



RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT



Author of
The Dutch Republic

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*Philosophy and the Making
of Modernity 1650–1750*

JONATHAN I. ISRAEL

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1650–1750**

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Map: Europe during the Early Enlightenment

Table 1: The Early Latin Editions of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Table 2: The Major Clandestine Philosophical Manuscripts of the Early Enlightenment (1680–1750)

Library and Archive Locations

ABM	Aix-en-Provence: Bibliothèque Méjanes
ARH OSA	The Hague: Algemeen Rijksarchief. Oud Synodaal Archief
AUB	Amsterdam: Universiteitsbibliotheek
BL	London: British Library
BPK	Berlin: Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz
CBU	Cordóba: Biblioteca Universitaria
CRL	Copenhagen: Royal Library
CUL	Cambridge: University Library
GA Amsterdam	Amsterdam: City Archives
GA The Hague	The Hague: City Archives
GA Leiden	Leiden: City Archives
GA Rotterdam	Rotterdam: City Archives
GA Utrecht	Utrecht: City Archives
GrUB	Groningen: Universiteitsbibliotheek
FBM	Florence: Biblioteca Marucelliana
FBN	Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale
HHL	Harvard: Houghton Library

HKB	The Hague: Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library)
HRN	Haarlem: Rijksarchief Noord-Holland
HUB	Halle: Universitätsbibliothek
JRL	Manchester: John Rylands Library
JUB	Jena: Universitätsbibliothek
LDrW	London: Dr Williams Library
LIHR	London: Institute of Historical Research
LUB	Leiden: Universiteitsbibliotheek
MBN	Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional
MoBM	Montpellier: Bibliothèque Municipale
NBN	Naples: Biblioteca Nazionale
PBA	Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal
PBM	Paris: Bibliothèque Mazarine
PBN	Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale
PBP	Parma: Biblioteca Palatina
SBU	Salamanca: Biblioteca Universitaria
SRL	Stockholm: Royal Library
TBM	Toulouse: Bibliothèque Municipale
UCLA	Los Angeles: University of California, Research Library
UCLA-CI	Los Angeles: Clark Library
UUL	Uppsala: Universitetsbibliotheket
VBM	Venice: Biblioteca Marciana
WHA	Wolfenbüttel: Herzog-August-Bibliothek

Other Abbreviations

AGB	<i>Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens</i>
AGPh	<i>Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie</i>
BJHP	<i>British Journal for the History of Philosophy</i>
BMGN	<i>Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden</i>
GCFI	<i>Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana</i>
GRSTD	Groupe de Recherches Spinozistes. Travaux et Documents (Paris, Sorbonne)
GWN	<i>Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland</i>
JHI	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
LIAS	LIAS. <i>Sources and Documents relating to the Early Modern History of Ideas</i>
MvSp	<i>Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis</i>
NRL	<i>Nouvelles de la République des Lettres</i>
Res. Holl.	Resolutions of the States of Holland as published in the <i>Resolutien van de Heeren Staten van Holland en West-Vriesland</i> (276 vols.; <i>The Hague, c. 1750–1798</i>)
RSI	<i>Rivista Storica Italiana</i>
St. Spin.	<i>Studia Spinozana</i>
SVEC	<i>Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century</i>
TTP	<i>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i>

TvSV

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Map. Europe during the Early Enlightenment

PART I

THE RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

1

INTRODUCTION

i. Radical Thought in the Early Enlightenment

To many a courtier, official, teacher, lawyer, physician, and churchman, philosophy and philosophers seemed to have burst upon the European scene in the late seventeenth century with terrifying force. Countless books reflect the unprecedented and, for some, intoxicating, intellectual and spiritual upheaval of those decades, a vast turbulence in every sphere of knowledge and belief which shook European civilization to its foundations. A sense of shock and acute danger penetrated even the most remote and best defended fastnesses of the west. The Spanish physician Diego Matheo Zapata, writing in 1690—before his own conversion to Cartesianism—implored the cohorts of Cartesians and *Malebranchistas* besieging every citadel of traditional learning in Spain to desist, warning that it was not just received philosophy and science which was at stake but also, ultimately, the beliefs of the people, the authority of Church and Inquisition, the very foundations of Spanish society.¹ A Spanish professor of medicine claimed, in 1716, that Descartes' philosophy had thrown all Europe into the greatest intellectual and spiritual perplexity seen for centuries.² In less isolated regions the agitation was no less. A Zeeland preacher, writing in 1712, appalled by the impact of Descartes, Spinoza, and Bayle, despairingly compared the Netherlands of his time to the ancient Athens of the warring Hellenistic philosophy schools, a land racked by intellectual controversy where rival

schools of thought battled ceaselessly, philosophy divided the ruling élite, and even the common people were proving susceptible to new ideas, letting themselves be 'led like children through the whirlwinds of thought', the helpless prey of philosophical seducers and, through new ideas, becoming entrapped in the 'Devil's snares'.³ Parts of this tide of new concepts, moreover, were of a distinctly radical character, that is, totally incompatible with the fundamentals of traditional authority, thought, and belief.

During the later Middle Ages and the early modern age down to around 1650, western civilization was based on a largely shared core of faith, tradition, and authority. By contrast, after 1650, everything, no matter how fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of philosophical reason and frequently challenged or replaced by startlingly different concepts generated by the New Philosophy and what may still usefully be termed the Scientific Revolution. Admittedly the Reformation had earlier engendered a deep split in western Christendom. But throughout the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, there was still much, intellectually and spiritually, that the western segments of Christendom shared. Mid-seventeenth-century Europe was still, not just predominantly but overwhelmingly, a culture in which all debates about man, God, and the World which penetrated into the public sphere revolved around 'confessional'—that is Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist), or Anglican issues, and scholars fought above all to establish which confessional bloc possessed a monopoly of truth and a God-given title to authority. It was a civilization in which almost no one challenged the essentials of Christianity or the basic premises of what was taken to be a divinely

ordained system of aristocracy, monarchy, land-ownership, and ecclesiastical authority.

By contrast, after 1650, a general process of rationalization and secularization set in which rapidly overthrew theology's age-old hegemony in the world of study, slowly but surely eradicated magic and belief in the supernatural from Europe's intellectual culture, and led a few openly to challenge everything inherited from the past—not just commonly received assumptions about mankind, society, politics, and the cosmos but also the veracity of the Bible and the Christian faith or indeed any faith. Of course, most people at all levels of society were profoundly disquieted by such sweeping intellectual and cultural change and frightened by the upsurge of radical thinking. Jeremiads were heard everywhere. In Germany, from the 1670s onwards, there was a powerful reaction to the sudden stream of 'godless' books appearing in both Latin and the vernacular and obviously designed to overthrow all conventionally accepted values and beliefs.⁴ University students were assumed to be especially vulnerable. A treatise by a Leipzig theologian published in 1708 sought to equip German professors with ready-made, concise Latin answers and philosophical demonstrations with which to combat the tide of philosophical atheism, deism, Naturalism, fatalism, and Neo-Epicureanism, and especially the penetration of the kind of radical thought which 'calls God Nature' and equates 'His intelligence, energy, and capability, with *Natura Naturans*', that is, the most systematically philosophical form of atheism.⁵

Whereas before 1650 practically everyone disputed and wrote about confessional differences, subsequently, by the 1680s, it began to be noted by French, German, Dutch, and

English writers that confessional conflict, previously at the centre, was increasingly receding to secondary status and that the main issue now was the escalating contest between faith and incredulity. Instead of theological controversy, 'now', exclaimed an English publicist abhorring Anthony Collins' *A Discourse of Freethinking* (1713), a work which rejects scriptural authority and provoked deep outrage, 'now religion in general is the question; religion is the thing stabb'd at; the controversie now is, whether there ought to be any form of religion on earth, or whether there be any God in Heaven.'⁶

Revealed religion and ecclesiastical authority long remained the chief targets of the new radical thinkers. But they were by no means the only ones. A prominent late seventeenth-century German court official, the Freiherr Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff (1626–92), observed in 1685 that what the radicals ultimately intended was to make 'life in this world' the basis of politics.⁷ This, he explained, amounted to a revolution in outlook and expectations which potentially changed everything. Numerous theologians, he grants, strove valiantly to counter the disastrous impact of the new radical ideas, especially Spinozism, which he saw as the backbone of the radical challenge in the sphere of faith and Church authority. But what was insufficiently grasped in the Germany of his day and inadequately opposed, in his opinion, were the consequences of such ideas as Spinoza's for politics, the public sphere, and the individual's place in society. For in Spinoza, he avers, nothing is based on God's Word or commandment so that no institutions are God-ordained and no laws divinely sanctioned: hence the only legitimacy in politics is the self-interest of the individual.⁸ Nor did the mounting strife over the nature and status of morality reverberate any

less stridently. The Dutch preacher, Johannes Aalstius, held in his general introduction to Christian ethics, published at Dordrecht in 1705, that the new radicalism, and especially Spinozism, overturns the entire structure of divinely ordained morality.⁹ Were such influences to gain wide acceptance, he predicted, mankind would in the future concern itself only with individual happiness in this life.¹⁰ To many it appeared a frightful prospect.

It is, furthermore, a drama which profoundly involved the common people, even those who were unschooled and illiterate. What did they know of the Scientific Revolution or the new philosophical ideas, one might well ask? Surely, it is often supposed, there was turmoil on the surface but little change in the minds and outlook of the great majority. But while it is true that the intellectual revolution of the late seventeenth century was primarily a crisis of élites—courtiers, officials, scholars, patricians, and clergy, it was precisely these élites which moulded, supervised, and fixed the contours of popular culture. Consequently, an intellectual crisis of élites quickly made an impact on ordinary men's attitudes too and by no means only the minority of literate artisans and small bourgeoisie. Doubtless some officials, theologians, and academics toyed with trying to confine the more awesome shifts in ideas to the sphere of élite culture so as to preserve intact the existing structures of authority and belief among the common people. After 1650, as those pervaded by the new concepts increasingly doubted the existence of Hell and the reality of eternal torment for the damned, for example, some consideration was given to whether it might be possible to screen such disbelief from the general population.¹¹ But attempting such wholesale

deception would have involved restructuring the entire system of cultural relations between élites and common people on the basis of consciously, systematically, and universally propagated fraud and deceit, scarcely a feasible project.

In practice, ordinary folk could not be shielded from the philosophical revolution transforming the outlook and attitudes of Europe's élites.¹² To many the consequences of this seemed alarming in the extreme. Especially worrying, according to Seckendorff, was the growing trend among ordinary folk to mock Holy Scripture, reject Heaven and Hell, doubt the immortality of the soul, and question the existence of Satan, demons, and spirits.¹³ If one demands proof that new ideas were rapidly transforming attitudes and beliefs throughout society, such proof was abundantly evident on every side and in every part of Europe. Indeed, surely no other period of European history displays such a profound and decisive shift towards rationalization and secularization at every level as the few decades before Voltaire. 'The triumph of the mechanical philosophy,' it has been rightly asserted, 'meant the end of the animistic conception of the universe which had constituted the basic rationale for magical thinking.'¹⁴ In England a veritable sea-change had taken place by the early eighteenth century. In Holland medals were issued in the 1690s celebrating the slaying of Satan and the end of belief in magic and witchcraft. In Germany the key public campaign, based on new philosophical ideas, which brought the trying and burning of witches to an end, took place during the first decade of the eighteenth century. Similarly, as has been justly observed of society and culture in Venice, if one wants to know when the crucial shift took place which led to the end of cases of sorcery, the virtual end

of ecclesiastical control over intellectual life, and the first emergence of women into the public sphere as putatively equal to men in intellect, artistic capabilities, and personal freedom, then that decisive moment occurred in the period between 1700 and 1750.¹⁵

If one accepts there is a direct and crucial connection between the intellectual revolution of the late seventeenth century and the wide-ranging social and cultural change in Europe in the period immediately preceding Voltaire, then the implications for the history of Enlightenment thought are far-reaching. There is indeed an urgent need for Enlightenment historians to put much more emphasis on what was happening before and down to the 1740s. Indeed, there is a case for arguing that the most crucial developments were already over by the middle of the eighteenth century. Certainly the Radical Enlightenment arose and matured in under a century, culminating in the materialistic and atheistic books of La Mettrie and Diderot in the 1740s. These men, dubbed by Diderot the 'Nouveaux Spinosistes',¹⁶ wrote works which are in the main a summing up of the philosophical, scientific, and political radicalism of the previous three generations. Seen in this light they represent the extreme, most uncompromising fringe of the general trend in culture and ideas towards rationalization and secularization. But their less radical colleagues undoubtedly had a far greater impact on attitudes and popular culture. In fact, neither the Reformation of the sixteenth century nor the so-called 'High Enlightenment' of the post-1750 period—often little more than footnotes to the earlier shift—even begins to compete with the intellectual upheaval of the Early Enlightenment in terms of sheer impact, and the depth and extent of the intellectual and spiritual

changes it brought about. It may be that the story of the High Enlightenment after 1750 is more familiar to readers and historians, but that does not alter the reality that the later movement was basically just one of consolidating, popularizing, and annotating revolutionary concepts introduced earlier. Consequently, even before Voltaire came to be widely known, in the 1740s, the real business was already over.

Most accounts of the European Enlightenment concentrate on developments in only one or two countries, particularly England and France. Although it is often taken for granted that this is where the most important philosophical and scientific developments in the century 1650–1750 took place, there are strong grounds for questioning the validity of such an approach. For the intellectual scenario of the age was extremely wide-ranging and was never confined to just one or two regions. It was, on the contrary, a drama played out from the depths of Spain to Russia and from Scandinavia to Sicily. Its complexity and awesome dynamic force sprang not only from the diversity and incompatibility of the new philosophical and scientific systems themselves but also from the tremendous power of the traditionalist counter-offensive, a veritable ‘Counter-Enlightenment’ which, as with the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century, generated a major reorganization and revitalization of traditional structures of authority, thought, and belief. For the age of confessional antagonism, broadly the period 1520–1650, had equipped Europe’s governments, churches, courts, schools, and universities with newly devised or reinforced mechanisms of spiritual and intellectual control which proved extremely effective in tightening the cohesion of society and culture, and strengthening the State and ecclesiastical authority, and

therefore represented an accumulation of power and influence which was not going to be lightly abandoned anywhere.

However, even the most assertive and intolerant of these instruments of doctrinal supervision, such as the Calvinist *consistoires* or the Spanish Inquisition, were primarily geared to eradicate theological dissent and were soon partly, if not largely, outflanked and neutralized by the advance of new philosophies and scientific ideas which posed a much tougher problem for ecclesiastical authority to deal with than had religious heresy, especially as it proved difficult to separate what was compatible from what was incompatible with established religious doctrine. Hence, before long, confusion, hesitation, and a rapid fragmentation of ideas prevailed everywhere, even in Rome itself.¹⁷ Furthermore, in the new context, in contrast to the past, none of Europe's rulers, not even the Papacy, could easily decide on, or consistently adopt, a coherent intellectual and spiritual strategy. Opinion was simply too divided for this to be feasible. Should rulers and the Churches try to suppress both the moderate Early Enlightenment and its radical offshoots by shoring up the structures of the past, or should they discard the old structures and ally with one or another strand of the moderate Enlightenment—Neo-Cartesianism as expounded by Malebranche, or Newtonianism perhaps, or the widely adopted system of the German philosopher Christian Wolff (1679–1754), to forge a new orthodoxy and a more cogent front against the radical wing? Although this or that ruler chose one or the other path, the overall result was one of collective disarray and bafflement. Historically, State and Church had worked closely together and since the mid-sixteenth century had met the challenge of confessionalizing the population with spectacular success. Whether Catholic,

Lutheran, Calvinist, or Anglican, the people of western and central Europe had everywhere been grouped into cohesive doctrinal blocs formidably resistant to rival theologies. But once the main thrust of dissent ceased to be theological and became philosophical, there set in an inexorable slackening and loss of coordination in State–Church collaboration in the cultural, educational, and intellectual spheres.

Whatever strategies governments and Churches adopted, the European intellectual arena grew more complex, fragmented, and uncertain. Paolo Mattia Doria (1662–1746), the Genoese patrician and *érudit* who resided in Naples from the late 1680s, subsequently playing a key part in that city’s spectacular intellectual life during the Early Enlightenment, a seasoned observer of the philosophical currents of the age,¹⁸ in 1732 published a book deploring the sudden fervour for the ideas of Locke and Newton ‘in Rome, in Naples, and in other parts of Italy’ and the progress of English empiricism, since the late 1720s, in a land already rent from top to bottom by warring philosophies.¹⁹ What he terms the ‘furore Lockense’ served, in his view, only to escalate and convolute further what was now a five-cornered contest in which scholastic Aristotelianism, though in full retreat, still fought on tenaciously against three competing cohorts of respectable *moderni*—*Lochisti*, the *Cartesiani-Malebranchisti*, and the devotees of the Leibnizian-Wolffian system. The *Lochisti* might be gaining ground rapidly, and many clergy had joined them, but all they would accomplish, admonished Doria, would be to further split the middle ground. By contributing to the pulverization of Italy’s former cultural, intellectual and spiritual cohesion, they were simply opening the door, albeit inadvertently, to the awesome fifth column, the radicals or *Epicurei-Spinosisti* as he terms them—who reject all authority

and established ideas and despise Revelation, the Church, and Christian morality.²⁰ Italy was in the grip of a gigantic and horrifying dilemma. Doria considered Locke dangerous, Cartesianism ‘damaging to civil society’,²¹ and Pierre Bayle of Rotterdam *perniciosissimo*;²² yet all these were innocence itself, he declares, compared with the threat to Church and society posed by the radicals.²³ For those ‘who deny God the attributes of goodness, love, intelligence and providence’, the *Spinosisti*, not only demolish all religion but are also ‘destructive of civil society’.²⁴

Advocates of the mainstream moderate Enlightenment in the early eighteenth century before Voltaire simultaneously promised that the new ideas, and the sweeping away of ignorance and superstition, would confer immense benefits on mankind while warning—often no less stridently than their conservative opponents—of the terrible dangers inherent in the proliferating intellectual turmoil. Christian Thomasius (1655–1728), for example, chief herald of the Early Enlightenment in Protestant Germany and Scandinavia, did not doubt that the war on ‘superstition’ in which he himself was a prominent participant, and the application of new ideas in society, what he termed *philosophia practica*, offered humanity great advantages whether in administration, government, medicine, education, technology, or reforming the legal system.²⁵ But with deep disquiet, he also acknowledged that the intellectual upheaval was stimulating a vast upsurge in incredulity and *Atheistery*—like Bayle, he defines ‘atheism’ to mean denial of divine Providence and reward and punishment in the hereafter. Not the least disturbing aspect of this erosion of faith, he held, was the

manner in which countless false and hypercritical champions of piety, mostly, he says, ignorant bigots and obscurantists, seize the opportunity to condemn and vilify upright wellmeaning *philosophes* (such as himself) before the public.²⁶ The honestly enlightened, striving for the improvement of society, found themselves inextricably caught up, he maintains, in a vast conflict on two fronts, battling ignorance and superstition on one side, and the 'Atheisten' on the other.²⁷

The most pressing priority in the new context, it was universally acknowledged, was to overcome the growing fragmentation of ideas and, by means of solid demonstrations and convincing arguments, restore stable and enduring structures of authority, legitimacy, knowledge, and faith. But if the need was obvious, how was it to be met? Without a consensus as to the criteria of truth and legitimacy, without an agreed methodology and principles, the task was impossible. Some progress towards the common goal might be made if leading intellects were less inclined to feud with each other and more unified in their attacks on the Radical Enlightenment; but even this limited goal appeared increasingly unattainable. In Italy, the gaps between the three main enlightened moderate camps proved unbridgeable. In Germany, the often virulent struggle between the eclectic Thomasians and the more systematic Wolffians proved irresolvable.²⁸ Meanwhile, nothing caused more dismay than the ambivalence and corrosive scepticism of one of the most widely read and influential thinkers of the age, Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). Bayle, his critics complained, 'avoue, il prouve, il repète cent fois que la raison est incompatible avec la religion';²⁹ but when he infers from this that individuals must

therefore be guided solely by faith and the dictates of divine Revelation, was he being serious or playing libertine games with his readership? No one seemed to know for sure. Was Bayle, who was to be the 'Patron Saint' of so many eighteenth-century thinkers including Voltaire, Diderot and d'Holbach, a sincere Christian, as he and his defenders claimed, or as his enemies insisted, an atheist, wreaking philosophico-theological havoc on all sides and duping the public.³⁰ And if Bayle was the prime enigma, there were also others, not least Locke and Vico.

Those who undertook to wrestle with the intellectual dilemmas of the age were labelled by Thomasius, using the French term *philosophes*. In the late seventeenth century it was a term just beginning to acquire a new and revolutionary resonance. If philosophy itself was as old as pre-classical Greece—or older—it had assuredly been marginal to the life of society since the advent of the Christian empire in late antiquity, from the time of Constantine the Great onwards. From then until around 1650, philosophy had remained the modest 'serving-maid', as some called it, of theology and in an essentially ancillary relationship to the other great vocational disciplines, law and medicine. It was only with the intellectual crisis of the late seventeenth century that the old hierarchy of studies, with theology supreme, and philosophy and science her handmaidens, suddenly disintegrated. With this philosophy was released from her previous subordination and became once again an independent force potentially at odds with theology and the Churches. No longer the ancillary of others, philosophers became a new breed, formidably different from the subservient, abstract theoreticians of former times. However unsettling in a society expressly based on authority, tradition, and faith, it was henceforth—at any rate

down to the dawn of the nineteenth century—the exponents of philosophy (which then included both theoretical and experimental science), as much as, and eventually even more than, the still strongly entrenched theologians and lawyers, who dominated the intellectual agenda and determined the outcome of controversies. Presenting and popularizing the new findings, concepts, and theories, the *philosophes*—of whom Fontenelle and Boulainvilliers were the first in France to acquire European reputations—suddenly discovered that they too could exert a practical impact in the real world—in ideas in the first place but through ideas also on education, politics, religion, and general culture. Philosophy became not just emancipated but also powerful. This happened, as the French historian of thought Boureau-Deslandes noted in 1737, because *philosophes* had discovered how to influence debates about education, moral notions, the arts, economic policy, administration, and ‘toute la conduite de la vie’.³¹ Even in lands remote from the forefront of intellectual innovation, the power of philosophy in the new context was undeniable. When the medical revolution—based primarily on Dutch ideas—began in Spain in the 1680s, the Valencian physician Juan de Cabriada, a devotee in particular of the famous Professor Dele Boe Sylvius, at Leiden, expressly identified *libertad filosófica* (liberty to philosophize), and especially to study Cartesianism, and receive up-to-date information about philosophical debates from ‘Germany, France and other provinces’, as the prime engine of change, the instrument with which to smash down Spain’s outmoded, medical culture, based on Galen, with its age-old zeal for blood-letting and purging.³²

Hence Europe’s war of philosophies during the Early Enlightenment down to 1750 was never confined to the

intellectual sphere and was never anywhere a straightforward two-way contest between traditionalists and *moderni*. Rather, the rivalry between moderate mainstream and radical fringe was always as much an integral part of the drama as that between the moderate Enlightenment and conservative opposition. In this triangular battle of ideas what was ultimately at stake was what kind of belief-system should prevail in Europe's politics, social order, and institutions, as well as in high culture and, no less, in popular attitudes.³³

Of the two rival wings of the European Enlightenment, the moderate mainstream, supported as it was by numerous governments and influential factions in the main Churches, appeared, at least on the surface, much the more powerful tendency. Among its primary spokesmen were Newton and Locke in England, Thomasiaus and Wolff in Germany, the 'Newtonians' Nieuwentijt and 's-Gravesande in the Netherlands, and Feijóo and Piquer, in Spain. This was the Enlightenment which aspired to conquer ignorance and superstition, establish toleration, and revolutionize ideas, education, and attitudes by means of philosophy but in such a way as to preserve and safeguard what were judged essential elements of the older structures, effecting a viable synthesis of old and new, and of reason and faith. Although down to 1750, in Europe as a whole, the struggle for the middle ground remained inconclusive, much of the European mainstream had, by the 1730s and 1740s, firmly espoused the ideas of Locke and Newton which indeed seemed uniquely attuned and suited to the moderate Enlightenment purpose.

By contrast, the Radical Enlightenment, whether on an atheistic or deistic basis, rejected all compromise with the past and sought to sweep away existing structures entirely,

rejecting the Creation as traditionally understood in Judaeo-Christian civilization, and the intervention of a providential God in human affairs, denying the possibility of miracles, and reward and punishment in an afterlife, scorning all forms of ecclesiastical authority, and refusing to accept that there is any God-ordained social hierarchy, concentration of privilege or land-ownership in noble hands, or religious sanction for monarchy.³⁴ From its origins in the 1650s and 1660s, the philosophical radicalism of the European Early Enlightenment characteristically combined immense reverence for science, and for mathematical logic, with some form of non-providential deism, if not outright materialism and atheism along with unmistakably republican, even democratic tendencies.

Down to the 1750s the principal luminaries of the moderate Enlightenment were uninterruptedly battling on several different fronts simultaneously. Divided among themselves into three main separate factions contending for the middle ground, they were at the same time engaged in fending off traditionalists on one flank and radicals on the other. Hence it became a typical feature of intellectual conflict that moderates endeavoured to shield themselves against conservatives by stressing, even exaggerating, the gulf dividing them from the universally reviled and abhorred radicals while, simultaneously, traditionalists sought a tactical advantage, in their public discourse, by minimizing the gap separating the latter from the moderates as much as possible. A classic instance of such manoeuvring was the controversy surrounding the publication of Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois*, a landmark of moderate Enlightenment thought, in 1748. Scarcely had it appeared than it was vociferously decried, especially by the Jesuits in France, Italy, and Austria as

'Spinosiste et déiste' in inspiration, since it treats morals and laws as essentially natural, man-made contrivances bearing no relation to any God-given absolute standard.³⁵ At this point it was also retrospectively pointed out that Montesquieu's earlier work, the *Lettres Persanes* (1721) was similarly infused with Spinozist ideas about morality and law and that when discussing the Emperor Theodosius once again 'Spinoza est le modèle que l'auteur a voulu imiter'.³⁶ Forced to reply, Montesquieu published a brochure at Geneva, in February 1750, maintaining (not altogether convincingly) that the accusation was self-contradictory since Spinozism, properly understood, is incompatible with deism. In any case, he insisted on his own Christian allegiance, and belief in a providential God 'comme Créateur et comme conservateur' of the universe; he had always condemned, he claimed, those who assert that the world is governed by blind fate and scrupulously differentiated in his writing the material world from 'les intelligences spirituelles'.³⁷ Montesquieu's assurances that 'il n'y a donc point de Spinosisme dans *l'Esprit des Loix*'³⁸ were cautiously accepted by most governments, including, after a protracted controversy, the imperial court at Vienna, though the papal Inquisition at Rome, after considerable hesitation, rejected his defence and banned the book anyway in November 1751.

The question of Spinozism is indeed central and indispensable to any proper understanding of Early Enlightenment European thought. Its prominence in European intellectual debates of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century is generally far greater than anyone would suppose from the existing secondary literature; one of the chief aims of this present study is to demonstrate that there

has been a persistent and unfortunate tendency in modern historiography to misconstrue and underestimate its significance. Admittedly, the term 'Spinosisme' as used in the French Enlightenment, or *Spinozisterey*, as it was called in Germany, was frequently employed, as in the campaign against Montesquieu, rather broadly to denote virtually the whole of the Radical Enlightenment, that is, all deistic, Naturalistic, and atheistic systems that exclude divine Providence, Revelation, and miracles, including reward and punishment in the hereafter, rather than strict adherence to Spinoza's system as such.³⁹ Yet this does not mean that it was a vague or meaningless usage. On the contrary, the extremely frequent and extensive use of the terms Spinozism and *Spinosistes* in Early Enlightenment discourse, not least in Bayle, who devoted the longest single article in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* to the subject of Spinoza and *Spinosisme*, is precisely intended to connect—and with considerable justification, as we shall see—Spinoza's philosophy with a wide-ranging network of other radical thought. Thus, for example, the most voluminous eighteenth-century European encyclopaedia, Zedler's *Grosses Universal Lexicon* (see pp. 135, 655 below), published at Leipzig and completed in 1750, provides separate entries for 'Spinoza' and 'Spinozisterey' both of which are individually considerably longer than what is said about 'Locke'.⁴⁰ The pattern is the same in the later French *Encyclopédie* edited by Diderot and d'Alembert: for all the lavish praise heaped on Locke by d'Alembert in his preliminary discourse to the *Encyclopédie*—praise which, as we shall see, may have had a diversionary purpose—in the body of the *Encyclopédie* itself

the coverage given to Locke is far less, scarcely one fifth, of the coverage accorded to Spinoza.⁴¹

The *Grosses Universal Lexicon* lists the leading 'Spinozists' apart from Spinoza himself as 'Leenhof, Kuyper, Lucas, Boulainvilliers, Cuffeler, the author of *Philopater*, Wyermars, Koerbagh, Lau, Lahontan, Moses Germanus, Stosch and Toland'.⁴² In addition, a second list is given of those suspected of being strongly influenced by Spinoza, namely 'Geulincx, Bredenburg, Bekker, Deurhoff, Burman, Wachter and [Jacob] Wittichius'. Today most of these names, aside from those of Boulainvilliers and Toland, are largely or entirely forgotten. Yet there is little justification for ignoring or marginalizing these writers since even a cursory examination of their writings shows that their views are more radical and, in some cases, more innovative than those of numerous figures who, for one reason or another, are far more familiar to those who study and discuss the Enlightenment today. For this reason, another key objective of this present study is to redress the balance somewhat in their regard too.

ii. The 'Crisis of the European Mind'

As employed in this present work, the term 'Crisis of the European Mind' denotes the unprecedented intellectual turmoil which commenced in the mid-seventeenth century, with the rise of Cartesianism and the subsequent spread of 'mechanical philosophy' or the 'mechanistic world-view', an upheaval which heralded the onset of the Enlightenment proper in the closing years of the century.⁴³ Admittedly, new philosophical and scientific ideas such as Cartesianism cannot claim all the credit for engineering the resulting revolutionary transformation in European culture. New kinds of theological

controversy often contributed both to weakening the internal cohesion of the main confessional blocs and, as has been shown in the case of the decline of belief in Hell and eternal torment for the damned, to driving some of the most characteristic changes of attitude regarding traditional beliefs during this most decisive of all periods of cultural change.⁴⁴ Yet it was unquestionably the rise of powerful new philosophical systems, rooted in the scientific advances of the early seventeenth century and especially the mechanistic views of Galileo, which chiefly generated that vast *Kulturkampf* between traditional, theologically sanctioned ideas about Man, God, and the universe and secular, mechanistic conceptions which stood independently of any theological sanction. What came to be called the 'New Philosophy', which in most cases meant Cartesianism, diverged fundamentally from the essentially magical, Aristotelian, 'pre-scientific' view of the world which had everywhere prevailed hitherto and worked to supplant it, projecting a rigorous mechanism which, in the eyes of adversaries, inevitably entailed the subordination of theology and Church authority to concepts rooted in a mathematically grounded philosophical reason—albeit most 'Cartesians' of the 1650s and 1660s never intended to undermine theology's hegemony or weaken the sway of the churches to anything like the extent which rapidly resulted.⁴⁵

This transitional phase, or prelude to the Early Enlightenment, arguably corresponds to the larger part of the second half of the century, down to the 1680s. In these years, the sway of theology, ecclesiastical authority, and divine-right monarchy appeared broadly still intact but was perceptibly being weakened by the onset of alarming rifts and fissures.

