death, wonders chancing before death or after death, monuments left of thinges done or written, and kinde of Funerals shewing how well or euill the person was beloued.
    - The Definition and the thing defined,
    - The Description and the thing described,
    - The Interpretation and the thing Interpreted.
- and some bee of thinges, which bee eyther
  - Inward Places be either
    - Of the substance it selfe, which be these.
      - The matter and the thing made.
      - The Forme and the thing formed.
      - The generall kinde and his special kinde.
      - The difference and his propertie.
      - The whole and his partes Integral.
      - Principall and not principal.
    - Or of thinges accompanying Substance as these
      - Generation and the thing ingendred,
      - Corruption and the thing Corrupted,
      - Vse, Abuse.
      - Subiectes.
      - Adiacentes, and Actions.
      - Apposition.
      - Common Accidentes.
      - Signes and Circumstances, as time place and meane, &c.
  - Outwarde Places bee these
    - The Cause Efficient and his Effect,
    - The End, and the thing ended.
    - The fower Opposites as
      - Relatiues.
      - Contraries,
      - Priuatiues,
      - Contradictories,
    - Thinges diuers in kinde: called in latine, Disparata,
    - Comparison, as more or lesse
    - Like or Vnlike.
    - Example and Comparison,
    - Also to Comparison may be added these places.
      - From the Comparatiue to the Superlatiue.
      - From the Positiue to the Comparatiue,
      - From two Positiues to two Coparatiues
      - From two Positiues to two Superlatiues,
      - and contrariwise.
    - Proportion,
    - Changed proportion.
    - Disproportion,
    - Changed Disproportion,
    - Translation or Figuratiue speech.
- Artificiall Places are eyther
  - or Inartificiall places which bee these six
    - Or meane places bee these three
      - Coniugates,
      - Cases,
      - Diuision.
    - Foreiudgementes.
    - Rumors,
    - Tormentes,
    - Wrytinges.
    - Oath,
    - Witnesses.

All which six places are comprehended vnder the place of Authority as you may see in the Table of Authority hereafter following, in which Table are set downe the saide inartificiall places together with the definitions and vses thereof.

L 2

How to invent an argument: a table of 'places' from Thomas Blundeville's *Arte of Logike* (1599)

Why not logike?

Gabriel Harvey was a ropemaker's son who became a Professor of Rhetoric at Cambridge in 1574 when he was twenty-two years old. He thought of himself as a pioneering humanist, and seems to have taken pleasure in insulting his traditionalist Arts-course colleagues. They mocked him in turn for his extravagant Italian clothes and 'ridiculous senseless sentences, finicall flaunting phrases, and termagant inkhorne tearmes', but he retaliated by presenting himself as a moderator, seeking to restrain those who wanted to be 'new-new' rather than just 'new'.[26]

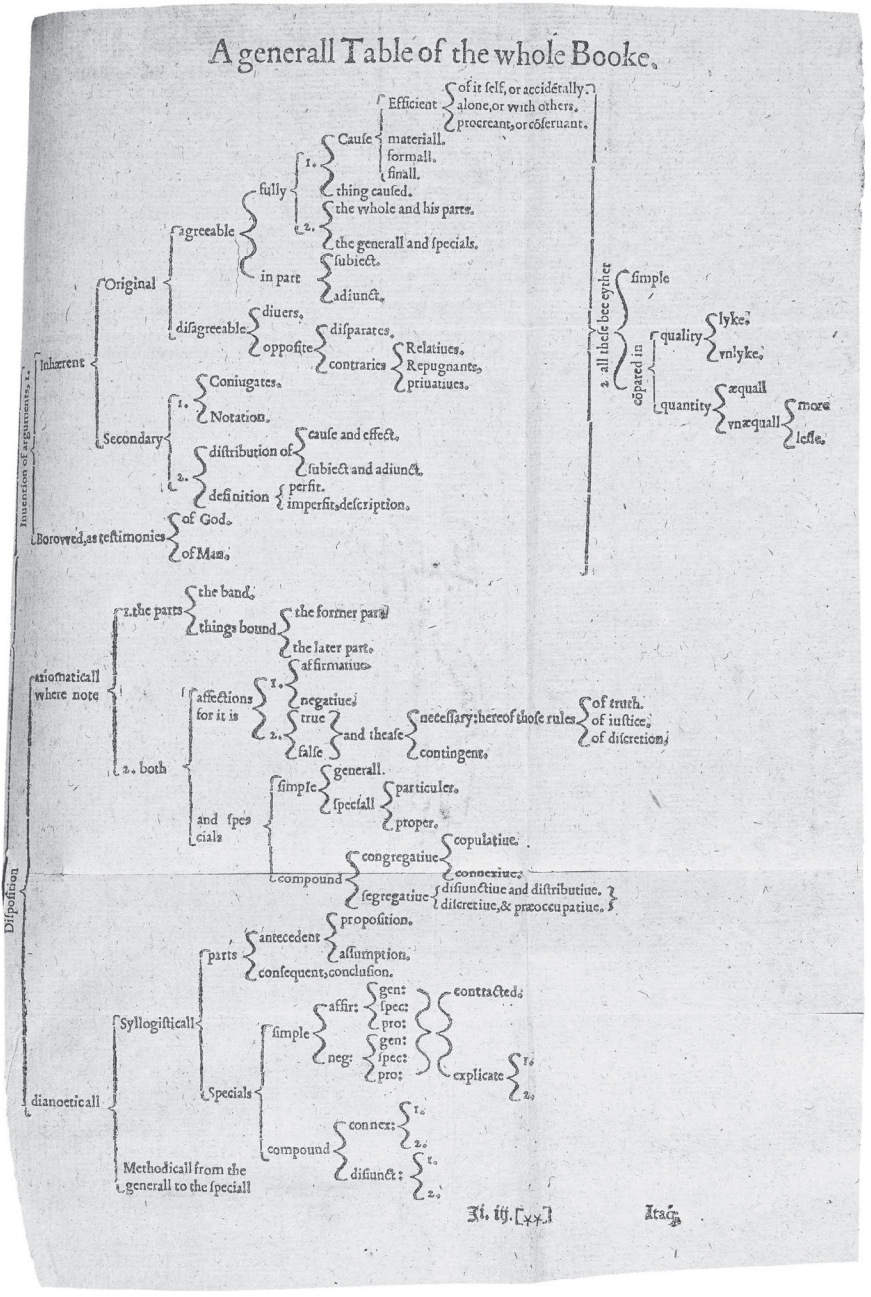
Harvey had made a name for himself by promoting a version of logic

that was supposed to do away with the time-consuming complexities of Aristotle, and he promised his students that it would save them from the fate of the 'simple artist' or a 'bare professour' by opening up lucrative careers in government and law. The new logic was the invention of a Paris Arts teacher called Pierre de la Ramée (Petrus Ramus), who, in a series of works going back to the 1540s, had – as Harvey explained – 'notably reformed' the old logic, and purged it of 'many absurdities'. Ramus did away with the paraphernalia of predicaments, predicables and syllogisms, defining logic simply as the *ars bene dissere* – the art of discoursing well – and reducing it to two parts. The first was *inventio*, which meant dividing your theme into several 'topics' ('places' or *loci* such as causes of various kinds and 'inartificial' arguments, based on direct observation), and the second was *dispositio*, or the art of setting out your topics systematically, preferably by means of *epitomes*, or bracketed diagrams in which a general category is divided over and over again, allowing a complex argument to be taken in at a single glance.[27]

In his native France, Ramus had a reputation as a cocksure miner's son who was trying to subvert the time-honoured Aristotelian Arts course with his vulgar dichotomous method. But after losing his life in the St Bartholemew's Day massacre in Paris in 1572 he became a hero in Protestant Britain: a martyr who had given his life for reform in both logic and religion. Thanks to the playwright Christopher Marlowe, who got to know Gabriel Harvey in Cambridge in the 1580s, Ramus made an early entrance onto the English stage. The low-born hero of Marlowe's *Tragedie of Doctor Faustus*, first performed around 1588, is a young professor in the Arts faculty at Wittenberg (a teacher for Hamlet and Horatio?) whose spirit revolts at the prospect that he might 'live and die in Aristotle's workes'. His first step – before he makes a pact with the devil – is to adopt the new dichotomizing method: he sides with Ramus when he muses that the 'chiefest end' of logic is simply 'to dispute well', and when he repeats himself in Latin – '*bene dissere est finis logices*' – he is not only displaying an Arts-course mannerism, but also quoting Ramus directly.[28]

A year or two later, in Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*, Ramus returned to the English stage as a 'professor of logick' ambushed by a gang of 'blockish Sorbonnists' – conservative students enraged by his insults to Aristotle and by extension to the Catholic church.

> Was it not thou that scoftes the Organon,
> And said it was a heape of vanities?
> He that will be a flat decotamest [dichotomist],
> And seen in nothing but Epitomes:



Ramus's method of dichotomies, from Abraham Fraunce's *Lawiers Logike* (1588)

> Is in your judgement thought a learned man . . .
> *Argumentum testimonii est inartificiale.*
> To contradict which, I say *Ramus* shall dye:
> How answere you that? Your *nego argumentum*
> Cannot serve, sirra: Kill him.

Ramus offers a conciliatory remark about Aristotle ('he that despiseth him can nere be good in logick or philosophie') but no one believes him: 'ne'er was there colliar's son so full of pride,' the Aristotelians reply: 'stab him, I say, and send him to his friends in hell.'[29]

The first exposition of Ramus in English was *The Logike of the most Excellent Philosopher P. Ramus Martyr*, which appeared in 1574, by a professor at St Andrews called Rollo MacIlmaine. He began by suggesting that religion had suffered 'greate hurte' from those who 'would have all thinges kept close eyther in the Hebrewe, Greke or Latyn tongues'. Just as Cicero had 'amplified his native tongue' by adapting Latin to the needs of philosophy, MacIlmaine proposed to add new words to the English language ('gaynesettes' for *opposita*, for example) so that it could 'expresse all thinges contayned into liberall artes'.[30]

Several others followed MacIlmaine's lead, putting Ramus into English in the hope of snatching the art of logic from the 'doctors chayre' and making it 'common to all'. (There was also a version in Welsh.) The most successful of them was a poet called Abraham Fraunce, who, after seven wasted years at Cambridge, decided to transfer 'from Philosophy to Lawe'. But he was appalled by the Norman jargon of English lawyers – 'hotchpot French,' as he called it, 'stufft up with such variety of borrowed words' such as *villen in gros*, *villen regardant* and *tenant par le curtesie*. The lawyers gave too much respect to unexamined traditions, according to Fraunce: they were 'like Catholikes', who 'beleeved as the Church beleeved, but why the Church beleeved so, it never came within the compasse of their cogitation'. The law needed to be purged of linguistic superstition, and a dose of Ramism should do the trick.[31]

Fraunce published his *Lawiers Logike* in 1588, promising to avoid the elaborate artifices of 'miserable Sorbonists' and confine himself to what he called *logicall analysis* or *naturall logike* which, as Ramus had shown, could be reduced to 'invention' of topics, followed by 'disposition' in dichotomous diagrams. Fraunce then extended his method from law to poetry, including a work by the Roman poet Virgil. He began by dividing the poem into two parts: Virgil's own argument about 'the incontinency of a lover', and the lament of his lovelorn hero Corydon; the lament is then divided

into a pair of complaints, one addressed to Corydon's beloved and the other to himself; the first is then broken into two parts – accusations of cruelty and offers of hospitality – while the second gets a table of its own, featuring both a 'calling backe of himselfe' and a 'remedy of contraries', which consists either in weaving a basket or finding another lover.[32]

Fraunce was sure his readers would be impressed by the ease and simplicity of Ramist logical analysis, especially if, like him, they had wasted their youth on 'formalities, quiddities, haecceities, albedinities, animalities, substantialities, and such like'. But he also imagined the reaction of an old-school Aristotelian called Mayster Quiditary, who shudders at the prospect of a world in which 'every cobler can cogge a Syllogisme', and 'every Carter crake of Propositions': 'Hereby is Logike prophaned, and lyeth prostitute, remooved out of her Sanctuary, robbed of her honour, left of her lovers, ravyshed of Straungers, and made common to all, which before was proper to Schoolemen, and only consecrated to Philosophers.' To which Fraunce rejoins with breezy confidence: 'Yet, good mayster Quiditary . . . Coblers bee men, why therefore not Logicians? And Carters have reason, why therefore not Logike?'[33]

THE DIFFUSION OF HUMANIST PHILOSOPHY

Shakespeare's audiences may well have been surprised to see a humanist prince like Hamlet subjecting himself to the plebeian drudgery of the Arts course. But the social standing of universities had improved with the spread of humanism. As far back as the 1490s Sir Thomas More spent a couple of years at Oxford, learning Greek from scholars newly returned from Italy, publishing his *Utopia* (a Latin sequel to Plato's fable of Atlantis) in 1516, and later serving as Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII; and Thomas Cranmer studied humanist texts in Cambridge before becoming Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532 and promoting the use of English in church services. Both of them were eventually executed (More in 1535, Cranmer in 1556), but other courtier-humanists fared better, for instance Sir Thomas Wyatt (Cambridge, translator of Seneca), Sir Nicholas Bacon (Cambridge, Lord Keeper of the Seal) and Roger Ascham (Cambridge, royal tutor). In the 1540s Henry VIII created professorships of Greek at Oxford and Cambridge, and by the end of the century Moral Philosophy had been added to the list of subjects required for a degree in Arts.

On the other hand, royal children still received their education in private, with humanist tutors to teach them philosophy, history and poetry

in Latin and Greek, and perhaps French and Italian too. Edward, son of Henry VIII, could write Latin 'with facility' by the time he came to the throne in 1547 at the age of nine, and before long he was reading Plato in the original. Lady Jane Grey, who succeeded him on his death seven years later, was also noted for her precocious humanist learning. Roger Ascham would tell an ingratiating story about visiting her ancestral home in Leicestershire in 1550, when she was thirteen.

> Hir parentes, the Duke and Duches, with all the houshould . . . were huntinge in the Parke: I found her, in her Chamber, reading *Phaedon Platonis* [Plato's *Phaedo*, which tells of the death of Socrates] in Greeke, and that with as moch delite, as som gentleman would read a merie tale in *Bocase* [Bocaccio's *Decameron*] . . . I asked hir, whie she wold leese such pastime in the Parke: smiling she answered me: I wisse, all their sport in the Parke is but a shadoe to that pleasure, that I find in *Plato*: Alas goode folke, they never felt, what trewe pleasure ment.