Sporadically, especially in France and Italy, various manifestations of clandestine atheistic and deistic traditions reaching back via such authors as Bodin, Bruno, and Giulio Cesare Vanini, the alleged ‘atheist’ burned at the stake in Toulouse in 1619, and then through earlier Italian thinkers, notably Machiavelli and Pomponazzi, to ancient Rome and Greece, appeared, albeit usually in the veiled, camouflaged manner of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century libertines. This form of intellectual dissent, termed *libertinisme érudit*, still an appreciable force in the late seventeenth century, sought to mask, but simultaneously to disseminate, views opposed to prevailing theological and metaphysical orthodoxies by presenting opinions and quotations culled mostly from classical authors in innovative and seditious ways, paying particular attention to sceptical, irreverent, and atheistic sources such as Lucian, Epicurus, and Sextus Empiricus, and historians of philosophy such as Diogenes Laertius.⁴⁶

This was a potent intellectual undercurrent, especially in France and Italy, and one which played a notable role in preparing the ground for the rise of the Radical Enlightenment, especially by creating a sophisticated audience potentially receptive to its message and promoting the theory, insinuated particularly by Machiavelli and Vanini, of the political origin of organized religion.⁴⁷ However, such erudite *libertinismo* was never strictly part of the phenomenon of the Radical Enlightenment itself. For the perfecting of the erudite libertine techniques was chiefly a feature of the early seventeenth century—especially the work of Gabriel Naudé (1600–53) and François de la Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672)—when there was still little or no possibility of

producing or propagating a systematic philosophy explicitly at odds with the prevailing orthodoxies. The *libertins érudits*, however seditious, were essentially precursors of the Radical Enlightenment operating behind a dense layer of camouflage.

From the 1650s, particularly in the relatively freer atmosphere of the Netherlands and England, the opportunity to forge an explicit and systematic philosophical radicalism existed. Nevertheless, all new streams of thought which gained any broad support in Europe between 1650 and 1750, such as the philosophies of Descartes, Malebranche, Le Clerc, Locke, Newton, Thomasius, Leibniz, or Wolff, sought to substantiate and defend the truth of revealed religion and the principle of a divinely created and ordered universe. If the great thinkers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century uniformly reviled bigotry and 'superstition' and discarded, if not expressly rejected, belief in magic, divination, alchemy, and demonology, all except Spinoza and Bayle sought to accommodate the new advances in science and mathematics to Christian belief (if not always to that of one or other Church) and the authority of Scripture. They asserted as fundamental features of our cosmos the ceaseless working of divine Providence, the authenticity of Biblical prophecy, the reality of miracles, immortality of the soul, reward and punishment in the hereafter, and, in one way or another—sometimes highly unorthodox as with Le Clerc, Locke and Newton—Christ's mission as the Redeemer of Man.

Admittedly, fragmentation of ideas as such was not entirely a new phenomenon. For there had never been a single accepted corpus of philosophy and science, linked to theology, which was universally acknowledged and taught in the west. It is true that before 1650, as afterwards, Europe's

philosophical heritage was ramified and diverse. Nor since the Reformation had there been a single dominant theology. Instead, four competing principal Churches—the Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican—had each in its own manner secured a locally dominant position in spiritual life, education, and general culture. Each confessional bloc exhibited its own distinct theological tradition, exegetical methodology, ecclesiastical hierarchy, and network of institutions of higher learning.

Yet despite the profound disarray and distress generated by the Reformation and sporadic wars of religion, by the late sixteenth century a generally stable and imposing façade of spiritual and intellectual unity had been restored, each main confessional bloc succeeding in the territory it dominated in establishing a cultural hegemony which was both locally overwhelming and remarkably resilient. After around 1590, changes in Europe's confessional boundaries, even in the midst of the horrors of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), became increasingly rare. Furthermore, while remaining irreconcilably antagonistic towards each other, these hegemonic Churches all successfully built, each in its own sphere, a confessional uniformity, not only within their own ranks but, in most cases (other than in the Dutch Republic and England) also in society as a whole. They were able to confine lesser Churches and fringe sects to a completely marginal status, or eliminate them altogether. Even in confessionally hybrid states such as the electorate of Brandenburg-Prussia which, in 1701, became a monarchy, there was a strong propensity before 1650 for the constituent territories to belong predominantly to one or another confession; thus in Brandenburg, Pomerania, and East Prussia the Lutheran and, in Cleves, Mark, and Ravensberg, the

Reformed (Calvinist). Finally, all four main church blocs found they could agree, if not on questions of authority and numerous secondary points of theology, then broadly, on the core Christian doctrines to be upheld and protected.

The four principal confessions also largely agreed as to the metaphysical, logical, and scientific underpinning, namely scholastic Aristotelianism, best adapted to reinforcing and extending the sway of their ultimately convergent theologies.⁴⁸ Hence, while scholastic Aristotelianism in the seventeenth century was by no means either entirely uniform, nor as inflexible and unwilling to debate the new mechanistic theories as is sometimes implied,⁴⁹ it was nevertheless, in both Catholic and Protestant lands, throughout Europe until the 1650s overwhelmingly *philosophia recepta*, the officially and ecclesiastically sanctioned philosophy prevailing in universities and academies, and dominating philosophical and scientific discourse and textbooks.⁵⁰ Characteristic ingredients of this common Aristotelian legacy included the idea that all knowledge comes initially through the senses, and that the human mind—as Locke concurred later, in opposition to Descartes—is first a ‘tabula rasa’, and the key notion that all things are constituted of matter and form, the latter emanating from the soul or essence of things so that bodies and souls cannot be separate entities in themselves, a concept resulting in the celebrated doctrine of ‘substantial forms’.⁵¹ This concept of innate propensities in turn shaped scientific procedure by giving priority to classifying things according to their ‘qualities’ and then explaining the specific responses and characteristics of individual things in terms of primary group properties. Behaviour and function consequently arise, and are determined by, the soul or essence

of things rather than mechanistically. Hence there is a conceptual but no observable or measurable dividing line between the 'natural' and 'supernatural', a distinction which could only be clearly made following the rise of the mechanistic world-view.

If discrepancies, tensions, and contradictions abounded, it is nevertheless true that a broadly coherent culture took shape in most of Europe between the Reformation and the middle of the seventeenth century, favoured and supported by an elaborate apparatus of royal, ecclesiastical, and academic authority. Powerful instruments of religious and intellectual censorship had been forged to deal with the problem of religious heresy and these could in turn be put to use to tighten the linkage between theology and approved philosophy. From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, Europe was a civilization in which formal education, public debate, preaching, printing, bookselling, even tavern disputes about religion and the world, were closely supervised and controlled. Virtually nowhere, not even in England or Holland after 1688, was full toleration the rule, and hardly anyone subscribed to the idea that the individual should be free to think and believe as he or she thought fit.⁵² Still at the end of the seventeenth century, 'le dogme de la tolérance', as a French correspondent urged Leibniz, in 1691, was widely considered exceedingly dangerous despite the rapidly growing support for it, indeed the worst of all errors, because it is the one which encourages acquiescence in all the others—and was perceived as being primarily promoted by Socinians and 'ceux qu'on nomme Déistes et Spinosistes'.⁵³

Consequently, the cultural and intellectual system prevailing in mid-seventeenth-century Europe, with the partial

exception only of England and the United Provinces was—deep confessional divisions notwithstanding—doctrinally coherent, geared to uniformity, authoritarian, and formidably resistant to intellectual innovation and change. As such, it harmonized admirably not only with the dominant ecclesiastical and aristocratic hierarchies presiding over Church and society but also the pervasive princely absolutism of the age. Yet, astonishingly, it was precisely when the monarchical principle was most dominant, in France, Germany, Scandinavia, and Italy alike, that this common European culture, based on the primacy of confessional theology and scholastic Aristotelianism over belief, thought, education, and scholarship, first faltered, then rapidly weakened, and finally disintegrated.⁵⁴ From the 1650s onwards, first in one land, then another, variants of the New Philosophy breached the defences of authority, tradition, and confessional theology, fragmenting the old edifice of thought at every level from court to university and from pulpit to coffee-shop.⁵⁵

In places, even entire countries, Cartesianism gained an imposing general preponderance which here and there lasted many decades. Yet despite its broad and vigorous impetus internationally from around 1650 down to the 1720s, there was never much likelihood that it could supplant *philosophia aristotelico-scholastica* as the new generally accepted consensus, welding philosophy, science, and theology coherently into a new unity receiving both official and ecclesiastical sanction. In the first place there were too many internal intellectual difficulties and tensions within Cartesianism, which, in the longer run, sapped its unity, cogency, and momentum. Secondly, there was little prospect

that Europe's princely courts and Churches would uniformly espouse Descartes' system as formerly they had that of Aristotle. For leading voices within all Churches either hesitated or expressed strong opposition, some unsure whether Cartesianism was really as useful and effective a prop for the core doctrines of Christianity as Descartes and his followers claimed, others convinced that Cartesianism was, on the contrary, prejudicial to Christianity and the ecclesiastical interest. Then thirdly, Aristotelianism, though badly shaken and widely disparaged, was by no means eliminated but rather adapted and fought back, with considerable effect.⁵⁶ Even in the United Provinces and England, where the new mechanistic ideas gained an early primacy, Aristotelianism remained an appreciable factor in the equation.⁵⁷ Post-1650 Aristotelians in northern and southern Europe not only deplored the mechanistic systems of Descartes, Gassendi, and others as incompatible with traditional epistemology, metaphysics, and science but as a first step towards irreligion and atheism.⁵⁸ According to Giovanni Battista Benedetti (or De Benedictis; 1620–1706), rector of the Jesuit college in Naples at the end of the seventeenth century, chief advocate of scholastic Aristotelianism in Italy, and, after the publication of his *Philosophia perpatetica* (1687), a formidable presence also in Spain and Portugal, the *Cartesiani* and *Malebranchisti*, for all their disclaimers, were calling divine Providence into doubt and undermining belief in the core Christian 'mysteries'.⁵⁹

The Cartesians failed, moreover, to maintain any real sense of unity among themselves. Rather, especially in France, they split into openly warring factions with the three leading figures—Antoine Arnauld (1632–94), Nicolas

Malebranche (1638–1715), and Pierre-Sylvain Régis (1632–1707)—all at each other's throats.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Descartes' system proved unable to sway not only many clergy and academics, within all confessional camps, but also some of the most acute thinkers and scientists of the age; and while some among the latter, like the renowned Dutch physicist, Christian Huygens, kept their reservations to themselves, others, including Locke in England, Leibniz in Germany, and Vico in Naples, not only formidably criticized their great precursor but presented imposing new philosophical systems of their own which sapped confidence in Cartesianism much as Descartes had discredited Aristotelianism.

A further factor which greatly contributed to the depth and intensity of the general crisis of the European mind was the susceptibility of all major Churches, and many minor ones, made brittle by internecine wrangling both theological and philosophical, to experience major new and enduring rifts within their own ranks. In effect, practically every Church itself became deeply divided, in part over matters connected with current philosophical and scientific debates, while simultaneously beset by fresh forms of internal theological dissension. Hence philosophy served both to complicate and intensify conflicts between rival theological factions, though in Italy and France it also frequently happened that even priest-professors belonging to the same religious orders took opposite sides in the struggle for and against the 'New Philosophy'.⁶¹ Thus Jansenists and anti-Jansenists (especially the Jesuits) engaged, from the 1640s onwards, in vociferous strife within the Catholic Church in France and both parts of the Netherlands, as well as less noisily in Italy, even while

both sides had in addition to cope with splits between Cartesians and anti-Cartesians within their own ranks. No less acrimonious was the rivalry erupting within the Dutch Reformed Church between the liberal (Cocceian) and orthodox Calvinist (Voetian) wings, antagonism exacerbated by the tendency of the former to champion Cartesianism and the latter scholastic Aristotelianism.⁶² Similarly, the Anglican Church in Britain and Ireland divided theologically and intellectually (as well as politically) in the late seventeenth century between the traditionalists or 'high-flyers' and the liberal 'Latitudinarian' wing which proved receptive to Newtonianism if, at first, not to Locke. Even the clergy of Spain and Portugal, hitherto rock solid in their unity and commitment to scholasticism, fell into disarray towards the close of the seventeenth century as the Aristotelians strove (unsuccessfully, on the whole) to mobilize the Inquisition against the 'innovatores' while the Cartesians and *Malebranchistas* pointed out that John Wycliffe and many another 'appalling heretic' had wallowed in Aristotle.⁶³ Intellectually, the Iberian Peninsula may have struck other Europeans as remote and backward. Juan de Cabriada warned his compatriots in 1686 that due to their insufficient awareness of current philosophical and scientific developments elsewhere, they were disdained in other European lands like the 'Indians of America'.⁶⁴ Yet for all that, by the 1680s Spain too was becoming deeply fragmented by the New Philosophy and, despite the time lag, the bitter struggles over philosophy and science that erupted there in the early eighteenth century were in essence not greatly different from those convulsing the rest of Europe.

The concept of a 'crisis of the European mind' in the late seventeenth century as a transitional phase sandwiched between the confessional era and the Enlightenment was introduced into modern historiography by the Belgian historian of thought Paul Hazard (1878–1944) in his seminal work *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris, 1935) though, with his eye chiefly on developments in France, he tended to date the onset of the crisis unacceptably late, to around 1680.⁶⁵ More convincingly, Hazard described the intellectual upheaval as 'all-embracing, imperious, profound', a turmoil which 'though born of the seventeenth century was destined to leave its impress on virtually the whole of the eighteenth'.⁶⁶ His claim that the 'daring utterances of the *Aufklärung* ... pale into insignificance before the aggressive audacities of [Spinoza's] *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [and] the amazing declarations of the *Ethics*' while 'neither Voltaire nor Frederick II ever came near the ungovernable anti-clerical, anti-religious frenzy of Toland and his like' remains valid, as does his thesis that the decisive breakthrough of modern rationalism and secularization to predominance in western civilization occurred during the final decades of the seventeenth century and the opening years of the eighteenth.⁶⁷

Indeed, some such notion as that introduced by Hazard is essential—as long as we modify his dates—since there has to be some sort of label to describe the prelude before the Enlightenment, that is, roughly the decades 1650–80, when the cohesion and unity of the confessional outlook, the ascendancy of theological orthodoxy and scholastic Aristotelianism, frayed under the impact of the New Philosophy.⁶⁸ In this present study, the period 1650–80 is

designated the phase of transition or 'crisis of the European mind' preceding the onset of the Enlightenment, and the period 1680–1750 the more dramatic and decisive period of rethinking when the mental world of the west was revolutionized along rationalistic and secular lines. By the 1750s, all major intellectual innovations and accomplishments of the European Enlightenment were well advanced if not largely complete.

The 'crisis of the European mind' was a collective, but also a deeply unsettling and traumatic individual experience, not least for the scientists themselves, of whom Blaise Pascal (1623–62) was probably the most eloquent in expressing the mental and emotional agonies such profound soul-searching could involve. Pascal painstakingly rescues and reaffirms his Christian faith by dividing reality into totally separate compartments. As for Descartes, Pascal maintains in his posthumously published *Pensées* (1670) that he finds his offence unforgivable: for instead of by-passing the whole question of God, as he ought to have done, he has Him merely press a button 'pour mettre le monde en mouvement; après cela, il n'a plus que faire de Dieu'.⁶⁹ Another eminent scientist of the period, the Danish anatomist and geologist Nicholas Steno (1638–87), with no less passion than Pascal, eventually concluded that faith and science cannot be easily or satisfactorily reconciled and abandoned the latter completely to champion the former. Lorenzo Magalotti (1636–1712), secretary of the first of the European scientific academies of the later seventeenth century, in Florence, and a man in touch with all the latest scientific developments internationally, was no less tormented. During his years in Vienna (1674–8) he lapsed into a deep and irreversible personal intellectual crisis, even admitting, in January 1676, to his morbidly devout

sovereign, Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, that despite every effort to keep up his Catholic allegiance, deep down the new ideas had stifled his faith,⁷⁰ an admission almost certainly connected with his falling into disgrace at the Tuscan court on his return there in 1678.

The European crisis had far-reaching intellectual and religious and also, at least potentially, political implications. Hazard has been criticized for giving insufficient emphasis to the political aspects of the 'crisis', that is the reaction against divine-right monarchy and absolutist ideology and the onset of republican political theories linked expressly, or tacitly, to radical philosophy. It has also been suggested that Hazard failed to grasp the extent to which the intellectual legacy of the English Revolution of the 1640s, and especially the social and religious ideas of the Levellers and Diggers with their democratic, and sometimes communistic, inclinations, may have served not just as a source of radical ideas for the Radical Enlightenment as a whole, but conceivably, even constituted the ideological driving force of the entire European phenomenon, especially its political and social radicalism.⁷¹

Although it cannot be said that its political thought was one of its most prominent or developed features, undeniably the Radical Enlightenment was republican, did reject divine-right monarchy, and did evince anti-aristocratic and democratic tendencies. Democratic republicanism was a particularly marked feature of the writings of the Dutch, English, and Italian radicals though it is also encountered, albeit much more faintly, in French and German contexts. However, there is little of a concrete nature to suggest that the continental Radical Enlightenment did in fact principally

derive from English influence and example. On the whole, it seems more likely that the phenomenon derives from a broader, international context. After all, there were other quasi-revolutionary upheavals in mid-seventeenth-century Europe, notably the Frondes and the Massaniello rising (and the brief establishment of a republic) in Naples in 1647–8, which made a scarcely less profound impression on the European consciousness in general and radical minds in particular than the revolutionary upheaval in England. Then, judging by the intense interest it aroused, one might well insist that the Glorious Revolution of 1688–91 was actually more important as a political exemplum to the radical minds of the early Enlightenment than anything that happened earlier, and this was not in essence a national achievement of the English—nor was it then regarded as such—but essentially a consequence of Dutch *raison d'état* and a large-scale invasion from the continent.⁷² Furthermore, it seems that in Britain itself the social libertarianism of the mid-seventeenth century faded away in the late seventeenth century and did not reappear until the end of the eighteenth.⁷³

Finally, while it is clear that a highly developed republican tradition of political thought evolved in England from the 1650s onwards, and its characteristics have been studied in great detail by scholars, it is far from evident that this corpus of ideas was the prime inspiration for the radical republican tradition with which we are concerned in this present study. What has been termed the 'Anglicization of the republic',⁷⁴ produced certain specific features—an emphasis on land as the basis of political influence and an orientation towards the outlook and needs of the English gentry—which render this corpus of thought appreciably different from the

alternative republican tradition, essentially urban and commercial, originating in the work of such writers as Johan and Pieter de la Court, and Spinoza's Latin master, Franciscus van den Enden, with its uncompromising anti-monarchism and egalitarian tendency, a tradition which sprang up on the continent and leads in direct line of descent to the revolutionary rhetoric of Robespierre and the French Jacobins.

In any case, focusing on national contexts is assuredly the wrong approach to an essentially European phenomenon such as the Radical Enlightenment. The movement or current was an international network bent on far-reaching reform philosophically, socially, ethically, in matters of gender and sexuality, and also politically, drawing inspiration from a wide range of sources and traditions, albeit from the 1660s onwards it evinced a high degree of intellectual cohesion, revolving in particular around Spinoza and Spinozism. Given the range of its sources and its widespread impact, as well as an immense anti-radical reaction extending to every corner of Europe, the most essential prerequisite for a balanced view of its origins, development, structure, and reception is to adopt a very broad European view. However difficult it may be to achieve a balanced coverage across a region as culturally diverse as Europe, it is essential to work in that direction if so crucial a manifestation of European history and culture is not to be largely overlooked and marginalized simply because it is too far-ranging and pervasive to be coped with in terms of traditional notions of 'national' history.

2

GOVERNMENT AND PHILOSOPHY

i. The Advent of Cartesianism

By 1648 Europe's rulers had been engulfed for over a century in inter-confessional conflict. Most of this incessant strife had been ideological and political rather than physical but, in France and the Low Countries, between the 1560s and the 1590s, and in Germany and Bohemia during the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), there had also been unprecedented slaughter, savagery, and destruction. Rarely had this war of confessions been a straightforward conflict between Catholics and Protestants. More often, the religious battle was triangular or even quadrilateral, as in Lutheran Germany where the new State Church simultaneously fought Catholicism, Calvinism, and radical Protestant fringe movements, such as Anabaptism, Spiritualism, and Socinianism. Between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth century, confessionalization and the resulting war of the Churches constituted Europe's prime engine of cultural and educational change. So powerful indeed was the ideological, intellectual, and general cultural impulse of confessionalization that monarchs, patricians, and republics had little choice but to take sides, selecting one main bloc or another, and imposing their own local confessional agenda. Education, social welfare, the arts, scholarship, no sphere of activity remained free from the unrelenting demands of confessional and theological rivalry.

Some rulers, plainly, were more zealous for confessional uniformity, and given to campaigns to stamp out dissent, than others. Some permitted an informal toleration of selected

dissenters for one reason or another, often because they valued their economic contribution or lacked the means to eliminate them militarily. A few states, such as the Dutch Republic, Brandenburg-Prussia, and, until the mid-seventeenth century, also Poland, embraced a broader, more formal toleration of confessions. There were also cases, such as Brandenburg-Prussia after 1613, where the prince chose a different confessional allegiance to that prevailing among his subjects. Yet everywhere organized Churches of one theological complexion or other were deemed indispensable pillars of the social order, arbiters of belief, morality, education, and censorship, and the ultimate guardians of authority, by élites and populace alike. So great indeed was the cultural ascendancy of the dominant or State Churches in their respective zones of hegemony that confessional theology long remained the principal and overriding criterion in assessing all intellectual debate and innovation.

Before 1650, science and philosophy accordingly were of little immediate concern to rulers and ruling élites. Because these activities were subjected to the claims of confessional theology, and practised in institutional contexts directly or indirectly under ecclesiastical supervision, princes and parliaments could safely ignore philosophy and science as something largely peripheral to the business of government. If, in the early seventeenth century, various European rulers were renowned connoisseurs of art and architecture, few saw any need to concern themselves with philosophy or science. From the 1640s, however, beginning on the continent with the onset of the Cartesian controversies in the United Provinces and, in England, with the intellectual ferment and proliferation of religious sects resulting from the Civil War (1642–7), this hitherto prevailing pattern of confessionally

regulated cultural cohesion progressively disintegrated, initiating one of the most decisive intellectual and cultural shifts in western history. As the supremacy of theology waned, non-theological accounts of man, God, and the world, that is, the New Philosophy, especially Cartesianism, penetrated with such novel and unsettling consequences that rulers, however unaccustomed to such a role, found themselves compelled to intervene. After around 1650 governments had no alternative but to endeavour to cope with the vast issues, cultural, intellectual, theological, and political, raised by the New Philosophy and science, rendering philosophical matters an integral and essential part of their statecraft. Government intervention often provided some semblance of intellectual stability in a particular country or region for a time, but overall it simply added to the growing fragmentation of thought, since there was little scope for coordinating cultural, educational, or censorship policy between states. Moreover, even where vigorous intervention effectively ensured a particular intellectual stance, the respite was mostly temporary, not just because monarchs' successors often preferred a different philosophical stance from their predecessors, but because the intellectual controversies of the age stirred such profound anxieties and dissension that even the greatest potentates, such as Louis XIV or the Swedish kings, and, in Italy, the Pope, proved powerless altogether to quell the commotion.

In continental Europe, major intellectual turmoil developed first in the Dutch Republic and the Calvinist states of Germany. In order to avail himself of the relative intellectual freedom reigning there, Descartes had chosen to live and work from the 1620s onwards mainly in the United Provinces, and it was there he wrote his chief works of

philosophy, established his fame, and launched his philosophical enterprise, a project which Bayle and most of the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century, for all their criticism, continued to venerate as marking the true beginning of 'modernity' and 'enlightenment' in men's ideas.¹ By the late 1640s his influence in the Dutch universities, and Dutch scholarship, medicine, and science, at a time when it was still almost unnoticed in his native land, was already far-reaching. Except for Groningen, where the academic senate managed to damp down the agitation, all the Dutch universities, especially Utrecht and Leiden, lapsed into a philosophical struggle unprecedented in European history since ancient times for acrimony, duration, and divisiveness.² The result was a deep and abiding split between philosophical conservatives, broadly the scholastic Aristotelians, whose chief spokesman was the famous Utrecht professor Gijsbertus Voetius (1589–1676), and innovators, primarily Cartesians, intent on revolutionizing not just philosophy but also physics, astronomy, medicine, and in some respects even Bible criticism and theology, along the lines of Descartes' mechanistic world-view.

But the resistance to the New Philosophy proved as fervent and tenacious as its support. As was later the case everywhere, champions of *philosophia aristotelio-scholastica* in the Netherlands claimed to be defending faith and ecclesiastical as well as intellectual authority, adhering, like Voetius, to a fundamentalist, hard-line confessional orthodoxy. Yet the continent-wide contest which began in the Dutch Republic was not straightforwardly one between *novatores* and the presiding public Churches. On the contrary, before long the Dutch and German Reformed Churches were

no less plunged in internecine strife and acrimony than the universities.³ In northern Calvinist lands, Reformed orthodoxy had been increasingly challenged since the 1640s by a new, liberal theological tendency inspired especially by Johannes Cocceius (1603–69), originally from the Calvinist city of Bremen, but since 1650 professor of theology at Leiden.⁴ The ensuing theological struggle between liberal and conservative wings within the Dutch public Church then became entwined with the issue of Cartesianism in such a way that the theological split paralleled and became linked to the growing rift over philosophy and science.

Originally mostly matter for learned wrangling in Latin, very soon the hugely divisive issues at stake also began to be debated in taverns, passenger barges, and popular pamphlets in the vernacular.⁵ One of the most fiercely contested issues was the status of philosophical reason itself, the Cartesio-Cocceians, as their opponents expressed it, maintaining that ‘philosophy is a divine truth as sure as Holy Scripture, a Letter of God, and infallible, a measuring-rod of Scripture, so that whatever contradicts it is false’ while the Aristotelio-Voetians insisted that philosophy should not be free in the way that Descartes envisaged, indeed has no independent status or absolute validity but is merely ancillary to theology.⁶ A leading Cartesio-Cocceian and champion of philosophical reason, Christopher Wittichius (1625–87), whose career spanned both the Lower Rhine and the Dutch Republic, held that ‘what we know from within, by means of pure reason, we must deem to be revealed to us by God.’⁷ Another Cartesio-Cocceian, Louis Wolzogen, averred that the origin and ‘cause of the use of right reason’ is God Himself. Like Wittichius, Wolzogen judged it impossible that God’s Revelation should

conflict with the natural light—that is, our, or rather Descartes', 'clear and distinct ideas'.⁸

Such sweeping reverence for philosophical reason, as well as the Cocceians' proneness to query traditional renderings of Hebrew and Greek in the authorized States Bible,⁹ and construe passages of Scripture as allegories or figurative usages, not intended to be understood literally, provoked the Voetian charge that their adversaries were systematically subordinating the Bible to philosophical reason. For the Cartesians, they charged, 'philosophy and philosophers are the interpreters of Scripture in matters of nature'¹⁰ for whom, on many points, Holy Writ 'speaks according to the erroneous notions of the common people of the time'.¹¹ Wittichius and other Cartesio-Cocceians did indeed argue that 'philosophical knowledge of natural things can not be had from the sacred books'¹² but nevertheless indignantly denied they were reducing theology to philosophy or encroaching on the authority of Scripture.¹³ For decades, the exalted status the Cartesio-Cocceians accorded 'philosophy' continually aroused their opponents' condemnation and wrath. Later, in a vitriolic attack on Wittichius entitled *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena* (1677) by Petrus van Mastricht—who (from 1678) was Voetius' successor at Utrecht—the *novatores'* veneration of 'philosophy' was exploited to buttress the accusation that, for all their denying it, at bottom the Cartesians embrace Spinoza's doctrine that God and Nature are one.¹⁴ After 1670, Cartesians were continually obliged to counter the smear that their proofs for the existence, and their concept, of God were suspect and that they were somehow responsible for Spinozism,¹⁵ while Voetians, eager to make

the most of such hard-hitting rhetoric, lost no opportunity to tar their opponents as 'Spinosistische Cartesianen'.

A related issue was the respective positions of philosophy and theology in the hierarchy of scholarly disciplines. Voetius' theological defence of Aristotelian 'substantial forms' on the grounds that Genesis and Proverbs specify 'permanent natures' and 'distinct species of things', in a manner which validates the scholastic concept, is closely related to his insistence on the primacy of theology over all learning, including philosophy.¹⁶ By rejecting 'substantial forms' and, in their antagonists' view, contradicting Scripture, the Cartesians seemed to be supplanting theology's God-given supremacy and enthroning reason, that is, making reason all-powerful, as a leading Italian Aristotelian later expressed it, and theology 'powerless',¹⁷ and in this way also usurping the rightful authority of the Church. The consequences of such a revolution in ideas, and in the hierarchy of intellectual disciplines, according to conservatives, Protestant and Catholic alike, would be socially, morally, religiously, and also politically catastrophic.

No less fraught with tension, from the 1650s, was the Copernican thesis revived by Galileo and espoused by the Cartesio-Cocceians, of the earth's motion around the sun. Copernicus and Galileo may have potentially revolutionized astronomy and cosmography, but until the 1650s the Copernican controversy had barely ruffled the surface of intellectual consciousness in most of Europe. Only around the middle of the century, when it came to be adopted as a key element of the New Philosophy, and Descartes' mechanistic conception of the universe simultaneously became a prime target of the scholastic Aristotelians, did there arise a wider

appreciation of what was involved.¹⁸ Voetius and the Calvinist orthodox were primarily concerned, in this controversy, with upholding the authority of Scripture and the unity of truth, including the Aristotelian conception of 'substantial forms', rather than assessing the astronomical evidence as such. By the late 1650s, heliocentrism and its implications for 'philosophy' and religion were being vehemently disputed in popular as well as learned publications in the Netherlands,¹⁹ a phenomenon which materialized only somewhat later in most other parts of Europe. Wittichius, Frans Burmannus (1628–79), and other leading Cartesio-Cocceians held that 'philosophy', both theoretical and experimental, corroborates the truth of the Copernican thesis that the earth moves around the sun, and that its verification in turn confirms that 'Scripture,' as Wittichius puts it, 'speaks according to the outward appearance of things as they seem to our senses.'²⁰ This, protested orthodox Calvinists, was tantamount to claiming 'God says things to us He knows are not true, in other words lies to us; since, in the story of Joshua and elsewhere [Ecclesiastes 1: 4–7; Psalms 19: 5–7], Holy Scripture plainly affirms the sun circles the earth, this must be so.'²¹ Wittichius indignantly denied that his view that Scripture explains natural things 'according to the opinion of the vulgar' implies that God deliberately lies to us or that he was subordinating theology to reason.²² But this point proved as irresolvable as it was fundamental, given that there was so much, philosophically and theologically, at stake. The Voetian campaign against Copernican heliocentrism, vigorously resumed by Petrus van Mastricht and Melchior Leydekker

(1642–1721) in the 1670s and 1680s, persisted down to the end of the century.²³

The ‘God’ of the Cartesians, objected their opponents, was no longer the true God who governs and conserves the universe, and intervenes in human affairs, but some abstract ‘principle’, essentially just Professor Wittichius’ ‘Deus primaria est motus causa’ (God is the first cause of motion). The commotion in the universities became so intense that by the mid-1650s it was impossible for the States of Holland any longer to stand aside. Guided by their Pensionary, Johan de Witt (1625–72), a gifted mathematician and something of a Cartesian himself, who in this matter was advised by a leading Cartesio-Cocceian, the Leiden theologian Abraham Heidanus (1597–1678), the States promulgated an edict on philosophy designed to ‘prevent abuse of freedom to philosophize to the detriment of true theology and Holy Scripture’.²⁴ This carefully crafted enactment, passed in October 1656, over the objections of the Aristotelio-Voetians and Leiden burgomasters, conceded enough to the orthodox to reduce friction and quell the student unrest recently witnessed at Leiden, while simultaneously—despite banning mention of Descartes’ name and the titles of his books from lectures and disputations—conserving the core of ‘freedom to philosophize’. To accomplish this, De Witt, Heidanus, and the States of Holland sought to separate theology and philosophy as much as possible, declaring them different spheres of activity. Where an overlap was unavoidable, the philosophers, stipulated the decree, must defer to theology and eschew contentious interpretation of Scripture ‘according to their principles’.²⁵ All six of Leiden’s professors of theology and philosophy—three for each discipline—were required to endorse the edict before the academic curators, swearing on

oath to uphold its terms, including the ban on mentioning Descartes' name in lectures. Though basically a victory for the Cartesians, and an endorsement of 'freedom to philosophize', the decree nevertheless also deftly echoed, at least superficially, the Leiden academic senate's original ban on teaching Cartesianism.

Comparative calm followed, though tension remained acute, until the Dutch 'disaster year' of 1672 when Louis XIV invaded in overwhelming force, the populace rioted, and the De Witt régime was overthrown. With the ensuing restoration of the stadholderate, and elimination of the regent faction which favoured the CartesioCocceian faction, the Voetians had their opportunity to engineer a counter-offensive, first in Holland and Zeeland and, after the French retreat in 1673, also in Utrecht. The new orthodox Calvinist head of the Leiden theology faculty, Friedrich Spanheim (1632–1701), presided over this vigorous but ultimately futile attempt to extirpate Cartesianism from Dutch academic culture, an initiative which had little lasting impact other than further embittering the atmosphere and provoking renewed student unrest.²⁶ It proved impossible, in the circumstances of the late seventeenth century, to wean a large part of the professorate and student body, or for that matter of the Reformed Church's preachers, away from their Cartesian allegiance or to nullify the newly-won status of philosophy and science.

In 1676, spurred by Spanheim, the recently purged Leiden curators drew up a list of twenty Cartesio-Cocceian propositions deemed especially reprehensible by Voetians, including the methodological requirement to begin by doubting everything 'even the existence of God' besides Wittichius' maxim that 'Scripture speaks according to the prejudices of the common people' and the radical Cartesian

doctrine (which none of the Cartesio-Cocceian professors would admit to accepting) that 'philosophy is the interpreter of Scripture,'²⁷ concepts that those directing the anti-Cartesian drive wished to see banned from teaching. The young Stadholder, William III, approved the list of condemned tenets and the ban was duly posted up around Leiden in Latin and Dutch, in the name of both curators and burgomasters. The authors responsible for these forbidden doctrines were named and, besides Descartes himself, predictably included, Wittichius, Wolzogen, and Cocceius.²⁸ But the Cartesio-Cocceian part was sufficiently strongly entrenched to resist with an appreciable effect. At Leiden Heidanus, Wittichius, and the scientist Burchardus de Volder, the first professor to introduce practical experiments in physics at a Dutch university, joined forces to devise, and anonymously publish, a devastating critique of the curators' intervention which became a best-seller.²⁹ For their defiance, Heidanus was dismissed from his chair, and Wittichius and De Volder severely reprimanded, but to little avail. By the early 1680s it was obvious that Wittichius and De Volder were the real victors. The attempt to enforce the revived hegemony of scholastic Aristotelianism collapsed. From the 1680s down to around 1720 Cartesianism enjoyed an incomplete, and still fiercely challenged, but nevertheless fairly general ascendancy in all the universities and civic high schools, from Franeker to 's-Hertogenbosch, and broadly over Dutch intellectual life as a whole.

ii. Cartesianism in Central Europe

Consequently, the Netherlands became the chief source of a powerful intellectual current, basically a modified, academic

Cartesianism, which spread rapidly across Germany and the rest of northern Europe. Descartes' native land, meanwhile, where both Church and universities were, as we shall see, predominantly hostile to the New Philosophy, played a much less prominent role as an engine of mechanistic ideas in pre-Enlightenment Europe, a circumstance insufficiently stressed by historians. The primacy of the Netherlands as an exporter of Cartesian ideas and mechanistic thinking within Europe was due firstly to Cartesianism's early breakthrough in the Dutch scholarly world and secondly to Holland's pre-eminence in publishing and exporting Descartes' works, as well as the major commentaries on his philosophy. But it was also due to the high prestige of the Dutch universities internationally and especially their unmatched capacity in this period to attract large numbers of foreign students, particularly from Germany, Scandinavia, and Hungary but also Scotland, England, and France.

In Germany, the penetration of Cartesian philosophy and science in the 1650s, began, predictably, in the north-west German Calvinist states which maintained close cultural links with the Dutch Reformed Church.³⁰ Here too the penetration of Cartesian ideas was fiercely contested.³¹ In 1651, at the university of Nassau-Dillenburg, at Herborn,³² where Wittichius (who was then teaching there) and a young professor, Johannes Clauberg (1622–65), originally from Solingen but trained at Leiden and destined to become one of the foremost Cartesian expositors in Europe, had been quietly infiltrating Cartesian ideas into their teaching for several years, uproar ensued when the two professors openly espoused Cartesianism in the lecture-room. Protests from the theology faculty obliged the prince, Count Ludwig Heinrich,

to intervene. But how was he to decide which was the philosophy best suited to the smooth functioning of higher education in his state and the stability of society? Requiring guidance, he sent a circular to all five Dutch universities enquiring about their policies on philosophy. All five senates replied that they had banned Cartesianism as disruptive and 'harmful', though Groningen somewhat spoilt the effect by adding that, in contrast to Leiden and Utrecht, there the prohibition was also enforced in practice.³³ Swayed by the Aristotelio-Voetian case, Ludwig Heinrich prohibited Cartesianism in Nassau-Dillenburg and expelled both Clauberg and Wittichius from his lands. Herborn thenceforth remained for decades a bastion of Reformed orthodoxy and scholastic Aristotelianism.

Other German Calvinist princes, however, reacted very differently.³⁴ The preeminent ruler in northern Germany, the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm (ruled 1640–88) of Brandenburg-Prussia had spent part of his youth at the Stadholder's court in The Hague and studied briefly at Leiden. Subsequently, the Dutch context remained fundamental to his statecraft and, as has often been remarked, in every field from military and economic organization to architecture. Furthermore, he not only married the eldest daughter of the Dutch Stadholder, Frederick Henry, but shared his father-in-law's tolerant outlook in theological and intellectual matters. A Calvinist ruler over a predominantly Lutheran land, he was compelled furthermore to devise policies apt to ease, rather than exacerbate, the ceaseless and disruptive antagonism between the Lutheran and Calvinist confessional blocs. Thus, for both personal and political reasons, the court at Berlin

consistently inclined towards the Cartesio-Cocceians rather than Voetian-style Calvinist orthodoxy.³⁵

Until the founding of Halle, in 1694, there were three universities in the electorate—Frankfurt an der Oder, Königsberg, and the most recent, constituted in 1654, the predominantly Calvinist academy of Duisburg, in Cleves. Frankfurt and Königsberg, though long Lutheran by tradition, were increasingly required, after 1650, not just to cease polemical attacks on Calvinism but to learn to accommodate both confessions. Hence, while initially, in the 1650s, Cartesianism chiefly flourished on the Lower Rhine while elsewhere in Brandenburg-Prussia it was robustly opposed by Lutheran and Calvinist orthodox alike, the Elector refused to intercede anywhere to support scholastic Aristotelianism. When the synods condemned the advance of mechanistic ideas in the universities and civic high schools, Friedrich Wilhelm ruled that university professors were accountable only to him and not to the ecclesiastical authorities.³⁶ On one occasion, he answered complaints about the spread of Cartesianism, by remarking that he saw no reason why students should not be taught both the old and new philosophies and thereby learn to argue *pro et contra*.³⁷

Despite rumours that the Cartesians predominated at Frankfurt an der Oder as early as 1656, there is no firm evidence of Cartesian hegemony in Frankfurt until the 1680s.³⁸ At Duisburg, on the other hand, Cartesianism became dominant as early as 1651 when the future university, then still a civic high school, received both Clauberg and Wittichius, who were welcomed and assigned chairs there by the elector's 'Stadholder', the former governor of Dutch

Brazil, Count Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen.³⁹ While Duisburg later lost its brief prominence in German intellectual life after the French devastation of Cleves, in 1672–8, during the 1650s and 1660s it was one of the chief breeding-grounds of the New Philosophy in the Empire. Besides Clauberg and Wittichius, a third leading exponent of Cartesianism at Duisburg, in the years 1657–61, was the widely influential medical professor Theodore Craanen, originally from Cologne but trained in Holland, a theorist who reduced all bodily processes to mechanistic cause and effect and so admired Descartes that Bayle later styled him ‘un grand zélateur de ce philosophe’.⁴⁰

The next most important German Calvinist prince—until a Catholic line succeeded to the electorate in 1685—was the ruler of the Palatinate. The Elector Karl Ludwig (ruled 1649–80) had lived longer in Holland than Friedrich Wilhelm and was even fonder of the Dutch model, especially as regards toleration and intellectual matters. A great-grandson of William the Silent, through his paternal grandmother (a half-sister of the Stadholder Frederick Henry) brought up chiefly at The Hague, Karl Ludwig championed toleration against the wishes of most of his subjects, as well as the Calvinist clergy, permitting freedom of worship not only to Lutherans and Catholics but also Jews, Spiritualists, and even Socinians. This prince’s aversion to rigid confessional thinking, and his taste for Cartesianism, persuaded his more conservative subjects that he was practically a freethinker himself.⁴¹ Especially unpalatable to the Reformed orthodox were his academic statutes of 1672 which, apart from chairs in theology, abolished the requirement for professors to belong to the Reformed Church and hence threatened what

over the last century had been Heidelberg's solidly Calvinist identity.⁴²

In a curious irony of history, one of the first non-Calvinists offered a chair at Heidelberg was none other than Spinoza himself, who received a fulsome invitation from the elector in February 1673. With equal courtesy the philosopher declined, preferring not to put Karl Ludwig's guarantee of 'freedom to philosophize'—provided he did not 'disturb the established religion of the state'⁴³—to the test.⁴⁴ The elector's court *philosophe*, Urbain Chevreu (1613–1701), who spent the years 1671–8 in the Palatinate, later recounted how Spinoza's name came to the elector's attention.⁴⁵ Originally, after the publication in 1663 of his 'geometric' exposition of Descartes' system, Spinoza enjoyed an entirely respectable reputation in Germany as one of the chief expositors of Cartesianism alongside Clauberg, Wittichius, Heereboord, Andreae, Geulincx, and Mansvelt. Moreover, while such leading scholars as Leibniz and Jacob Thomasius knew soon after its appearance that Spinoza was also the author of the universally deplored *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Karl Ludwig and Chevreu were seemingly still unaware of this in 1673. Hearing Chevreu speak 'fort avantageusement de Spinoza', the elector, who was also *rector magnificentissimus* of his university and an accomplished Latinist, asked for extracts from the book on Descartes to be read to him. Greatly impressed, he at once ordered the famous invitation to be sent, ignoring the protests of his sub-rector, a Calvinist theologian, who did know about the *Tractatus* and tried to point out the danger. In later years, the Palatine elector's prestigious offer to Europe's most reviled philosopher was publicly explained

as a lamentable error arising from Spinoza's 'deception' in originally posing as a 'Cartesian'.⁴⁶

On Karl Ludwig's death the Palatinate's philosophical stance changed abruptly. The last Calvinist elector, Karl der Fromme (ruled 1680–85), desired to restore the primacy of Calvinist theology and confessional criteria, and, guided by his orthodox court preacher, tried to suppress Cartesianism and reinstate Aristotelianism.⁴⁷ Policy then shifted again after his death, when the electorate devolved upon the Catholic house of Neuburg, rulers of Jülich-Berg, who chiefly resided at Düsseldorf. Heidelberg, moreover, was again devastated by the French during the Nine Years' War (1688–97), and the university temporarily closed. On being reopened in 1700 the then ruler, Wilhelm von Neuburg (ruled 1690–1716), a noted champion of toleration and ally of the Dutch against Louis XIV, wished to revive the university as a multi-confessional, intellectually liberal, pro-Cartesian establishment. A step which particularly bolstered Cartesian influence was the elector's purchase, in 1706, of the 4,973 books of the recently deceased Utrecht professor of German background, Johannes Georg Graevius (1632–1705?),⁴⁸ a life-long adherent of Descartes, as well as a correspondent of Leibniz and a member of the Cartesian coterie at Utrecht, styled the 'college of sçavants' who had participated prominently in the Dutch comets controversy of 1664–5. This renewed ascendancy of Cartesianism, however, also proved temporary. After the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, in 1713, when the Dutch alliance was no longer needed, especially under Karl Philipp von Neuburg (ruled 1716–42), who espoused a much more traditional Catholic approach to educational matters than his predecessor, intellectual policy in Jülich-Berg and the

Palatinate underwent another volte-face.⁴⁹ A rigidly Catholic confessional stance was imposed, the sway of the anti-Cartesian Jesuit academy of Düsseldorf (where the library contained not a single book by Descartes, Leibniz, or Spinoza)⁵⁰ asserted, and the university at Heidelberg entrusted to the Jesuits. With this, the status of philosophy in the Palatinate had turned full circle since 1650 and, for a time, *philosophia aristotelio-scholastica* again reigned supreme as the official philosophy of the Neuburg territories, universities, and court.

For the same reasons Cartesianism penetrated the Calvinist territories of Germany before reaching Lutheran and Catholic states, it also appeared relatively early in the German-speaking Swiss Reformed cantons. The Reformed Church in German-speaking Switzerland traditionally maintained close ties with both the Palatinate and the United Provinces and hence the New Philosophy also made early and rapid progress there. Dutch cultural influence in Reformed Switzerland flowed especially strongly via academic links, some 250 Swiss students studying at Leiden alone during the half century 1650–1700.⁵¹ At Zürich, Cartesianism was introduced into university teaching in the late 1650s by Johannes Lavater (1624–95) and his colleague Caspar Waser,⁵² adherents of a Swiss Cartesianism derived mainly from the works of Clauberg and the Leiden professor Adriaen Heereboord (1614–61) rather than directly from Descartes.⁵³ Before long, though, the impact of Cartesianism here too proved unsettling, with vehement protests from the preachers soon obliging the city government to curtail freedom to philosophize.⁵⁴ A still more abrupt volte-face, occurred at

Bern where Cartesianism was introduced by one of the professors, David Wyss, in 1662. By 1668 antagonism between Cartesians and Aristotelians at Bern and Lausanne was so intense that the cantonal government felt obliged to adopt the Church's advice and ban all teaching of Cartesian philosophy and science as 'gefährlich und schädlich' (dangerous and damaging).⁵⁵ The prohibition was extended by decrees of March and April 1669, when the sale and distribution in the canton of Cartesian handbooks and commentaries, besides Descartes' own works, was forbidden, and students returning from the Netherlands were required henceforth to sign a formula formally repudiating Cartesianism. The ban was further tightened in March 1671, with stiffer penalties, threatening professors with loss of their chairs and students their study stipends if they disobeyed.

Yet despite the hopes of the doyen of the Dutch anti-Cartesian counter-offensive, Spanheim, who wrote to a Swiss colleague in 1676, wishing 'your Switzerland luck [in the fight to resist Cartesianism] and that Basel should stick firmly to the old orthodoxy',⁵⁶ the hard line adopted at Bern and, to a lesser extent, Zürich was not replicated in the other Reformed cantons. On the contrary, from the 1660s first Basel and later Geneva gradually became havens of the New Philosophy. At Basel the presiding figure in cultural and intellectual affairs during the third quarter of the century was Lukas Gernler (1625–75), a theology professor and an admirer of Cocceius, who corresponded with several Cartesio-Cocceians in the Netherlands, including Burmannus at Utrecht.⁵⁷ Gernler supported the advent of Cartesianism, urging the Basel authorities to grant 'freedom to philosophize' provided nothing which was taught impugned Scripture's account of

natural things.⁵⁸ The Cartesianism taught at Basel from around 1660 was evidently again based primarily on Heerboord. At Geneva, meanwhile, Cartesianism penetrated noticeably later than elsewhere in Switzerland and when it did, in the late 1660s, it percolated, not as in German-speaking Reformed Switzerland from the Netherlands, but France, being introduced into lectures at the university by Jean-Robert Chouet, a Genevan who previously worked in France, where he had established Descartes' philosophy a few years earlier at the Huguenot academy at Saumur.

The Swiss cantons, then, were and remained divided, partly for and partly against mechanistic philosophy. Moreover, not only did it prove impossible to achieve a coordinated Swiss Reformed stance on philosophy, medicine, and science, but even within cantons dissension proved unavoidable. There was a continual tension between the New Philosophy and Reformed orthodoxy and, as part of this, between heliocentrism and the old astronomy. Not only were the universities and consistories divided, but even key individuals such as Gernler were to no small degree split within themselves. Like his friend Maresius at Groningen, Gernler's disquiet mounted with the passage of time. He and his colleagues at Basel disliked Voetius, but were also perturbed by the acrimony and divisiveness which seemed everywhere to mark the progress of Cartesianism, and especially its undeniable tendency to produce radical offshoots. In particular, Gernler became deeply alarmed on hearing of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Writing to Switzerland's pre-eminent Bible scholar at the time, his friend Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633–98) at Zürich, soon to emerge as the foremost adversary of Spinozism in Switzerland, he passed on news obtained from Groningen,

that the author of that execrable work was a Dutch Jew called 'Spinosa', information which almost simultaneously reached the learned Heidegger from Heidelberg and Marburg.⁵⁹

iii. The New Philosophy conquers Scandinavia and the Baltic

The outbreak of the Cartesian controversies in the Baltic followed directly on the Cartesian penetration of Central Europe. At the principal Swedish university, Uppsala, Cartesian ideas in philosophy, science, and medicine were introduced into lectures by the leading medical professor Petrus Hoffvenius (1630–82) backed by the university rector Olaus Rudbeck (1630–1702) early in the 1660s. As a student, Hoffvenius had met Descartes in person during the latter's four-month residence in Stockholm at the end of his life.⁶⁰ But the French philosopher's stay in Sweden had almost no direct impact on the Baltic intellectual scene.⁶¹ Only later did the New Philosophy enter mainstream Swedish intellectual life, after the study trip undertaken by Hoffvenius and Rudbeck to Leiden and Utrecht in the late 1650s.⁶² It was there that the two scholars became fervent converts. When he openly introduced Cartesian ideas into his lectures back in Sweden, Hoffvenius precipitated a major rift within the academic faculties at Uppsala, with the consequence that, in 1664, the ecclesiastical estate of the Swedish parliament, or Riksdag, petitioned the regency government, ruling since the demise of Charles X in 1660, for a general ban on Cartesianism in the kingdom.⁶³

In the Swedish monarchy, as in Denmark-Norway-Holstein, the Lutheran Church was an immensely powerful

institution and the only truly cohesive cultural force binding the constituent parts of the empire together. The opposition of the Church automatically placed the innovators in a difficult position. According to the clergy's submission to the Riksdag, Cartesianism is a doctrine which acknowledges the truth of Scripture in *res fidei* (matters of faith) but not in chronology, cosmology, or natural science, and claims that the Bible speaks 'in accordance with the ignorant notions of the common people'.⁶⁴ Rudbeck fought back with some success, owing to the support of the university's chancellor, Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie, the country's wealthiest nobleman, a grandee who had himself studied philosophy and was a noted bibliophile, possessing the largest library in Sweden after that of the Crown, and who sat on the ruling regency council. Even so, a highly fraught compromise was the best that could be attained, leaving Hoffvenius if not silenced then obliged to refrain from lecturing on the broad principles of Cartesianism.⁶⁵ Henceforth he confined his teaching to purely technical topics, avoiding sensitive philosophical and scientific questions.

Nevertheless, during the 1670s a suffused, unobtrusive Cartesianism slowly penetrated in Sweden, as in Denmark-Norway. In 1678 Hoffvenius published a batch of scientific treatises, under the title *Synopsis physica*, a compendium based chiefly on Clauberg and de Raey, which remained the standard physics handbook in Sweden until the end of the century.⁶⁶ Behind the scenes Hoffvenius spread Cartesian ideas and heliocentric astronomy without mentioning Descartes' name or stating openly what he was doing. Others, though, were less discreet. In 1679 Niels Celsius (1658–1724), one of Hoffvenius' ablest students and a ardent

Cartesian, provoked uproar at Uppsala during a public disputation by reiterating Descartes' maxim that scientific observation is the only basis of authority in astronomy and openly criticizing those who insist on a literal reading of Scripture—often, he suggested, under a false cloak of piety—to obstruct progress in science.⁶⁷

Finally, in the mid-1680s erupted a full-scale theologico-philosophico-scientific battle between the defenders of the old and the partisans of the new philosophy. In this contest, the Swedish Church, backed by part of the divided Uppsala philosophy school, faced the medical, and the rest of the philosophy, faculty. In the Riksdag, the ecclesiastical estate urged the king, Charles XI (ruled 1660–97), to proclaim Aristotelianism the official philosophy of the monarchy and ban Cartesianism, recommending that instruction in physics at Uppsala be transferred from the (now strongly Cartesian) medical faculty to the philosophy faculty, where it should be entrusted to a reliable Aristotelian and opponent of heliocentrism.⁶⁸ In some perplexity, the king sent copies of the petition to all faculties at Uppsala, requiring responses in writing.

In Denmark at this time, leading theologians, such as Hector Gottfried Masius, at Copenhagen, buttressed their charge that Cartesianism imperils Lutheran orthodoxy by citing Descartes' systematic use of doubt in metaphysics, even to the point of doubting the existence of God, at any rate as a philosophical procedure, and deploring the pernicious influence of Cartesio-Cocceian methods of Bible exegesis.⁶⁹ The Uppsala theology faculty argued likewise, echoing the protests of the Dutch anti-Cartesians, especially Petrus van Mastricht who, in his *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena*,

charged that Cartesianism subordinates Scripture to a philosophy based on mechanistic principles, deeming Scripture to be adjusted to the 'ignorant notions' of the common people.⁷⁰ The latter principle the Uppsala theologians expressly attributed to Wittichius but also, ominously for the Cartesians, to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, cited here as an anonymous work.⁷¹

The philosophy faculty granted that an unrestricted *philosophandi licentia* (freedom to philosophize) would harm society, but insisted that a carefully limited, responsible freedom of disputation is essential for teaching philosophy and for scientific research. Denmark, it was pointed out, was no less staunchly Lutheran than Sweden, and there discussion of Cartesian doctrines was permitted, as was shown by recent academic disputations at Copenhagen and Kiel in Holstein-Gottorp.⁷² Sweden's standing in the world, and Swedish scholarship, would assuredly suffer, it was held, if teaching and disputing Cartesianism were banned in the monarchy: for wherever freedom to philosophize 'is not tolerated not only *physica* but also moral philosophy, philology, and the general humanities are ruined as is universally known'.⁷³

Circumventing the delicate issues of heliocentrism and Descartes' use of doubt, the medical professors stressed the scientific and humanistic value of Cartesian concepts for scientific research and methodology, basing their arguments on Heereboord, De Raey, and Wittichius. This text was largely compiled by Johan Bilberg (1646–1717), professor of mathematics since 1679, and now the leading Swedish Cartesian. A warm admirer of Dutch learning, Bilberg also sought to impart new momentum to Copernican astronomy in Sweden though, as it was still not possible anywhere in the

Baltic openly to espouse heliocentrism in publications and the lecture-room, he did so mostly in manuscript texts and private classes at his home.⁷⁴

Deeply disquieted, the Swedish Court sought a balanced approach to the dilemmas of the New Philosophy, setting up a commission comprising not only officials and churchmen but also declared Cartesians, including Bilberg himself.⁷⁵ Aiming at compromise, this body sought a *modesta philosophandi libertas* while preventing an unrestricted *philosophandi licentia*.⁷⁶ But it took time to devise a suitable formula which would satisfy the needs of both religion and scholarship; and, in the meantime, the vexed situation served only to inflame the quarrel at Uppsala and foment strife in the other universities. Controversy flared at Lund, a new institution founded in 1666 as an instrument to 'Swedify' the provinces recently conquered from Denmark, and also at the Finnish university, at Åbo, founded by Gustavus Adolphus in 1640. At the time it was set up, around half the professors teaching there had received at least part of their academic training in Holland,⁷⁷ and down to the early eighteenth century Dutch influences remained conspicuously strong. As at Uppsala, it was the medical professors trained in Holland, such as Elias Tillandz, who introduced Cartesian doctrines, and again, it was the orthodox Lutheran theologians who resisted.⁷⁸ The anti-Cartesian camp in Finland was headed by Johan Gezelius (1615–90), former *Generalsuperintendens* of the Lutheran Church in Livonia, and latterly Bishop of Åbo, author of a handbook of Aristotelian philosophy.

Only in March 1689 did the commission conclude, advising the king that while *philosophia cartesiana*

unquestionably assists the progress of natural science, medicine, and mathematics, inadequate regulation of freedom to philosophize undermines religion, morality, and society. Accordingly, neither the old nor the new philosophy should be banned in Sweden-Finland. Rather the king should impose a carefully regulated *libertas philosophandi* designed to prevent encroachment by philosophy on theology and especially any 'philosophisk critique' of the Bible.⁷⁹ The ensuing royal decree on philosophy, adopting this solution, was promulgated at Stockholm on 17 April 1689. In striving to separate philosophy from theology as much as possible, the edict bears distinct affinities with Holland's decree on philosophy of 1656.