Lady Jane's pitiful reign – it ended after nine days when she was beheaded on the orders of Mary, the Catholic daughter of Henry VIII – made a memorable symbol of female Stoicism fused with Protestant piety and aristocratic grace. The image of the Platonizing royal martyr would be invoked repeatedly after the death of 'Bloody Mary' in 1558, when the throne passed to another of Ascham's humanist pupils, the 25-year-old Elizabeth.[34]

Ascham claimed that as a child Elizabeth spoke 'French & Italian as well as English', and 'talked to me readily and well in Latin, and moderately so in Greek', and when she became Queen he commended 'her perfit redines, in *Latin*, *Italian*, *French*, & *Spanish*', adding that 'she readeth here now at Windsore more Greeke every day, than some Prebendarie of this Church doth read Latin in a whole weeke.'[35]

A smattering in Latin

If humanist culture reached up to the aristocracy, it also flowed downwards to local schools. Shakespeare, for example, picked up the elements of Ciceronian philosophy, together with what Ben Jonson called his 'small *Latine* and lesse *Greeke*', at the King's Free Grammar School in Stratford upon Avon in the 1570s. In particular, he seems to have encountered two Latin textbooks by Desiderius Erasmus of Amsterdam: collections of maxims and anecdotes culled from the classics to help young scholars with their Latin while giving them instruction in moral philosophy. Erasmus ranged far, but kept returning to the Christ-like figure of Socrates: the wisest of men, but also the humblest, looking like an unkempt peasant

and expressing himself in the fewest, simplest words. Socrates was, according to Erasmus, the perfect philosopher because he was a perpetual *morio*: a clown, jester or buffoon, who was declared the wisest of men by the oracle, because he realized he knew nothing, and whose death provided a perfect *exemplum* of indifference to the ways of the world.[36]

Shakespeare left school around the age of thirteen, but his grounding in humanism served him well. Cassius in *Julius Caesar* recalls how he abandoned Epicureanism for Stoicism and learned to rise above 'accidentall evils', and Friar Laurence urges Romeo to put on the 'armour' of 'adversities sweete milke, Philosophie'. Malcolm's advice to Macduff echoes Seneca: 'Give sorrow words; the griefe, that do's not speake, Whispers the o're-fraught heart, and bids it breake.' Leonato in *Much Ado* is closer to Cicero's 'academic' scepticism: the Stoics, he says, may have 'made a pish at chance and sufferance', but 'there was never yet Philosopher, That could endure the tooth-ake patiently'. There is even a philosophical side to Falstaff: the fat knight has the Socratic knack of imparting wisdom by playing the fool, as well as getting banished as a 'misleader' of young men; and the manner of his death, as recounted by Mistress Quickly ('I put my hand into the bed and felt them [his feet], and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so uppard, and uppard, and all was as cold as any stone') echoes Plato's account of the death of Socrates.[37]

A sizable section of Shakespeare's audiences would have recognized his allusions to humanist philosophy, even if they had no Latin. They might well have come across Sir Thomas Chaloner's English version of Erasmus's exuberant satire *Encomium Moriae*, published as *The Praise of Folie* in 1549 and often reprinted. The punning allusion to Thomas More in the figure of *Moria*, or Folly, might be lost on them, but they could enjoy the way she mocks the 'graduates of artes' for their tiresome notion that 'it is a miserable thyng to be begyled.' Then there were the miserable followers of 'the *archestoike Seneca*': if they wanted to live like 'a new found god without bodily sence', they should 'take theyr wyseman to theim selfes and . . . go and dwell with hym in *Platos* citee, or in the lande of *Fairie*, or *Utopia*', while the rest of us – though 'Stoike frogges dooe crocke' – get on with enjoying ourselves, for 'most miserable is it (I saie) not to erre, and not to be deceived.'[38]

Readers without Latin could pick up further lessons in humanist philosophy from a selection of the proverbial wisdom of Erasmus which came out in 1569.

> *Ex aspectu nasictur amor.* Of sight is love gendred . . . Now wee reade that certaine Philosophers even for this cause, and amonges them *Democritus*,

> plucked out their own eyes, because they were the occasioners, & provokers of al evil afflictions & lustes.
>
> *Nosce teipsum*. Know thy selfe. Plato ascribeth this divine sentence to Apollo. But whose sayenge it ever was, Certes it is both true and Godlye, and worthy of Christen men to be continuallie borne in mind.
>
> *Sustine & abstine*. Susteyne and absteyne . . . The author of it is *Epictetus* a noble philosopher, by which two wordes he hath comprised all that pertayne to the felicity of mans life, & that, that other Philosophers could skarce declare in so many great volumes, hath he declared by these two wordes.
>
> *Amicitia aequalitas, amicus alter ipse*. Friendship (saieth *Pithagoras*) is equalitie, and all one minde or will, and my friend is as who should say another I.
>
> *A fabis abstineto*. Absteyne from beanes . . . bycause they be windie, and do engender impure humours, and for that cause provoke bodely lust.
>
> *Cibum in matellam ne inmitas*. Put not meat into a pisspot . . . all one in effecte with that sayeng of Christ. Cast not perles afore swine.

The compilation was amusing and informative, but also bizarre: those who knew Latin would not need the English glosses, and those who needed the glosses had no use for the Latin, except perhaps as a status symbol.[39]

The first philosophical classic to be honoured with a complete English translation was Cicero's *De Officiis* in 1558. The translator was a poet and dramatist called Nicholas Grimalde, who claimed that *Ciceroes thre bookes of duties*, as he called it, encompassed 'the whole trade, how to live among men dycreetly, and honestly . . . as none can be righter, only Scripture excepted'. An English version was, he thought, long overdue.

> I wished, many more to be parteners of such sweetnesse . . . endeavouring, by translation, to do likewise for my contrimen: as Italians, Frenchemenne, Spaniardes, Dutchmen, & other foreins have liberally done for theirs. So, chiefly for our unlatined people I have made this latin writer, english . . . & have caused an ancient writing to becomme, in a maner, new againe.

The works of the Greek philosophers had been accessible to Romans in the time of Cicero, Grimalde said, 'as now adayes the French, & Italians welframed writings be to those Englishmen, that understande them'. And Cicero – 'the first, and the chief that ever cladde ladie Philosophie in Romane attire' – would surely have approved of the attempt to dress philosophy in English garments too:

> These richesse, and treasures of wit, and wisedome, as Cicero transported out of Greece into Italie; so have I fetched from thence, and conveied them

> in to England, and have caused Marcus Tullius [Cicero] (more than he could do, when he was alive) to speake English.

Grimalde hoped to capture 'the meaning of the author' in 'usuall words', without resort to 'ynckhorne termes' or 'wrasted or farrefetched fourmes of speech', and he wanted his translation to be judged by the same standards as an original work. But he did not have the courage of his convictions: the *Thre bookes of duties* was printed in double columns, with Cicero's Latin alongside Grimalde's translation. The arrangement was designed, as Grimalde explained, for two kinds of readers: those who could speak Latin 'redyly, and wel favoredly', but went 'half blank' when asked to explain a philosophical question in their own language; and those who 'have English meatly well, & but a smattering, or small tast in the latine: which number is great among the scholars of this realme'. The first full English translation of a philosophical classic gave fair warning to its readers: they would not get far without Latin.[40]

Lives of the philosophers

In 1547 a graduate of the Oxford Arts course called William Baldwyn published a *Treatise of Morall Philosophye, contayning the Sayinges of the wyse*. It proved popular, but its title was misleading: Baldwyn's *Treatise* was essentially a history of philosophy – the first in the English language – describing the 'lyves and wittye answers' of dozens of pagan philosophers.

> Pythagoras. When it was asked hym what sciencer he was, he answered, a Philosopher, which is a desirer of wisdome, thinkyng it a greate arrogancie, to have called himselfe wise . . . Beyng asked what was Philosophie, he sayd: the meditacion and remembraunce of death, labouring daylye to get the soule libertie in thys pryson of the bodye . . .
>
> Thales. Some saye that as he went forthe of hys house to beholde the starres, he fel downe sodaynly into a pit, & was therfore mocked of an old wyfe that he kept in his house, with this saying: O Thales, how thinkest thou to comprehende those thynges that are in heaven, that cannot see suche thinges as are before thine iyes . . .
>
> Epimenides. This Epimenides beynge on a tyme sent of hys father into the countreye, to fetche home a sheepe: about nonetyde as he travayled with the sheepe on hys necke, beyng weary, he went into a cave, and slepte 57 yeare. And whan he waked, he soughte for the shepe and because he coulde not fynde hym, he wente backe agayne into the fyelde, and whan he sawe that al thinges were chaunged, beyng greatly astonished, he returned to the

> towne: and whan he wolde have entred into hys owne house, they asked who he was: and when he saw his yonger brother, he was so olde that he knew him not . . . His countrey folke say, he lyved 299 yeres . . . Some thinke that he died not at that age, but fell aslepe agayne untyll an other tyme . . .
> SOCRATES. After that Socrates perceyved that there was no frute in the speculacion of naturall Philosophye, and that it was not greatly necessarye to the outwarde maners of lyvyng, he brought in the kynde called Ethick, that is morall Philosophye, and taught it daylye both in the shoppes and streetes . . . Socrates held opinion that there was but one God . . . which had made & governed al thinges, and that the soul of man was immortal . . . To him that asked him whether it were better to mary or no, he sayde: whiche soever ye doe, it shall repente thee . . .
> PLATO. To one of hys boyes whiche had displeased hym, he sayde: yf I were not angrye, I would trymme thee . . .

Having told similar stories about some twenty other wise men, from Aristotle to Seneca, Baldwyn offered an anthology of 'preceptes and counsayles', versifying them as 'Pythhie meters of dyvers matters'.

SOCRATES	He that to wrath & anger is thral, Over his wyt hath no power at al.
PYTHAGORAS	The more that a man hath of aboundance, So much the lesse hath he of assurance.
SOCRATES	The frendes whome profyt or lucre encrease, When substaunce fayleth, therwithal wil cease: But frendes that are coupled with harte, and with love, Neither fear nor fortune nor force may remove.
SOCRATES	Wisedome and Science, which are pure by kinde, Should not be writ in bookes, but in minde. For wisedome in bookes, with the booke wil rot, But writ in minde wil never be forgot.
PLATO	To fayne, to flatter, to glose and to lye, Requyre coulours, and wordes fayre and slye, But the uttraunce of truth is so simple & playne, That it needeth no studye to forge or to fayne.

Philosophy was of course the work of 'unbelevyng gentiles', and 'not to be compared with the most holy scryptures', but according to Baldwyn it was 'not utterly to bee despised'. It had its uses 'as an handemayden, to perswade such thinges as scripture dothe commaunde', and when we realized that 'these heathen persons' had managed to lead virtuous lives

without knowing Jesus, we would be impelled to 'amende ours, & folowe the good doctrine they have taught us'.[41]

Although Baldwyn did not mention the fact, his *Treatise* was no more than an abridgement of a work on the *Lives and Opinions of the Philosophers*, written in Greek around 250 CE by an otherwise unknown author called Diogenes Laertius. No one could mistake Diogenes' *Lives* for a work of discriminating scholarship, and it had long languished unread; but after being translated into Latin in the fifteenth century it became one the founding texts of humanism. It was manifestly unreliable, but its sheer range – it featured more than eighty different thinkers – cast doubt on the idea of Aristotle as the only philosopher worth remembering, and on Cicero's account of philosophy as a stately dance of four sects presided over by the wisdom of Socrates. Philosophy as Diogenes presented it was a riot of pagan opinions, confirming the maxims attributed to a contemporary of Socrates called Protagoras that 'there are two sides to every question' and 'Man is the measure of all things'.[42]

Lives of the Philosophers is sometimes scurrilous, for example in the attention it gives to another Diogenes, known as the Cynic – 'a Socrates gone mad' who demonstrated his scorn for the world by insulting Plato and Alexander the Great, dressing in rags, masturbating in public, and sleeping in a tub. The concluding chapter was outlandish in a different way: it gave a serious and sympathetic account of the doctrines of Epicurus, covering not only empiricism (the notion that sensations are a criterion of truth) and atomism (the theory that the physical world consists of tiny particles moving in an infinite void), but also mortalism, or the doctrine that there is no escape from the oblivion of death. Cicero had condemned the Epicureans as coarse voluptuaries, but in *Lives* they figure as serene exponents of philosophical indifference, teaching that 'even on the rack the wise man will be happy'. Unlike Socrates or the Stoics, however, they sought happiness in this world only, arguing that death should hold no fear for us, since 'when we are, death has not come; and when it has come, we are not'.[43]

Apart from its informativeness, *Lives* offered an appealing line in gentle comedy. Philosophy had three branches, according to Diogenes: physics, dialectics, and ethics, and the greatest of them was ethics. But the philosophers he described showed little wisdom or dignity: Chrysippus, for example, died of a fit of laughter brought on by one of his own jokes, and Heraclitus tried to rid himself of dropsy by plastering himself with cowdung and lying in the sun, only to be eaten by dogs who mistook him for a sausage. The cumulative effect is ironic rather than edifying, and when Baldwyn commended the *Lives* as an aid to Christian piety, there was a lot he had to leave out.

The first doctor

Diogenes Laertius began *Lives of the Philosophers* with speculations about when philosophy came into being. Its name is indelibly Greek, he said (it 'refuses to be translated into barbarian languages'), and the first philosopher – the only one who 'had no teacher' – was probably Thales of Miletus, a century before Socrates. But Diogenes also considered the possibility of an earlier origin, amongst 'barbarian' nations such as the Chaldeans of Babylon and Assyria, the Gymnosophists of India, the Druids of Gaul, or perhaps Zoroaster and the Magi of Persia (who supposedly lived 5000 years before the fall of Troy), or still better the ancient Egyptians, going back 48,863 years before the birth of Alexander the Great.[44]

When humanist authors tried to turn the *Lives* to Christian uses, they seized on Diogenes' speculations about the pre-Greek origins of philosophy. Baldwyn, for example, opened his *Treatise* by endorsing the philosophical credentials of the Indians and their Gymnosophists ('of which Buddas was the chiefe'), as well as the French with their Druids and Persians with their Magi. But above all he emphasized a source that Diogenes had overlooked: the Jewish patriarchs. The Bible taught, after all, that God had 'alwayes loved moste the Hebrues', and he would not have denied them the boon of philosophy. Presumably he taught it first to Noah and Abraham, who passed it to the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, who transmitted it not only to the captive Moses but also to the Greeks – specifically Thales (a contemporary of Isaiah, according to Baldwyn) and Pythagoras (who flourished when Nebuchadnezar was King of Babylon). Baldwyn could thus treat Diogenes' *Lives* as if they were lost books of the Bible, proving that the Greeks, far from being the inventors of philosophy, had borrowed it from the Jews.[45]

Christianity could be seen as another chapter in the same story – the story of 'the Dignities of Schooling', as it was called by William Kempe in 1588. Kempe had studied at Cambridge before becoming Master of Plymouth Grammar School, and he produced a Ramist textbook on arithmetic as well as a 'methodical' account of *The Education of Children*, in which history as a whole was reduced to a succession of philosophical 'schoolmaysters' starting with Adam, who 'no doubt did his duetie in teaching his children'. Adam was succeeded by 'his sonne Seth, a very godly and learned schoolemaster', followed a few generations later by Noah (the 'repayrer of mankind after the flood', who was known to the Greeks as Prometheus). These early teachers lived before the invention of writing, according to Kempe, but they 'were adorned with such heroicall spirits and golden wittes' that they could 'conceive and keepe in minde' without it. Then there

was Abraham ('of whom GOD himself testifieth, that he taught his children and familie the way of the Lord'), followed by Moses, after whom 'the race of the Prophets is brought to an ende', together with 'the goodliest beawtie of this Hebrewe Schoole . . . the old schoole of God's people'.[46]

Kempe then turned to the pagans, or 'the schoole of the gentiles, which we may call the Schoole of humanitie'. First there was Sarron, King of the French, who 'ordained publicke Schooles of learning, to represse the outrageous behaviour of naughtie men'. Later, 'in the daies of Abraham's pilgrimage', there was 'a Doctor heere in England' called Druyus ('the Schoole of humanitie was heere planted when it was tender and young') who passed his 'great knowledge and learning' to 'the philosophers of Fraunce', who were 'a long time afterward called Druides'. That was where the Greeks came in: 'in the dayes of Nehemias,' Kempe said, 'Socrates . . . kept a great schoole of Philosophers' which was 'a most perfect looking glasse, wherein we may beholde the image and state of a goode schoole'. Socrates was succeeded by 'the divine Philosopher Plato', who 'kept a Schoole in *Academia*', and then by Aristotle, through whom Greek philosophy took hold in France, England, Germany, Egypt and Chaldea, and 'last of all in Italie'.[47]

The reference to the belatedness of Italian learning was a dig at Roman Catholicism. Philosophy had reached perfection, according to Kempe, in the 'schoole of Christianitie', which acknowledged God as the 'author of discipline and learning'. Jesus himself had been 'the first doctor therein', and his doctrines were so clear that they had no need for learned languages or priestly hierarchies, let alone a pope. Christianity was thus essentially Protestant, according to Kempe, and peculiarly English too: the roots of 'our own schoole', he said, can be traced back through kings Alfred and Arthur to Joseph of Arimathea, who, after tending the body of the crucified Christ, was 'sent hither' and landed at Glastonbury, where he founded the first Christian church. 'The Gospell was received heere even from the coming of Christ', according to Kempe, many ages before the rise of the papacy.[48]

Out of Egypt

Humanists were also intrigued by a reference in Diogenes Laertius to a philosopher called Hermes who was supposed to have invented the Egyptian system of justice. Other sources linked Hermes to the Egyptian god Thoth, and suggested that he was the inventor of writing and the author of no fewer than 36,555 books. The African bishop Augustine of Hippo, writing in the fifth century, claimed that 'Hermes the Egyptian, called Trismegistus [thrice-blessed]', was a philosopher who flourished in the time of Moses, 'long before the sages and philosophers of Greece'.[49]

The name of Hermes Trismegistus hovered for centuries at the margins of Christianity, associated with sun-worship and the quest for a 'philosopher's stone' which would cure all sorts of diseases and transmute base elements into gold. According to a fifteenth-century manuscript, for example, Hermes was the 'fadir [father] of philosophris', and the 'prophete and kyng of Egipt' who had invented a range of potions which – though 'nought so incorruptible as is heavene of our lord god' – could restore an old man 'to the firste strenkthe of yougthe'.[50]

Around the same time, an Italian scholar discovered a set of Greek dialogues which appeared to be the work of Hermes. They excited the interest of the Florentine patron Cosimo de Medici, who ordered the humanist scholar Marsilio Ficino to set aside his work on Plato and produce a version of Hermes with the utmost urgency. Ficino's translation, which appeared in 1463, was called *Pimander*, after a character in the first dialogue who promises to lead us through the celestial spheres to the abode of 'mind [*nous*] the father of all, who is life and light', or the sun-king who 'gave birth to a man . . . who had his father's image'.

> If you want to see God, consider the sun, consider the circuit of the moon, consider the order of the stars . . . The sun, the greatest god of those in heaven, to whom all heavenly gods submit as to a king and ruler, this sun so very great, larger than earth and sea, allows stars smaller than him to circle above him. To whom does he defer, my child? Whom does he fear?

If this was the voice of pagan magic, it was not uncongenial to Christian humanists, and Ficino claimed that Hermes was 'called *Trismegistus*, or thrice-greatest, because he was the greatest philosopher and the greatest priest and the greatest king'. Hermes was not only the author of the 'ancient theology' which 'reached absolute perfection with the divine Plato', but also a prophet – a contemporary of Moses – who foresaw 'the ruin of the old religion, the rise of the new faith, the coming of Christ, and the judgment to come'.[51]

William Baldwyn followed Ficino in treating Hermes as the first and greatest of philosophers, 'whose workes bothe divyne and Philosophicall, excede farre all other that therof have entreted'.

> Of all the philosophers, of whome we purpose to wryte, Hermes, otherwise called Mercurius Trismegistus, is not only the most excellent, but also the most auncient . . . He was called Trysmegistus, because he was the chefest Philosopher, the chefest priest, & the chefest kinge. He prophesied of the regeneracyon, and beleved the resurrection of the body, and the immortalitie of the soul.

Baldwyn also invoked Hermes' insights into God (who 'created al thynges' and 'from whose knowledge nothynge maye be hyd') and the soul ('an incorruptible substaunce'), before projecting some proverbial moral philosophy onto him:

> He that at ones instance, an other wil defame
> Wyll also at an others to the last do the same.
> For none are daungerous and doutful to trust:
> As those that are redyest to obey every lust.

With sentiments like these, Hermes should, according to Baldwyn, be recognized as the common ancestor of Christianity and ancient moral philosophy.[52]

A generation later, William Kempe suggested that Hermes had in fact lived in the days of Abraham, when the English philosopher Druyus was imparting his doctrines to the French:

> In *Egypt* there were noble students of Philosophie and wisedome neere about the same time, with whome . . . Abraham disputed, and in many things instructed them better . . . And about this time there flourished in this Schoole Mercury Trismegist, the wonder of Philosophie.

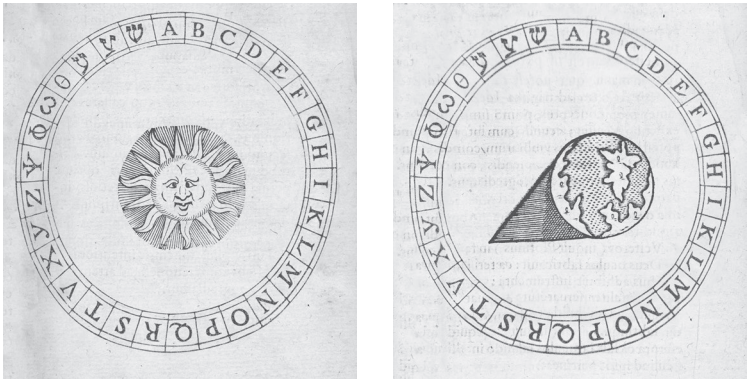
Moses himself had of course received an Egyptian education, and the same applied to the Greeks:

> Many famous learned men of Greece and other Countries from time to time afterward, for the bettering of their learning, resorted into Egypt, as to the head and spring thereof. In which number are Thales, Pythagoras, and Plato.

The first and greatest of philosophers, in short, were Egyptians rather than Greeks.[53]

Shadows of ideas

In March 1583 Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham, received information about 'sundry . . . Italians desirous to go to England after Easter', including a certain 'Signor Doctor Jordano Bruno . . . a professor in philosophy . . . whose religion I cannot commend'. Giordano Bruno had been born in Nola, outside Naples, in 1548, and entered a Dominican convent at the age of fifteen, graduating in theology twelve years later. But when he revealed himself as a disciple of Hermes Trismegistus rather than Aristotle he had to flee to Geneva, only to be expelled again. He found refuge in Toulouse, where he spent a couple of years teaching astronomy before moving to Paris in 1582 and publishing



The light of the sun and the shadow of the earth, from Giordano Bruno's *De Umbris Idearum* (1582)

a brief Latin book called *De umbris idearum* (*Shadows of Ideas*), which featured Hermes invoking ancient Egyptian mysteries concerning thirty intentions of shadows, thirty conceptions of ideas, and thirty segments of concentric circles. *Shadows* was nothing if not baffling, but it won its author a pension from Henry III, King of France.[54]

Bruno reached London in the spring of 1583 and took up residence with the French ambassador before making a trip to Oxford to show off his philosophical prowess. In his first lecture he derided every philosophical author apart from Hermes, with his cult of the sun, and Epicurus, as a proponent of an infinite universe. He also claimed that Hermes and Epicurus had been vindicated by the Polish mathematician Nicolaus Copernicus, who argued in 1543 that the earth is not the centre of the universe, but simply one of the planets going round the sun. The Oxford masters were unimpressed, as one witness would recall.

> When that Italian Didapper, who intituled himselfe *Philotheus Iordanus Brunus Nolanus, magis elaborata Theologia Doctor, &c* with a name longer than his body had . . . seene our University . . . his hart was on fire, to make himself by some worthy exploite, to become famous in the celebrious place . . . When he had more boldly then wisely, got up into the highest place of our best and most renowned schoole, stripping up his sleeves like some Jugler, and telling us much of *chentrum & chirculus & chircumferentia* (after the pronunciation of his Country language) he undertooke among very many other matters to set on foote the opinion of Copernicus, that the earth did

> goe round, and the heavens did stand still; whereas in truth it was his owne head which rather did run round, & his braines did not stand stil.
>
> When he had read his first Lecture, a grave man, & both then and now of good place in that University, seemed to himselfe, some where to have read those things which the Doctor propounded: but silencing his conceit till he heard him the second time, remembered himselfe then, and repayring to his study, found both the former and later Lecture, taken almost verbatim out of the workes of Marsilius Ficinus.

The Oxford masters goaded Bruno to proceed to his third lecture, 'that once more they might make trial of him', after which they confronted him with proof of his plagiarism, and as far as they were concerned that was 'an end of that matter'.[55]

But Bruno's self-confidence was undimmed, and when he got back to London he wrote a set of Italian dialogues called *La Cena de le Ceneri* (*Ash Wednesday Supper*), in which a charismatic Italian by the name of Theophilo explains a new philosophical synthesis to two dull Englishmen, Smitho and Prudentio Pedante. Theophilo begins by praising Copernicus: despite labouring in ignorance of the sun-philosophy of Hermes and the infinite universe of Epicurus, he had refuted the earth-centred cosmology of 'the ordinary popular philosophy', thus becoming, according to Theophilo, 'greater than all the astronomers who came before him'. Copernicus, who was 'sent by the gods as the dawn that announced the rising sun of the ancient true philosophy', had a worthy successor in the young Italian who had recently amazed the Oxford masters:

> Perhaps it is not fitting for me to praise him, when he is so close to me – as close, indeed, as I am to myself . . . Yet sometimes it is not only right but necessary to speak well of oneself . . . If Columbus is honoured in our times . . . then what are we to say of one who has pierced the air and penetrated the heavens, journeyed amongst the stars and crossed over the margins of the world, dissolving the imaginary barriers between the celestial spheres . . . throwing open the doors of truth and stripping nature of all her vestments and veils.

Theophilo then urges Smitho to reflect on the philosophical backwardness of his countrymen.

> Such are the fruits of England: search far and wide amongst today's doctors of grammar and you will never find such a constellation of pedantic pig-headed ignorance and presumption, mingled with a deep rustic rudeness that would try the patience of Job. And if you cannot believe it, go to Oxford and get them to tell you what happened when he [Bruno] disputed publicly with the doctors of theology in the presence of various

> members of the English nobility. Have them explain how learnedly he answered all their arguments, and how the unfortunate doctor who was meant to be the champion of the Academy on that grave occasion came to a halt fifteen times over fifteen syllogisms, like a chicken on a leash. Let them describe the old pig's incivility and discourtesy, and the patience and humanity with which Bruno replied – true Neapolitan that he is, and raised under a kindlier sky.

The confidence with which Bruno expounded the idea of an infinite universe without a centre made him a celebrity in London's Italian community, a favourite at the court of Elizabeth, and perhaps a model for Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and Prospero in *The Tempest*.[56]

When the French ambassador was recalled to Paris in October 1585, Bruno left with him, putting an end to his two-and-a-half year season as the most glamorous philosopher in England. He then enjoyed a peaceful interlude teaching philosophy at Wittenberg (another companion for Hamlet and Horatio?) before returning to Italy, where he was arrested by the Holy Office, and, after trials lasting eight years, burned alive on the Campo de' Fiori in Rome in 1600.

BECOMING A PHILOSOPHER

The poet John Donne studied at Oxford and Cambridge in the 1580s, trudging through Aristotle while developing a taste for Cicero, Seneca and above all the 'new philosophy' of Giordano Bruno.

> And new Philosophy cals all in doubt,
> The Element of fire is quite put out;
> The Sunne is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him, where to looke for it.

But Donne confessed to being 'no great voyager in other mens workes', and 'no swallower nor devourer of volumes nor pursuant of authors'. He considered philosophy closer to music than theology, and believed that – just as 'hearers and players are more delighted with voluntary than with sett musike' – it ought to be performed in a spirit of spontaneous improvisation.[57]

Felicity and Happinesse

Donne was not alone: more and more readers were coming to see themselves as potential philosophers, for whom the classic texts were not so much venerable antiques as amiable companions in their own quest for wisdom. They had

a special affection for Stoicism, with its doctrine that distress can be conquered by strength of mind, and in 1598 an Oxford master by the name of Thomas James produced an exquisite anthology called *The Moral Philosophie of the Stoicks*. 'If you have a desire to be of the Philosophers profession,' he said, you should 'lay before your face the manifolde troubles which your poore soule must be contented to endure', and purge yourself of 'false imagination'.

> The last fence and strongest rampier that we can have against . . . accidents is this, to be resolved that we cannot receive any harme but of our selves: and that if so be our reason be so well governed as it ought to bee, we cannot be wounded at al . . . O that we could be once fullie perswaded . . . not to feare death, good God how happie should we then be?

The Stoics were of course advocates of self-reliance rather than trust in divine providence, but James proposed to use them as 'a meanes to help Divinitie', claiming that 'no kinde of philosophie is more profitable and neerer approaching unto Christianitie.' Unluckily for him, however, the Stoics had also acquired a reputation for outrageous sanctimony, becoming the butt of a running joke which abused them as *stocks*, or stupid blockheads: 'Let's be no Stoickes,' as Tranio says in *Taming of the Shrew*, 'nor no stockes'.[58]

Many would-be philosophers preferred scepticism to Stoicism, and in 1579 a lawyer called Sir Thomas North came to their aid with *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, an attractive translation of a work written by the Greek author Plutarch around 100 CE. Plutarch's project was to defend the scepticism associated with Plato's academy, but his book was a collection of 'stories' rather than a treatise. It thus had the power – as North put it – to 'reache to all persons, serve for all tymes, teache the living, revive the dead'. Stories appealed directly to 'experience', North said: 'it is better to see learning in noble mens lives, than to reade it in Philosophers writings', which are 'private' and 'fitter for universities then cities'. He judged the market well, and his *Lives* enjoyed enormous popularity, as well as providing Shakespeare with the raw material for *Julius Caesar*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.[59]

Another side of Plutarch would surface in English in 1603, with the publication of *The Philosophie, commonlie called, the Morals*, translated by Philemon Holland. Holland was a Cambridge graduate and Master of Coventry Grammar School, and he knew he would be criticized for promoting the work of a 'poore Pagan' who knew nothing of 'the chiefe and principall thing, to wit, *the Law of God and his Trueth*'. But he maintained that Plutarch could do a double service for Christianity – first by exposing 'the contradictions of Stoick philosophers' (who never aligned their lives with their doctrines), and then by refuting the 'blasphemie' of the Epicureans

(whose morals were 'meere beastly brutalitie'). The Aristotelianism of the Arts course was no more than 'a gamesome sport, or vaine and toyish pratling, devised only for to gaine glory', but scepticism was a way of life, 'serious, grave and of weighty importance', and leading to 'that felicity and happinesse, which the divine Philosopher *Plato* so much recommendeth'.[60]

Unlike Wilson and Lever a generation before, Holland could assume that his readers were accustomed to philosophy in English translation, but he still provided a glossary of Greek–Latin words.

> *Academie* – A shadowy place full of groves, a mile distant from *Athens*, where Plato the philosopher was borne, and wherein hee taught. Of it, the Academicke Philosophers tooke their name, whose manner was to discourse and dispute of all questions, but to determine and resolve of nothing.