Yet the anti-Cartesians had been partially vindicated and, in the 1690s, continued to oppose Cartesianism with great tenacity both in Sweden and, still more, in Finland. It was only around 1700 that the Swedish Cartesians gained that broad hegemony over the academic and intellectual life of the country which in the early eighteenth century was characteristic of Uppsala, Lund, and Åbo alike, as well as the medical and scientific establishment in Stockholm.⁸⁰ At Lund, the supremacy of a Neo-Cartesianism inspired principally by Wittichius, De Volder, Andala, and Malebranche was confirmed in 1710 with the appointment of a pupil of Bilberg, Andreas Rydelius (1671–1738), who remained for several decades the pre-eminent exponent of Cartesian philosophy and theology in the Baltic.⁸¹

The impressive flowering of Swedish science during the first half of the eighteenth century thus unfolded within a matrix which during its formative period, until the 1730s, was predominantly Cartesian. In medicine, Lars Roberg, who

studied for many years in Holland and was a pupil in particular of De Volder, did much to change medical thought and teaching in Sweden and established the first academic hospital (on the Leiden model). Similarly, the astronomers Olof Hiorter and Anders Celsius, after whom the centigrade thermometer is named, emerged from a Cartesian background, as did the great naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707–78) who began his academic career in a Lund dominated by Rydellius, in 1727, and, at least as regards his early formation, also Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) first a scientist but later, after his revolt against rationalist philosophy, perhaps the greatest mystic of the eighteenth century.

iv. France: Philosophy and Royal Absolutism

In France the main impact of the Cartesian controversies was felt appreciably later than in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia, but earlier than in Italy and the rest of Catholic Europe.⁸² The implications of the New Philosophy were clear enough by 1650, but through the 1650s and 1660s all sections of the Church in France and nearly the entire academic establishment firmly opposed the advance of Cartesianism. This is true indeed even of the Jansenists, habituated though they were to dissent, and the Huguenots. Thus, in 1656, the governors of the comparatively liberal Huguenot academy of Saumur—Sedan was reputedly more conservative—considered whether to permit the teaching of Cartesian ideas but at that stage resolved against precisely because this philosophy had proved so disruptive in the Dutch and German universities.⁸³ Among Jansenists meanwhile, Pascal's disparagement of Descartes as 'inutile et incertain', a

philosopher who reduces God to the status of a divine mechanic who exists 'pour mettre le monde en mouvement',⁸⁴ was not in itself untypical. Admittedly, one leading Jansenist spokesman, Antoine Arnauld (1612–94), was also a leading advocate of Cartesianism. But he was an isolated figure in this respect and by ardently espousing Cartesianism aroused no small anxiety among friends and allies within Jansenism, who had some reason to fear his philosophical proclivities would render them even more suspect in the eyes of the Crown and episcopal hierarchy than they were already.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, official disapproval of Cartesian philosophy, encouraged by the papal ban on Descartes' works of 1663, became slowly more resolute and emphatic. When Descartes' remains were transferred to the imposing church of Sainte Geneviève-du-Mont, in Paris, in 1667, it was forbidden for any funeral oration to be delivered.⁸⁶ In 1670–1, prompted by the Sorbonne and the Jesuits, the *Parlement* of Paris discussed whether to impose a general prohibition on the publication and distribution of Descartes' works in France.⁸⁷ Opinion was divided and nothing followed, but this served only to increase the pressure on the Crown to give a clearer lead. The Sorbonne repeatedly reaffirmed its condemnation of Descartes' doctrines, as was widely noted in Spain and Italy as well as France.⁸⁸ The largest teaching order, the Jesuits, increasingly stifled those voices within their own ranks sympathetic to Cartesianism.⁸⁹ The second largest, the Oratorians, lapsed into deep divisions over philosophy. A teaching ban was vigorously urged in the highest circles and gradually the Court edged towards this. Louis XIV finally intervened, in August 1671, forbidding the teaching of

Cartesian philosophy in the colleges and universities of France by royal decree, but stopping short of prohibiting the publication, sale, and distribution of Cartesian books. Henceforth instruction in Cartesianism took place mainly through private lectures of the sort Pierre Régis gave in Toulouse and other provincial towns during the 1670s, or private tuition.⁹⁰

Louis' decision to throw the weight of royal authority behind the cause of *philosophia aristotelio-scholastica* pleased the Sorbonne, the Jesuits, and most bishops but created a harsh quandary for the Oratorians.⁹¹ A teaching and preaching order founded in 1611, they were within France—though they mostly lacked comparable influence elsewhere—the chief rivals of the Jesuits in providing secondary education for young men and preparing novices for the priesthood. By the mid-1670s there was unmistakable evidence that the Oratorians were not observing the ban seriously and that the order generally, and its most eminent philosopher, Father Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) specifically, were tilting towards the New Philosophy. Malebranche at this juncture was working on his first great book, the *De la Recherche de la Vérité* (1674–5). The ban was also disconcerting for many others. The young Pierre Bayle, for instance, having fled to Geneva after abjuring his conversion to Catholicism and returning to the Protestant faith of his family, abandoned the Aristotelianism he had imbibed from his Jesuit teachers in Toulouse and embraced Cartesianism; yet, on returning to France, he could no longer teach Cartesianism openly. Hence, on assuming his chair at the Huguenot academy at Sedan, Bayle found himself obliged to lead a philosophical double life, professing Cartesianism

(for the time being) privately and scholastic Aristotelianism in lectures.⁹²

The king's objective was to prevent in France the kind of intellectual turmoil which had engulfed other lands. The scientists recruited into the new royal Académie des Sciences, in Paris, were not pressured to identify with one philosophy or another; but neither were they permitted to engage in philosophical polemics for or against Cartesianism, or any other philosophy, the king being entirely unwilling to relegate the judgement of philosophical truth. Meanwhile, the Oratorians' persistence in teaching Cartesianism in defiance of the king's wishes angered many and aggravated the traditional rivalry between the two main teaching orders. The Jesuits accused the Oratorians of endangering Church and society, though Bayle suggests they did so chiefly out of pique at seeing the best students desert their colleges for those of their competitors. But however that may be, the Jesuits, backed by much of the hierarchy, eventually persuaded the king to make an example of their rivals. Intervening through the Archbishop of Paris, he compelled them to acknowledge their 'errors' and sign an abject formula of submission, which was duly ratified by the sixth general assembly of the order, in Paris, in September 1678.⁹³

The rules to which the Oratorians submitted represented what was effectively now the official policy of the French monarchy on philosophy. The key points were a general requirement to keep philosophy subordinate to theology and the authority of the Church, that freedom of the will be taught in the 'manner of Aristotle', and that there be no departure from the 'principes de physique d'Aristote communément reçus dans les collèges'. There was to be no teaching of the

'doctrine nouvelle de Monsieur Descartes, que le Roy a défendu qu'on enseignât pour de bonnes raisons'.⁹⁴ Moreover, henceforth professors of philosophy had to teach seven fundamental doctrines of metaphysics directly contrary to those of Descartes, in particular affirming that extension is not the essence of matter, and that in every body there is a 'forme substantielle réellement distinguée de la matière' and that the soul is really present in, and united with, the whole human body.⁹⁵ Also obligatory was the doctrine that a void is not impossible. Finally, it was forbidden to teach any kind of political theory, or anything concerning the principles of monarchy.

Louis desired uniformity, order, and hierarchy, intellectual as well as political, social, and ecclesiastical. But nothing is harder than to control men's minds and, as an astute observer noted at the time, Louis was bound to weaken his monarchy, and the sway of authority in France, by introducing new tensions rooted in matters 'purement philosophiques', causing numerous loyal Catholics, clergy among them, to resent this 'new yoke' at a time when society and the Church were already convulsed by the Jansenist controversies. To require teachers and scholars to articulate concepts contrary to what they inwardly judged to be truth was to drive them 'insensiblement à la révolte', creating intellectual antagonism ultimately bound to find expression in 'entreprises téméraires contre l'autorité légitime'.⁹⁶ The king, furthermore, was endangering the authority of the Church and reverence for its teaching: for by insisting the 'mysteries' of the Christian faith 'dépende des principes de la philosophie, et que notre religion et Aristote sont tellement liez qu'on ne puisse renverser l'un sans ébranler l'autre', Louis was linking what the people believe to disputed philosophical tenets which experience

showed were crumbling daily under the assaults of the 'nouveaux philosophes'.⁹⁷ By thus encumbering the French Church with outmoded philosophical and scientific doctrines, Louis, some of his subjects alleged, was needlessly giving the Protestants a huge and unwarranted advantage.

But the king had made up his mind. The 'principes de Descartes' were 'formally banned in the schools of the kingdom' as a leading early eighteenth-century French scientist later put it, and there were orders that one should teach only the 'philosophie d'Aristote'.⁹⁸ In subsequent decades the ban on teaching Cartesianism, and the obligation to teach only *philosophia aristoteli-scholastica*, was continually reaffirmed through a long series of edicts of the Sorbonne.⁹⁹ Scholars who refused to acquiesce, especially if they openly opposed royal policy, were firmly dealt with. Pierre Valentin Faydit had been expelled from the Oratorians in 1671 for his excessively zealous espousal of Cartesianism. Father Malebranche, whose books, published in the Netherlands, were banned in France,¹⁰⁰ was forbidden to teach and driven into semi-isolation. Antoine Arnauld, albeit more for Jansenism than publicly supporting Cartesianism, felt obliged to flee to Holland in 1679.

But in France as in the rest of Europe, monarchical and ecclesiastical authority were insufficiently strong to hold the line against the New Philosophy. While there was no formal instruction in Cartesianism in the colleges and universities, and members of the Académie des Sciences were barred from debating philosophical questions, Cartesianism percolated slowly but inexorably into all segments of French intellectual life.¹⁰¹ By the 1680s it was obvious that royal policy on

philosophy was becoming distinctly frayed at the edges and Church and universities intellectually increasingly divided. Nevertheless, adversaries of the new ideas, especially the Jesuits, showed little willingness to relent even during the closing years of Louis' reign, so that until 1715 there was no sign of the policy being abandoned.¹⁰² As late as 1705, the University of Paris reissued its ban on the teaching of Cartesianism.¹⁰³

A principal factor affecting the lines of combat was the rapid growth, from the 1680s onwards, of radical thought. It was doubtless inevitable in France as elsewhere that traditionalists should take to labelling their opponents accomplices of the *Spinosistes* while, in reply, the Cartesians should bend every effort to show that their teaching, far from threatening, provided the best protection for, the core Christian 'mysteries'. Without doubt radicalism imparted added plausibility to Jesuit accusations against Descartes and Malebranche. The accusation that Malebranche's system which, according to the Jesuit *Journal de Trévoux* in 1708, effectively 'annihilates the Divinity by reducing it to the totality of the world', was a form of back-door Spinozism was publicized in particular by the famous Jesuit controversialist, Father René-Josèphe Tournemine (1661–1739), chief editor of the *Journal de Trévoux* for many years, who did not hesitate to label *Malebranchisme* a 'spinosisme spirituel'.¹⁰⁴ His influential *Réflexions sur l'athéisme* (1713), published originally as a preface to Fénelon's *Démonstration de l'existence de Dieu* (Paris, 1713), features a robust refutation of Spinoza considered by some the most effective advanced on the Catholic side of the confessional divide.¹⁰⁵

According to Tournemine, Spinoza (like Malebranche) roots his philosophy in Cartesianism except that it superadds the reduction of matter and spirit into one substance, an inference, he insists, as confused and illogical as anything can be. 'Ce système, que son obscurité seule rend célèbre' at once collapses, asserts Tournemine, under the impact of the 'argument from design'.¹⁰⁶ Any discerning person who ponders the marvels of nature, including the bodily structures of the tiniest creatures, understands that all this cannot be the result of blind fatality: 'toute la nature montre l'existence de son auteur'.¹⁰⁷ Equally inconceivable, he held, is Spinoza's doctrine of 'one substance' for 'rien n'est plus clairement démontré que l'impossibilité d'une matière pensante'.¹⁰⁸ 'Ce rare génie', as Tournemine sarcastically styles the philosopher who, armed with obscure terminology, seeks to make the incompatible compatible, unifying matter and spirit, had indeed conjured up the greatest intellectual threat of the age but one which, under analysis, proves to be philosophical nonsense.¹⁰⁹ Malebranche, granted Tournemine, was no atheist but a loyal Catholic. In fact, in Tournemine's opinion there are no true atheists, since no one can really believe the universe was not created by an intelligent Creator: 's'il y a eu des hypocrites d'athéisme, il n'y a jamais eu de véritables athées'.¹¹⁰ Hence there are no genuine Spinozists, despite the sinister claims of 'Monsieur Bayle' to the contrary. But if all deism, atheism, and Spinozism, according to Tournemine, is ultimately hypocrisy, falsehood, and affectation, this did not alter the fact that France was now teeming with *Spinosistes* and 'de prétendus athées Cartesiens et Malebranchistes', adept at employing Malebranche to undermine belief in divine

Providence, striving to unify matter and spirit and reduce everything to general laws of nature.¹¹¹

v. Reaction in the Italian States

Although the question of the New Philosophy did not become a major public issue in Italy until the 1670s, from that point on government and Church were compelled to wrestle with the dilemmas created by the New Philosophy in the Italian states no less strenuously than in lands north of the Alps. Indeed, there was such an intensity of intellectual debate, much of it of high quality, that Italy rapidly emerged as one of the most heavily contested philosophical and scientific arenas of the Early Enlightenment. The appreciable differences in government policy regarding new ideas, as between states, resulted primarily from the divergent preferences of individual rulers, the two dominant models being, on the one hand, the Tuscany of Cosimo III—and, after 1730, the kingdom of Savoy—where, over many decades, a stringently conservative policy was pursued, opposed to both wings of the Enlightenment, and, on the other hand, a more flexible and liberal, or at least more hesitant, posture such as prevailed in Venice and, most dramatically, until the 1720s in Naples.

The reactionary stance adopted in Florence was almost entirely due to princely whim. In the past the Medici grand dukes of Tuscany had generally been at the forefront of patronage of learning and science as well as the arts. The grand-ducal court protected Galileo as far as was possible, after the papal condemnation of Copernican astronomy in 1633, down to the great scientist's death in 1642, and would have preferred to give him a grander, more public, funeral than the Church was willing to countenance. Nevertheless,

while the patronage of science continued subsequently, and Leopoldo de' Medici (1617–75), younger brother of Grand Duke Ferdinand II (ruled 1621–70), founded Europe's first true academy of science, the Accademia del Cimento (1657–67), in Florence, providing his scientists with laboratories, apparatus, and research funds, as well as premises for them in the Palazzo Pitti, great care was taken to fence off the wider questions of science and philosophy, including further discussion of Galileo's heliocentric system, from the purely empirical research the Medicean academy sponsored. The Florentine model of scientific enquiry after Galileo's retraction, so far as published and public debate was concerned, was pure experimental work eschewing all broader intellectual issues. Even the very fact that Galileo championed Copernican heliocentricism was publicly suppressed.

In private, especially at Court in Florence and in the declining, but not moribund, University of Pisa, Galilean principles and Cartesian philosophy were nevertheless avidly explored and discussed. That Florence was still a focus of scientific work, and also, behind a discreet veil, of wider intellectual endeavour was reflected in the spiritual odyssey of Magalotti and, in 1666, by the entry into the grand duke's service of the Danish biologist and geologist Nicholas Steno (1638–86), at the time a fervent Cartesian and one of the ablest scientific minds in Europe. In fact, while studying at Leiden (1660–3), Steno had embraced not just Cartesianism but also, albeit briefly, radical tendencies and become a friend of Spinoza.¹¹² On settling in Florence, though, Steno converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism and soon also discarded his Cartesianism. But he still closely followed philosophical developments and initially forged ahead with his scientific work, producing, among other things, a

pioneering theory of geological evolution. A few years later he underwent a second conversion, and abandoned philosophy and science completely, resolving to devote his formidable energies henceforth to furthering the cause of the Counter-Reformation. Becoming a priest in 1675, Steno rose to become one of the most influential ecclesiastics in the intellectual sphere in Catholic Europe.¹¹³

A new stringency regarding Cartesianism, Galilean astronomy, and intellectual freedom generally, followed the accession of the immensely devout Grand Duke Cosimo III (ruled 1670–1723).¹¹⁴ Cosimo had already shown signs of hostility to the New Philosophy during his tour of Holland in 1667 when, accompanied among others by Magalotti, he encountered several of Steno's Dutch scientist friends. Hearing that Cosimo viewed his book on Descartes negatively, Spinoza also wanted an interview, but was told that the prince preferred not to receive 'such a man'.¹¹⁵ On becoming grand duke in 1670, Cosimo vigorously championed the clergy's claims to supremacy over Tuscany's intellectual and cultural life, collaborated with the Inquisition in censoring books and controlling the book-trade, and leaned heavily on the university at Pisa, which he considered a dangerous nest of 'innovators'.¹¹⁶ This once flourishing academy still boasted some eminent professors, but the rigid conservatism, and prohibition on Cartesianism imposed by Cosimo accelerated the steady shrinkage in student numbers noticeable there since the mid-seventeenth century, the university continuing to contract until, by the 1730s, a mere 200 students remained.¹¹⁷

The suffused, discreet character of Florentine participation in the early Enlightenment was exemplified by such figures as Magalotti, Alessandro Marchetti (c. 1632–1714), a philosophy professor at Pisa, immersed in Galileo and Descartes but debarred from teaching the ideas he was preoccupied with, who eased his frustration by translating Lucretius' great Epicurean poem, *De Rerum Natura*, into Italian during the years 1664–8 but was then forbidden to publish it,¹¹⁸ and the grand duke's famous librarian, Antonio Magliabechi (1633–1714), the most celebrated librarian of the age.¹¹⁹ Magliabechi's correspondents, Bayle and Leibniz among them, were to be found everywhere and even the most recondite bibliographical news reached him from every land.¹²⁰ His phenomenal memory, keen intelligence, and huge personal library, as well as his grasp of what was in the books he perused, made him a veritable oracle of contemporary learning and the international Republic of Letters. When visiting Italy, eminent *érudits* from abroad, including Leibniz, who visited Florence late in 1689, judged it essential not just call on Magliabechi but also, at least in part, to base their wider intellectual strategy in Italy on his advice.¹²¹ Through Magliabechi, information about—and for the favoured few—access to prohibited ideas, books, and manuscripts was readily available even in the heart of Cosimo III's Tuscany.

For half a century scarcely any new philosophical and scientific ideas received official encouragement in the grand duchy with the exception, during the closing years of Cosimo's rule, of English philosophical concepts judged directly useful to the strengthening of belief in revealed religion, especially the 'argument from design' in the version

propounded by such writers as John Ray and William Derham. This indubitably involved some concession to modernity, for this kind of physico-theology was ultimately inseparable from Copernican heliocentrism, and closely associated with Boyle and Newtonianism. But despite the qualms of the Inquisition, which nearly blocked the project, the Tuscan Court eventually concluded that the advantages of espousing such reasoning outweighed the drawbacks. A friend of Newton and a scientist skilled at wielding the microscope, as well as a vicar, William Derham (1657–1735) had delivered the London Boyle Lectures in 1711–12, adhering closely to Ray in affirming that the intricacy and complexity of the bodily structures revealed by science proves the world ‘a work too grand for anything less than a God to make’.¹²² When publication of the Italian translation of Derham’s *Physico-theology* (1713), was finally authorized in Florence, in July 1719, it was stressed that his and Ray’s physico-theology was not just acceptable from the Catholic standpoint but positively ‘useful’.¹²³

The death of Cosimo ushered in a period of partial liberalization in the grand duchy and a noticeable lessening of the Church’s sway, under the last of the Medici grand dukes, Gian Gastone (ruled 1723–37).¹²⁴ Fond of boys and drinking to excess, Gian Gastone, who had lived for some years in central Europe, had a taste for new and foreign philosophy, especially Leibniz and Wolff. Discarding his father’s policies, he showed distinctly less reverence for the Church, reduced the disabilities affecting the Jews, and eased Cosimo’s draconian restrictions on the book trade. He also permitted the professors of Pisa, after half a century of repression, freedom to discuss the new philosophies and scientific concepts

though, much to the resentment of some professors, he also appointed the crypto-deist Giovanni Alberto de Soria (1707–67), who was to emerge in the 1730s and 1740s as one of the leading philosophical minds in Italy, to a lectureship in philosophy there, in 1727, at the startlingly young age of 20. De Soria was seen as belonging to the intellectual following of Marchetti and widely suspected of being a modern ‘adherent’ of Epicurus, a member of the philosophical underground, steeped in libertine ideas, reaching back to Vanini, Bruno, Pomponazzi, and Machiavelli, and allegedly receptive to the new deistic ideas infiltrating from beyond the Alps.¹²⁵ Certainly De Soria revered the memory of his gifted predecessor, boldly praising his Italian rendering of Lucretius as ‘nobilissima’. De Soria classified him significantly as a disciple of Democritus, implying that Marchetti had adhered to an uncompromisingly mechanistic view of causation and (like the Spinozists) the innateness of motion in matter as well as the oneness of body and soul.¹²⁶

Gian Gastone’s liberalizing attitude quickly led to friction with the ecclesiastical authorities, in no way lessened by his decision in 1731 to permit a notorious deist, the Baron von Stosch—latterly driven from Rome as an undesirable influence and a suspected spy for the British government (in particular, regarding the Court of James, the Old Pretender to the British thrones)¹²⁷—to settle in Florence, bringing his splendid collection of art and antiquities, and a library reportedly teeming with every sort of heterodox and freethinking literature.¹²⁸ Even more irritating to the Papacy was Gian Gastone’s decision in 1734 to erect a handsome monument to Galileo, capped by a portrait bust of the great scientist, in one of the main churches of Florence, Santa

Croce, whither, a century after his condemnation in Rome, Galileo's remains were duly transferred amid the pomp of a public commemoration.

Despite several interventions by the Inquisition to try to reverse the erosion of its authority, including an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to get Stosch expelled from the grand duchy, the trial and imprisonment of a friend of De Soria, the deist poet, Tommaso Crudeli, an admirer of Marchetti and Sarpi accused of denigrating theology as 'superfluous and useless', and, finally, in 1745, a crack-down on De Soria himself, an incident cited by the ecclesiastical authorities as a 'great example for teaching [scholars] to be very moderate and circumspect in their speech',¹²⁹ intellectual censorship in Tuscany continued to ease, and official encouragement of moderate Enlightenment trends to increase from the late 1720s onwards. Curiously, at that very moment, as Italy's formerly most reactionary state shifted to a more flexible stance, its place as the chief opponent of the Enlightenment in Italy was taken by a principality which had previously kept to a liberal intellectual policy linked to political and administrative reform—Piedmont, or the kingdom of Savoy.

Administrative reform in Savoy culminated in the early 1720s when the king, Vittore Amadeo II (ruled 1675–1730), reorganized secondary education in the kingdom, reducing the teaching functions of the clergy and refounding the University of Turin under a new constitution, effectively transferring it from ecclesiastical to royal control.¹³⁰ Briefly, this process was accompanied by an official espousal of moderate Enlightenment thought. Indeed, after the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13) something approaching a Neo-Cartesian and *Malebranchiste* ascendancy set in.¹³¹ When the

revived university reopened its doors, in November 1720, the inaugural oration delivered by Bernardo Andrea Lama (d.1760), a Neapolitan disciple of Malebranche who had spent some years in Paris and was later, during the 1730s, one of the chief disseminators of Newtonianism in Italy,¹³² included a scathing attack on the scholastic Aristotelianism still widely favoured in southern Europe. Thus, even though the friction between the Court at Turin and the Papacy during this reign was essentially jurisdictional rather than doctrinal, it nevertheless to some extent encouraged innovative scientific and philosophical debates and trends.

What was widely discerned at the time as a crucial change in intellectual policy ensued, following the Concordat of 1727 between Vittore Amadeo and the Pope, heralding a marked shift in the attitude of the Court to philosophy and related issues. From 1727 the Pope, 'charmé de la devotion du roi', as Montesquieu puts it,¹³³ made substantial concessions over ecclesiastical jurisdiction and privilege in return for Savoy's support for the doctrinal and ideological goals of the Church. The Inquisition was restored and, in the late 1720s, especially after the accession of Carlo Emanuele III (ruled 1730–73), philosophical debate came to be frowned upon and prominent adherents of the new systems were regarded as a readily expendable asset.

In 1730 a joint royal and papal investigation began into what were deemed suspicious and undesirable tendencies at the university. Several professors were purged. Lama departed for the friendlier atmosphere of Vienna.¹³⁴ The officials secular and ecclesiastical who purged the university attributed the blight to the allegedly excessive intellectual freedom which results from theology being dominated by

philosophy, instead of philosophy by theology, as in any properly ordered society. Even so, they reported, matters had not lapsed to the point that Creation by a providential God was denied, or anyone held the 'world is eternal', or other pernicious concepts 'through which one arrives finally at the impious doctrine of Benedetto Spinoza which has caused a villainous atheism in many regions of Europe'.¹³⁵ After 1730 Savoy gained the reputation of being virtually the most unenlightened land in Europe. In the late 1730s, the marquis d'Argens derided the Savoyards as a benighted people virtually impervious to modern thought. When one mentions the names of the *savants* of Europe to them, he sneered, they ask only whether they are 'good Catholics'; there, he added, Le Clerc passes for a simpleton, Bayle 'pour un sot', and Arnauld for a liar.¹³⁶

The readiest point of entry in northern Italy for first Cartesianism, then radical and Leibnizian ideas, and, after 1730, for Newtonianism and finally Wolffianism, was the Venetian Republic, including Padua, then still probably the liveliest university town in the peninsula. Casanova, who studied there in the early 1740s, stresses the extraordinary vitality and lack of discipline among the students. Book censorship in the Venetian Republic was patently weaker, and the powers of the Inquisition more limited, than probably anywhere else in Italy.¹³⁷ There were also numerous learned men familiar with intellectual life abroad among the patricians as well as the academic fraternity. When Leibniz visited Venice, in March 1689 and again early in 1690, he became friendly with Michelangelo Fardella (1650–1718), a Sicilian friar who had become a leading luminary in both Padua and Venice, 'because I saw he combined meditation on intellectual

things with understanding of mathematics, and because he pursued truth with great ardour'.¹³⁸ Fardella was already known as the foremost Italian Cartesian advocate of his generation, and a fervent champion of Descartes' two-substance doctrine, which he judged the best shield for Christian belief against the modern *Epicurei*. Insisting on the human soul's entire separateness from the body,¹³⁹ in his *Filosofia Cartesiana Impugnata* (1698) Fardella accounts Cartesianism, if only cardinals and bishops would see it, their surest and best defence against the atheism of 'Democrito, Obbes e Spinosa'.¹⁴⁰ Yet, despite initial reservations, Fardella's growing admiration for Leibniz also prompted him, like other Venetian intellectuals later, to promote Leibnizian influence, especially among Padua's mathematicians and scientists.

But if Venice was the gateway to Italy for Cartesianism, Leibnizianism, and much else from the 1680s onwards, it was equally a focus of determined traditionalist resistance. Suspected (with some reason) of Protestant inclinations, casting doubt on transubstantiation, and implying that vows of chastity are contrary to the Law of Nature, Fardella himself was investigated by the Inquisition, in 1689.¹⁴¹ Despite memories of Sarpi and the republic's former resistance to papal pretensions, ecclesiastical power and old-style piety both loomed large. Montesquieu concluded during his visit to the city in 1728, that 'les Jésuites ont rendu les sénateurs dévots de façon qu'ils font tout ce qu'ils veulent à Venise. O tempora ! O mores!'.¹⁴² Historically, there had long been an undercurrent of Naturalism, and free thought and libertine tendencies may have been more rife than ever under the surface, but outwardly Venice was still a culture steeped in

conventional religiosity. Indeed, it was also in Venice that Montesquieu commented sardonically: 'jamais on n'a vu tant de dévots, et si peu de dévotion qu'en Italie'.¹⁴³ But if, as events later proved, ecclesiastical power seemed more imposing than it was in reality, intermittently the Papacy, the Inquisition, and the Jesuits could mobilize the Venetian government against new intellectual trends, and not without considerable local support. For many onlookers, including Fardella, were deeply apprehensive of the new *Epicurei* and their 'atheistic' ideas. Nor was anyone in the slightest doubt as to who, ultimately, was the chief inspirer of the modern *Epicurei*. If Casanova mentions only one modern philosopher in the preface to his memoirs where he explains his philosophy of life, nothing was more apt than that that one should be Spinoza.

From the 1670s down to the 1720s, however, by far the most important intellectual ferment in Italy was that which welled up in Naples. By 1680 a philosophical coterie inspired by an ardent Cartesianism had taken shape there which was unique in Italy in extent, vigour, and creativity. Earlier, a libertine underground had flourished since the Renaissance, feeding on the usual stock writers of Franco-Italian libertine culture—Epicurus, Lucretius, Lucian, Machiavelli, Pomponazzi, Cardano, Bodin, and Montaigne—and, judging from the scope and character of subsequent debates, seems to have moulded a philosophically aware coterie familiar with Naturalistic and republican ideas and mentally already attuned to deploying philosophy against prevailing structures of authority, tradition, and faith. Yet without the rise of the New Philosophy, the Neapolitan *novatores* would in all probability never have emerged into the open or become an effective

vehicle for the propagation of new philosophical and scientific ideas in Italian culture more widely.

Cartesianism provided a matrix capable not just of accommodating, but also inseparably blending, both a moderate stream, eager to overthrow the hegemony of scholastic Aristotelianism while remaining loyal to the Church, and the libertine Naturalistic undercurrent. Known as the Accademia degli Investiganti, these *érudits* publicly declared themselves admirers of Descartes and devotees of philosophy, science, and mathematics. They also invoked, if to a lesser extent, Gassendi, Marchetti, the physicist Borrelli, Emanuel Maignan, and Robert Boyle.¹⁴⁴ While they insisted with growing boldness on the necessity and usefulness of ‘freedom to philosophize’,¹⁴⁵ the régime, unlike that in Tuscany, discreetly encouraged their activities. In particular, the Neapolitan *moderni* enjoyed the favour of the marqués del Carpio (viceroys, 1683–7) and the Andalusian grandee Don Luis de la Cerda, duke of Medinaceli (viceroys, 1696–1702), who had known Queen Christina in Rome and, on arriving in Naples, showed a keen interest in philosophy as well as art, opera, and bordellos.