Holland went on through further newcomers such as *alphabet*, *alternative*, *anarchie*, *annales*, *anniversarie*, *antidote*, *antipathie*, *apathie*, *apologie*, *and aristocratie*, *atomi* and *axiomes*.

> *Aristocratie* – a forme of Government, or a State, wherein the nobles and best men be Rulers.
> *Atomi* – Indivisible bodies like to motes in the Sunne beames, of which *Democritus* and *Epicurus* imagined all things to be made.
> *Axiomes* – Were principal propositions in Logicke, of as great authoritie and force as Maximes in law.

Amongst the other new arrivals were *basis*, *centre*, *colleague*, *colonies*, *criticks* ('Grammarians, who tooke upon them to censure and judge Poemes and other works'), *cube*, *curvature* and *cynicke philosophers*:

> *Cynicke Philosophers* – Such as *Antisthenes*, *Diogenes* and their followers were: so named of . . . their dogged and currish manner of biting [the Greek κύων or *Kuōn* means 'dog']; barking at men, in noting their lives over rudely.

Holland also gave a welcome to *democratie*, *echo*, *elegi*, *emphaticall*, *empiricke physicians*, *etymologie*, *exstasie* ('a traunce or transportation of the minde'), *flatulent*, *habite*, *hemisphaere*, *hieroglyphicks* ('the Aegyptians sacred Philosophie, delivered not in characters and letters, but under the forme of living creatures and other things engraven'), *horizon*, *identity* ('samenesse, or being the very same'), *lyceum* and *lyrical poets*:

> *Lyceum* – A famous place neere to *Athens*, wherein Aristotle taught *Philosophie*. His followers, because they conferred and disputed walking in this Lyceum, were called *Peripatetici*.
> *Lyrical Poets* – Such as composed ditties and songs to be sung.

Next he introduced *metaphysicks* ('unto which all other knowledge serveth, and is to be referred'), *monarchie*, *mythologie*, *oligarchi*, *oracle* ('an answere or sentence given by the devil, or the supposed gods of the heathen'), *paederasti*, *paradox* ('strange or admirable opinion'), *positions* ('such sentences or opinions as are held in disputation'), *problemes* and *rivals* ('those who make love together, unto one and the same woman'). He concluded with *Stoicks* and *Scepticks*:

> *Stoicks* – Certeine Philosophers, whose first master was *Zeno*.
> *Scepticke philosophers* – who descended from *Pyrrho* [Pyrrho of Elis, a contemporary of Aristotle], for that they would consider of all matters in question, but determine of none: and in this respect they were more precise than the Academicks.[61]

I love not to smell of the inkhorne

Since the beginning of the century, a handful of philosophical authors across Europe had been experimenting with modern vernaculars instead of Latin. The practice was pioneered in Italy, and a set of dialogues on war, published in Italian in 1521, appeared in English translation in 1562. The author was commended to the Queen as a 'worthie Florentine . . . famous and excellent', but before long Niccolò Machiavelli became an object of general revulsion. His *Il Principe*, or *The Prince* – a brief advice book published shortly after his death in 1527 – contained a discussion of *crudeltà e pietà* which argued that a conscientious head of state should be prepared to act without mercy. The suggestion soon took on a life of its own, and Machiavelli's name became a byword for unscrupulous self-seeking: not only Make-Evil but also old Nick, the devil himself.[62]

In the 1590s Machiavelli started to appear on the English stage, thanks to Shakespeare ('notorious Machevile', 'subtle', 'politicke' and 'murtherous') and Marlowe ('admired I am of those that hate me most'). Meanwhile Protestants were using him as proof of the evil of Catholicism: a recusant priest was not only a 'politique Atheist' and 'Jugling Jesuite' but a 'Machievellian Turkish practiser . . . well practised in Machievel, turning religion into pollicie', while Catholics were 'turning the truth of God into a lye, and religion into superstition', because 'to forsweare, dissemble, and deceave is a commandement of their good Lord Machiavell.'[63]

Il Principe had not yet been translated into English, but it was known through a polemic which circulated widely in manuscript before being printed in 1602. Its argument was that Machiavelli had embraced 'the doctrine of *Epicurus*, (the doctor of Atheists, and master of Ignorance)

who esteemes, that all things are done and come to pass by fortune, and the meeting and encountring of atomes'. ('Can any sentence come from the divell of hell more detestable than this?') But readers were assured that this 'poison sent out of Italie' could not have any effect on 'most happy England', which was ruled by a Queen who had the virtues not only of a prince but also of a philosopher, in the ancient sense of the word: 'for in old time, that name was taken for a person full of wisedome and science, not for a dreaming unsociable man, as he is commonly taken at this day.'[64]

The reputation of Italian philosophy had not been enhanced by Giordano Bruno's visit to England, and it was soon eclipsed by translations of several French works advocating an urbane scepticism reminiscent of Plutarch. In a treatise which appeared in English in 1604, the Catholic priest Pierre Charron referred to the two ancient versions of scepticism – the gentle scepticism of the 'academics' and the stricter scepticism of Pyrrho and his disciple Carneades – both of which made an effective case for the doubtfulness of every possible opinion; but he clinched his argument by referring to 'the discoverie of the new world, the East and West Indies', which was revealing a greater diversity of human customs and opinions than the ancient sceptics could ever have imagined. Christians had traditionally shunned scepticism on the grounds that it promoted doubts about everything, including the existence of God; but Charron inverted the argument, claiming that by sweeping away bogus certainties scepticism made room for Christian faith.

> To plant and establish Christianity among infidels, or mis-beleeving people, as in these dayes in *China*, it were a very excellent method to begin with these propositions and perswasions: That all the wisedome of the world is but vanity . . . Man must first renounce and chase away all opinions and beleefs, wherewith the spirit is already anticipated and besotted, and present himself white, naked, and ready to receive it. Having well beaten and gained this point, and made men as it were Academickes or Pyrrhonians it is necessary that we propose the principles of Christianity as sent from heaven, brought by the Embassadour and perfect messenger of the divinity.

As well as permitting a new kind of Christian propaganda, scepticism was a powerful weapon against all kinds of intellectual conceit. 'I make open warre,' Charron said, 'against such spirits weake by nature, preoccupated, puffed up, and hindered by acquired wisdome' – against Aristotle in the first place, and then Plato and Thomas More, with their 'strange and elevated formes or images of life' and 'castles in the aire', and also the *pedanti* of Italy. He then denounced the Stoics, with their 'sullen frowning and

frampole austeritie of opinions, maners, words, actions and fashion of life', and 'counterfeit language . . . different and declining from the customes of other men'. From now on philosophy was going to make itself available to all – 'altogether pleasant, free, bucksom, and if I may so say, wanton too; and yet not withstanding, puissant, noble, generous, and rare'.[65]

Charron's exuberance seems to have inspired his translator too. Samson Lennard was a former soldier who said he preferred to stick to the 'plaine English phrase, because the gravity of the matter required it', and avoid all Latin forms. 'I love not to smell of the inkhorne,' he said, hoping that *Of Wisdome* would have the allure of an original work in English, and not 'seeme to be a translation'.[66]

A jerke of the French jargon

Charron did not claim Christian scepticism as his own invention. He had learned it from his friend Michel de Montaigne, a politician and philosopher who had died in 1592, and whose *Essayes* would become available in a luxurious but widely read English translation in 1603. Montaigne had a knack for making his journeys through the classics seem aimless and improvised, but they always ended up in a state of poised indecision, usually hinted at but occasionally spelled out.

> Whosoever seekes for any thing, commeth at last to this conclusion, and saith, that either he hath found it, or that it cannot be found, or that he is still in pursuit after it. Al philosophie is divided into these three kindes. Hir purpose is to seeke out the truth, the knowledge and the certainty. The Peripathetikes, the Epicurians, the Stoickes and others have thought they had found it . . . Carneades and the Academikes, have dispaired the finding of it, and judged that truth could not bee conceived by our meanes . . . Pyrrho, and other Skeptikes . . . say, that they are still seeking after trueth.

But the distinctions between philosophical sects are far more fluid than anyone likes to admit, and you should not worry if you find them confusing. There is no real difference, for example, between the two kinds of sceptics – 'Academikes' and 'Pyrrhonians' – and in any case both of them contradict themselves, by pretending to content themselves with 'doubt and ignorance' while secretly they yearn for truth. In any case they would need 'a new language' to 'expresse their General conceit'.

> Ours is altogether composed of affirmative propositions, which are directly against them. So that, when they say, I doubt, you have them fast by the sleeve, to make them avow, that at least you are assured and know, that they

> doubt . . . *A perswasion of certaintie, is a manifest testimonie of foolishnes, and of extreame uncertaintie*. And no people are lesse Philosophers and more foolish, then *Platoes* Phylodoxes, or lovers of their owne opinions.

But the Phylodoxes (or 'Dogmatists') are just as absurd as the sceptics: the reason they put on 'the face of assurance' is that they are tormented by doubts, so they are not really dogmatists after all, but sceptics 'under a resolving forme'.[67]

The gift that Montaigne offered his readers was not so much a new doctrine as a new literary form: the playful and self-mocking 'essay' which, instead of yearning for certainties, relishes its own fallibility.

> There's more adoe to interprete interpretations, than to interprete things: and more bookes upon bookes, then upon any other subject. We doe but enter-glose ourselves. All swarmeth with commentaries: Of Authors, their is great penurie . . . Our opinions are grafted one upon an other. The first serveth as a stocke to the second; the second to the third. Thus we ascend from steppe to steppe. Whence it followeth, that the highest-mounted hath often more honour, than merite. For, he is got-uppe but one inch above the shoulders of the last save one.

In order to be sure of his intellectual independence, Montaigne proposed a new topic for philosophical inquiry: his own person, or at least the implied author of his essays – a kind of chuckling Socrates or incorrigible Falstaff. 'I studie my selfe more than any other subject,' he wrote: 'it is my supernaturall Metaphysike, it is my natural Philosophie.'[68]

Like the ancient Stoics, Montaigne regarded self-knowledge as the only source of wisdom and virtue; but unlike them he did not think we could ever reason ourselves out of our natural beliefs.

> Let a Philosopher be put in a Cage made of small and thin-set yron-wyre, and hanged on the top of our Ladies Church steeple in *Paris*; he shall, by evident reason, perceive that it is impossible hee should fall downe out of it; yet can he not chuse . . . but the sight of that exceeding height must needs dazle his sight, and amaze or turne his senses.

Philosophical self-examination, in short, gives us little to contemplate apart from our own inconstancy, confusion and unfathomable folly.

> This supple variation and easie-yeelding contradiction, which is seene in us, hath made some to imagine, that wee had two soules; and others, two faculties . . . foresomuch as such a rough diversitie cannot wel sort & agree in one simple subject . . . If I speake diversly of my selfe, it is because I look diversly upon my selfe. All contrarieties are found in hir . . . shamefast,

> bashfull, insolent, chaste, luxurious, peevish, pratling, silent, fond, doting, labourious, nice, delicate, ingenious, slowe, dull, froward, humorous, debonaire, wise, ignorant, false in wordes, true-speaking, both liberall, covetous and prodigall. All these I perceive in some measure or other to bee in me, according as I stirre or turne my selfe; and whosoever shall heedefully survay and consider himselfe, shall finde this volubilitie and discordance to be in himselfe, yea and in his very judgement. I have nothing to say entirely, simply, and with soliditie of my selfe, without confusion, disorder, blending, mingling; and in one word, *Distinguo* is the most universal part of my logike.

The only thinkers Montaigne really liked were Plutarch and Seneca, whose teachings were 'the prime and creame of Philosophie . . . presented with a plaine, unaffected, and pertinent fashion'. Cicero had his admirers too: but 'boldely to confesse the trueth,' Montaigne said, 'his maner of writing seemeth very tedious unto me, as doth all such-like stuffe'.

> I had rather understand my selfe well in my selfe, then in Cicero . . . To learne that another hath either spoken a foolish jest, or committed a sottish act, is a thing of nothing. A man must learne, that he is but a foole.

The foolishness of others may be amusing, but our own folly is, as Montaigne put it, 'a much more ample and important instruction'.[69]

John Florio, the translator of the *Essayes*, said he had done his best to dress Montaigne in the English fashion. But unlike Samson Lennard, translator of Charron, he wanted his translation to sound a bit outlandish. Montaigne had always presented himself with a certain *'douceur Françoise'* – 'sometimes extravagant, often od-crocheted, and ever selfe-conceited' – and Florio did not think he could 'philosophate' and 'fantastiquize' in English without borrowing 'uncouth words' from French (and indirectly from Latin), giving a short list of examples: 'entraine, conscientious, endeare, tarnish, comporte, efface, facilitate, ammusing, debauching, regret, effort, emotion'.

> Shall I apologize translation? Why but some holde (as for their free-hold) that such conversion is the subversion of Universities . . . Yea but my olde fellow Nolano [Giordano Bruno] tolde me, and taught publikely, that from translation all science had its of-spring. Likely, since even Philosophie, Grammar, Rhethorike, Logike, Arithmetike, Geometrie, Astronomy, Musike and all Mathematikes yet holde their name of the Greekes: and the Greekes draw their baptizing water from the conduit-pipes of the Egiptians, and they from the well-springs of the Hebrews or Chaldees.

'Learning cannot be too common,' as Florio put it, 'and the commoner the better.' By adapting the English language to the 'delightsome varieties' of his author – 'Sole-Maister of Essayes' – Florio hoped to get philosophy to 'talk our tongue (though many times with a jerke of the French *Jargon*)'.[70]

To goe beyond others

Florio's description of Montaigne as 'Sole-Maister of Essayes' was calculated to give offence to the pampered son of the humanist courtier Sir Nicholas Bacon. Francis Bacon was a lawyer and Member of Parliament, an advocate of Ramist logic and author, in 1597, of a book of *Essayes*, which tried, in fewer than twenty pages of English, to rival what Montaigne had done in a thousand pages of French. ('Some bookes are to bee tasted, others to bee swallowed, and some few to bee chewed and digested.') Before long, however, Bacon struck off in a different direction, and in 1605, when he was in his fifties, he produced a treatise on the future of philosophy which was in effect anti-Montaigne: in *Of the advancement of Learning* he sought to show that the old-fashioned urbanities of humanism and scepticism need to be jettisoned in favour of a forward-looking pursuit of 'endlesse progresse'.[71]

Bacon was a politician, and *The advancement of Learning* was addressed not to the fool within us all but to James Stuart, who ascended the British throne on the death of Elizabeth in 1603. He began by comparing His Royal Majesty to the thrice-blessed Hermes, with 'the power and fortune of a King; the knowledge and illumination of a Priest; and the learning and universalitie of a Philosopher'. He then boxed the philosophical compass by listing various obstacles to the advancement of learning. He put 'Emperique Statesmen' and 'politique men' in the first place – in other words, Machiavellians who puff themselves up with Italianate '*Ragioni di Stato*' and dismiss their rivals as '*Pedantes*'. Then there were the humanists or 'Intellectualists', whose 'delicate learning' dealt in 'wordes and not matter', and who '*sought truth in their owne little worlds, and not in the great and common world*'. Something similar could be said of the 'contentious learning' of 'Schoole-men' – Arts-course philosophers who embroiled themselves in 'monstrous altercations and barking questions' while their wits remained 'shut up in the Cels of a few Authors (cheifly Aristotle their Dictator) as their persons were shut up in the Cels of Monasteries and Colledges'. If tradition is not constantly challenged by innovation, Bacon said, truth will be infested with 'fantasticall learning', and turn 'degenerate and imbased'. 'For as water will not ascend higher, than the levell of the first spring head, from whence it descendeth: so knowledge derived from *Aristotle*, and

exempted from libertie of examination, will not rise againe higher, than the knowledge of *Aristotle*.' The obstacle to philosophical progress was not antiquity as such, but the habit of treating it with uncritical reverence. 'Antiquity deserveth that reverence, that men should make a stand thereupon, and discover what is the best way, but when the discovery is well taken then to make progression. And to speake truly, *Antiquitas seculi Iuventus Mundi*.' Antiquity was the youth of the world, and we must cast off its prejudices so that 'knowledge may not bee as a Curtezan for pleasure, & vanitie only, or as a bond-woman to acquire and gaine to her Masters use, but as a Spouse, for generation, fruit, and comfort'.[72]