Among early leaders of the Neapolitan Cartesians were physicians such as Tommaso Cornelio (1614–84) who, as early as 1661, styled Descartes a glittering new light to the age, outshining by far Bacon, Gassendi, and all other moderns,¹⁴⁶ and Leonardo di Capoa (1617–95), an implacable foe of Galenist medicine. Other luminaries included Francesco d’Andrea (1625–98), a legal official, and the legendary philologist and teacher, Gregorio Caloprese (1650–1714), a ‘great Cartesian’, Vico called him, who spent much of his time south of Paestum in the coastal town of

Scalea, where he established his philosophical school.¹⁴⁷ No less fervent a Cartesian was the merchant philosopher Giuseppe Valletta (d. 1714), Leibniz's host when he reached Naples in 1689, and owner of the most impressive private library—of some 16,000 volumes—in the city.¹⁴⁸ His library, which was visited by the viceroy in 1688 and liberally served all the Cartesian fraternity, who also often held their meetings there, was effectively the headquarters of the Investiganti.¹⁴⁹ A younger but no less dedicated Cartesian, who came to the fore in the 1690s, initially an admirer of Fardella, was the lawyer, Costantino Grimaldi (1667–1750).

Cartesianism created a new context in Naples in that henceforth an organized intellectual opposition, openly aspiring to supplant traditional academic culture in the viceroyalty,¹⁵⁰ and comprising both moderate and radical impulses, rapidly penetrated all public and private intellectual discourse. The interplay of moderate and radical tendencies was perceptible from the outset, moreover, being inherent, for instance, in Caloprese's teaching method, which first solidly grounded his followers in Cartesianism and then required the deployment of Descartes' arguments to refute Lucretius and the modern atheists, especially Spinoza.¹⁵¹ As early as 1671 the Congregation of the Holy Office, in Rome, warned the Archbishop of Naples about the spread of the 'ideas of Descartes which some apply in the theological field with exceedingly dangerous consequences'.¹⁵² It was not until the mid-1680s, though, that there occurred a direct clash between ecclesiastical and academic authority and the spreading New Philosophy which, in Naples, additionally assumed an anti-Jesuit and pro-Jansenist tinge.¹⁵³ In 1685–6 there was a flurry

of sermons in the city, publicly decrying 'Renato' and Gassendi as 'atheists' and 'very dangerous'. In March 1688, a lawyer who had attended gatherings in Valletta's house denounced the group to the Inquisition as mockers of Christ and 'atheists'. Little more happened, however, until after the arrival of the new hard-line Archbishop of Naples, Cardinal Giacomo Cantelmo (1645–1702), who remained in office from 1691 until his death. Orchestrated by this prelate and his ally, Benedetti, rector of the Jesuit college, a general campaign was unleashed against Cartesianism, *filosofi moderni*, and 'atheism', the Jesuits, here as elsewhere, being especially eager to safeguard their hold over secondary education in the viceroyalty.¹⁵⁴

In 1691 the Inquisition arrested two of the more junior Investiganti, Basilio Gianelli and Giacinto de Cristoforo, accusing them of denying miracles, Heaven and Hell, and the divinity of Christ, as well as claiming Christ was an 'impostor', that there are no saints, the Pope has no legitimate authority, there were men before Adam—a clear echo of La Peyrère—that men are composed of atoms like animals, and 'all things are ruled by Nature'.¹⁵⁵ This episode, dubbed the 'trial of the atheists', caused a considerable stir throughout Italy and as far afield as Madrid. In the end, the efforts of the archbishop, the Jesuits, and the Inquisition were thwarted by the Spanish viceroy and his officials, who refused to accept that Cartesianism and the New Philosophy should be generally condemned.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the viceroy objected to the Inquisition's procedure, and even expelled the senior inquisitor for exceeding his powers, provoking a commotion over the scope of Inquisition jurisdiction in the viceroyalty, which transferred responsibility for resolving the imbroglio to

Madrid and Rome. Hence, the lack of co-operation between government and ecclesiastical authorities precluded any clear-cut conclusion. Even so, the campaign did not entirely founder. Cristoforo languished in the archbishop's dungeon until 1697, the *Investiganti* were firmly pinned on the defensive and henceforth obliged constantly to affirm their Catholic orthodoxy, while the dangers of Cartesianism, atomism, Naturalism, and texts such as Marchetti's *Lucretius* were abundantly advertised.¹⁵⁷

By the 1690s, in Rome as in Naples, the ecclesiastical hierarchy was in arms against the *Cartesiani* and other new-fangled *fisico-matematici*, and still more their radical offshoots. The papal authorities in Rome formally banned Spinoza *in toto* by a decree of August 1690.¹⁵⁸ But neither the offensive against Cartesianism, nor that against Spinoza, could succeed simply by asserting, however impressively, the power and authority of the Papacy, the episcopacy, the religious orders, and the Inquisition. The princely and viceregal courts of Italy had to be persuaded of the need to impose, or more accurately re-impose, stringent intellectual and academic discipline. The whole enterprise depended on launching a successful publicity campaign, demonstrating the dangers forcefully enough to produce firm and co-ordinated peninsula-wide action. But this, in turn, obliged the Church's spokesmen to enter the intellectual arena themselves, and engage directly in philosophical polemics with Cartesians and *Malebranchistes*, and it was precisely here that supporters of reaction proved unable to muster enough authority and cogency to overwhelm their adversaries.

Nevertheless, powerful anti-Cartesian and anti-Gassendist polemics poured forth in Latin and Italian alike. In 1694

Bernardo de Rojas published his *De formarum generatione contra Atomistas* at Naples, championing Aristotle's doctrine of 'substantial forms', lambasting Gassendi as a disciple of the ancient atheistic Greek thinkers Democritus and Epicurus,¹⁵⁹ and styling Descartes' doctrine of motion as external to and separate from matter deeply flawed and apt to generate vast confusion and danger.¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the foremost publicist against the *Cartesiani* in the vernacular was the indefatigable Benedetti, who followed up his *Philosophia peripatetica* (four volumes, Naples, 1687), with the widely read *Lettere apologetiche in difesa della teologia scolastica* (Naples, 1694), published under the pseudonym Benedetto Aletino, and maintaining the New Philosophy leads inevitably to spiritual catastrophe and weakening of Catholic belief.¹⁶¹

Compelled to defend themselves and their friends, without hope of obtaining ecclesiastical permission to publish, d'Andrea and Valletta penned vigorous defences of Cartesianism which then circulated in manuscript from the mid-1690s.¹⁶² Valletta stressed Descartes' philosophical and scientific cogency and, no less adamantly his Catholic zeal, claiming Aristotelian anti-Cartesianism is basically a 'Protestant' tendency, ascribing the vitriolic encounters among the 'Calvinists' of Holland, Germany, and Switzerland to an international Calvinist conspiracy designed to vitiate a philosophy which is modern, true, and supportive of the Catholic Church.¹⁶³ Descartes' 'fondamento principale', according to Valletta, is divine Providence and his other key point the 'immortality of the soul'.¹⁶⁴ Extolling the achievements of the French philosophers, Malebranche, Nicole, and Arnauld, he insisted (rather dubiously) that

outside Italy Cartesianism was now widely accepted in Catholic countries and warmly espoused in the 'best universities of Europe'.¹⁶⁵

No more than Caloprese could Valletta circumvent the thorny issue of Spinoza, since the crux of Benedetti's Aristotelian offensive was the accusation that Descartes' ideas tend inherently to Naturalism and atheism. If Jesuits, the Inquisition, and adherents of Aristotle's 'substantial forms' claimed atheistic philosophy and Naturalism were now the paramount danger in Italy, and that the threat was rooted in Cartesianism, Valletta stressed the differences between Descartes and Spinoza, considering this vital if he was to vindicate modern philosophy and repel the Jesuit onslaught. His critics' prime error, he insisted, was their failure to realize that it was Spinoza, not Descartes, who forms the chief root of modern Naturalism and unbelief,¹⁶⁶ Valletta held that, unless swiftly rectified, this colossal error would destroy everything, including the Church. By failing to grasp the true nature of Italy's philosophical predicament, and attacking the wise Descartes, scholastics and traditionalists were in effect serving as the unwitting tools of the Spinozists. In a later work, the *Istoria filosofica* (1704), Valletta styles Spinoza a 'monster of Aristotelian impiety' whose denial of divine Providence, Revelation, and the immortality of the soul, as well as of Biblical prophecy, the Devil, Heaven and Hell, shows that 'in fact he was never a *Renatista*'.¹⁶⁷ Far from manifesting affinities with Descartes, Spinoza's true kinship is with the atheistic pagan Aristotle, the ruinous consequences of whose system, he alleged, were daily becoming clearer.

Backed by the ecclesiastical authorities, only Aristotelians could publish polemical works of philosophy in Italy until the

late 1690s, at any rate outside the Venetian Republic. But from 1699 pro-Cartesian works began to appear also in Naples, albeit semi-clandestinely. In that year, Costatino Grimaldi completed his *Risposta* to Benedetti and, knowing ecclesiastical permission to publish in Naples or anywhere in Italy was out of the question, sent the manuscript to be discreetly printed in Geneva (or Cologne) in 500 copies, and then smuggled back into the viceroyalty, stoking a fresh uproar.¹⁶⁸ Benedetti's aim, held Grimaldi, was to discredit the Naples *letterati* by linking them as a group to the 'heretics' of northern Europe. But this, he contended, following Valletta, was an outrageous calumny, since in reality it is Aristotelianism which nourishes, and the New Philosophy which undermines, Protestantism.¹⁶⁹ When Benedetti then published a second *Lettera*, turning his guns on Grimaldi, the latter answered with a second *Risposta* again printed abroad, and smuggled back in 1702, with the connivance of the viceroy's officials, this time in 600 copies. In 1703, again with the clandestine backing of the secular authorities, Grimaldi's reply to Benedetti's third *Lettera* was published this time in 750 copies, and in Naples itself, albeit with 'Cologne' falsely declared on the title-page.¹⁷⁰

In these publications unlicensed by ecclesiastical authority, Grimaldi adopts a more abrasive style than had his hero Fardella in Venice. Where Benedetti repeatedly cites the condemnation of Cartesianism by various northern European universities, urging this as proof that Cartesianism harms religion and is intellectually pernicious, Grimaldi mocks the Sorbonne¹⁷¹ and asks why Neapolitans should defer to judgements about philosophy reached in Dutch, Swiss, and German universities.¹⁷² The principal antagonists of

Descartes in northern Europe, he mentions in particular Voetius and Petrus van Mastricht, were indubitably heretics, while the foremost French philosophical commentators, Arnauld, Clerisier, Malebranche, and Régis, were committed Cartesians and good Catholics.¹⁷³ As Fardella insisted, Descartes' doctrine of two substances safeguards the immortality of the soul and the realm of spiritual forces, providing the key to successfully combining the New Philosophy with Catholic teaching and ecclesiastical authority.

Benedetti could not allow such pretensions to go unchallenged.¹⁷⁴ Backed by influential friends in Rome, he struck back with his *Difesa della Terza Lettera* (Rome, 1705), again emphasizing Louis XIV's implacable hostility to Cartesianism and that French royal policy on philosophy was being urged and supported by the foremost ecclesiastics in France. Nor by any means was it simply the Sorbonne but also Louvain, the prime seat of learning in the Catholic Netherlands and, by decree of the senate of May 1667, Caen university which had denounced Descartes as intellectually subversive, harmful to faith, and fatal to authority.¹⁷⁵ Catholics, furthermore, ought not to disdain the judgments of Voetius and Mastricht, or the prohibition of Cartesianism in Protestant universities,¹⁷⁶ for however deplorable their theology they correctly diagnose the intellectual perils inherent in the New Philosophy. Hence both Catholic and Protestant universities agree that Cartesianism is damaging and 'this is not good for you, believe me, Signore Grimaldi!' The precise implications of Descartes' two substances might be debatable but Cartesianism, argues Benedetti, plainly generates radical offshoots which, as everyone sees, destroy

faith, tradition, and morality. Noting that the anonymous writer (Lodewijk Meyer) of the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, a work which had caused great scandal in the north, expressly invokes Descartes and derives his venomous principles from the latter's philosophy,¹⁷⁷ Benedetti adduced as the clearest proof that Cartesianism produces atheistic and Naturalistic ideas the intellectual genesis of Spinoza himself: does not the anonymous author (Jarig Jelles) of the preface to Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma* insist that in his youth Spinoza steeped himself in Descartes? Benedetti also cites Bayle's article on Spinoza to prove that Spinoza's doctrine that God is equivalent to the unalterable laws of nature derives directly from the mechanistic categories introduced by Descartes. If Spinozism demolishes Christian faith, Cartesianism, maintains Benedetti, corrodes true belief by rendering incomprehensible the Church's teaching on the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist as well as making it hard to conceive of angels.¹⁷⁸

The viceroys' discreet support for the Neapolitan *Cartesiani*, a group which at the end of the 1690s and opening years of the new century, included Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria, assumed more concrete form during the viceroyalty of Medinaceli who encouraged the *letterati* to set up a literary academy which held its inaugural meeting in the viceregal palace in March 1698. Over the next years, Doria participated extensively in its proceedings and Vico on its fringes, but the surviving evidence shows the formal debates of the Accademia de Medina Coeli were confined to exclusively neutral humanistic, historical, and philological topics, deliberately eschewing contentious philosophical, theological, and scientific issues.¹⁷⁹ The policy of the viceregal régime,

evidently, was to shield the *Cartesiani* from their opponents and encourage their activity, while simultaneously avoiding giving public support to the New Philosophy.

Medinaceli lost his enthusiasm for the academy which bore his name, however, following the Bourbon succession to the Spanish throne in 1700, and the onset of a period of acute political instability in Spanish Italy, with part of the nobility supporting the new Bourbon monarchy and part plotting with Vienna to drive the Spaniards out and bring Naples and the other territories back under Habsburg sway. The atmosphere of political intrigue was further intensified by the Neapolitans' lively recollection of the Masaniello revolution of 1647–8, when the common people rose in revolt against both the Spanish régime and the nobility, and, briefly, a Neapolitan republic was established.

A plot to assassinate Medinaceli while he was out late at night visiting his favourite soprano foundered, as did the attempt by the mainly aristocratic conspirators to capture the principal citadel in Naples. Efforts to incite the common people, invoking Masaniello, were equally unsuccessful, and finally the viceroy's troops overpowered the hard core anti-Bourbon faction in fighting in the heart of the city. The conspirators, headed by the Prince of Macchia, were executed and their heads displayed on pikes. Shaken, Medinaceli evidently decided that philosophy might indeed be subversive; at any rate, he dissolved his academy and withdrew his support for Cartesianism. Vico, Doria, and the rest appear, nevertheless, to have reacted with shock and horror to the factionalism and selfish motives of the noble insurgents and were largely unsympathetic to what they considered the irrationality and violence of the Massaniello insurgency.¹⁸⁰ Their political ideal was to curb both baronial

and popular lawlessness through enlightened government based on the rule of law and, in the case of Doria, an admirer of the Dutch Republic, promoting republican values and consciousness.¹⁸¹

Six years later, in 1707, Spanish Bourbon rule in Naples did collapse and an invading Austrian army drove the Spaniards out. Doria, Vico, Grimaldi, and others, deeply affected by the political instability and intrigues of 1700–2, now had to adjust to the new Austrian Habsburg régime, directed from Vienna, which, for some years, remained in a somewhat precarious position, being opposed by the Papacy as well as the Spanish and French kings. Furthermore, the new Austrian viceroy quickly became embroiled in dispute with Rome over ecclesiastical privilege and benefices, which in turn prompted the new administration, like its predecessor, to trim back the Church's social and political influence and, linked to this, to encourage criticism of the jurisdictional claims of the Papacy, the episcopacy, the Inquisition, and religious orders.

This institutional friction between the new Austrian Habsburg régime and the papal government in Rome subtly influenced the changing intellectual atmosphere by inducing the authorities to adopt the same comparatively permissive attitude as their Spanish predecessors to the publication of books censured by the Church. Grimaldi, for instance, was commissioned to write and publish tracts affirming the right of the Neapolitan state to tax ecclesiastical lands, which were promptly banned by the Papacy. At the same time, with ecclesiastical book censorship being deliberately subverted by the new régime, the philosophical coterie could publish semi-clandestinely at Naples a variety of philosophical works

acceptable to officialdom, which the ecclesiastical authorities opposed. These included a new edition of Galileo's writings in 1710, an Italian translation of Adrien Baillet's biography of Descartes in 1713, with 'Basel' given on the title-page, and in 1722, with 'Turin' falsely declared the place of publication, the first Italian translation of Descartes' *Principia* under the title *I principi della filosofia*, together with a remarkable preface defending the right of women to participate in philosophical debate, penned by Giuseppa Leonora Barbapiccola, a follower of Doria and translator of the text.¹⁸²

By the opening years of the Austrian Habsburg régime, it was clear that Cartesianism had become powerfully entrenched in Naples and Sicily and was, in practice, being condoned by the secular authorities. However, here as elsewhere, Cartesianism could not supplant Aristotelianism in academic life or secondary education, and was strenuously resisted by much of the clergy. Consequently philosophy, and with it high culture and higher education, was progressively fragmented in Naples, creating an unprecedented intellectual disarray which, in turn, impelled philosophical enquiry onward into new and uncharted waters. Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), for instance, had in the 1690s been a more ardent Cartesian than he later cared to admit.¹⁸³ By 1707–8, however, he had experienced a change of heart, concluding that neither Cartesianism nor *Malebranchisme* could resolve the new spiritual impasse. In a public oration at the university, delivered before the new Austrian viceroy in 1708, Vico publicly denounced Cartesianism while, still more, deploring the now growing confusion in higher studies in which 'students' education is so warped and perverted' that a student may well be taught logic by an Aristotelian, physics by an Epicurean, general philosophy by a Cartesian, medicine by a

Galenist so that while university graduates ‘may become extremely learned in some respects, their culture as a whole (and the whole is really the flower of wisdom) is incoherent’.¹⁸⁴

Eventually, this quandary was to discredit philosophy itself. After two leading figures of the Neapolitan Enlightenment, Giannone and Grimaldi, fell out of favour and were banned by the secular authorities in the 1720s, the government in Naples began to turn against the new spirit of philosophical enquiry and criticism. Indeed, it became increasingly suspicious of ‘philosophy’, and Naples eventually lost its former centrality in Italian intellectual life. But until the 1740s the effect was intellectually creative rather than deadening. After Vico and Doria a third major thinker of the Neapolitan Enlightenment arose in the shape of Antonio Genovesi (1712–69) who later, in the 1750s, was to repudiate philosophical enquiry as a seductive but hopeless quest, insisting that the Christian Enlightenment must now concentrate exclusively on practical objectives, eschewing theoretical issues. But as a young scholar, in the 1730s and 1740s, Genovesi emulated Caloprese, Vico, and Doria in seeking overarching metaphysical solutions to the awesome intellectual dilemmas of the age. One of the most comprehensively learned and acute observers of the Italian scene, where subsequently he focused on plans for the improvement of commerce, agriculture, administration, transportation, and law, in the 1740s he tried to identify which philosophical stream of the moderate Enlightenment provided the best bulwark against radical ideas. His two major philosophical works, his *Elementa metaphysicae* (1743) and *Elementorum artis logicocriticae libri V* (1745), are grand surveys in which Genovesi examines all five chief

philosophical traditions fighting for mastery of Italy's intellectual life—the scholastic Aristotelianism of the schools and four classes of *moderni*. He finds all the modern trends formidable, acknowledging that all had made vast inroads in Italian culture. Cartesianism deserves considerable respect. Genovesi praised Descartes for demolishing scholasticism, using 'doubt' as an instrument of enquiry to overcome scepticism, and introducing 'freedom to philosophize'; and agrees that the human soul is *substantia incorporea*, totally distinct from matter.¹⁸⁵ But, like Vico and Doria, he also finds Cartesianism seriously flawed, solid insights fatally laced with error, leading ultimately to 'fanaticism' and the overthrow of Christian truth:¹⁸⁶ after all, out of Cartesianism, he concluded scathingly, emerged 'Bekkerianismus et Spinozismus'.¹⁸⁷ Secondly, there were the *Leibnitiani*, or adherents of the Leibnizian-Wolffian system, since the 1690s likewise a powerful force first in Venice and then in all Italy. But here too Genovesi detected weaknesses which led him to infer that the Leibnizian-Wolffian system could not conquer the Italian philosophical arena.¹⁸⁸ Next came the empiricism of Newton and Locke, which again Genovesi approves of in part but then ultimately rejects as incapable of providing an adequate basis for the stable coexistence of reason and faith.¹⁸⁹

The fourth main category of moderns, and by far the worst, were the radical deists, who deny Christ's Gospel and miracles and reject the absoluteness of 'good' and 'evil' as well as the immortality of the soul—which Locke's empiricism, he notes, disconcertingly fails to rescue.¹⁹⁰ While Genovesi himself was criticized by traditionalists for not

attacking the *fatalisti* strenuously enough,¹⁹¹ he entirely agrees with them that radical ideas pose a grave threat to morality, civil society, and all mankind. Moreover, while he briefly mentions other figures, he is emphatic that the 'head of the modern deists is Spinoza',¹⁹² insisting that the whole thrust of the first part of his *Elementa* is directed principally against the *Democritici* and *Spinozisti*.¹⁹³ Striving to overturn Spinoza's Bible criticism, Genovesi lauds Huet's 'most splendid' *Demonstratio* and invokes Houtteville. Attempting to break Spinoza's system, he assails the *Ethics* as well as the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and also such Spinozistic writers as Cuffeler and Boulainvilliers.¹⁹⁴ But ultimately, he found that both he himself and the high culture of his time were trapped in an irresolvable intellectual quandary. He trusts in his faith, repudiating not only radical thought but the supposedly rational Christianity of Le Clerc, insisting that only the 'Church is the legitimate interpreter of Holy Scripture'.¹⁹⁵ But his quest for philosophical truth lapsed into an inconclusive and deeply frustrating deadlock and while he warned of the dangers of turning theology completely away from and against philosophy,¹⁹⁶ he finally became convinced there is simply no fully viable, philosophically coherent basis for enlightened government, education, and high culture.

Caught in this insoluble metaphysical impasse, Genovesi concluded that none of the modern philosophical systems adequately make sense of the world, or are altogether safe for society or individuals to trust in. Ultimately, the *Cartesiani*, *Newtoniani*, and *Leibniziani* are all unreliable and unsatisfactory, just as the Aristotelians are and still more the deism and atheism of the new *Epicurei*: 'nam ex

Cartesianismo profluxit Bekkerianismus et Spinozismus, ex Gassenistarum secta materialismus, Leibnitiana philosophia vergit ad idealismum, Neutoniana ad purum mechanismum' (For from Cartesianism flowed Bekkerianism and Spinozism; from the Gassendist sect issued materialism, Leibnizian thought leads to idealism, and Newtonianism to pure mechanism).¹⁹⁷ Pantheistic atheism, avers Genovesi, reaches back to the Pythagoreans and Eleatics of ancient Greece¹⁹⁸ and is now the chief threat to the well-being of Italy. But how can the *Spinozisti* be defeated philosophically? Genovesi admits that he simply does not know.¹⁹⁹ Perhaps, in the end, only faith, the human heart, and determined government action can repel the threat.

Thus pure philosophy came to appear bankrupt, more apt to mislead than help man towards his salvation. In his discourse of 1753 on the true goals of the arts and sciences, his manifesto proclaiming the future direction of the Neapolitan Enlightenment, and the cultural stance an enlightened Neapolitan government should embrace, Genovesi publicly rebukes—and turns his back on—the world of abstract philosophy, extolling instead the practical and technical potential of the Enlightenment, a posture henceforth the hallmark of his work. In this text, written in Italian and intended for a broad audience, Genovesi again broaches Spinoza but now no longer pronounces his name, merely alluding darkly but with evident apprehension to the 'most impious and cold-hearted of the philosophers of the last century'.²⁰⁰

3

SOCIETY, INSTITUTIONS, REVOLUTION

i. Philosophy and the Social Hierarchy

Is there a social dimension that helps explain the timing and psychological origins of the rise of radical thought? That the chief breeding-grounds of radical ideas during the century 1650–1750 were large, internationally orientated, dynamic cities with exceptionally high levels of immigration from a wide area, commercial and manufacturing, as well as governmental centres, such as Amsterdam, The Hague, London, Paris, Venice, Naples, Berlin, Vienna, Copenhagen, and Hamburg, where traditional, sharply delineated social hierarchies and forms of deference were perceptibly eroding, suggests that there may be. Radical ideas, seemingly, were nurtured within an urban milieu characterized by exceptional fluidity of social relations and movement between social strata, features which correspond directly to the freer, more flexible intellectual framework which emerged.

Historians in recent decades have become conscious of the evolution in western and central Europe during the century and a half before the French Revolution of a wholly new kind of public sphere for debate, exchange of ideas, and opinion-forming, located outside the formal consultative procedures and assemblies of the past, a public sphere which emerged only where a high degree of social and cultural interchange existed outside the deliberations of formal political, judicial, and ecclesiastical bodies and institutions.¹ Among the

novelties in European life generating this forum of public opinion formation beyond the sway of princely courts, the judiciary, the Church, and parliaments were the new erudite journals, 'universal' libraries, literary clubs, lexicons, and encyclopaedias, culminating in the great *Encyclopédie* (seventeen volumes, Paris, 1751–65) of Diderot and D'Alembert, and generally the new post-1648 Republic of Letters,² as well as, more mundanely, newspapers, gentlemen's magazines, tea- and coffee-houses and, after around 1730, also Masonic lodges.³

Except the last, all these new cultural institutions and forms of sociability were products of the last part of the seventeenth century and conclusively demonstrate the decisive impact of the period 1680–1750, or the early Enlightenment, as distinct from the post-1750 High Enlightenment, in the transformation of European society and culture. Equally, they confirm the crucially formative role in generating the new outlook of the major commercial and courtly cities of especially north-western Europe. The style and flavour of the Early Enlightenment 'public sphere' might fairly be described as a cross between the aristocratic and the commercial with, as its overriding feature, the de-emphasizing of social grades and status, breaking with the hierarchical values of traditional society. Its concern with polite sociability between men (and to a much lesser extent women) of contrasting backgrounds, and a predilection for conversation urbane, cosmopolitan, and unencumbered with pedantic erudition, arose naturally and automatically from the advent of new associations and locations with no fixed rules of access, which—as in the case of the tea and coffee shops which began to proliferate in Holland, London, and Hamburg from the 1660s and 1670s—provided a social space not

specific to any one class.⁴ The result was the emergence of a new type—the polished gentleman and knowledgeable ‘man of the world’ who is unclassifiable under the old social criteria. Noting that this new sphere of polite conversation was the preserve of no one social class, Doria calls it a forum of ‘complete liberty’, prominently featuring noblemen and women, but to which men of middling and even humble birth could readily gain admittance once furnished with the necessary veneer of *buon gusto*, a mixture of social graces and reading which, in principle, was available to anyone.⁵

Casanova, the ultimate pseudo-gentleman as well as libertine, was highly educated, highly polished, and regularly mixed with aristocrats and fine ladies, as well as lesser mortals, but he was the son of an obscure actor in a big city (Venice) and, in his later years, he was employed as a nobleman’s librarian.

The quasi-aristocratic tone of the developing ‘public sphere’ could not, therefore, preclude its being a levelling force generating new space for social mingling. Among French writers who significantly contributed to the burgeoning corpus of radical thought were several nobles, but the foremost figures, apart from Boulainvilliers and d’Argens, came from a wide spectrum of middling backgrounds: Bayle was the son of a Huguenot pastor, Fontenelle stemmed from a Rouennais legal family, the latter’s atheistic disciple Du Marsais was a private tutor,⁶ La Mettrie was the son of a Saint Malo textile merchant, while Diderot was the illegitimate son of a master cutler. The Dutch radicals from the brothers Koerbagh, sons of a manufacturer, to Mandeville, a city physician, were predominantly, like Spinoza himself, a merchant’s son, from an urban, often Amsterdam or Rotterdam middle-class background. Among German

radicals, Tschirnhaus was an aristocrat while Knutzen and Edelmann were sons of organists, Stosch and Wachter the offspring of Protestant pastors, and Lau of an official. Among the Italians, Radicati and Conti were nobles, albeit the first was disowned by his family, rejected by his class, and died in destitution, while Giannone was of obscure parentage and Vico an underpaid, undervalued, junior professor.

Aristocrats who became *philosophes*, regularly rubbing shoulders with non-noble scholars, writers, and publishers, as well as professionals, pseudo-gentry, and *bourgeois gentilhommes*, were apt to be detached in some significant way from the traditional culture and outlook of the nobility. Mostly, they had been disowned or belonged to a highly fluid, cosmopolitan fringe found in large capital cities. The prolific marquis d'Argens sprang from the judicial *noblesse de robe* in Aix-en-Provence but was estranged from his family and lived from his writing in Holland, deprived of his former affluent status and lifestyle, until he began a new career as a German courtier in the 1740s. By contrast, the typically provincial aristocracy and gentry of Europe, rural and small-town élites residing in localities over which their families had presided for generations, were profoundly conservative in their reading and, whether Protestant or Catholic, highly resistant to new intellectual trends. Research into the libraries of the nobility of rural Franconia, for instance, reveals a lack of interest in modern philosophy or science, as complete as that of the provincial aristocracies of Brittany and Normandy.⁷ As in the past, the cultural world of the rural nobility was thoroughly traditional, steeped in law, juridical politics, and theology. Those libraries of aristocrats and high officials which do reveal affinities with the intellectual world of the *philosophes* were usually encountered in dynamic cultural centres in

which traditional social barriers had become increasingly blurred.