Instead of appealing to eternal principles, Bacon invoked the 'condition of these times'. The consummate wisdom of King James, together with 'the Art of Printing, which communicateth Bookes to men of all fortunes' and 'the opennesse of the World by Navigation', was allowing knowledge to flourish as never before, particularly in Britain. After two periods of vigour long ago, learning was ready to make a 'third Visitation' and, with the blessing of a learned King, 'this third period of time will farre surpasse that of the *Graecian* and *Romane* Learning', and would of course express itself in English rather than Greek or Latin.[73]

But none of this could happen until the universities were reformed. They should stop treating the Arts as preliminaries, to be 'studied but in passage' by young men on their way to the so-called 'Professions'. They should recognize 'Philosophie and Universalitie' as 'Fundamental knowledges', and start paying proper salaries to Arts-course teachers so as to encourage 'the ablest man . . . to appropriate his whole labour, and continue his whole age, in that function'.[74]

Bacon concluded by confessing his own limitations. 'I could not bee true and constant to the argument I handle,' he wrote, 'if I were not willing to goe beyond others; but yet not more willing, then to have others go beyond mee againe.' He had, however, touched on every topic that his contemporaries would have associated with the word *philosophy*, from the stultified Aristotelianism of the Arts course to the inspiring examples of Ramus and Erasmus, Seneca and Cicero, and Plato and Socrates, who themselves drew on traditions going back to Moses and Hermes Trismegistus. More or less absent-mindedly, Bacon had produced the first philosophical work in English that was neither a commentary, nor a compilation, nor a translation. By a long and circuitous route, philosophy was starting to speak English.[75]

1651
Puritans, philosophers, comedians

On the afternoon of Sunday, 7 September 1651, Benjamin Whichcote rose to address a large congregation in Trinity Church, Cambridge. Whichcote was a leader of the so-called 'Puritans' – plain-speaking Protestants intent on purging the Church of England of the last vestiges of Roman Catholicism – and his Sunday sermons (or 'lectures', as he called them) had been drawing crowds for fifteen years. But today's lecture was going to be special: Whichcote, who had recently become provost of King's College and vice-chancellor of the University, would be setting out some proposals for religious and political peace.

The civil wars which flared up in Britain in 1642 had culminated in the beheading of King Charles in Whitehall on 30 January 1649. His son Charles was then crowned as his successor in Scotland, while England and Wales were reconstituted as a 'Commonwealth' under a Puritan-dominated Parliament. In the summer of 1651, Charles II led an invasion of England, but it was crushed by Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army at Worcester on 3 September, and Parliament had now called on preachers like Whichcote to give thanks.[1]

PHILOSOPHY AND THE DAY OF WRATH

Cambridge was a stronghold for Puritans and parliamentarians – unlike Oxford, which favoured the monarchy. But the Cambridge reformers seem to have spent more time fighting each other than making common cause against papists and royalists. They swapped accusations of Socinianism, Arianism and other deviations from Trinitarian orthodoxy, and their disagreements were exacerbated by quarrels over philosophy and the future of the universities.[2]

Philosophers and other heathens

Protestants had always decried the Arts course for its Catholic affiliations and its dependence on Aristotle. But while the first generation of reformers drew inspiration from the humanist rediscovery of ancient moral philosophy, their Puritan successors tended to see philosophy in its entirety as essentially anti-Christian. However you looked at it, the church was in trouble: 'every Altar smoaks more from Sulphur then Perfumes,' as the poet John Cleveland put it, and 'he that undertakes to become the Conciliator of the Universe, shall finde enough to do.'[3]

Whichcote hoped to conciliate nonetheless. He was a Puritan, but a moderate one, and he asked his audience to recognize that 'in all things saving' – in every question affecting their spiritual fate – 'all truly good men among us, do substantially agree.'

> Good men, differing in *their own* expressions, yet agree in scripture formes of words: acknowledging, the meaning of the holy Ghost in them is true; and they endeavour to understand and finde it out, as well as they can: therfore they should continue friends, and think, they agree; rather then think, they do not agree.

Sermons could be contentious in those days, with officious note-takers listening out for deviations from orthodoxy. On this occasion the critics included Anthony Tuckney, Master of Emmanuel College, the notorious 'seminary for Puritans' where Whichcote himself had once studied. The following day Tuckney sent a reprimand to his former student. 'I verily beleive,' he wrote, 'that Christ by his bloud never intended to purchase such a peace; in which the most Orthodox . . . with Papists, Arians, Socinians, and all the worst Haeretiques, must be put all into a bag together.' After receiving a conciliatory reply, Tuckney returned to the attack. Whichcote had once been 'studious and pious' and 'very loving and observant', he said; but then he fell amongst 'Philosophers, and other Heathens' – especially 'PLATO and his schollars' – and now seemed to be plotting to replace true Christianity with 'Platonique faith', steeped in 'Philosophie and Metaphysicks', or 'Moral Divinitie . . . with a little tincture of Christ added'. Whichcote needed to remember that sermons are 'less affecting the heart, when so buisying the head', and that faith is fed not by 'Nature', 'Reason', or 'Mind and Understanding', but by plain gospel truths. He should heed St Paul's warning against 'words in an unknown tongue', and stop spicing his lectures with 'schoole-language . . . farre different from the scripture'. Above all he should remember that 'scripture scarce anywhere

speaks particularly of the Philosophers and wise men of the Heathens, with approbation and honour, but generallie with dislike and contempt.' Philosophy had been 'begot in the depth of anti-Christian darkeness', Tuckney said, and was destined to 'vanish in darkeness; at the light of a brighter day: which wee hope is approaching'.[4]

Synagogues of Satan

Hostility to philosophy at Cambridge went back to the beginning of the century, when a fellow of Christ's College called William Ames grew so exasperated with the Aristotelianism of the Arts course that he fled to the Netherlands, where he ministered to several zealous English congregations. In 1627 he wrote a tract entitled *Medulla Theologiae* (translated as *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*), which argued that the Bible contained 'all things which are necessary to salvation', and that theology rather than philosophy was 'of all Arts, the supreame . . . proceeding in a special manner from God'. He advised his fellow Christians to shun all 'ostentation of humane wisdom' and avoid 'words or sentences of *Latine*, *Greeke*, or *Hebrew*, which the people do not understand'. Bible truths could not be harmed by 'drinesse of style, and harshnesse of . . . words', and any explanation they required could be provided through the 'logick analysis' of 'that greatest master of Arts, Peter Ramus'.[5]

In the 1640s Ames's objections to philosophy were revived by a group of self-styled 'separatists' who denounced the Arts faculties for trying to disparage 'the simplicitie of the Apostles' and

> stop the peoples mouths that cry so hard against them, by telling them that it is not for Lay-men to be too confident, being no Scholers, and ignorant of the Originall; that the Originall hath it otherwise then our Translations: And thus they keep all in a misterie, that they onely may be the Oracles to dispense what, and how they please.

Now that the scriptures were available in English, however, 'why should not Englishmen understand them?' There was 'nothing in Hebrew or Greek but may be exprest in English', and scholars had no right to suggest

> that the Scriptures though we have them in our owne tongue, are not yet to be understood by us, without their helpe and interpretation, so that in effect we are in the same condition with those we have so long pitied, that are forbid to have the Scriptures in their owne tongue . . . Is the Cabinet open to us, and doe we yet want a Key? has so much labour beene spent? so many Translations extant, and are we yet to seeke?

Masters of Arts who flaunted their 'skill in Arts & Languages' and praised the 'idiome and proprieties of the Hebrew and Greeke languages' were in effect dishonouring their God.[6]

Many Puritans believed that the civil strife they were living through heralded the 'great day of wrath' foretold in the New Testament. They thought that Christ was about to return to earth, and specifically to England, in order to smite the Church of Rome ('mother of harlots') and build a 'new Jerusalem', where he would reign for ever as 'Lord of lords, and King of kings'. But he was not going to come back until the last relics of papism had been destroyed; and as far as the separatists were concerned, that meant the universities had to be dissolved just as the monasteries had been a century before. The 'Prognosticke of the great whore of Babylon will light upon them', and their books – 'their whole Aristotle, . . . all their Physicks and Metaphysicks, and all their Philosophy' – would be consumed by fire, 'for there is a mighty heavy Judgement comming even over you Universities . . . and all that belongeth thereunto'.[7]

William Dell had been a fellow of Emmanuel College before becoming a minister to the New Model Army, and in 1649 he returned to Cambridge as Master of Caius College. But he did not come as a friend. Universities were, in Dell's opinion, an '*Antichrists Kingdom*', founded 'in the *darkest* times of *Popery*'. They were riddled with '*Philosophy* or *Heathenism*', and their Arts faculties were 'Synagogues of Satan' which 'stink before God with the most loathsome abomination'. They were an '*Antichristian Fountaine*' spewing out a '*carnal Clergy* . . . bred up in *Philosophie*', who reminded him of the soldiers who put a crown of thorns on Christ's head and a reed in his hand instead of a sceptre: 'these *Universities* are those Antichristian Souldiers,' Dell said, 'and this reed is *Philosophy*.' But the universities would not be able to withstand the 'Word of Christ' expressed 'in the clearnesse and plainnesse of the gospel', and their fate was 'plainly foretold' in the Bible, when the 'throne of the beast' is smothered in the wrath of an avenging angel.[8]

BODY AND SOUL

Whichcote's 'plea for peace' was bound to arouse hostility, but he had a powerful argument on his side. His opponents could not deny that the 'foundation of Protestancy' lies in the principle that 'everie Christian must thinke and beleeve, as he findes cause.' But they also had to admit that inward convictions can be contaminated by sin, folly or false prophecy,

in which case they must surely be examined in the light of reason. 'I allways thought,' Whichcote wrote, 'that that doth most affect and command the hearte; which doth most fullie satisfie and convince the minde: and what reacheth the minde, but reason?' The fact that the great philosophers were pagans who knew nothing of Christ did not mean that Christians had nothing to learn from them.

> The time I have spent in Philosophers, I have no cause to repent-of; and the use I have made of them, I dare not disowne . . . I find the Philosophers that I have read, good; so far as they go . . . I have thought itt profitable to provoke to jealousie lazie or loose Christians, by Philosophers.

Tuckney responded by distinguishing between practical logic and philosophical speculation: Ramus's logic was useful in the analysis of scripture, but metaphysics and ethics had nothing to offer except 'notion and speculation', and on occasion heresy. Spanish Jesuits who used Aristotle to shore up Catholicism were bad enough, and French sceptics who advocated 'libertie of opposing, or doubtfullie disputing' were worse. But the most dangerous philosopher of all, according to Tuckney, was a newfangled French papist by the name of Renatus Cartesius or René des Cartes, whose works – written in Latin and French over the last fifteen years and now beginning to appear in English translation – were already winning converts, even in Cambridge.[9]

Masters and possessours of Nature

Descartes had not written much, but he was famous throughout Europe as the thinker most likely to fulfil Francis Bacon's dream of freeing philosophy from the tyranny of tradition. Bacon himself had died in political disgrace in 1626, at the age of sixty-five, but his reputation was sustained by expanded editions of his *Essays*, and by a utopian tale called *New Atlantis*, which was published in 1627 as a supplement to a collection of his scientific essays. *New Atlantis* described an institution dedicated to 'the Knowledge of Causes, and Secrett Motions of Things; and the Enlarging of the bounds of *Humane Empire*, to the Effecting of all Things possible', and Descartes drew inspiration from it when it appeared in French in 1631.[10]

He was then in his mid-thirties, living in seclusion in the Netherlands. He had been working for some years on a treatise called *Le Monde* (*The World*), in which he hoped to show that there is a mechanical explanation for everything in the natural world: not only the behaviour of terrestrial objects, including human bodies, but also – following the discoveries of

Copernicus and his followers Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler and most recently Galileo Galilei – the movements of the planets (including the earth) as they circle round the sun. Descartes believed that his own aspirations echoed those of *New Atlantis*, and in the summer of 1632 he appealed for a rich patron to support 'the advancement of the sciences' by paying for astronomical observations 'in accordance with the method of Francis Bacon'. A year later, however, the office of the Inquisition in Rome forced Galileo to renounce Copernicanism, and Descartes took fright: 'if this view is false,' he said, 'then so too are the entire foundations of my philosophy.' Galileo was a venerable scholar, and if he could be persecuted for saying that the earth goes round the sun, there was not much hope for a young outsider like Descartes. *Le Monde* was almost ready for the printer, but Descartes decided to withdraw it.[11]

In 1637 Descartes brought out a different book, comprising three 'essays' covering optics, meteorology and geometry. (He was prudent enough to avoid astronomy.) There was also an introductory essay called *Discours de la Méthode* (probably modelled on *New Atlantis*), which took the form of an idealized intellectual autobiography. It traced the journey which had taken the young Descartes from the Aristotelian subtleties he studied at school to the practical challenges of life as a soldier and then the invention of a 'method' which, he claimed, enabled him to discover the mathematical principles – or 'laws of nature', as he called them – that govern the physical world. He now intended – in the words of an English translation which appeared in 1649 – to establish further 'points of knowledge, which may be very profitable in this life', and hoped to replace the 'speculative Philosophy which is taught in the Schools' with 'a practicall one', so that

> knowing the force and workings of Fire, Water, Air, of the Starrs, of the Heavens, and of all other bodies which environ us, distinctly, as we know the several trades of our Handicrafts, we might in the same manner employ them to all uses to which they are fit, and so become masters and possessours of Nature.

He concluded by appealing for help from 'all good Wits',

> contributing every one, according to his inclination and power, to those experiments [*expériences*] which are to be made, and communicating also to the publique all the things they should learn; so that . . . joyning the lives and labors of many in one, we might all together advance further then any particular Man could do.[12]

A long chaine of discourses

Descartes's appeal drew an enthusiastic response from an English Catholic called Sir Kenelm Digby, who believed that the 'never enough praysed Gentleman Monsieur Des Cartes' had left us with 'no excuse for being ignorant of any thing worth the knowing'. In 1640 Digby invited his hero to come over to England, where he could pursue his inquiries at perfect leisure. Descartes was tempted. 'I have been thinking of moving to England for more than ten years,' he said: religion should not be a problem ('I have been told that the King is a Catholic at heart'), and 'I would prefer living there to many other places.' Digby renewed the invitation when he visited the Netherlands in 1641, but Descartes prevaricated. A year later, he heard that Digby had been imprisoned on suspicion of political conspiracy, and he abandoned the plan, noting that 'things are going very badly in that country.'[13]

Digby was released after a year and fled to Paris, where he worked on a comprehensive exposition of Descartes in English. A luxurious edition of *Two Treatises* appeared in 1644, and when some passages were translated for Descartes he declared himself satisfied, saying that 'my opinions seem to accord easily with his.'[14]

In the first of the *Treatises*, Digby explained Descartes's mathematical approach to the natural world and contrasted it with Aristotelianism. 'Imagine I have an apple in my hand,' he wrote: 'the same fruite worketh different effects upon my severall senses', which then 'send messengers to my fantasie with newes of the discoveries they have made' – the apple's chilliness and weight, for instance, the reds and greens of its skin, or its sweetness and mellow perfume. The natural 'bent and inclination of my understanding' will be to 'pinne those ayery superstructures upon the materiall thinges themselves', as if sensations of temperature, colour, smell and flavour represented 'Entities', 'Qualities' or 'actuall Beings' that exist inside the apple, rather like its pips. But the inference is unwarranted, according to Digby: our senses mislead us when they present us with the 'forms' and 'qualities' of objects, just as they misled Aristotle and his followers: in truth such notions arise not from the world around us but from the structure of our sensory apparatus.[15]

The old philosophers had assumed that every name or notion reflects 'some real positive entity or thing'. If a wall was white or black, for instance, they postulated 'an *Entity* or *Quality*, whose essence is to be *whitenesse or blacknesse*, diffused through the wall'. Aristotelian jargon was simply a mask for ignorance and incuriosity, and it reminded Digby

of a man in the mortar trade who sent his son to grammar school, only to find that he was learning nothing except long words: 'being asked by his father, what was Latine for *bread*?' the boy 'answered *breadibus*; and for *beere*? *beeribus*' – upon which he was told to 'putt off his *hosibus* and *shoosibus*, and fall to his old trade of treading *Morteribus*'.[16]

Descartes had triumphed over deceptive verbiage, according to Digby, by demonstrating that everything in the physical world can be 'reduced' to the 'local motion' of 'particles' in conformity with mathematical 'laws of nature', which meant that there was no longer any need to postulate Aristotelian 'forms' or 'qualities' or any other 'mysterious causes above the reach of human nature to comprehend'. He had thus shown that 'nothing whatsoever we know to be a body, can be exempted from the declared lawes, and orderly motions, of Bodies', and hence that 'knowledge hath no limits', and 'nothing escapeth the toyles of science.' But that was only half the story. Descartes had also shown that when we turn our attention on ourselves, we 'pass the Rubicon of experimentall knowledge' and move beyond 'the boundes that experience hath any iurisdiction over'. Human thoughts, deeds and artefacts are 'of such a nature, as they can not be reduced unto those principles, by which all corporeall actions are effected', and our existence must therefore involve 'some other thing besides that one which we see: . . . somewhat else that is not a body: which . . . must necessarily be a spiritual substance'.[17]

Digby had led an unlucky life. He was three years old when his father was executed in 1606 for his part in the Catholic conspiracy known as the Gunpowder Plot. He was brought up by his grieving mother, and after a brief period at Oxford fell in love with an intellectually accomplished young woman called Venetia Stanley. They married in secret and enjoyed intense happiness, but within seven years she was dead, and he never ceased to grieve for her: a death-bed portrait by his friend Sir Anthony van Dyck was his constant companion for the rest of his life. For two years he took refuge in Gresham College – an independent society of scholars that had been operating in London since the end of the last century – and studied the principles of chemistry. But what really interested him was not natural science itself, but its implications for the nature of the soul and its chances of surviving bodily death.

The problem was an ancient one, and the most popular solution was to treat the soul as a self-sufficient entity that takes up temporary residence in a human body at birth and departs at the moment of death. Plato and Pythagoras supported that opinion, but Aristotle rejected it and so did his Christian followers, who maintained that the soul is the 'form' or 'harmony'

of the body, and incapable of existing separately. (Hence their commitment to bodily resurrection.) The doctrine had not always carried conviction, however, and John Donne struggled with it when illness brought him close to death. What happened, he wondered, when someone dies?

> The *Bell* rings out . . . His *soule* is gone; *whither*? Who saw it *come in*, or who saw it *goe out*? *No body*; yet every body is sure, he *had one*, and *hath none*. If I will aske meere *Philosophers*, what the *soule* is, I shall find amongst them, that will tell me, it is nothing but the *temperament* and *harmony . . . of the Elements in the Bodie* . . . and so, in itselfe is *nothing*, no *seperable substance*, that overlives the body . . . But yet I have one neerer mee than all these, mine owne *Charity*; I ask that; & that tells me, *He is gone to everlasting rest* and *joy* . . . That *body* which scarce *three minutes* since was such a *house*, as that that *soule* . . . was scarse thorowly content, to leave that for *Heaven*: that *body* hath lost the *name* of a *dwelling house*, because none dwells in it, and is making haste to lose the name of a *body*, and dissolve to putrefaction.

Ordinary Christians would never stop thinking of their souls as '*seperate substances*', according to Donne, and philosophers were wasting their breath when they tried to dissuade them.[18]

Digby believed that Descartes had resolved the problem, and the second of his *Two Treatises* was devoted to 'the Nature of Mans soule'. Drawing on private conversations with Descartes, he argued that many of the functions commonly attributed to the soul – so-called 'animal' functions, such as passion and sensation – are no more than mechanical processes taking place in the brain and nerves; but the mental, intellectual or 'reasonable' functions do not depend on the body at all. It followed that human souls comprise nothing but 'reason' or 'discourse', in other words 'apprehensions', or thoughts 'interlaced and woven one within an other'. Discourse, according to Digby, is the power that produces not only 'those actions of man, which are peculiarly his', but also the 'thinges which result out of them', such as 'houses, Townes, Tillage, Handicrafts, Armes, shippes, Commonwealthes, Armies, Bookes, and the like . . . In all these we finde one generall thridde, to run quite through them . . .; which is, a long chaine of discourses.' He went on to claim that the soul, consisting as it does of discourse, must be an independent 'thing' or 'substance'. Our bodies can change from one day to the next, he said, but we ourselves remain 'the very same thing, the same *Ego* as before'.

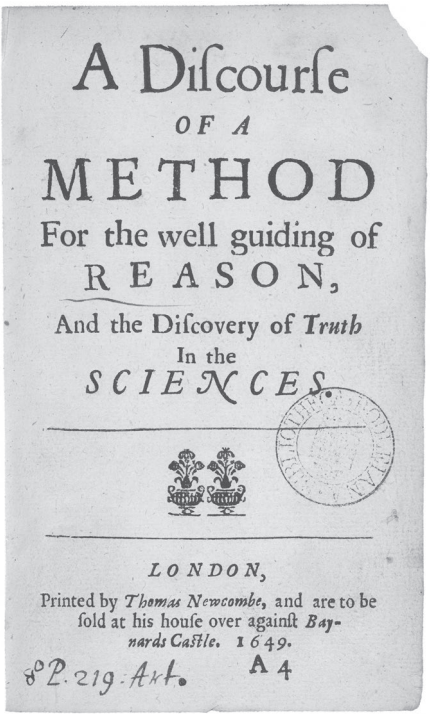
> When all body is abstracted in us, there still remaineth a *substance*, a *thinker*, an *Ego*, or *I*, that in it selfe is no whitt diminished, by being (as I may say) stripped out of the case it was enclosed in.

If the soul can exist apart from the body, then (according to Digby, following Descartes) it must be exempt from 'the causes of other thinges mortality'. And it seemed to follow, therefore, that Digby's deepest hope would be fulfilled, and that after his death he would be reunited for ever with his wife.[19]

A Cambridge Cartesian

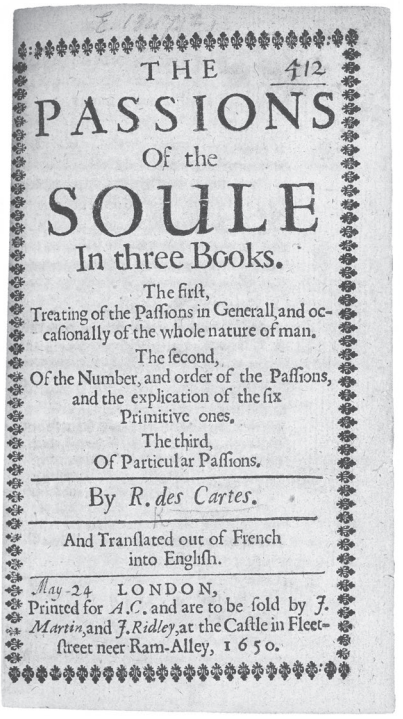
Following Digby's advocacy in *Two Treatises*, several of Descartes's more popular works – those written in French rather than Latin – appeared in English translation. The *Discourse of a Method*, which appeared in 1649, was promoted as a 'New Model of Philosophy', comparable to Cromwell's army, a 'Masterpiece' like the paintings of van Dyck, and an exercise in Stoic grace – a 'Divertissement to those who would rather Reform themselves, then the rest of the world'. *The Passions of the Soule by R. des Cartes* came out in 1650 (only a few months after the original French edition) complete with a preface invoking Francis Bacon and appealing for money for 'experiments' that might cost 'the whole Revenue of two or three of the richest Kings on earth'. When an essay on musical harmony was translated three years later, Descartes was commended as 'one of the fairest Flowers in that Garland of the *Mathematicks*, wherewith this *Century* . . . may, without breach of Modesty, take the right hand of *Antiquity*, and stand as well the *Wonder*, as *Envy* of Posterity'.[20]

The English editions presented Descartes as a Baconian inquirer, untrammelled by tradition, as well as an elegant stylist and distinguished mathematician, but he was also known to be a Catholic and perhaps an enemy to the parliamentary cause. As far as Tuckney was concerned, the 'Cartesian' method (as he called it) was an expression of monstrous arrogance. Descartes had begun the *Discours* by claiming that he owed his achievements not to any special talent but to a decision he made long ago, to think things out for himself. 'As for all the Opinions which I had till then receiv'd into my beleef,' he said, 'I could not do better then to undertake to expunge them once for all, that afterwards I might place in their stead, either others which were better or the same again, as soon as I should have adjusted them to the rule of reason.' Tuckney regarded this declaration of intellectual independence as an affront to the trust in scriptural tradition which is the foundation of true religion. 'Reason hath too much given to itt in the mysteries of Faith,' he said, while 'right reason' was 'much talkt-of; which I cannot tell, where to finde'. Cartesian doctrine seemed to treat the simple beliefs of early Christians as if they were 'errours, or not established truths; till I coming *de novo*, without anie prepossession of them, shall studie and reason my selfe into a beleife of them'. Tuckney did not directly


A Diſcourſe
OF A
METHOD
For the well guiding of
REASON,
And the Diſcovery of *Truth*
In the
SCIENCES.

LONDON,
Printed by *Thomas Newcombe*, and are to be ſold at his houſe over againſt *Baynards Caſtle.* 1649.

8°P. 219. Art. A 4


THE 412
PASSIONS
Of the
SOULE
In three Books.

The firſt,
Treating of the Paſſions in Generall, and occaſionally of the whole nature of man.

The ſecond,
Of the Number, and order of the Paſſions, and the explication of the ſix Primitive ones.

The third,
Of Particular Paſſions.

By *R. des Cartes.*

And Tranſlated out of French into Engliſh.

May 24 LONDON,
Printed for *A.C.* and are to be ſold by *J. Martin*, and *J. Ridley*, at the Caſtle in Fleet-ſtreet neer Ram-Alley, 1650.

Descartes's entry into English: *Discourse of a Method* (1649) and *Passions of the Soule* (1650)

accuse Whichcote of drawing heretical conclusions from Descartes's method; but he had heard of 'something somewhat this way . . . within this twelvemonth, out of the pulpitte', somewhere in Cambridge.[21]

Tuckney did not name his heretical colleague, but he was clearly referring to a young friend of Whichcote's called Henry More, who was a fellow of Christ's College, a prolific author, and a declared admirer of the 'sublime and subtill Mechanick' called 'Mounsieur des Chartes'. At the end of 1648 More had written to Descartes, announcing that 'my own thoughts run entirely along the channels in which your fertile mind has anticipated me', but permitting himself to question Descartes's austere account of the fundamental properties of matter. He was rewarded with a gracious reply about how movements of particles give rise to sensations, and he responded by urging Descartes to amend his heartless view that animals are mere machines

and therefore incapable of feeling pain. More was looking forward to a reply to another letter when he learned that Descartes had died in February 1650, while staying at the court of Queen Christina of Sweden in Stockholm.[22]

For More, Descartes's death at the age of fifty-three was both a personal shock and a setback for 'true knowledge of God and religion'. He feared that young men were falling into '*libertine* mirth and freenesse' in reaction to the 'Christian gloriation' of puritanical 'enthusiasts'. The question of atheism was, he said, becoming

> very seasonable for the times wee are in, and are coming on, wherein Divine Providence granting a more large release from *Superstition*, and permitting a freer perusall of matters of Religion, then in former Ages, the Tempter would take advantage where hee may, to carry men captive out of one darke prison into another, out of *Superstition* into *Atheisme* itself.

Anyone who appealed to the authority of the Bible was, according to More, liable to be dismissed as a '*superstitious Sneaksy*, or *moped Legallist*', and the only remedy lay in rational proofs of the kind proposed by Digby ('that learned Knight our own Countryman') and of course Descartes.[23]

Descartes based his defence of religion not on sacred books, but on 'innate notions and ideas' and 'naturall facultyes' that are present in every one of us. We are all familiar, for example, with the idea of perfection, and can therefore comprehend 'an *Idea* of a *Being absolutely and fully perfect*'– in a word, God. But such a notion 'implyes in it *necessary Existence*', and it follows – according to More's paraphrase of Descartes – that 'unlesse we will wink against our own naturall light, we are without any further Scruple to acknowledge *that God does exist*'.[24]

The argument might be impeccable from a logical point of view, but it was too brisk and formal to excite religious emotion, and More supplemented it with evidence of divine activity in the world. He acknowledged the potency of the mechanistic explanations favoured by 'the French Philosophy', but refused to go along with the 'profound *Atheists* and *Epicureans*' who 'inferre from thence that *all the Contrivances* which are in *Nature*, even the frame of the *bodyes* both of *Men* and *Beasts*, are from no other principle but the jumbling together of the Matter'. Refusing to recognize the beauty and regularity of nature as proof of a divine intelligence was, More said,

> reasoning in the same Mood and Figure with that wise Market-mans, who going down a Hill, and carrying his *Cheeses* under his Armes, one of them falling and trundling down the Hill very fast, let the other go after it, appointing them all to meet him at his house at *Gotham*, not doubting but they beginning so hopefully would be able to make good the whole journey.

Popular tales of 'miraculous effects' – maidens possessed by devils, for instance, or witches perched on top of steeples – gave further proof of a supernatural world: 'I am as well adjusted in my own judgement of the *existence of Spirits*,' More said, 'as that I have met with men in Westminster-Hall, or seen Beasts in Smithfield.'[25]

In a sprawling collection of *Philosophicall Poems* published in 1647, More sought to merge Descartes's philosophical innovations with a set of perennial doctrines 'on which the Platonists, the best and divinest of Philosophers, and the Christians, the best of all that do professe religion, do both concur' – a set of fundamental principles which, he claimed,

> well agrees with learned Pythagore,
> Egyptian Trismegist, and th'antique roll
> Of Chaldee wisdom, all which time hath tore,
> But Plato and deep Plotin do restore.

Ancient wisdom, as More understood it, postulated a boundless universe in which seven planets, including the earth, circle round the sun, while the soul, or 'mind', is an indestructible 'substance' independent of the body.