The public sphere of the pre-1750 Enlightenment, then, generated a new reading culture, conversational style, and intellectual framework. One unmistakable sign of change was the receding of Latin from its age-old hegemony over intellectual activity, and the emergence of the vernacular in its place, a shift which itself entailed a cultural revolution, for the first time firmly separating the world of polite conversation from that of academic disputation and theological and legal scholarship. If French became the language of non-academic intellectual discourse among Europe's higher social echelons,⁸ by 1700 a remarkable crop of popular philosophical writers had appeared further down the social scale who conversed, read, and wrote primarily in their own vernacular languages. But the widening gulf between old and new was far more than just a matter of language; it was also one of style. Especially esteemed in the new arena were clear, concise, readily grasped proofs, stripped of the pedantry and academic terminology and jargon of traditional scholarly discourse.⁹

That men are unlikely to acquire radical habits of thought from a sedentary existence in a traditionally hierarchical milieu was asserted by several contemporary writers. As the Hamburg pastor Johannes Müller observed in 1672, country folk were the social segment least affected by new philosophical ideas, while ordinary artisans and merchants were, if not entirely, then mostly immune. The real menace, he believed, was the open outlook of persons—courtiers, diplomats, soldiers, and 'men of the world'—who travel widely, continually mixing in different cultural and religious contexts, particularly if they frequent lands such as France,

England, and Holland where, according to him, libertine thinking was rife.¹⁰ Immanuel Weber (1659–1726), a connoisseur of the Lutheran German small courts who, in 1684, became chamberlain of the principality of Schwarzburg-Sonderhausen, dedicated his philosophical dialogue on atheism, published in 1696, to Count Christoph Ludwig of Stolberg-Königstein since, according to him, this prince was one of the few remaining paragons of old-fashioned princely piety, a ruler genuinely opposed to foreign fashion and the extravagant styles rampant in most late seventeenth-century courts, and hostile to the new philosophical ideas which Weber was attacking.¹¹ The craze for opera, ballet, theatre, masquerades, and other such pleasure-seeking, declares Weber, instils irresistibly precisely those most addicted to foreign novelties with a yearning for philosophy with which to stifle qualms of conscience and fear of divine retribution. Hence the fad for philosophy now sweeping the German courts, far from being designed to edify and uplift, he insists, has an essentially irreligious and immoral purpose.

*Habitué*s of the German Protestant princely courts, according to Weber, read Hobbes and debated Bayle's appalling proposition that atheists can lead a virtuous life.¹² One routinely distinguished between 'practical' and 'theoretical' atheists, acknowledging the latter to be, if much less numerous, the more pernicious of the two varieties, being impervious to pious admonition and prone to try to sway others.¹³ Every German courtier, he says, knows Spinoza is the chief, most infamous, and most dangerous of 'theoretical' atheists, and consequently, he places more emphasis on him than other morally and religiously subversive writers. Alas,

many had been corrupted, he avers, by Spinoza's denying the divine authorship of Scripture, and claiming the prophets were not divinely inspired but just ordinary men in the grip of exceptional 'fantasies', as well as his designating the Biblical miracles 'purely natural happenings which only seem supernatural to us because we are ignorant of their natural causes'.¹⁴ German courtiers, he adds, also commonly knew the doctrine of one substance and Bayle's argument that Spinoza represents the culmination and systematization of ancient strains of philosophical atheism stretching back to the pre-Socratic Greeks.

But if Spinoza is the unmatched arch-atheist of modern times, there were plenty of lesser figures infiltrating and morally debilitating the German courtly world of the 1690s. In particular, he mentions—evidently following Müller here—the Sephardic Jewish deist Uriel da Costa,¹⁵ the Amsterdam writer and associate of Spinoza 'Frederik Warmond' [i.e. Adriaen Koerbagh]¹⁶ whose *Bloemhof*, he remarks, rejects the Trinity and Christ's divinity and divine mission, and claims Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch,¹⁷ and two more Dutchmen—Adriaen Beverland,¹⁸ whose *De Peccato naturali* he calls a 'frivolous little book' which mocks the concept of Original Sin, and the famous Balthasar Bekker,¹⁹ who had done more than anyone to sap German courtiers' belief in Satan, magic, possession, spirits, and witchcraft.²⁰ But the philosophical basis is Spinozism; what is principally needed to defeat this contagion, he urges, is a good supply of cogent refutations of Spinoza. Warning against the Socinian Frans Kuyper, he chiefly recommends Henry More, Mansvelt, Velthuysen,

Huet, Blyenbergh, Poiret, Abbadie, Wittichius, and Pierre Yvon.²¹

In France, it was the celebrated court preacher Father Jean-Baptiste Massillon who first sounded the alarm regarding the progress among the aristocracy of philosophy, in a series of sermons against 'incredulity' beginning in 1699.²² In a later sermon, delivered in 1704, also in the royal chapel at Versailles, with some of those he was criticizing sitting before him, he interprets this sudden aristocratic thirst for philosophy, much like Weber, as a form of rebellion against religion and the Church. He denounces it as an arrogant bid for personal independence, a device for quietening uneasy consciences with a veneer of high-sounding verbiage to camouflage profligacy and lust. He refuses to believe anyone deep in his heart genuinely doubts the existence of a 'souverain Créateur de l'Univers' who rewards the deserving and punishes the wicked.²³ Only to gratify carnal appetites while warding off disapproval and the risk of disgrace had some nobles donned philosophical arguments as their new armour. The true origin of the spreading enthusiasm for philosophy, held Massillon, was thus moral depravity, concupiscence, and pride, the philosophical unbeliever flaunting a wicked 'singularité qui le flatte et fait qu'il suppose en lui plus de force et plus de lumières, que dans le reste des hommes'.²⁴ Such *incrédules* use philosophy to tranquillize themselves and coax others, thereby creating more and more *incrédules*.²⁵ Yet not everyone is ready prey for the new philosophical seducers. There are still many devout men and women who heed the admonitions of the clergy. Massillon vows a war on philosophies total and unremitting which would end in the

triumph of Christ and the Church. In classical antiquity, he recalls, religion, authority, and morality had then too almost been overwhelmed by a similar mania for philosophy. The entire known world resounded to the clamour of philosophers and philosophies; yet in the end, all the philosophy schools of the Hellenistic and Roman world were humbled, vanquished, and ground to dust, compelled to admit that in Christ there is a 'philosophie plus sublime' than that of any philosopher.²⁶

Massillon distinguishes two distinct strains of New Philosophy invading the courtly world of Paris and Versailles. Both are corrupting and based on 'raison orgueilleuse'. But the philosophy of the Cartesians and providential deists who postulate 'un Dieu oisif, retiré en lui-même ... ne daignant pas à s'abaisser à regarder ce qui passe sur la terre', and virtually indifferent to the men he has created,²⁷ while harmful, is yet not so fatal as the more radical tendency, championed by hardened *esprits forts*, defined, according to Massillon, by advocacy of an 'enchaînement fatal d'événements', a God lacking both freedom and power. It is these new philosophical *incrédules* who deny divine Providence and believe in nothing except what is demonstrated by mathematical reason, in other words, Spinoza's followers, who threaten mankind with moral, religious, and social annihilation.²⁸

Avoiding direct engagement with the Cartesians, Massillon alludes to them, and all other modern mechanists except Spinoza, only indirectly, citing ancient Greek thinkers as surrogates for those he says are again disseminating the 'vains préceptes de la philosophie'. By identifying Spinoza alone among modern philosophers spreading dangerous ideas by name, Massillon emphasizes his unparalleled centrality in the rise of French incredulity. What an amazing phenomenon

it is, he stresses, that Spinoza a foreigner of obscure and low birth, should be apotheosized in France into a modern philosophical 'saint' in the imaginations of libertine courtiers and aristocrats, ladies as well as men, a model upon which to base not just their thoughts but their very lives. Spinoza has indeed, he laments, become the universal 'saint' of the *esprits forts*.²⁹ His explanation for this strange phenomenon is partly psychological and partly moral. Despite their arrogant airs, French noblemen who profess unbelief are not wholly swayed in their hearts by the philosophical verbiage they spout, not really firm in their impiety. Driven by apprehension and anxiety to try to drown the gnawing self-reproach within them, they feel impelled to find philosophers capable of stiffening their courage and resolution—'des impiés véritables, fermes et intrépides dans l'impiété'.³⁰ So strong is this impulse that some 'madmen' even went to search out the infamous Spinoza in his homeland—an allusion to Saint-Evremond as well as Condé, who had had Spinoza summoned to his presence at Utrecht in 1673, and according to at least one professed former friend of the philosopher, Henri Morelli (if not to most modern scholars), did actually confer with him at length.³¹

By venerating their 'saint' of impiety, claims Massillon, the new heretics had lapsed into a credulity far more irrational and despicable than any they reproach loyal Christians with. 'Ce monstre', as he calls Spinoza, had built his own philosophical system, needing no one to help him cultivate atheism and iniquity. But he had built it upon the most preposterous and tedious paradoxes and contradictions. His system is nonsensical. 'Hors d'impieété, tout est inintelligible,' he affirms, so that were it not for his denying a providential

God and miracles, his work would long since have sunk without trace into oblivion. It is not then his intellectual cogency but matchless impiety which had conferred on Spinoza his unrivalled status.

If, in Paris and London, the Radical Enlightenment flourished amid a fluid, mixed world of nobles and non-nobles, bourgeois and sons of artisans, at Vienna it had less prolific and few indigenous roots and was mainly based among the coterie around Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736) and his intimates, again a mixture of nobles and non-noble *érudits*. This group largely consisted of foreigners, such as his favourite aide-de camp, Baron Georg Wilhelm von Hohendorf (d. 1719), a Prussian Junker by origin who had, however, served many years in the Ottoman army as a mercenary, learnt excellent Greek in Constantinople, and was an expert in the religion, customs, and erotic life of the Levant, and the French *savant*, deist, and dealer in rare books Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy, a man who had intrigued against the French regent and seen the inside of the Bastille in 1719, and who was the prince's guest in Vienna in the years 1721–3.³² Other participants included (briefly) the English deist John Toland, and, for much longer, the Neapolitan refugee *savant* of radical inclinations, Pietro Giannone. As has been emphasized, the influence of this libertine philosophical coterie on the local élites of Austria and Bohemia was extremely slight,³³ but in a wider, international context with their contacts in Germany, Holland, Flanders, France, and Italy, it was undoubtedly of much greater significance. Eugene supported Leibniz's proposals for an academy of sciences in Vienna and was known as a patron of philosophy and science, while the fame of his 'magnifica

biblioteca', as Giannone called it, with its many rarities, reverberated across Europe.³⁴ Eugene's library was Giannone's laboratory and it was there, among its unrivalled profusion of forbidden books and manuscripts, that he was able to steep himself, as he could not in Italy, in the works of Spinoza, Toland, and other radical writers.³⁵

A leading personality of the age, as well as a famous military commander, diplomat, and courtier, Eugene of Savoy had entered the Emperor's service at the time of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, and later played a leading role, alongside Marlborough, among the generals of the anti-Louis XIV coalition during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13). Afterwards, among other posts, he served as governor-general of the Austrian Netherlands (1716–25) with one of his residences in Brussels, though he was frequently absent during those years in Vienna and elsewhere. Publicly renowned as a collector of art and a sponsor of Jansenism, privately he was a noted connoisseur of courtesans and the erotic, and a frenetic bibliophile with a special liking for suspect philosophical and erotic literature.³⁶ His closest associate in philosophical, as well as military and convivial matters, was Hohendorf, who probably first introduced both Toland and Lenglet Dufresnoy to him and who certainly procured for him many of his choicest rare books and manuscripts.³⁷

Among the extreme rarities in his library was an original annotated manuscript of *La Religion Chrétien conduit par la raison éternelle* (1704), a Spinozistic text by the lapsed Catholic monk, and later Calvinist preacher, Yves de Vallone (c.1666–1705) which the prince probably acquired, together

with other *libri prohibiti*, while visiting Holland in 1707,³⁸ and, in a copy discovered by Toland in Amsterdam in 1709, the *Gospel of Barnabas*, a rarity prized by Muslims and Jews but reviled by the Churches, since it recounts Jesus' life and passion expressly denying his divinity and Resurrection. Toland had become interested in the topic of the Nazarenes, or Jewish Christians, the alleged source of this 'gospel', while studying at Leiden years before—the text figures prominently in his *Nazarenus*—and it was presumably through him that it found its way into Eugene's library.³⁹ Hohendorf too amassed a famous collection scarcely less prolific in *clandestina* philosophical and erotic than that of his master.⁴⁰ Besides everything by Spinoza, Lodwijk Meyer's *Philosophia*, and many other key published radical writings of the late seventeenth century, he possessed numerous 'forbidden' manuscripts including Boulainvilliers' *Essay de métaphysique*, De Vallone's *Religion du Chrétien*, and, still more impious, the foremost of the German examples of the genre—the *Symbolum Sapientiae* (or *Cymbalum Mundi*),⁴¹ and the most notorious of all the clandestine manuscripts—*La Vie et l'Esprit de Mr Benoît de Spinoza*.⁴²

The psychological roots of radical thought, according to Massillon, Weber, and other hostile observers, lay in pride, the desire to be independent of the Church and of others, and the need for a philosophical screen of justification for sexual profligacy.⁴³ Eugene and Hohendorf vividly personify the link between what was a veritable cult of the erotic, an almost open flouting of conventional morality and religion, and a fascination for 'forbidden' philosophy. But the pride entailed was not necessarily aristocratic, or that of any class, but rather

of those who chose to disdain and place themselves outside the norms and traditional attitudes of the society in which they lived.⁴⁴ But if the independent-minded defied religion, ecclesiastical authority, and society, thereby, in the opinion of most, fatally imperilling their souls, it must indeed have seemed advisable and reassuring to seek out philosophical arguments demonstrating the soul is not immortal, that there is no supernatural governance of the lives of men, nor reward or punishment in the hereafter.⁴⁵ Why live in dread of divine retribution for profligacy, adultery, and debauchery if one can live entirely free of remorse and dread of the Day of Judgement? And precisely in this field—with his ‘geometric’ demonstrations that the impious and dissolute need not fear divine retribution—Spinoza was invaluable, furnishing more, better, and pithier arguments and proofs against revealed religion, divine Providence, and supernatural forces than any other philosopher of the age, even Hobbes.⁴⁶

ii. Shaftesbury, Radicati, Vauvenargues

Many nobles figure among the ranks of the radical writers and thinkers of the early Enlightenment—Lahontan, Boulainvilliers, d’Argens, Vauvenargues, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Conti, Radicati, and, of course, Spinoza’s friend Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhaus—among others that spring to mind. Yet each of these men of privileged birth became in some way estranged or detached from his particular family or noble group, and doubtless partly in consequence of becoming isolated or remote from his class, was drawn into forging, through philosophy, a new kind of meritocracy of mind and attitude, reflecting the extreme social fluidity postulated by deistic and libertarian premises. An

obvious instance is Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), originator of the ‘moral sense’ theory, a deist who passionately believed there is an objective basis for morality and the ‘public good’ separate from that decreed by revealed religion, arguing however against Hobbes and Spinoza that the private ‘good’ of the individual is not the only motivation for human action and that there is a way to balance self-interest against the individual’s benevolent or moral sense, and allegiance to the ‘public good’.⁴⁷

Shaftesbury sought to place morality, ‘politeness’, and sociability on a new intellectual basis, and did so inspired by a vision of a novel type of society ruled not by any traditional landed élite but a new kind of élite of affairs and ideas—an élite of the cultured, well-meaning, and gentlemanly.

Moreover, his social and moral conception was closely linked to his role as a radical ideologue of the ‘Glorious

Revolution’.⁴⁸ In his post-aristocratic philosophy, ‘liberty’ is the basis for a new and more enlightened culture—‘liberty’ not just in the constitutional sense defined by the Glorious Revolution, but liberty as a political and social condition, liberty defined by debate, criticism, and cultural exchange, what has been called ‘a condition of unlimited interpersonal

interaction’.⁴⁹ The Revolution ended England’s age-old domination by Court and Church and created every likelihood that the country would now be politically and culturally dominated (as indeed it was) by the landed gentry. But Shaftesbury, whose extreme sensibility and delicate health, as well as aversion to the mainstream politics of his own class, led him to retire from active politics, undertook in his intense and lonely intellectual odyssey to show how his new ideal of ‘politeness’—which was fiercely derided by Jonathan Swift—could help create a wider, more accessible space in

which elements from the commercial and professional classes of London and the other cities could participate alongside the gentry and the rising pseudo-gentry.⁵⁰

Other radical thinkers of noble extraction were similarly removed from the normal context of aristocratic life and activity. Henri de Boulainvilliers, comte de Saint Saire (1658–1722) was another deist of impeccable noble pedigree and perhaps comes closest to being a *philosophe* who believed in the reality of noble status and its structural importance for society and politics. Yet Saint-Simon was not alone in considering him a personage somehow detached from his class by his profound intellectual engagement. Like Shaftesbury, Boulainvilliers became deeply addicted to the pleasures of reading and the mind and, as Lenglet Dufresnoy remarked, it was surprising, even disconcerting ‘de voir un homme de sa naissance joindre des réflexions si profondes à une érudition aussi grand et aussi variée que la sienne’.⁵¹ Where Shaftesbury argues against, but also parallels, Spinoza’s ethical project, detaching morality from any connection with theology and revealed religion, elevating intellectual love of the universe above physical pleasure, and deeming virtue the highest pleasure of the mind, a ‘virtue’ that unites the private and the public good, Boulainvilliers, for his part, emerged as the profoundest and most influential of all the exponents of Spinozism in early eighteenth-century France.

But others were still more drastically alienated from the claims and pretensions of aristocracy than Shaftesbury or Boulainvilliers. The most uncompromising radical of aristocratic background, and one of the few to declare the impossibility of reforming society on enlightened lines

without redistribution of land and property, was also arguably the most thoroughly estranged from his family and class.⁵² Count Alberto Radicati di Passerano (1698–1737), scion of an ancient Piedmontese lineage, had arrived at the Court of Turin at the age of 9 as a page. Not the least of the many misfortunes which marred his short and tragic life was a disastrous marriage to a Piedmontese noble lady, contracted when he was 17, which led to bitter strife with her family, culminating in nine months of imprisonment on allegations which turned out to be false. This experience doubtless contributed not just to his subsequent feelings of estrangement but also his highly unconventional views on marriage and sex. After spending the years 1719–21 in Regency France, about which nothing is known but where, presumably, he deepened his acquaintance with freethinking and radical thought,⁵³ he returned to Savoy, where he participated in the tentative reformist initiatives of the early 1720s. But what, even then, struck the king's ministers in Turin as a disquietingly radical tendency left him dangerously exposed after the *rapprochement* between the Savoyard Court and the Papacy, in 1726–7, and the re-establishment of the Inquisition in the kingdom.⁵⁴ Increasingly at odds with his own as well as his wife's family, and intensely fearful of the Inquisition, which he regarded as his mortal enemy, Radicati fled into exile in northern Europe, from which he was never to return, and which led to his gradual impoverishment and social marginalization.⁵⁵

Steeped in Machiavelli, Sarpi, and Bayle, Radicati also at some point discovered Spinoza, who became the prime influence on the further elaboration and growing radicalism of his ideas on society and politics, as well as in philosophy and

religion.⁵⁶ He was entirely at one with Spinoza in regarding 'democratical' government 'the most ancient and agreeable to the natural and free condition of men'.⁵⁷ An early draft of his *Discours moraux, historiques et politiques*, which he presented to the Savoyard king before his exile, in 1729, and which scandalized the Court with its remarks about the Church, probably already savoured of the republicanism fully evident in the final version. In England, Radicati became a militant deist and connoisseur of radical literature, exploring, besides much else, the writings of Blount, Toland, Collins, and Tindal, and styling the latter 'un savant auteur de notre parti'.⁵⁸ His most famous work, the 94-page *Philosophical Dissertation upon Death* was translated by Thomas Morgan and published in London in 1732. Here Radicati rejects Newtonianism, insisting motion is inherent in, not external to, matter, denies divine Providence, affirming the laws of nature to be unalterable, and rejects the notions of absolute 'good' and 'evil', including the Christian teaching on death and suicide. He argues, like Spinoza and Shaftesbury, that 'good' can be determined only by what benefits society and the individual.⁵⁹ Thus where pain and misery outweigh what is worthwhile in life, suicide is both a perfectly natural and also a 'good' solution.⁶⁰

Publication of this treatise, which he designated a 'consolation for the Unhappy', provoked an immediate outcry.⁶¹ The Attorney-General accounted the *Dissertation* 'the most impious and immoral book I have ever read'.⁶² George II's consort, Queen Caroline, a well-read lady and admirer of Samuel Clarke, Newton's chief philosophical spokesman, perusing the book a few weeks after its

appearance, recorded her shock at being confronted with such a work 'wherein the author embraces the atheism of Spinoza and afterwards draws conclusions from his doctrine that destroy all society and virtue'.⁶³ In November 1732, the author, translator, and publisher were all arrested. Radicati was briefly imprisoned and then released on bail but found the atmosphere confronting him in London so intimidating he soon went into his second exile, settling this time at The Hague.⁶⁴ He died at Rotterdam, completely destitute, in 1737.

A French nobleman who died at a still earlier age, a *philosophe* born into the *noblesse de robe* but eventually socially marginalized, was Luc de Clapiers, marquis de Vauvenargues (1715–47). Like d'Argens, a native of Aix-en-Provence, Vauvenargues chose a military career, and served in a crack royal regiment for ten years (1733–43) until obliged to retire without prospects owing to his physical collapse during a campaign against the Austrians in Bohemia. Disfigured, sick, immersing himself in solitary study in the dreary lodgings he rented in Paris, Vauvenargues brooded and read, developing a sombre philosophy of life expressed in a concise aphoristic style in a series of essays and fragments all written during the decade 1737–47.⁶⁵

Like Radicati—and indeed all radical thinkers of the Early Enlightenment—Vauvenargues expressly rejects the 'cause occulte de M. Newton', maintaining that motion is innate in matter and affirming the 'ordre immuable et nécessaire' of all that happens.⁶⁶ He too rejects 'freedom of the will' and asserts the relativity of 'good' and 'evil'.⁶⁷ 'On n'a point de volonté,' he contends, 'qui ne soit un effet de quelque passion ou de quelque réflexion,' adding 'donc l'homme ne peut agir que par les lois de son Dieu'.⁶⁸ As with Spinoza, 'God' in

Vauvenargues is not the Creator of the universe, the source of good and evil, the guardian and judge of man, or the divine legislator who lays down the rules of morality. He is simply the totality of nature and its unalterable laws. Accordingly, for Vauvenargues, morality is constructed by man and 'l'humanité est la première des vertus.'⁶⁹ The primary influences shaping his philosophy were Bayle and especially Spinoza, whom he could hardly avoid discovering through reading Boulainvilliers, a virtually inevitable source for such a figure at the time.⁷⁰ But the Spinozism of Vauvenargues is an intensely moralistic, individual philosophy, if also a political stance in the service of the liberated individual. Preoccupied with the implications of Spinoza's system for lifestyle and morality, he seems utterly remote from the polemics and Biblical criticism of the *Tractatus* and the carefully crafted system-building of the *Ethics*. Typically *vauvenarguien* is his wrestling with the paradox lodged at the heart of Spinoza's system, that all human decisions and actions are determined necessarily, and there is no free will, but that yet this fatalism 'n'exclut point la liberté', that is, a liberty including security of life, buttressed by political and social conditions and laws.⁷¹

Vauvenargues' politics reflects the uninhibitedly secular, individualistic character of his thought. Adopting the Hobbesian-Spinozist principle that neither natural law nor natural morality exist, and that 'good' and 'bad' begin with the legislation and moral rules established by men in the context of the State, justice for Vauvenargues exists only under a sovereign. But since justice is really nothing other than the power of institutions and the legal process established and maintained by rulers and legislators, its quality will vary greatly from State to State and from time to time. Since men

are naturally, and inevitably, determined to self-preservation and self-aggrandisement, absolute justice is unattainable, and the real purpose of the legal machinery in any State is to minimize friction and limit the disruptive effects on society and other individuals of each person's natural drives. 'Les hommes sont ennemis-nés les uns des autres', he asserts, 'non à cause qu'ils se haïssent, mais parce qu'ils ne peuvent s'agrandir sans se traverser.'⁷² Unlike Hobbes and Locke, however, Vauvenargues does not contrast the state of nature where men are at war with one another with life under the State, separating the two by postulating a basic contract. Rather, like Spinoza, he sees no real distinction between the state of nature, where men always have some mutual interests and collaborate for purposes of common defence and safety, and civil society where the State, to a greater or lesser extent, serves the needs of all.⁷³ In particular, Vauvenargues, like all the radicals, dislikes and rejects Hobbes' notion that with the forming of the State, the individual surrenders his natural right, including his natural right to criticize and judge.

Unavoidably, some groups and individuals will always be more powerful and richer than others. Inequality being inherent in society, the laws made by the State always have a provisional and relative, rather than an absolute or permanent character, being in effect a way of stabilizing and minimizing the harmful effects of a hierarchy and inequality which has no intrinsic legitimacy—God-ordained or otherwise. Vauvenargues did not emulate Radicati, or the German plebeians Knutzen and Edelmann, in suggesting that this illegitimate inequality should be erased through redistribution of property. However, as in Diderot later, whatever tends to level hierarchy and inequality also tends towards the good of

the community as a whole. Like Boulainvilliers, Vauvenargues is a firm opponent of royal absolutism. But he also warns, following Spinoza, that it serves no useful purpose to engage in revolution, or throw out a tyrant, if the people do nothing to change such systems of law and authority as pave the way for despotism. If the people want no more tyranny then they must learn to change their laws and create a well-ordered republic or constitutional monarchy. Vauvenargues does not share Spinoza's distaste for Cromwell, though; rather, he sees him not as a king under another name but an enemy of monarchy, illustrating the rise in the eighteenth century of the new myth of Cromwell, a feature of the radicalism of the age, as an enemy of tyranny and man of the people.⁷⁴

Vauvenargues, Radicati, and Doria, like Shaftesbury, were nobles but, unlike Boulainvilliers and d'Holbach, adhered to a political republicanism characterized by levelling and anti-aristocratic as well as anticlerical tendencies. Accordingly, they may be bracketed together with Spinoza, Van den Enden, Koerbagh, Leenhof, and Mandeville among the Dutch, Knutzen and Edelmann among the Germans, Radicati among the Italians, and Toland in England, as radical thinkers postulating, and to some extent actively envisaging, the destruction of the institutional and monarchical structure of the *ancien régime* and, in part, its hierarchical social system, as well as its theological and philosophical underpinning.

iii. The Revolutionary Impulse

During the early Enlightenment era, the prevailing European political legacy against which defenders of 'liberty' chiefly reacted was the near universal expansion of the monarchical

State in the direction of absolutism, that is, the new forms of monarchical and bureaucratic power, what Boulainvilliers calls *l'autorité arbitraire*, associated above all with the rule of Louis XIV (1643–1715). France under Louis XIV was indeed conceived by ideological opponents, such as Shaftesbury, as a malign power threatening the entire world with 'universal monarchy, a new abyss of ignorance and superstition'.⁷⁵

Smaller absolutist states had evolved, meanwhile, since the middle of the seventeenth century, parallel to that of France, in Brandenburg-Prussia, other German states, Sweden, pre-1688 England, Naples, and Savoy, which were no less inclined to suppress representative institutions, and established privileges and liberties, in the name of unrestricted monarchical authority. These too sought to debar the free expression of ideas, sometimes, as in the case of the absolutism of Vittore Amadeo II of Savoy, driving abroad and engendering a fierce reaction in opponents, such as Radicati, who passionately denounced every ideological strand of the new monarchical absolutism.⁷⁶

The reaction was psychological, philosophical, and also political and ideological. Since the royal absolutism against which radical thinkers reacted could not easily be reformed or corrected piecemeal this, in turn, and for the first time in European history, engendered an implicit and incipient, but nevertheless real and enduring, preoccupation with revolution. The social radicalism of the English Revolution of the 1640s, and the violence of the French Fronde (1648–53), and the Masaniello insurrection and Neapolitan republic of 1647–8, had lent revolution a generally unsavoury image, so that open advocacy of insurrection and revolutionary violence in order to achieve fundamental political and social change, though it

did occur, was heard only very rarely in the Early Enlightenment period. There were certainly passionate advocates of equality and redistribution of property, such as Spinoza's Latin master, Van den Enden, Knutzen, the Baron Lahontan, and Radicati, men who clearly envisaged or dreamt of a dramatically new social and economic order, but even these did not call for the mobilization of the masses—though Van den Enden at least did urge revolutionary conspiracy—in order to achieve it.

Yet the radical thinkers of the Early Enlightenment aspired to sweep monarchical absolutism away and remodel human society, politics, and culture on the basis of 'liberty', and this had to mean, in some sense, envisaging and condoning revolution. If, moreover the mid-seventeenth-century revolutions were largely or completely discredited, this still left the more alluring model of revolution—a seemingly civilized, gentle revolution which almost bloodlessly (at least in England, if not in Scotland and Ireland) toppled divine-right despotism and arbitrary power—namely the Glorious Revolution of 1688–91. Political ferment in Britain had triggered massive intervention by the States General and, following a seaborne invasion from the Netherlands of unprecedented magnitude, the Dutch Stadholder, William III, together with the Dutch States General and the English Whig opposition, had successfully removed James II, establishing a parliamentary State in which real power increasingly accrued to Parliament or, in effect, the English landed gentry. For continental Europe, no less than Britain, Ireland, and North America, the Glorious Revolution proved of crucial significance not just by rolling back the tide of divine-right monarchy and weakening Louis XIV internationally, but by generating a new political culture of

representation, rights, and 'freedom'.⁷⁷ Its achievements and principles, moreover, even if they interpreted these quite differently from the vast majority of more conservative observers, were warmly espoused by such publicists and ideologues as Blount, Shaftesbury, Toland, Walten, Leenhof, Radicati, Mandeville, Vauvenargues, and (more covertly) Diderot.