> If the mind
> Without the bodyes help can operate
> Of her own self, then nothing can we find
> To scruple at, but that souls separate
> Safely exist, not subject unto fate,
> No thing depending on their carcases,
> That they should fade when these be ruinate . . .
> The sunne's a type of that eternall light
> Which we call God, a fair delineament
> Of that which Good in Plato's school is hight . . .
> So doth the Earth one of the erring Seven
> Wheel round the fixed sunne, that is the shade
> Of steddy Good.

More went on to argue, in defiance of orthodoxy, that our immortal souls must have existed since the beginning of time. Plato had demonstrated the 'Prae-existency of the Soul', he thought, by arguing that we must have acquired our knowledge of the principles of reason before we were born. It was also supported by a more ancient tradition, going back through Pythagoras to Moses, who had, More said, anticipated 'the subtilest and abstrusest inventions of the choicest philosophers that appeared after him to this very day', including the '*Cartesian* Philosophy' with its

'transcendent *Mechanical* inventions, for the salving the *Phaenomena* in the world'.[26]

Despite being attacked by Tuckney for treating philosophers as 'fairer candidates for Heaven; then the scriptures seeme to allow', More persisted in formulating Christian doctrine in philosophical terms, offering helpful 'interpretations' of certain 'hard names' and 'obscure words'.

Aeon	eternity
Aether	the fluid fiery nature of heaven
Alethea-Land	the land of truth
Apathie	to be without passion
Eidos	Form or Beauty
Energie	I cannot better explain this Platonick term, Energie, then by calling it the rayes of an essence or the beams of a vitall centre
Eternitie	is the steddy comprehension of all things at once
Idea-Lond	The Intellectuall world
Intellect	Sometimes it is to be interpreted Soul. Sometimes the intellectuall faculty of the Soul. Sometimes Intellect is an absolute essence shining into the Soul: whose nature is this. A substance purely immateriall, impeccable, actually omniform, or comprehending all things at once
Logos	The appellation of the Sonne of God
Lower man	The lower man is our enquickned body, into which our soul comes, it being fully prepared for the receiving of such a guest
Pandemoniothen	all from the devill
Soul	when I speak of mans soul, I understand that which Moses saith was inspired into the body (fitted out and made of Earth) by God . . . the very same that the Platonists call Psyche

It was now the duty of all Christians to embrace philosophy as a whole, especially that of Descartes, and Plato his true master; indeed they should learn to see Plato as *Moses Atticus* – the Greek Moses who propounded a trinity of Unity, Eternity and Psyche that anticipated the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost: 'a Christian mystery wrapped up in a Platonicall covering', as More called it. 'To speak the truth,' he concluded, 'Stoicisme, Platonisme, and Pythagorisme are gallant lights, and a noble spirit moves in those Philosophers vains, and so near Christianisme, if a man will look on them favourably, that one would think they are baptized already not

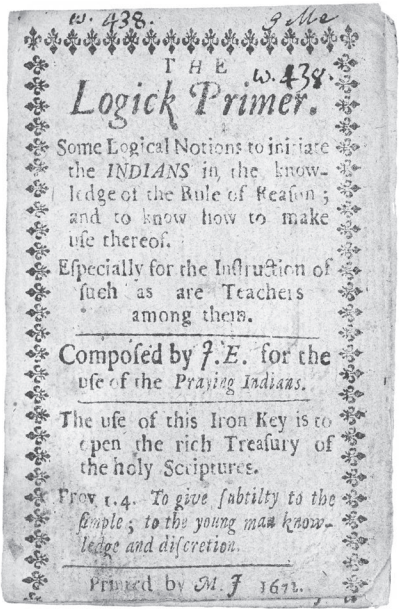
onely with water, but the holy Ghost.' But despite his efforts, very few Christians were persuaded.[27]

THE DESARTS OF AMERICA

When King Charles granted a charter to the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1629, hundreds of pioneering Puritans seized the opportunity of crossing the Atlantic to settle in New England. Over the following decade, they established some forty towns, each with around 500 citizens, nearly all of whom belonged to a reformed congregation led by a minister of their choice.[28]

Francis Higginson was one of those ministers. He was a Cambridge Master of Arts who, having fallen out with the Church of England, crossed the Atlantic with several dozen followers to start a new life in Massachusetts Bay. His son John, who was twelve at the time, remembered how they put their trust in God as they ventured 'over the *Ocean Sea*, into a *Desert Land*, in America; and this meerly on the Account of *Pure and Undefiled Religion*, not knowing how they should have their *Daily Bread* . . . in a place where time out of mind, had been nothing before but *Heathenism*, *Idolatry*, and *Devil-worship*'. But they found the Puritan colonies to be 'very like unto those that were in the *First Ages* of Christianity', and many other scholars followed them to 'the Desarts of America' in search of 'a place for the Exercise of the *Protestant Religion*'. By the middle of the century, New England was home to more than 100 Cambridge graduates – including thirty-five former students and colleagues of Tuckney at Emmanuel College – together with thirty from Oxford.[29]

A cousin of Tuckney called John Cotton made the journey in 1633. He had been 'educated in the *Peripatetick* way' at Cambridge before becoming a fellow of Emmanuel College, where, as he recalled, he renounced the 'Empty, Trifling, Altercative Notions . . . of the Pagan *Aristotle*' in favour of the 'excellent Methods of that excellent *Ramus*'. Over in New England, Cotton earned a reputation as 'a most *Universal Scholar*, and a *Living System* of the Liberal Arts, and a *Walking Library*'. A few years later, he was joined by Richard Mather, who had cut short his studies at Oxford on account of the 'great Superstition and Prophaness' he encountered there. He was then appointed to a living in Toxteth near Liverpool, only to be expelled for refusing to wear a ceremonial surplice ('better for him that he had gotten Seven Bastards' according to his bishop), after which he decided to take his wife and children 'over the Waves of the vast Ocean, in to a Land which was not sown'. He prospered in New England, winning praise


THE
Logick Primer.
Some Logical Notions to initiate the INDIANS in the knowledge of the Rule of Reason; and to know how to make use thereof.
Especially for the Instruction of such as are Teachers among them.
Composed by J. E. for the use of the Praying Indians.
The use of this Iron Key is to open the rich Treasury of the holy Scriptures.
Prov. 1.4. To give subtilty to the simple; to the young man knowledge and discretion.
Printed by M. J. 1672.

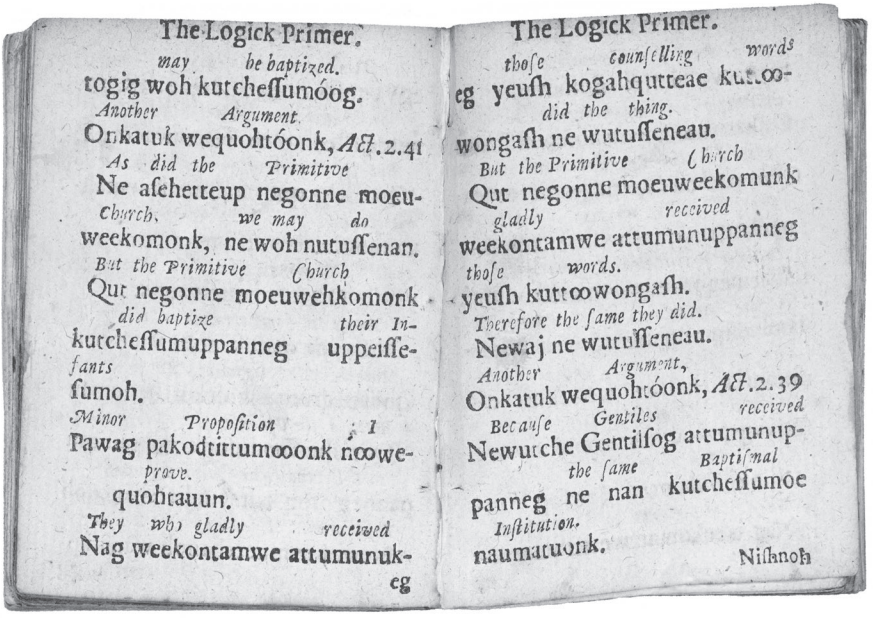
Logical analysis in Algonquin, from John Eliot's *Logick Primer for the Indians* (1671)

for the plain style of his lectures. 'He studiously avoided obscure phrases, Exotick words, or an unnecessary citation of Latine Sentences,' as his son would recall, 'aiming to shoot his Arrows not over his peoples heads, but into their Hearts and Consciences', and he earned himself the affectionate nick-name 'Matter' – 'for believe it this man hath Substance in him'.[30]

Indian prayers

In order to fulfil Biblical prophecies and prepare for the return of Christ, the Puritans of New England needed not only to cultivate their own faith but also, as they put it, to 'gospellize the Indians'. Some of them believed that local languages had Semitic roots, and concluded that 'these naked *Americans* are *Hebrewes*' – presumably one of those lost tribes of Israel which, according to the Bible, had to be 'found again, and called into Christ his Kingdome' before the blessed could be saved.[31]

The mission to bring the gospel to native Americans was led by John Eliot, who studied at Jesus College, Cambridge, but became convinced that


The Logick Primer.

may be baptized.
togig woh kutcheſſumóog.
Another Argument.
Onkatuk wequohtóonk, *Act.* 2. 41
As did the Primitive
Ne aſehetteup negonne moeu-
Church, we may do
weekomonk, ne woh nutuſſenan.
But the Primitive Church
Qut negonne moeuwehkomonk
did baptize their In-
kutcheſſumuppanneg uppeiſſe-
fants
ſumoh.
Minor Propoſition 1
Pawag pakodtittumoonk noowe-
prove.
quohtauun.
They who gladly received
Nag weekontamwe attumunuk-
eg

The Logick Primer.

thoſe counſelling words
eg yeuſh kogahqutteae kuttoo-
did the thing.
wongaſh ne wutuſſeneau.
But the Primitive Church
Qut negonne moeuweekomunk
gladly received
weekontamwe attumunuppanneg
thoſe words.
yeuſh kuttoowongaſh.
Therefore the ſame they did.
Newaj ne wutuſſeneau.
Another Argument,
Onkatuk wequohtóonk, *Act.* 2. 39
Becauſe Gentiles received
Newutche Gentiliſog attumunup-
the ſame Baptiſmal
panneg ne nan kutcheſſumoe
Inſtitution.
naumatuonk.
Niſhanoh

'toleration' for heathen learning could only 'prolong the storm and delay the reign of Christ', and sailed to America in 1631. 'Humane wisdome in learned Nations will be loth to yeeld . . . to Christ,' he said. 'But as for these poore Indians they have no principles of their own nor yet wisdome of their own . . . and therefore they do most readily yeeld to any direction from the Lord, so that there will be no such opposition against the rising Kingdome of Jesus Christ.' Eliot was heartened by an encounter with an 'Indian prince' who had taken a liking to the colonists ('much good men, much good God'); but he realized he would not get far by preaching in English, and in 1646 he founded a settlement for 'praying Indians' at Natick, fifteen miles west of Boston, where he would address them in their own language. He found them 'plain-hearted' and 'teachable' – unlike English congregations – and willing to 'receive the truth in the love of it, and obey it without shifting or gain-saying', and within three years he was reporting that 'all those signes preceding the glorious coming of Christ are accomplishing.' His colleague Richard Mather was equally hopeful: 'the Kingdom of Jesus Christ upon Earth . . . is now beginning to be set up where it never was before', amongst 'these Indians in New-England', he said, and 'the time is coming when things shall not thus continue.'[32]

Eliot devised a method for writing local languages in the Latin alphabet, and presented his native followers with a printed version of the Ten Commandments in Algonquin, followed by the Lord's Prayer and selections from the gospels, and eventually an entire Bible. But he wanted his converts to think for themselves, so he offered them lessons in Ramist logic, explaining how discourses can be broken down into propositions, and propositions into simple notions, and in 1672 he would print a thousand copies of a miniature logic primer with a text in Algonquin and glosses in English. By explaining 'the rule, where by every thing, every speech, is composed, analysed, or opened to be known', Eliot said, logic would provide the Indians with an 'Iron Key' to 'open the rich Treasury of the holy Scriptures'.[33]

Eliot's 'praying Indians' were still 'full of questions', however. 'Seeing the body sinneth, why should the soule be punished,' one young man asked, 'and what punishment shall the body have?' Another wanted to know, 'when such die as never heard of Christ, whether do they go?', and an elderly woman wondered, 'when all the world shall be burned up, what shall be in the roome of it?' Others asked 'what a Spirit is' and 'whether Jesus Christ . . . did understand Indian prayers'. Eliot could not 'renounce learning as an enemy to gospell ministeries', when the Indians he knew kept coming up with 'sundry philosophicall questions, which some knowledge of the Arts must helpe to give answer to'.[34]

Humane learning in New England

A few years later, the community at Natick was destroyed in a Pokanoket raid, and the Algonquin bibles and logic primers went up in flames. Millenarian hopes had already faded, and colonists were starting to worry about the future of their settlements and the needs of their own children. 'After God had carried us safe to *New England*,' as John Eliot wrote in 1643, 'and wee had builded our houses, one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance *Learning* and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministery to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust.' They might dream of providing their sons with the pure, Bible-based education that they themselves had never had; but in practice they were reluctant to turn their backs on the entire Arts-course tradition, especially as Latin was still the main medium of scholarship. A grammar school opened in Boston in 1636 under Daniel Maude, formerly of Emmanuel College, and it was quickly followed by a senior college in the nearby village of Newtown, which came to be called Cambridge in honour of the university where most of its masters had studied. Drawing inspiration from William Ames, the Puritan who had fled Cambridge for the Netherlands in

1610, the college instituted an Arts course for Puritans, taught in Latin and focused on biblical Hebrew and Greek, supplemented by sufficient Ramist logic to explain the 'Scripture consequences' of 'Scripture-trueth'.[35]

The college in Boston got off to a faltering start; but after two years it was rescued by a benefaction from John Harvard (another graduate of Emmanuel College), for whom it was renamed. In 1640 Henry Dunster (of Magdalene) became president of Harvard College, and stipulated that students must be fluent in Latin, and should avoid conversing in any other language. After three years studying Hebrew and Greek, with public disputations in Latin and declamations in Latin and Greek, they would undergo oral examinations for a 'first Degree', in which they had to demonstrate that they were of 'Godly life and conversation', and competent 'to read the Originalls of the *Old* and *New Testament* into the Latin tongue, and to resolve them Logically'.[36]

Nine young men passed the first Harvard test in the summer of 1642, after which they embarked on a fourth year of study – with a 'synopsis' of logic, and oral defences of various '*Theses* or positions' in 'Naturall and Morall *Phylosophy*, *Arithmetick*, *Geometry*, and *Astronomy*' – leading to a 'second Degree', which was supposed to correspond to an Arts degree in the old world.[37]

Harvard was still nominally committed to the Puritan ideals of William Ames, but its coverage of heathen disciplines – most notably Moral Philosophy – testified to a spirit of compromise, or perhaps a loss of nerve. Meanwhile, the victory of the Puritans in the English civil wars encouraged some colonists to consider returning home, or at least sending their sons back to complete their education. In 1647 President Dunster began to forge links with Oxford and Cambridge in the hope of ensuring that 'Degrees here taken may bee so accounted in England', and by the end of the 1660s some twenty Harvard graduates had become college fellows in Oxford and Cambridge.[38]