The Revolution of 1688 fundamentally transformed British institutions. But in their diverse ways of explaining or justifying what had happened most English political commentators, pamphleteers, and spokesmen, Tory and Whig, tended to negate, minimize, or at least refuse fully to acknowledge the kind of republican, pro-revolution, libertarian implications which radical ideologues of the Revolution insisted on proclaiming as its message.⁷⁸ Thus the Dutch radical and apologist of the Revolution, Ericus Walten, contemptuously rebuts the divine-right doctrine of the Anglican clergy, insisting that such teaching will quickly reduce the subjects of kings to 'slavery' and that subjects always have the right of armed opposition to monarchs and their representatives 'if they act illegally and attack them in their religion, freedoms, and property'.⁷⁹ Walten argues that the sovereign power originates in the people, that all men are born free by nature, and that 'this natural freedom always remains in its entirety' until and unless adjusted by formal contract.⁸⁰

Similarly, in his *Anglia Libera* (1701), Toland accounts Parliament, or any legislature, 'only a fiduciary power to make laws for the good of the society, and since no people can be suppos'd to intend their liberty and property shou'd be destroy'd by the authority they delegate to their

representatives, 'tis plain that whenever these neglect to fulfil their trust, or that they use it to contrary ends from those design'd by their principals', then the people may 'not only defend themselves against their legislators (as well as from others attempting to enslave or destroy them) but may likewise place this power afresh in such persons, and after what manner or form they shall think most conducing to their security, welfare, and felicity'.⁸¹ According to Toland, James II forfeited his right to rule in England, Scotland, and Ireland not only by violating his coronation oath but, more fundamentally, by 'an open breach ... of the natural relation or original compact between all kings and their subjects'.⁸² Because James sought to 'subvert our laws and liberties', the 'free people of this kingdom invited over the Prince of Orange, under whom they put themselves in a posture of defence and successfully recover'd the just rights of themselves and their posterity'.⁸³ And on this basis, he adds, the people 'may safely conclude that no king can ever be so good as one of their own making; as there is no title equal to their approbation, which is the only divine right of all magistracy, for the voice of the people is the voice of God'.⁸⁴

Such ideas were enthusiastically endorsed by Count Radicati. Indeed, in Radicati the revolutionary impulse went further than in almost any other Early Enlightenment *philosophe*. For not only does he affirm unequivocally that if the prince or magistrates alter or change the laws 'the people have a right to depose and punish them, according to their deserts seeing that the conditional obedience promised to them, ceases as soon as they cease to do their duty,'⁸⁵ but Radicati also insists that republics are intrinsically better than other kinds of government, and especially monarchies, which

are 'the worst of all', but that, in order to succeed they have to be placed on a democratic basis. The 'republics of Geneva, Switzerland, and others,' he says, 'notwithstanding they designed to settle a perfect democracy, were not able to succeed in it, because they did not establish it upon a proper foundation.'⁸⁶ What this 'proper foundation' entails, holds Radicati, is a fundamental social and economic reorganization so that 'men are equal in nobility, power and riches'. To this end, he asserts, 'all possessions must belong to the republic, which like a good mother, must distribute them to every man, according to his necessities; so that no man must be reduced to beggary, and no man must enjoy superfluities.'⁸⁷

Influenced perhaps by reading the Baron Lahontan's eulogy of equality in his *Nouveaux voyages* of 1703, Radicati goes so far as to condemn private property itself as 'inconsistent with the nature of a democratical government, and destroying it in its very infancy'.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the 'despotism of Louis XIV', as Tom Paine later expressed it, 'so humbled and at the same time fascinated the mind of France' that the people sank into a 'sort of lethargy ... from which it showed no disposition to rise'; according to him, 'the only signs which appeared of the spirit of Liberty during those periods are to be found in the writings of the French philosophers.'⁸⁹ Apart from a few of the libertine nobles who imbibed republican ideas abroad, this is indeed true, and the first *philosophe* who rejected the whole ideological apparatus of Louis' absolutism was unquestionably Boulainvilliers, who was thoroughly averse to the style and pretensions of his government, which he calls despotic and 'odieux'.⁹⁰ Especially he abhors divine-right rhetoric and the use of ecclesiastical sanction and theological

arguments to buttress Louis' rule. The learned count's political ideas evidently developed between the mid-1690s and 1720, precisely the period in which his Spinozist system more generally evolved, so it is not surprising to find unmistakable links between his philosophy and political ideology. He regarded Bossuet as one of those most responsible for foisting divine-right ideology on France and, consequently, one of those chiefly responsible for the political corruption of the country. Any observer who is 'suffisamment éclairé', he holds, 'regardera le système politique de l'Illustre Bossuet, évêque de Meaux, comme un des plus honteux témoignages de

l'indignité de notre siècle et de la corruption des coeurs'.⁹¹

Bossuet had forcefully given expression to the divine-right concept and, in Boulainvilliers' view, 'il n'y a rien en effet de si mauvaise foi que l'abus perpétuel qu'il a fait des textes de la Sainte Écriture pour former de nouvelles chaînes à la liberté naturelle des hommes, et pour augmenter le faste et la dureté des rois.'⁹²

The vitriolic anticlericalism in Boulainvilliers, as in that of all representatives of philosophical radicalism in the Early Enlightenment, was rooted in the conviction that the clergy were colluding with absolutist rulers, buttressing divine-right monarchy, and proclaiming the royal will a magical sacral power out of self-interest, to extend thereby their own authority and sway. But the hub of Boulainvilliers' critique of Louis' monarchy is not his repudiation of its pseudo-sacred divine-right status, buttressed by the Church, but his view of absolutism as a form of violence which methodically usurps rights and powers historically vested in a network of lesser institutions and bodies, thereby amassing an illicit and arbitrary power which unjustly heaps all manner of new fiscal, bureaucratic, and war-related burdens on the common

people.⁹³ Yet Boulainvilliers laments and deploras monarchical despotism without offering any real strategy for remedying the setback. Like Spinoza himself, he seemed immobilized between his detestation of tyranny, on one side, and fear of undermining the authority of the State on the other. Boulainvilliers passionately believes in the natural liberty of men but not in the people's right to participate in politics. Indeed, he was very far from being a democrat, desiring rather a kind of quasi-republic of the nobility, such as had lately emerged in England, where nobles share power with the monarch and balance his authority. He believed that such a thing had once existed in France but been gradually undermined by kings assisted by the negligence of the nobility themselves.

After Louis' death, Boulainvilliers was one of those who hoped there would be a revival of the French States General, and the *parlements*, with the nobility taking the lead, and that this would suffice not just to limit royal power in the future but produce a more equitable distribution of taxation and, in a republican sense, 'ranimer l'idée du bien public'.⁹⁴ Clearly Boulainvilliers had considerable sympathy for the post-1688 settlement in England, foreshadowing Montesquieu in his conviction that the balance between Crown and Parliament achieved in Britain represented the most successful instance in the Europe of his day of an arrangement of political institutions designed to secure liberty and the 'public good'.

Yet Boulainvilliers could not approve the manner in which the 'crowned republic' devised in England had come into being. For it was the fruit of a revolution which dethroned the legitimate monarch and expelled his most loyal supporters, and had, moreover, only come about owing to

conspiracy, treason, and a huge foreign invasion. The French nobility and people had unfortunately not been as 'attentive à ses privilèges et libertés' as they should have been but, by 1719, once his hopes that the new regency government would abandon the oppressive practices of the past and revive the States General had been dashed, Boulainvilliers could see no way to rectify the situation. However constituted, sovereignty, in his eyes, could not justifiably be challenged and opposed with conspiracy and violence. Hence there was simply no way to remodel politics and society from below.⁹⁵ This left him without any solution to his problem other than philosophical resignation, and recommending the people to be likewise resigned, in the face of a corrupt, deformed, and sporadically despotic Bourbon monarchical state.

Boulainvilliers' predicament was precisely that of Spinoza earlier and Diderot later.⁹⁶ According to Spinoza, the purpose of the State is to secure the freedom and common good, of all, and if the State becomes malign, or despotic, revolution may well be the consequence. His system means no form of government can claim a God-given sanction or any inherent legitimacy based on authority or tradition. There is no other sanction or legitimacy for the sovereign than the acquiescence and approval of the people. This means the path to self-liberation is always available and legitimate (if not always advisable) and that violent resistance to the sovereign, and revolution, consequently is sometimes inevitable, sometimes to be recommended, and, in itself, beyond blame.⁹⁷ If any government acts contrary to the interests of the people, it will automatically lose their acquiescence and its power to enforce its will, authority, and legislation.

Yet, at the same time, Spinoza maintains that revolutionary violence against a tyrant will generally have no useful result, stressing the danger involved 'in removing a monarch even if his tyranny is apparent to all'.⁹⁸ He does not have a high opinion of the common people and believes their veneration of their institutions is so ingrained that once they are 'accustomed to royal rule ... they will despise and mock a lesser authority'. Thus, when removing a despotic king, the people generally appoint another in his place who, he argues, if he does not wish to reign on sufferance, 'must deter the people from daring to repeat such action' and will, therefore, almost certainly seek to intimidate 'the people rejoicing in regicide as in a glorious deed' and refuse to acknowledge 'the people as judge of kings and master over him'.⁹⁹ Thus, he argues, 'a people has often succeeded in changing tyrants but never in abolishing tyranny or substituting another form of government for monarchy', claiming that English experience offers a sad example of this truth, Cromwell being merely a king under another name. In his opinion, nothing was done in the English commonwealth of the late 1640s and 1650s to establish a genuine republic. Nor, in his view, did the Romans really succeed in progressing from monarchy to a viable republic. When the Roman Empire reverted to being a monarchy, under Augustus, he says, this was 'merely a change of name as in England'.¹⁰⁰

Hence the best thing for any people, even when being tyrannized over, is simply to acquiesce in whatever form of government they are accustomed to. The Dutch Revolt against Spain, he argues, was a successful revolution and entirely justified, not owing to any general right, or advisability, of resistance to tyrants but simply because Holland was not a

monarchy and had never been subject to a sovereign monarch, sovereignty there having always been vested in the States. When Philip II of Spain, as Count of Holland, tried to usurp that sovereign power, he was violently and justifiably overthrown, at least in the northern Netherlands. But, insists Spinoza, 'it is by no means true that the States revolted against him since, in fact, they recovered their original sovereignty which had almost been lost.'¹⁰¹ Not a very convincing argument, the reader may well judge, but convenient for Spinoza in his dilemma of claiming, on the one hand, that the State exists for the common good and benefit of all, while arguing, on the other, that the forcible removal of despots is mostly inadvisable and the revolutionary impulse of the Dutch Revolt, except where the people are accustomed to republican ideas, mostly not to be emulated.¹⁰²

Diderot's political thought arose not from any deep preoccupation with earlier political thinkers but through his being led to explore the social and political implications of his general philosophy, based as it was, by the late 1740s, on an atheistic Naturalism and *fatalisme*.¹⁰³ Doubtless he became more politically conscious also as a result of his personal experiences and imprisonment at the hands of arbitrary, royal government in the late 1740s. Early in his career as a *philosophe*, Diderot translated and was deeply impressed with the work of Shaftesbury, whose influence on his first major work, the *Pensées philosophiques* (1746), is marked.¹⁰⁴ But it was then mainly the philosophical and ethical ideas of Shaftesbury, rather than his social and political concerns, which interested him, albeit with one notable exception—the idea of 'natural sociability'. During the 1740s, Diderot also read and absorbed other radical predecessors, notably

Spinoza,¹⁰⁵ Bayle, Lahontan,¹⁰⁶ Fontenelle,¹⁰⁷ Saint-Hyacinthe, Lévesque de Burigny, and La Mettrie;¹⁰⁸ and through perusing these authors, Diderot refined and elaborated his own philosophical system which, he came to realize only later, had wide-ranging political implications. These he was prompted to think through in the late 1740s, while commencing work on the *Encyclopédie*, and especially during intense discussions with his then comrade Rousseau in the years around 1750.

Indeed, it is remarkable how little Diderot's political thought owes to his great predecessors Locke and Montesquieu, or any notion of separation of powers by constitutional means, the political hub, one might say, of the mainstream moderate Enlightenment; he rules out all notion of a binding contract or constitutional checks designed to limit the sovereign power.¹⁰⁹ Scarcely less striking, despite claims to the contrary, is how little it owes to Hobbes. Until the early 1750s, Diderot had not in fact read Hobbes, or at least not referred to him, and in his main political articles in the *Encyclopédie* he only invokes him to deplore his failure to make any real distinction between 'subject' and 'citizen'.¹¹⁰ For Diderot the 'citizen' is not obliged to obey the sovereign unconditionally, but retains his right to judge and criticize, and by implication something more.¹¹¹ For the State exists not just to maintain order and security, as Hobbes argues, but also for what Diderot calls 'conservation de la liberté'.¹¹² Since the *Encyclopédie* had to pass the censors, and did so only with difficulty, one could hardly expect to find Diderot using its pages for the purpose of openly rejecting the principle of monarchy or criticizing the traditions of French

royal government. Nowhere in his political articles, as was remarked at the time, did he, or indeed could he have written disparagingly of monarchy or accorded the people any right to oppose despotic monarchical rule.

Nevertheless, discerning eyes noticed a subversive undercurrent which went far beyond merely encouraging the public to exercise critical judgement, based on reason, about everything; indeed, it had revolutionary implications integrally linked to his Naturalism and *fatalisme*. In the first place, as an ecclesiastical critic remarked in March 1752, a period when the project of the *Encyclopédie* was under particular pressure,¹¹³ there was Diderot's principle that all political authority comes from the hands of the people from whom it is assigned to the monarch, a concept which removes all trace of divine-right justification. If the will of God and the Christian religion provide the foundations of a Christian society, then a monarch owes his crown to God, and not to the people, and is answerable only to Him.¹¹⁴ If the king receives his authority from the people, then the implication is that he is answerable to the people and is no longer in the first place God's lieutenant on earth and the guardian of Christ's Church.

Then, in the second place, precisely by rejecting Hobbes' conception of man under the State as a 'subject' and insisting that he is a 'citizen', Diderot advances a conception of the public good which he (not Rousseau) was the first to dub the 'general will'. This obliges the sovereign to provide individuals and society collectively not just with the security, stability, and order in exchange for which they departed from the 'state of nature' but also to ensure the laws accord with the moral standards and aspirations of society, that is, they embody the 'general will'.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, his political

articles strongly imply that there is a crucial difference between the legitimate monarch who rules in accordance with the 'volonté générale' of his people and the tyrant who rules in his own interest, disregarding the public good. In his article 'Citoyen', Diderot asserts that the more the ruler renders everyone equal under the law the better the 'general will' is served, adding that maximizing equality and minimizing hierarchy are basic functions of a just monarchy. 'Plus les citoyens approcheront de l'égalité de prétensions et de fortune,' he says, 'plus l'état sera tranquille.'¹¹⁶ Equality, he says, might theoretically seem a characteristic of democracy rather than monarchy, but even in the most perfect democracy 'l'entière égalité entre les membres est une chose chimérique,' and stability is in practice best ensured by monarchy.¹¹⁷

According to Diderot, then, sovereignty cannot be divided, and the crucial distinction between governments is not whether they are monarchical or democratic but whether they are just or unjust, 'free' or despotic, in the sense of upholding the 'general will'. It is perfectly true that Diderot never defines the 'liberty' the State exists to uphold, and rules out all possibility of justified popular resistance against the despot who tramples the *volonté générale* under foot.¹¹⁸ Already as a young writer, he expressly rebuked Shaftesbury for praising those who assassinate tyrants.¹¹⁹ But in Diderot's political writing the questions of *liberté* and revolution are nevertheless left hanging in the air, an unsolved paradox, a *non sequitur* bringing political theory full circle back to the quandary embedded in Spinoza and Boulainvilliers. Though coherent, Diderot's political philosophy is inherently unstable, indeed explosive: if legitimate government is rooted in the principle of the 'general will', then just and justifiable

government is practically realizable only under an enlightened philosopher-king.

The essence of the radical intellectual tradition from Spinoza to Diderot is the philosophical rejection of revealed religion, miracles, and divine Providence, replacing the idea of salvation in the hereafter with a highest good in the here and now. In this tradition human happiness is envisaged partly as possessive individualism but partly as a shared sociability which places the highest good in the laws devised by society to permit the maximum amount of 'liberty' to each individual, in other words, laws which embody the common good. Diderot, like Spinoza, emphasizes the need to inculcate obedience to society's laws, defining true 'religion' as veneration for those laws and society's best interest and true piety as 'obedience' to the common good. This new form of quasi-religious reverence was eloquently expressed by Diderot's predecessor and older colleague working on the *Encyclopédie*, César Chesneau du Marsais (1676–1756?), a disciple of Fontenelle, in a text clandestinely printed allegedly at 'Amsterdam' in 1743, entitled *Le Philosophe*,¹²⁰ where he argues that despite the 'fables' which the people believe about the Flood, fire from on high, and lively imagery of eternal torment in Hell (as well as that of reward in Heaven), experience shows that religion provides only a feeble brake on crime, dishonesty, and wrongdoing: 'la superstition ne fait sentir que foiblement combien il importe aux hommes par rapport à leur intérêt présent de suivre les loix de la société';¹²¹ indeed, Du Marsais goes so far as to call 'la société civile ... pour ainsi dire, la seule divinité' that the true philosopher acknowledges on earth—he reveres it, he honours

it with his probity, by his scrupulous attention to his duties and by a sincere desire not to be a useless member of it.¹²²

If the concept of the secular 'common good' intrinsic to radical thought and Spinozism is allowed to spread, then inevitably political and social revolution based on notions of the 'general will', and the call for equality, seemingly becomes inevitable. The political instability the progress of these ideas must entail can thus only be precluded by rolling back the advance of radical thought as such. But to repel and overcome radical thought it was not necessary to attack the entire corpus of radical writers. Reviewing the situation in 1757, the Abbé François Pluquet, in his three-volume *Examen du fatalisme*, confirmed, as had so many before him, that there had indeed been a vast sea-change in French culture and intellectual life since the late seventeenth century, and that philosophical incredulity had unquestionably penetrated on a massive scale. What was at stake were two opposed visions of the world, one based on Revelation, religion, and miracles, the other rejecting these in favour of a philosophical determinism and materialism rooted in the idea that there is no divine governance of the world and no hereafter. The intellectual war now in progress is a war for humanity and for the world. But if the enemy is to be defeated then it is important to grasp how, strategically, the enemy can most effectively be attacked. There is, he insists, a high degree of intellectual interdependence connecting the recent writings of La Mettrie and (the unmentioned) Diderot, first to the earlier wave of clandestine and anonymous printed polemics against prevailing structures of authority of which the collection (edited probably by Du Marsais) entitled the *Nouvelles libertés de penser* ('Amsterdam', 1743)¹²³ was foremost, and

then, further back, to the collaborators and interpreters of Spinoza, of whom he cites Cuffeler, Bredenburg, Leenhof, and Wachter in particular. But ultimately, he insisted, the entire edifice of modern incredulity, with all its social and cultural implications, derives from Spinoza. All philosophical systems which are *fataliste*, and postulate that there is only one substance in the world, he argues, rest on and in the final analysis derive from, 'le Spinosisme'.¹²⁴

Hence the only way to check and defeat the fatalistic atheism of the militant *philosophes* now pervading French life is to demolish the foundations of Spinoza's system. Many writers had taken up their pens against Spinoza, yet still his philosophy remained unconquered. Early opponents such as Wittichius had completely failed. The celebrated Bayle 'lui-même, ce destructeur infatigable de toute doctrine systématique' who had destroyed so many, had nevertheless dismally failed to overwhelm Spinoza or even correctly understand his system.¹²⁵ Fénelon had failed no less obviously. Others, such as the great English philosopher Samuel Clarke and the formidable Isaac Jaquelot, had tried to overthrow his system by targeting a few key propositions which they considered fundamental, failing to realize that 'pour réfuter le fatalisme qui ne suppose qu'une substance' it is insufficient to overthrow parts, or even the whole of the upper edifice: one must demolish the foundations and this, alas, had not been done.¹²⁶ Nor had any recent controversialists done much better. It seemed an impossible situation and yet the truth had to be faced: 'on a souvent écrit contre ce philosophe, mais, à ce que beaucoup de personnes pensent, avec assez peu de succès.'¹²⁷

4

WOMEN, PHILOSOPHY, AND SEXUALITY

i. The Emancipation of Women

The revolutionary implications of radical thought for Europe's institutions, monarchical governments, and aristocratic social order could, at most, be only faintly glimpsed in the decades down to the mid-eighteenth century. Politically, the ultimate significance of the new radical ideas was not to become fully evident until the 1790s. Very different was the case with issues of sexuality, eroticism, and the place of women in society. Here the unsettling ramifications of philosophical naturalism and Spinozism, as well as Bayle's radical separation of morality from religion, became apparent at an early stage and were elaborated by such radical writers as Beverland, Leenhof, Radicati, Mandeville, Doria, and d'Argens.

The shift of intellectual debate in Europe from Latin to French, and from the academic sphere to courts, coffee-houses, clubs, and salons, enabled some women, especially noble ladies supplemented with a sprinkling of escaped nuns, actresses, female singers, courtesans, and others who were relatively well-educated, to discover the new philosophy and science and by means of intellectual 'enlightenment' transform their outlook and lives. Such was the impetus of philosophy in these decades that it could not only shatter authority, tradition, and the belief system of the past but also, for the first time, challenge and indeed fundamentally alter

existing patterns of social and cultural relations between men and women.

Intellectually, women for the first time became an audience and an active presence. Thus Fontenelle remarks, in the preface to his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), that he writes primarily 'pour les femmes' and those men who know little Latin, explaining that he esteems native insight and judgement, what he calls 'esprit', male or female, far higher than mere erudition, however great, which indeed, he notes, can sometimes be entirely devoid of true understanding.¹ But he seeks not just to educate women about science but also to 'enlighten' them and by so doing activate them in society. His aim, as he puts it, is to win over his fictional 'Madame la marquise' for the 'party of philosophy'.² Other *philosophes* similarly envisaged themselves as popularizers of the new philosophy and science outside the world of professional scholarship and the Republic of Letters. The marquis d'Argens saw his philosophical writing as primarily intended 'à l'usage des cavaliers et du beau sexe'.³

Admittedly, most contemporaries, male and female, viewed such infiltration of philosophical and scientific ideas among women, and still more the involvement of women in intellectual debate—let alone their entry into Fontenelle's 'partie de la philosophie'—with unease bordering on alarm. There was much resistance to, and condemnation of, such developments. Nor was this reaction groundless from a conservative viewpoint. For the intellectual shift undoubtedly did erode traditional notions of virtue, family, and social roles, crucially challenging woman's existing subordinate status. Furthermore, it raised issues of sexuality, male and female, in a way which disturbed not only traditionalists but

also those committed to a moderate form of Enlightenment. For, in general, the more radical the philosophical standpoint, the more emphatic the levelling and egalitarian tendencies implicit in ideas which, in turn, generated a growing impulse not just towards the emancipation of woman but of the human libido itself.

Should men and women think the same thoughts and on the same basis? Fontenelle, championing a relentlessly mechanistic world-view, professed to want to free literate, educated, spirited ladies from the 'obscurité' of imagining the physical world around us to be moved by an unseen chaos of supernatural and magical forces and spirits.⁴ But this meant persuading women to discard the fantasies of the past and think mathematically and mechanistically. One might suppose women naturally more suited to 'imagination' than precise thinking, mused Montesquieu, but it seemed to him undeniable that Descartes and the Cartesians had powerfully demystified the feminine mind, propelling it from the sphere of 'poetry' towards philosophy, no less than that of men.⁵ If modern philosophy overturns previous ideas about nature and the universe, 'réduisant tout à la communication des mouvements', it did so for women no less than men, at least potentially, creating a common intellectual 'monde' where one speaks only 'd'entendement pur, d'idées claires, de raison, de principes, de conséquences'.⁶ If, for the time being, something nevertheless remained of tradition and woman's subordination, it was perhaps fortunate, Montesquieu added, that it was Cartesianism and its variants which had dominated the philosophical scene hitherto, for if matters went any further, 'si quelque peuple allait s'infatuer du système de Spinoza', nothing at all would remain of imagination,

tradition, and 'poetry' or, he implied, of womanly deference to man.⁷ As it was, the new philosophical ladies of the salons perceived that 'la tyrannie des hommes', as the marquise de Lambert expressed it, exists 'par la force plutôt que par le droit naturelle'.⁸

The first and most obvious result of woman's arrival in the arena of philosophy was the advent of the high-born patroness of new ideas. Of these none was more widely celebrated than the Duchess, later Electress, Sophie von der Pfalz (1630–1714), wife of Ernst August (ruled 1679–98) of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, a principality known from the 1690s as the electorate of Hanover. Wife of one elector and sister to another (the philosophically inclined Karl Ludwig of the Palatinate), her eldest son became—shortly after her death, in 1715—George I of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Originally a keen devotee of Cartesianism, Sophie had an acute, enquiring mind and always placed great emphasis on the importance of 'philosophy'. Having been brought up in a liberal Calvinist milieu in Holland by her Stuart mother—Descartes' friend, Princess Elizabeth—but married to a Lutheran prince, she never entirely suppressed her early aversion to Lutheran pastors.⁹ Her horizons broadened by travel in Italy as well as Germany and the Netherlands, she liked to show her independent-mindedness, and early on in her married life caused rumours that she was given to perusing profane literature during sermons. Writing to her brother after receiving from the great Danish scientist-priest Nicholas Steno, then embarking on his drive to win high-born recruits for the Catholic Counter-Reformation in northern Germany, a letter full of devout sentiments in 1678, she irreverently mocked his piety.¹⁰ Indeed, she went so far as to

confide to Karl Ludwig that, in her view, there is much in the Christian religion which conflicts with the dictates of sound reason.¹¹

Descartes, moreover, was just a start. In March 1679 she informed her brother she was reading the recently published French edition of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*—presumably she would not had it remained available only in Latin—and found it ‘admirable’.¹² A week later, reading on, she was still more enthusiastic: ‘[Spinoza’s] livre est effectivement bien rare et tout à fait selon la raison.’¹³ Still more irreverently, she remarked that if it was true, as she had heard, that Spinoza had recently died, then surely some churchman must have poisoned him ‘car la plupart du genre humain vit du mensonge’.¹⁴ At Osnabrück, where she and her husband held court from 1661 to 1679 while he was the episcopal administrator of the principality, she learned more about Spinoza’s life from various courtiers, including the marquis de Rébenac, son of one of Louis XIII’s generals. Furthermore, Sophie encouraged interest in Spinoza among others there as well as at Hanover after her husband succeeded his elder brother as duke in 1679. Delighting in the intellectual progress of her younger son, Friedrich August—she considered George a frustratingly dull fellow by comparison—she reported to Heidelberg, in July 1679, that the young prince ‘sait Descartes et Spinoza casi par coeur’.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Leibniz had become councillor and librarian at Hanover where, as he assured Tschirnhaus, he was delighted by the prevailing atmosphere of intellectual freedom. Before long he had won Sophie’s confidence, gently steering her towards an attitude of antipathy towards both Cartesianism and Spinozism and a growing appreciation of

Leibnizianism. But if Leibniz advised, he always respected her as a philosophical force in her own right, and in later years the two frequently discussed the further evolution of the European philosophical scene, as well as his own system and, after 1700, such new thinkers as Toland, with whom both conversed at length and to whom both rapidly conceived a dislike.

But women not only emerged as patronesses of philosophy, influencing matters behind the scenes, as hostesses as it were of philosophical debate, but also as direct public participants in the escalating European war of philosophies. A woman with a formidable philosophical reputation for a time was Voltaire's mistress, Gabrielle-Émilie, marquise du Châtelet, whom he celebrated in print in 1738, as a paragon of female intellectual power, and a true disciple of Newton and of 'truth'.¹⁶ Furthermore, this 'Minerve de la France', as he calls her, not only shared his conversation, scientific experiments, and bed but soon rebelled against his uncompromising Newtonianism, demonstrating a spirited independence of mind.¹⁷ When Voltaire insisted she read Locke, she urged him to read Leibniz. Engaging a young Swiss savant, Samuel König, a devotee of Wolff, to tutor her in mathematics, she systematically explored Wolffianism, and by 1739 was in contact with Wolff himself. For a while, indeed, Wolff placed such importance on her intervention that he believed he would, through her—his 'Apostle to the French'—check the progress of what he called Voltaire's 'Newtonianischen Philosophie' and the 'not very useful principles of the present-day English' in France, hastening that of Wolffianism.¹⁸

Wolff's Huguenot ally in Berlin, Jean Henri Samuel Formey (1711–97), modelled the heroine of his philosophical novel, *La Belle Wolfienne*, on Voltaire's marquise. A key work of philosophical popularization of the Early Enlightenment, it appeared in Frankfurt in six volumes in 1741–2, and was plainly directed at women as much as, or more than, men. Its object is to persuade readers that the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy is the best and only way to rescue 'la vertu, la société, [et] l'église' from the radicals and 'fatalistes' and, in particular, Spinoza, the forces posing the greatest threat to religion, authority, and civilization.¹⁹

Initially, its heroine learns, Spinoza won 'quelques partisans' eager to throw off the yoke of religion which had become burdensome to them.²⁰ But eventually the philosophical tide turned and now the Leibnizian-Wolffian system had triumphed: Spinoza's 'ordre éternel, immuable, indépendant où Dieu n'y entre par rien' was everywhere collapsing before Wolff's proofs that another set of general laws would have been possible had God so chosen.²¹ But if Spinoza's *nécessité* now lay crushed under Wolff's *raison suffisante*, according to the Wolffians, Gabrielle-Émilie's prestige as a high-level broker in the international power-game of philosophy was soon impaired by doubts as to whether she was really 'une dame solidement savante'. Some mocked her pretensions, dismissing her as a superficial female, vain and coquettish, 'aient l'esprit vif, inquiet, curieux et bizarre', a woman merely affecting to cultivate philosophy for the purpose of 'couvrant l'irregularité de sa conduite'.²²

That at least a few high-born ladies amassed whole collections of radical philosophical literature for their private use is demonstrated by such examples as that of Caroline von

Hessen (1721–74), wife of the Landgrave of Hesse-Darmstadt. By the 1740s this lady was in regular contact with a Frankfurt bookseller who had been in difficulties with the authorities on more than one occasion for selling forbidden philosophical books.²³ Daughter of a pious mother, her father, Duke Christian III of Pfalz-Zweibrücken-Birkenfeld, was widely reputed a libertine and freethinker. Her personal cabinet of books, remarkably, included not only Bayle, Locke, and Montesquieu but Mandeville's *Free Thoughts on Religion* (1720) in its French edition of 1722, Collins—again in French, La Mettrie, and several works of the marquis d'Argens.²⁴

But could woman's intellectual emancipation be detached from a wider emancipation social, legal, political, theological, and sexual? There was no reason to think so. Admittedly, Spinoza himself argues that women are naturally too weak to assert themselves and stand up to men, and invariably let themselves be dominated. This indeed is his reason for excluding them from participation in his democratic republic: because they are weak and dependent they are not equal to men.²⁵ He evidently considered it impossible for women to free themselves from subjection to men. But his argument also implies, indeed requires, that if woman can somehow free herself from masculine domination and rival man in power and assertiveness, then there would no longer be any reason for refusing her equal access to the political process. As regards sexuality, Spinoza holds that in one's own interest one ought avoid scandalizing the moral notions of the community among which one lives. But equally, in his naturalistic philosophy, sexual pleasure, the libido, in so far as it is life-enhancing is a good thing and, in principle, in no way

different outside marriage than within it.²⁶ Consequently, there is no justifiable basis for restricting woman's sexual pleasure any more than there is for curtailing that of men.