When Dunster retired in 1654 he was replaced by Charles Chauncy, a former fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, who had fled England with his family in 1637 and won renown as a preacher in Massachusetts. Chauncy had been planning to return to England in order to help build the new Commonwealth, but when he received the offer from Harvard he decided to stay. He thanked God for providing New England with 'schools of humane learning' and set about purging the college of its residual hostility to the pagan Arts course. Ames had been right, he said, in maintaining that 'School-men & Popish writers' had 'made a very hodch-potch & minglemangle of heathenish Philosophy and Divinity together', but that did not

mean that schools which taught philosophy were 'seminaryes of wickedness'. William Dell exaggerated when he alleged, in a sermon in old Cambridge, that Arts courses were 'stews of Anti-christ' and 'houses of lyes', and Chauncy urged Harvard students to take advantage of 'the learning that the heathen Authours or philosophers have delivered in their writings'. There were 'many excellent & divine morall truths in Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Seneca &c', he said, and it would be ingratitude to God to 'condemn all pel-mel' and 'call universities Antichrists for reading of them'.[39]

The fact that the Arts as 'commonly taught in universities' comprised doctrines that 'heathen men have uttered out of the light of nature' did not mean they ought to be shunned. As far as Chauncy was concerned, the pagan discipline of Logic, as reformed by Ramus, had its uses as 'an instrument to assist in the contexture and retexture of Scripture' and a means of finding out 'when a Scripture is wrested, or falsly applied'. We should not allow 'heathenish Philosophy' to 'go cheek by jowle with the speaking in Scriptures', but the Bible itself was liable to 'false use', which could not be exposed without philosophical discipline: so 'what is this,' Chauncy asked, 'to the forbidding of sober & Christian Philosophy?'[40]

PHILOSOPHY OLD AND NEW

One of the arts that Chauncy promoted at Harvard was chronology, or the knowledge of dates; and as far as he was concerned the Bible provided 'the best & surest Chronology in the world'. Many scholars had examined the overlapping family histories in the Old Testament and come to the conclusion that Christ was born about 4000 years after the creation of the world; but the discipline was reinvigorated in 1650 when James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, published his *Annals of the Old Testament*, which gave a detailed chronology of biblical events from the creation in *Anno Mundi* 1 (AM 1) to the nativity in AM 4004.[41]

In 1655 the English poet Thomas Stanley would extend the art of chronology from the Bible to philosophy. He was responding to a remark by Montaigne, who had called for all the opinions of the philosophers to be gathered in a single 'Register', and like Montaigne he assumed that philosophy started with Thales and ended shortly before the birth of Christ. The basic aim of Stanley's *History of Philosophy* was to assign a date to every significant event in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, while correcting various mis-datings ('very great anachronisms') and tabulating the results in fold-out charts. He started with Thales (reproving Diogenes for an 'anachronism of one year' over his birth), and

fixed the beginning of the *Aera Philosophiae*, or AP 1 (580 BCE) to a ceremony at which Thales was named one of the Seven Sages. Xerxes crossed the Hellespont in AP 103, Socrates lived from AP 114 to 184, Plato from AP 152 to 234, and Aristotle from AP 199 to 261, and the story came to an end with the death of Carneades in AP 454 (126 BCE).[42]

But why did the story have to end there? The assumption that philosophy was over before the Christian era began had already been questioned by humanists who regarded Jesus as the founder of a philosophical school, and by Bacon with his notion of 'endlesse progresse'. The new taste for chronological charts put it under further pressure: once you have postulated a timeline, you will be tempted to extend it to the present and into the future: and 'when advanced to such height wee look down to the bottom from which philosophy first took her rise,' as Stanley put it, we will be pleased to 'see how great a progresse she hath made'.[43]

In the same year that Stanley started publishing his *History*, a German chronologist called Georg Horn took up the challenge in his Latin *Historiae Philosophicae*. The 'old philosophy', in Horn's account, started not with Thales but with Adam, and passed through Noah to the Greeks and Romans; the philosophical school founded by Jesus flourished briefly before declining through several phases of Arts-course Aristotelianism; then there was a 'renaissance of letters' in Italy, leading to the novel initiatives of Bacon and Descartes, which Horn referred to as the 'new philosophy'. In passing, Horn mentioned a couple of thinkers, Pierre Gassendi and Thomas Hobbes, who were now carrying the new philosophy into the future: the first philosophers, it would seem, to be mentioned in a history of philosophy in their lifetime.[44]

Atomism and new philosophy

The phrase *new philosophy* had been used before, for example in John Donne's response to Giordano Bruno ('new Philosophy cals all in doubt'). But it was now becoming a set formula, though its meaning remained vague. It was obviously meant to contrast with *old philosophy*, but that too was ill-defined: it had to include Aristotle and his Arts-course disciples, but it could also be extended to Plato, and sometimes to the entire tribe of pre-Christian thinkers.[45]

The issue was complicated by the question of 'Epicureanism', or 'atomism', as it was sometimes called. Christian theologians had always regarded it as a byword for atheism, sensual excess and moral weakness, but Diogenes Laertius devoted a sympathetic chapter to it, and in the 1640s the French natural scientist and 'new philosopher' Pierre Gassendi published

		Æra Philos.	
xlviii	Philippus. *Clem.*		
2			
3			
4			*Periander* died having raigned 40 years, *Aristot. polit.* 5. *Laert.*
xlix			
2			
3	Damasias. *Marm*	1	The attribute of *wise* conferred on *Thales*, and
4		2	the other six.
l		3	About this time *Thespis* began to present his
2		4	Tragedies: *Anaximander* found out the
3	Archestratides. *Hal.* 4.	5	obliquity of the Zodiack. *Plin.*
4		6	
li		7	
2		8	
3		9	
4		10	
lii		11	
2		12	
3	Aristomenes. *Laert.*	13	*Pittacus* died. *Laert:*
4		14	
liii		15	
2		16	
3		17	
4		18	
liv		19	
2		20	*Pythagoras* visits *Thales*. Collected from Jamblick
3		21	
4	Conias *Plut. Sol.*	22	
lv	Hegestratus. *Plut.*	23	
2		24	
3		2	
4		26	
lvi	Euthydemus. *Laert.*	27	*Chilon* was *Ephorus*. *Laert.*
2		28	*Anaximenes* flourished.
3		29	*Eusеb.*
4		30	
lvii		31	
2		32	
3		33	
4		34	
lviii	Erxyclides. *Paus.*	35	*Thales* died. *Laert.*
2		36	
3		37	
4		38	*Cyrus* takes *Sardys* and *Croesus*.
lix		39	
2		40	
3		41	
4		42	
lx		43	
2		44	
3		45	
4		46	
lxi		47	
2		48	
3		49	
4	Heracles. *Hal.* 4.	50	
lxii		51	

Philosophical chronology: a timeline from Thomas Stanley's *The History of Philosophy* (1655)

2		52	
3		53	
4		54	*Piſiſtratus* died having raigned 27 years; *Ariſt. Polit.* 5.
Lxiii		55	
2		56	
3		57	
4		58	
Lxiv	Miltiades. *Hal.* 7.	59	
2		60	
3		61	
4		62	
Lxv		63	*Darius* begun his reign.
2		64	
3		65	
4		66	
Lxvi		67	
2		68	
3		69	
4		70	
Lxvii		71	
2		72	
3		73	
4		74	
Lxviii	Lyſagoras *Marm.*	75	
2		76	
3		77	
4		78	
Lxix	Aceſtorides 11. *Hal.* 5.	79	
2		80	
3		81	
4		82	
Lxx	*Myrus Hal.* 5.	83	*Anaxagoras* born. *Laert by compute.*
2		84	
3		85	
4		86	*Pythagoras* died. *Euſeb.*
Lxxi	Hipparchus *Hal.* 6.	87	
2	Pithocritus. *Marm.*	88	
3		89	
4		90	
Lxxii	Diognetus. *Hal.* 6.	91	The Marathonian fight.
2	Hybrilides. *Hal* 7. *Paus.*	92	
3	Phanippus. *Plut. Ariſtic.*	93	
4		94	
Lxxiii	Archiſes. *Hal.* 8.	95	
2		96	
3	Ariſtides. *Marm.*	97	*Darius* died. *Xerxes* ſucceeded.
4	Philocrates. *Marm.*	98	
Lxxiv	Leoſtratus. *Hal.* 8.	99	
2	Nicodemus. *Hal.* 8.	100	
3		101	
4		112	
Lxxv	Calliades. *Marm.*	103	*Xerxes* croſt the Helleſpont: the fight at *Sala-mis*. *Anaxagoras* went to *Athens*.
2	Xantippus *Marm.*	104	
3	Timoſthenes *Marm.*	105	
4	Adimantus *Marm.*	106	
Lxxvi	Phædon. *Diod. Sic.*	107	
2	Dromoclides	108	
3	Aceſtorides	109	

a vast commentary on Diogenes, designed to restore the reputation of Epicurus, together with his fellow atomists Democritus and Lucretius. The atomist vision of the universe as a mass of tiny particles jostling in infinite space did not leave much room for creation, freedom, sin or salvation; but it was free of the taint of Aristotelianism, and Gassendi saw it as a forerunner of Descartes's mathematical approach to nature.[46]

The atomists were also open to other kinds of revival. They were noted for a line in wry good humour and stoical detachment, expounded in 1621 in a digressive book on *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton, writing under the pseudonym 'Democritus Junior', while Henry More signalled his acceptance of the truths of atomism, alongside those of Descartes and Plato, in a reckless poem called 'Democritus Platonissans'. Meanwhile John Evelyn was working on an English translation of Lucretius, who wrote in Latin light verse rather than heavy Greek prose, and displayed carefree attitudes to sexual pleasure: even if Lucretius was 'altogether *Irreligious*', Evelyn said, he was no worse than 'any other *Heathen Writer*'. The Stoics had after all left God 'linked and chained' by natural causes, while Aristotle argued that the world is infinite and eternal, and Plato was a '*Leveller*' who believed that '*Wives* and most other things' should be public property. If these 'exorbitant Chymara's' were tolerated by Christians, Evelyn asked, why not the cheerful precepts of atomism as well?[47]

Atomism could also be seen as having republican or even democratic implications, and Edmund Waller, a poet who served as Cromwell's Commissioner of Trade, welcomed Evelyn's Lucretius as a political parable.

> Lucretius with a Stork-like fate
> Born and translated in a State
> Comes to proclaim in English Verse
> No Monarch Rules the Universe;
> But chance and Atomes make *this All*
> In Order Democratical,
> Where Bodies freely run their course,
> Without design, or Fate, or Force.[48]

The idea of using atomism to buttress republicanism received further support from the poet Lucy Hutchinson, who had learned Latin from an obliging chaplain ('a pitifull dull fellow') before marrying the parliamentary leader John Hutchinson, participating in Commonwealth politics, and translating the whole of Lucretius into English.[49]

Hutchinson's exposition of atomism was not published in her lifetime, unlike that of her royalist counterpart Margaret Cavendish. Cavendish was probably the first woman ever to go into print as a philosophical

author, and she enjoyed flaunting her atomism as a token of contempt both for Arts-course Aristotelians and for pious Puritans. Some of her contemporaries took atomism very seriously, she said, but she pursued it 'not . . . for Truth, but Pastime'.

> Small *Atomes* of themselves a *World* may make,
> As being subtle, and of every shape . . .
> Thus *Life* and *Death*, and *young* and *old*,
> Are, as the severall *Atomes* hold.
> So *Wit*, and *Understanding* in the *Braine*,
> Are as the severall *Atomes* reigne.

'I pass my time rather with scribling than writing, with words than wit,' she continued: 'I have my delight in Writing and having it printed', and 'I print most of what I write.'[50]

Cavendish could be courageous all the same, as in a one-sentence 'Essay' on 'Atheisme, and Superstition' written in or around 1651. 'It is better to be an Atheist, then a superstitious man; for in Atheisme there is humanitie, and civility, towards man to man; but superstition regards no humanity, but begets cruelty to all things, even to themselves.' On the other hand she took no pride in her sex: 'Nature hath made . . . Mans Brain more clear to understand and contrive than Womans,' she said, and she would not claim to 'write so wisely or wittily as Men'. Just as 'the Moon hath no Light but what it borrows from the Sun,' she added, 'so Women have no strength nor light of Understanding, but what is given them from Men.'[51]

Cavendish certainly knew some brilliant men. Back in 1644 she had accompanied Henrietta Maria, the Catholic consort of King Charles, into exile in Paris, where she met another royalist exile, William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle, who was not only a tutor to the Prince of Wales (the future Charles II), but also – like his friend Kenelm Digby – an enthusiastic supporter of Descartes. Margaret was thirty years younger than him, but she agreed to become his wife, and by 1646 the Cavendishes were hosting a sumptuous philosophical salon in Paris.

Descartes was a regular guest, and a grateful recipient of their patronage, but Margaret Cavendish found him enigmatic: 'a man of the fewest words I ever heard,' she recalled, though 'I never . . . understood what he said, for he spoke no English, and I understood no other language.' Gassendi was a more rewarding conversationalist, and she praised his attempts to construct an Epicurean pedigree for Descartes's new philosophy, and his spirited polemics against the 'pretended science' of Aristotle which was still 'deluding the credulous multitude'.[52]

In 1649 the circle of royalist exiles in Paris was joined by Walter Charleton, who as well as being the king's physician was pursuing scientific inquiries of his own. A few years later he published a massive exposition of 'science Naturall upon the hypothesis of Atoms' based on the work of 'the immortal *Gassendus*'. In his *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana* (an English text despite its Latin title) he argued that Aristotelian notions of *substances*, *accidents* and *categories* were 'poetical and extravagant', whereas the atomist hypothesis of tiny particles in empty space issued in sturdy mathematical explanations of all sorts of natural phenomena. Atomism was also confirmed by 'Mechanick Experiments' – 'for as *Letters* are the *Elements* of *Writing*,' Charleton wrote (echoing Lucretius), 'and from them arise by gradation, Syllables, Words, Sentences, Orations, Books; so proportionately are *Atoms* the *Elements* of *Things*.' But Charleton regretted the boldness with which 'the excellent *Monsieur Des Cartes*' had 'fastened the hooks of his Mechanick Principles' onto 'all the Operations of Sense', and preferred to follow his friend Kenelm Digby, and Epicurus himself, in attributing a certain waywardness to the movements of atoms. On the other hand, he could not agree with Epicurus when he said that 'the humane soule doth not survive the funerals of the body', and he joined Descartes, Digby and More in seeing the soul as 'a substance distinct from, and independent upon . . . the body', and capable of 'eternall existence'. Epicurus himself was 'a sublime Witt . . . *Temperate*, Good and Pious', and while he had the misfortune to be 'a meere naturalist, borne and educated in times of Pagan darkenesse', he was no worse than Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. He deserved an exalted position in 'the Commonwealth of Philosophy', and Charleton was proud that, through his own efforts, Epicurus had at last 'learn'd English'.[53]

Old philosophy and magic

In passing, Charleton noted that new philosophical sects were springing up every day, and that the traditional classification – 'Pythagorean, Stoick, Platonist, Academick, Peripatetick, Epicurean, and Pyrrhonean, or Sceptick' – was no longer viable. But rather than extending the list indefinitely, Charleton proposed a new taxonomy reducing 'Modern Philosophers' to four 'general orders', on the basis not of their doctrines but of their attitudes to the old philosophy.

In the first place there were those rare spirits who 'ponder the Reasons of all, but the Reputation of none', and 'admit of no Monarchy in Philosophy, besides that of Truth'. They included 'the heroical *Tycho Brahe*, the subtle *Kepler*, the most-acute *Galileus* . . . and the Epitome of all, *Des*