Spinoza himself showed little interest in sexual issues and yet, paradoxically, his naturalistic system became the intellectual basis of by far the most important advance towards emancipation of the libido, including that of women, to emerge in the Early Enlightenment period. Several writers took up the point that if woman's subjection to man within marriage, the family, and law, is not after all ordained by a providential God and has no basis in Revelation, then the entire system of relations between the sexes prevailing in Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other societies lacks justification or basis, as does the one-sided repression of female sexuality. Woman should be in a position of equality to man, but had in fact been rendered shamefully subordinate: 'is not every woman that is married,' exclaims Mandeville, 'a slave to her husband?'²⁷

Adriaan Beverland (1650–1716) was the first to develop a radical standpoint in this sphere and, like his successors, proceeds from a specifically Spinozist position. A Zeelander and a veteran student who, from July 1669, spent a whole decade studying at Franeker, Oxford, Utrecht, and Leiden, becoming an accomplished classicist and a devotee of Ovid, Catullus, and Petronius, he was also noted for his libertine lifestyle.²⁸ The surviving portrait of him by Arie de Vois (see Plate 9) fully conveys the irreverence, affluence, and pursuit of the erotic which inspired his student years and linked him to his loyal ally Jacob de Goyer (d.1706), in Utrecht.²⁹ A tireless researcher into the sexual history of ancient Greece and Rome, Beverland combined his expertise in this area with

radical ideas to produce a philosophy of life centring around the liberation of the sexual impulse and glorification of the sexual act.³⁰ Particularly striking is his conclusion that desire for sexual pleasure is fundamental in everyone and that, whatever form it may take and however it may be repressed, this longing is a universal human trait. One consequence is that Beverland thinks puritanical attitudes and ascetism, whatever pious justifications may be adduced, always derive from ignorance, affectation, and hypocrisy.³¹ A second is his conclusion that womanly modesty and chastity are invariably an imposed or self-imposed imprisonment and form of deception, and that underneath all women are pleasure-seekers and sensualists no less than men. According to his scheme, there is no such thing as a woman who is 'pure' and chaste in mind.³² 'The feminine sex has the same passions as does ours,' insisted Beverland, but is forced to stifle it to a greater extent, sexual desire in women being generally condemned as contrary to womanly modesty.³³ Thus only within the restrictions of marriage can women satisfy their desires.

Beverland gained immediate notoriety in 1678, with the publication of his *De Peccato Originali*, a work which caused a public scandal, was banned, and, for many years, available only with difficulty and in Latin, despite being reprinted several times in 1678–9, but which later gained wider currency after appearing in 1714 in a clandestine edition in French; in 1746 a German translation, from the French, was published at Frankfurt.³⁴ In this erudite if irreverent tract, Beverland insists that Moses did not write the Five Books and comments on the corrupt state of the Biblical text;³⁵ and

claims, invoking Hobbes, La Peyrère, Koerbagh, and Richard Simon, as well as Spinoza, that Scripture employs terms and expressions adapted to the primitive and ignorant minds of the ancient Hebrews, which can only be properly understood in the light of philosophy.³⁶ The story of the Fall, he maintains, is a poetic allegory referring to nothing more than the discovery of sexual intercourse by Adam and Eve and the transmission of the sexual urge from generation to generation.³⁷ Already in 1679, some observers correctly realized that Spinoza had also inspired in Beverland a form of philosophical pantheism which had now become linked to a general theory of eroticism.³⁸

Shortly after its publication, the South Holland Synod condemned the book as a 'foul and blasphemous tractate'. Delegates were sent to protest to the Pensionary of the States of Holland, Caspar Fagel, complaining that Beverland had abused Scripture and was insinuating lascivious thoughts into the minds of the young, reading out the most offensive passages in his presence.³⁹ Fagel agreed the book should be suppressed. The university curators, summoned to 'clip his wings', had Beverland arrested in October 1679 and imprisoned in the Leiden town hall. He was tried by an academic court a few weeks later, found guilty as charged, and sentenced to the formal retraction of his blasphemous propositions, a heavy fine, and confiscation of a second treatise entitled *De Prostibulis Veterum* (On the Brothels of the Ancients) as well as expulsion from the university and long-term banishment from the provinces of Holland and Zeeland.⁴⁰ He was also obliged to undertake never to write such 'obscenities' again.

Briefly he sought refuge in Utrecht, but was soon expelled from there too. In March 1680 he fled to England, according to rumour, threatening to produce fresh 'impieties' and send these to Holland 'as revenge' for the humiliation and punishment to which he had been subjected. In London he was befriended by the libertine savant Isaac Vossius, friend and ally of the deists Saint-Evremond and Temple. Fragments of Beverland's *De Prostibulis Veterum* were reportedly incorporated by Vossius into the preface of his edition of Catallus of 1684.⁴¹ After Vossius' death, in 1689, Beverland, as the latter's executor, tried to engineer his rehabilitation in his homeland by gratifying the new king of England, the Dutch Stadholder, William III, in particular by helping to procure Vossius' large and valuable library for Leiden, frustrating the efforts of Richard Bentley and others to obtain it for Oxford's Bodleian. These manoeuvres failed to restore his standing in Holland, however, and he stayed in England, where he died, forgotten and completely destitute, in 1716.

Similar ideas soon also surfaced in other writers suspected of radical tendencies and were obviously spreading in society. According to Bayle, female sexual modesty and chastity has nothing to do with love of God or morality, and the chief reason why women abstain far more than men from sexual promiscuity is that 'les hommes ont établi la gloire des femmes dans la chasteté.'⁴² Were women able to satisfy the desires of nature without compromising their reputations, he suggests, 'elles porteroient la débauche plus loin que ne font les hommes.'⁴³ In his *Dictionnaire*, Bayle devotes several articles to ancient philosopher-courtesans, such as Hipparchia and Laïs, whom he describes as clever, beautiful, and extraordinarily dissolute, and whose sexual exploits he by no

means seems to condemn.⁴⁴ According to Lahontan, whose *Voyages* were widely read and scandalized many, not only did the Canadian Indians adhere to naturalistic principles about God and Nature which bore an uncanny resemblance to Spinozism, they also left their daughters free, outside marriage, to enjoy the use of men for sex just as they pleased.⁴⁵

Traditionalists, by contrast, drew reassurance from the universally agreed fact that women were less attracted to philosophy, less inclined to atheism, and generally more devout than men.⁴⁶ Radical thinkers such as Toland might claim that this piety, and disinclination for philosophy, was due to lack of exposure to enlightened ideas: 'women are equally capable of all improvements with the men, had they but equally the same advantages of education, travel, company, and the management of affairs.'⁴⁷ Similarly, in 1709 Mandeville has one of his female interlocutors complain that women are always at a grave disadvantage in conversation since men receive all the education at schools and universities, asking 'why should we venture then (their head-pieces being so much better furnished than ours) to hold arguments, or parley with them?'⁴⁸ But among the great majority, male and female, who abhorred radical ideas most people, while loath to permit women such opportunities of reading, contact, and travel, preferred to believe there is an innate gender difference which renders woman naturally more devout and resistant to the corrosive effects of concupiscence and radical ideas than men. One of Toland's innumerable critics, William Wotton, in his *Letter to Eusebia* (1704) assured his fictional lady correspondent that 'if indeed your sex should enter into the irreligious notions which now

prevail too much amongst the men, the next generation would be irrecoverably lost'; but 'God be thanked,' he added, 'religion keeps up its authority, in a great measure with your sex still, and God grant it may ever do so.'⁴⁹

There were diverse ways of explaining this alleged innate gender difference and some were prepared to devote much ink to elucidating the point. It was a hallowed tradition to claim that women innately have less intellectual capacity than men, but such a view, in the new context, had certain obvious tactical disadvantages. Theodore Undereyck (1635–93), a prominent German Calvinist pastor, based at Bremen, worried lest 'Naturalists' and libertines should exploit the common prejudice that women possess less judgement, as well as intellect, than men, to suggest the undeniable fact that the 'female sex is more opposed to atheism and dedicated to God ... than the male sex' proves piety is in some way feminine and therefore foolish.⁵⁰ To counter this threat, he observes that women are naturally more moderate in their passions, and less inclined to study than men. Thus, he concludes that women's disinclination to read and 'limited understanding' should not be regarded as foolishness but rather a gift from God, a wondrous treasure, enabling women to end up, spiritually, both wiser and more sensible than men.⁵¹ Where numerous men imagine they possess more intellect than others and think that to impress their fellows 'one must believe not what others believe but rather what others do not believe,'⁵² and distance oneself from the opinions of the 'common man', a form of arrogance which infuses the *esprits forts*, women are mercifully free of such pride and consequently more devout, God-fearing, and submissive to authority. Admittedly, Undereyck grants, there are also

dissolute women. But even the most debauched, he says, have usually been made so by men, are less inclined to blasphemy, profanity, and sacrilege than men, and can be more readily persuaded to revert to a God-fearing way of life.⁵³

Undereyck also tries to turn to advantage the conflation of body and soul so characteristic of the Naturalists and Spinozists he strives to combat. The 'atheists', he affirms, contend that mind and body are one and that the bodily impulses and needs of men and women also infuse their minds and outlook. This, he says, can only reinforce the implication that devotion to Christ is an unthinking, female characteristic. But in reality, he insists, following Descartes, body and spirit are totally distinct principles and can not interact. Consequently, if women are less given to impiety than men, as they are, it is a fallacy to attribute this crucial difference to inherent physical differences. Rather, the innate difference is spiritual in quality, 'after the Fall' greater obstacles having been put in the path of the male sex in attaining salvation than in that of women.⁵⁴ Furthermore, holds Undereyck, God so created men that in their attitude to women they aspire always to be lord and master while imparting a quite different nature to woman, filling her with longing to accept man as her lord and master.⁵⁵ That man dominates and woman obeys is therefore an innate but not a bodily difference bestowed by God in the Creation. It is this spiritual disparity which accounts for women being inherently readier than men to submit to Christ the Lord.⁵⁶ However, this same fundamental difference means that if, for whatever reason, woman is not as dependent as she should be on father, brother, or husband—as may happen with youthful widows and unmarried women—then woman's vanity, more

unthinking, impulsive, and animal-like than that of men, is more apt to be corrupted and seduced.⁵⁷ Woman's frivolity and passion for beautiful clothes and jewellery shows what great perils her irrationality poses for society. The only answer is for society and the State to strengthen authority, marriage, and the family.

In certain select social contexts, however, it was difficult to be sure that woman was more immune to radical thought than man. Appalled by the penetration of philosophy among the French courtly aristocracy by around 1700, Father Massillon took the view that French noble ladies were barely less prone to follow the lead of the *esprits forts* than the aristocratic male. Are not the high-born ladies of Versailles and the great châteaux of France, he asks, nowadays more gorgeously coiffured and attired than ever while at the same time prattling incessantly about the 'eternal truths of geometry' and subtleties of metaphysics?⁵⁸ But if it was obvious to him that women in fact can take to reading philosophy and cultivating the intellect, this new phenomenon, he believed, stemmed from aristocratic pride and a rebellious desire to gratify the lusts of the body in defiance of morality and the Church.

In the fraught intellectual atmosphere of the times, skirmishes over key exempla drawn from history, variously interpreted to show that women could, or could not, justifiably or actually vie with men in matters philosophical abounded. A female intellectual martyr gleefully lionized by Toland was the lovely Hypatia of fifth-century Alexandria, the 'glory of her own sex and the disgrace of ours', a young woman celebrated alike for her beauty and wisdom. She surpassed everyone as a teacher of philosophy, Toland

assured readers, and was 'daily surrounded by a circle of young gentlemen'.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, this paragon ventured to express anticlerical opinions during a jurisdictional dispute between the civic governor and Bishop Cyril of Alexandria. For speaking against priestly power, says Toland, she was assailed in the year AD 415 by an indignant mob incited by the clergy. The people 'stripped her stark naked', killed her, and 'tore her to pieces'. Cyril, later made a saint by the Church, is accounted by Toland the 'contriver' of this murder 'and his clergy the executioners of his implacable fury'.⁶⁰ Needless to say, this effort to 'blast the reputation of the venerable Saint Cyril' outraged opponents, prompting one to retort that Hypatia, on the contrary, was a 'most impudent school-mistress', a shameless 'She-philosopher' who in order to repel one unwanted suitor employed a stratagem—throwing her menstruating towel in his face—which the 'most common prostitute in Venice would blush at'.⁶¹

ii. Conversational Freedom; Sexual Freedom

As attitudes associated in particular with Parisian high society during the Regency period, following the death of Louis XIV in 1715, spread, albeit often in diluted form, across Europe, it was increasingly felt that the fashion for freer interaction between men and women posed severe practical problems by eroding traditional social and moral values. The transformed, intellectually and sexually freer, Parisian milieu generated a new type of 'gentleman', for which the freethinker Saint-Evremond was often seen as the prototype—the elegant talker who disdains war, politics, and religion and seeks distinction among his fellow men through a combination of philosophical

grasp, wit, irreverent writing, and refined pleasure-seeking.⁶² But it was not the *Evremondisti*, as such men were dubbed in Neapolitan high society, who posed the main challenge. For such masculine pretensions and hedonism were not in themselves either particularly novel or disturbing. Rather it was the new concept of 'free conversation' between men and women who were not in close family proximity which was unsettling. It is true this 'free conversation' between gentlemen and ladies, while encompassing philosophy, religion, and science, mostly excluded politics and legal issues.⁶³ But the crucial point was that it generated a new kind of social space for women, underpinned by philosophy, characterized by liberty of speech outside the family framework.

A remarkable discussion of the impact of the new attitudes on women, and relations between the sexes, was that of the veteran Neapolitan philosopher—something of an *Evremondiste* and crypto-Spinozist himself—Paolo Mattia Doria. Indeed, little known though it is, his 454-page *Ragionamenti*, published at 'Francfort' (Naples?) in 1726, 'in which it is shown that woman, in almost all the chief virtues, is not inferior to man', a work dedicated to Duchess Aurelia d'Este of Limatola, is a classic of the Early Enlightenment. The essential problem, he makes clear, is that the new fashion for 'liberty of conversation between men and women', now part of the cult of refinement and 'buon gusto' emanating from the Parisian salons, necessarily entails a weakening of traditional forms of supervision of women by masculine relatives. For in the new context, not only is there more intermingling of men and women on a freer basis, but also, and scarcely less disturbing, women now hear much more of what men say to each other—that is, they have more

opportunity to learn about politics, social realities, religion, and even sex.⁶⁴ This ineluctably means some erosion of traditional standards of purity, chastity, authority, and family honour.⁶⁵

Philosophy, he shows, is having immense practical consequences for society. For however much women may have been excluded from intellectual discourse in the past, the reality is that women are just as capable of grasping the truths of philosophy, and discussing philosophical propositions, as men. They also have an equal right to participate in the progress of philosophy.⁶⁶ The evidence for this he draws from the history of ancient Greek philosophy. Epicurus in particular, he remarks, had sought female philosophical disciples whose intellectual attainments are beyond dispute. He makes much of the most celebrated of the Greek hetaerae, Aspasia, friend of the great statesman Pericles and famous for her wisdom and profound knowledge of philosophy.⁶⁷ Her house was one of the prime venues for philosophical discourse in late fifth-century Athens, he points out, and among others, was frequented by Socrates. Of course, he admits, one must condemn Aspasia and other such Greek philosophical ladies despite their intellectual brilliance and wisdom, for they were, as he puts it, as lustful and lascivious as they were beautiful and wise.

Precisely this, according to Doria, is the problem. For since the late seventeenth century, a new 'Epicureanism' (i.e. Spinozism) backed by scepticism was again pervading society, and the inevitable consequence of permitting 'libertà di conversare' is that women will again become philosophically aware and therefore 'infected' by Epicureanism and scepticism and consequently more

vulnerable than before to sinful and lascivious thoughts. 'Libertà di conversare' for women inevitably means more opportunity for intimacy and amorous dalliance outside marriage.⁶⁸ How can the undesirable and harmful consequences of this be avoided or at least minimized? Many men, notes Doria, endeavour to resist the advance of 'libertà di conversare' and revert to old-fashioned propriety, debarring women from intellectual discourse and contacts. Yet such a conservative strategy, he argues, can not possibly work unless we are to go to the extremes of the 'barbarous Turks' and literally lock up our womenfolk at home, precluding all contact with the outside world.⁶⁹ A régime of restrictions short of virtual imprisonment of women by men would serve merely to keep women ignorant of philosophy—and here his argument takes a radical twist—and therefore highly vulnerable to seductive words and apt to resort to deceit and subterfuge to meet their lovers.⁷⁰ Only philosophy then can inculcate true virtue, even if, at the same time, it transforms traditional relations between the sexes.

The solution, held Doria, is to recognize that it is essential in the new context to 'bene educare le donne' (educate women well).⁷¹ Girls must be taught from an early age to love virtue for its own sake, rather than having chastity imposed on them, and must learn proper, safe and uplifting ideas.⁷² Human nature being what it is, he admits, sexual attraction will sometimes overwhelm reason, but this is just as much a problem with men as women. In the end, he concludes, and here he reveals his crypto-Spinozist colours, the level of virtue among women will reflect the general level of virtue in society, that is, the worthiness or unworthiness of the attitudes of the men alongside whom women live and who determine

their education, the laws to which they are subject, and their religion.⁷³ If corrupt conduct, adultery, and seduction go unchecked among men, then so they will, in corresponding degree, among women. Thus the deplorably promiscuous ladies of Imperial Rome, with Messalina and Agrippina foremost among them, simply reflected the execrable corruption of manners which, according to Doria, arose after the fall of the republic.⁷⁴ Doria's final conclusion is that women are equally suited to intellectual endeavour as men, equally prone to vice and virtue, and equally in need of mind and body being kept in a healthy, harmonious balance.⁷⁵

One of those who imbibed such views from Doria in Naples, and set herself to cultivate philosophy was Giuseppa-Eleonora Barbapiccola, the translator—from French, not Latin—of Descartes' *Principia* into Italian.⁷⁶ An acquaintance of Vico, Giuseppa-Eleonora also drew inspiration from Valletta, Spinelli, and Grimaldi.⁷⁷ She was, moreover, as she reveals in her preface, a woman with a mission. Her aim in translating Descartes was not just to propagate Cartesian ideas among those who knew no Latin, but to spread awareness of Cartesianism among women in particular and draw fellow women into philosophical debate.⁷⁸ She too extols the women philosophers of classical Greece, lauding Aspasia as 'teacher' and later wife of Pericles, though she demurely passes over in silence the issues of sexuality raised by Doria. She admits that most ladies of position waste their time on frivolous pursuits such as discussing the latest fashions and choosing ribbons, but insists that such deplorable inadequacy is due not to 'nature but wretched education'.⁷⁹ Like Doria, she appeals for a fundamental reform of schooling for girls.⁸⁰

A woman of the Early Enlightenment participating in philosophical debate among men had either, like Barbapiccola, to evade the subject of sex or, like the Parisian *salonnière*, Madame de Lambert, insist that women in the Republic of Letters must have a reputation for 'virtue'.⁸¹ Consequently, the sexual issues involved could only be explored in print by male writers, and the plea for emancipation of the libido, male and female, could only be widely urged by masculine radical thinkers. The result predictably horrified contemporary opinion. Beverland, Leenhof, and Radicati went furthest, broaching the question of sexuality from their Spinozist premise that good and bad are purely relative concepts and that ethics must be built on the principle that no absolute morality exists. Rather than innate or inherited concepts, the criterion for a sound ethics can only be what does, or does not, benefit the community and the individual.⁸² Thus neither religion nor social customs can provide genuine guidance, as indeed is obvious, claims Radicati, from the bewildering variety of attitudes and norms they prescribe. Thus while 'primitive Christians highly praised such women and virgins as killed themselves when they were in manifest danger of having their chastity violated', among other religions female abstinence is not held in remotely comparable esteem.⁸³ On the contrary, the 'husbands of the city of Calicut, East India', he contends, 'very lovingly interchange their wives' while those of other East Indian regions 'send their daughters to the temples that they may be deflowered by the priests and believe that, in so doing, they make a most holy sacrifice to their gods'.⁸⁴ Similarly, he held, there is no absolute standard of decency and indecency. 'In Sicily, Spain, Portugal, etc.,' he points out, 'a virtuous woman

or maiden would blush extremely to be saluted or kissed by a man, or if he should see her naked breasts, whereas, at the same time, a French or English damsel alike virtuous, suffers it without the least disturbance or emotion; and this because the first have been taught that these things are indecent and the second that they are allowable.⁸⁵

Applying his principle (not unlike Mandeville's) that 'those things which contribute to the public quiet and happiness' are good and such as 'conduce towards its disquiet and ruin' bad, Radicati avers complete sexual freedom, including that of women, to be good.⁸⁶ He deplores the repressive effect of convents, which merely obliges every young woman unfortunate enough to be so confined to masturbate 'in some measure to mitigate the boilings of her concupiscence'.⁸⁷ The more sexually repressive a society, or as he expresses it, the more the 'foolish and unjust separation of the different sexes which is practised in many places', the more homosexuality in all its forms flourishes, claiming there was less homosexuality in England and Holland than in southern Europe precisely because in those northern climes women enjoy more sexual freedom.⁸⁸ The cult of virginity, and prohibition on intercourse before marriage for girls, he condemns as a generally harmful thing. One appalling consequence, according to Radicati, is that unmarried girls who, overcome by desire, have intercourse and become pregnant so dread the disapproval and condemnation of society that they frequently abandon or even kill their illegitimate offspring.⁸⁹

The new notion of self-discovery as well as discovering the world, through philosophy and 'libertà di conversare' between the sexes, explains that remarkably close linkage

between philosophy and sex so pervasive in the European Enlightenment. Moreover, it was especially women, or so it seemed to the philosophical liberators of the Early Enlightenment, who were in need of advice about how to free themselves from the subjection and repression of the past, advice that could not be otherwise than simultaneously philosophical and sexual. The chief significance of *Thérèse Philosophe* (1748), the best and most serious of the Early Enlightenment erotic philosophical works—according to the marquis de Sade, *Thérèse* is the only one ‘qui ait agréablement lié la luxure et l’impiété, et qui ... donnera enfin l’idée d’un livre immoral’⁹⁰—most certainly does not lie, as has been claimed, in having been published ‘precisely at the moment when the first great barrage of Enlightenment works burst into print’.⁹¹ Rather, its importance lies in its being a reworking of much earlier Enlightenment ideas, especially Spinozism, in the erotic sphere, having been written, almost certainly in view of the numerous echoes between it and known works of the marquis—by d’Argens, either during his years in Holland in the 1730s or soon after in Germany.⁹²

The crucial point is that the author expresses what has been termed his ‘naturalisme à la Spinoza’⁹³ through the perceptions and words of a young woman who undergoes a long and eventful process of sex education.⁹⁴ According to the author’s hedonistic philosophy, there is no difference between physical and spiritual salvation which are one and the same, and to be found exclusively in this world. Since intellectual and sensual striving for the supreme good are, in reality, inextricably entwined, philosophy becomes literally the bed-fellow of pleasurable sex. As in Beverland, Leenhof, and Radicati, all notions of absolute good and evil are

abolished in favour of an ethics of relativity and, again following Spinoza, the only overriding moral restraint which survives is the imperative to respect and defer to the human laws of the society in which one dwells 'qui sont comme les liens des besoins mutuels de la société'.⁹⁵ One suffers unhappiness or worse if one rebels against the laws of one's country, not because rebellion is innately wrong but, as Thérèse expresses it, because one is then persecuted by the rigour of the law, remorse, and the hatred and contempt of one's fellow citizens which is, she thinks, as it should be, for in seeking one's own fulfilment and pleasure 'chacun doit être attentif à ne rien faire qui blesse la félicité de son voisin'.⁹⁶

It is a text in which conventional glorification of virginity is replaced by the open eulogizing of sexual pleasure for women no less than men—but only such forms of sensual gratification as do no injury to others. Cultivation of piety gives way to extolling the ethic of the worldly 'honnête homme' and his female equivalent, exaltation of God's commandments to veneration of the human law. During her period as a young nun, Thérèse had led a pinched, truncated, wretched life under the guidance of her Catholic confessors. Step by step she had emancipated herself from such slavery through voyeurism, masturbation, learning from more enlightened men and also from erotic books. Thérèse eulogizes masturbation as what gave her back joy in life and her psychological and bodily health.⁹⁷ Finally, Thérèse discovers love and extramarital intercourse and, pondering it all with the seriousness life deserves, becomes a *philosophe*, finding happiness and worldly salvation. As for religion: 'il n'y a point de culte, Dieu se suffit à lui-même.'⁹⁸

CENSORSHIP AND CULTURE

i. French Royal Censorship

A crucial factor shaping the rise of radical thought in Europe—as well in a different way, the moderate Enlightenment—was the impact of censorship, secular and ecclesiastical. While it is true that Europe’s intellectual censorship in early modern times was unsystematic and frequently inefficient, providing minimal scope for coordination across political and jurisdictional borders and exhibiting all the chaotic, bewildering, institutional, and procedural variety characteristic of the *ancien régime*, one must not underestimate either its broad impact or the degree of ideological convergence all varieties of institutionalized censorship manifested in fighting radical ideas. All across the continent, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, unacceptable views were suppressed and publishers, printers, and booksellers, as well as authors of books embodying illicit ideas punished.

Even in Europe’s two freest societies—the Dutch Republic and England—lands where urban culture was most prevalent, and the rigid social hierarchies of the past had become most fluid, radical writers were more profoundly influenced by censorship than is often realized. In Britain there was a marked easing of censorship after the Glorious Revolution, and especially the expiry of the Licensing Act in 1695, a phenomenon linked to a more general receding of the Church of England’s influence in cultural life.¹ Nevertheless, appreciable constraints remained. Deistic writers who denied

miracles and the divine authorship of Scripture, decried the established Church, or the constitutional outcome of the Glorious Revolution, could not ignore restrictions imposed by parliamentary authority. Especially, the Blasphemy Act of 1698, which expressly outlawed denial of Christ's divinity, and rejection of the Trinity (except for Jews, who were exempt from its provisions), was not to be treated lightly. Toland's first book, *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696), may have been timed to exploit the demise of the Licensing Act, but that did not prevent its being denounced, and publicly burnt, by both the English and Irish Parliaments, while Toland himself was obliged to flee Ireland, where he had returned in expectation of appointment to a government post, orders being issued for his prosecution as a 'public and inveterate enemy to all reveal'd religion ... one who openly affected to be head of a sect'.² In 1710 the House of Commons condemned Matthew Tindal's *Rights of the Christian Church Asserted* (1706) and a second work of 1709, defending that text, works denying the ecclesiastical power all independent authority, as well as an English translation of Jean Le Clerc's long review of the former, all three being publicly burned by the common hangman, because Tindal, according to William Carroll, endeavours to establish the 'state of nature' and 'fundamentally subverts all natural and reveal'd religion, and overthrows our Constitution both in Church and state'.³

Soon after Anthony Collins, shaken by the outcry against his *Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713), took refuge for a time in the Netherlands. On returning, he took charge himself of the delicate task of distributing his anonymously published discourse, enjoining his Huguenot friend, Pierre des Maizeaux, when, through him, entrusting 120 copies to a London bookseller, to 'caution Mr Robinson never to have

above 3 or 4 of my books of *Freethinking* to lye in his shop at a time, and not to publish [i.e. advertise] them in any publick manner'.⁴ Less prudent Thomas Woolston who, unlike Collins and others, unwisely put his name to his publications, even when denying Christ's miracles and Resurrection, claiming 'liberty of thinking, writing and judging for ourselves in religion is a natural, a Christian and a Protestant right,'⁵ was tried by the Lord Chief Justice in person, at the Guildhall in March 1729, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment and a 100-pound fine. Unable to pay, moreover, the luckless Woolston remained in prison after serving his year, and there he died in 1733. Out of caution, David Hume decided to omit his strictures about miracles from his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), publishing these only some years later, and he continued to exercise a degree of self-censorship down to the 1750s and beyond.⁶

No doubt, as the eighteenth century dawned and progressed, society gradually edged towards a greater appreciation of religious toleration and intellectual freedom. Champions of the moderate Enlightenment mostly denounced unrelenting adherence to past attitudes as apt to play straight into the hands of the radicals, though few would go as far as the Newtonian William Whiston, who styled traditional intolerance a dreadful thing, providing a 'fatal handle to the Deists, Atheists and Libertines to abhor the offerings of the Lord and blaspheme the name of Christ'; indeed, 'suspect all religion to be a cheat.'⁷ In France, the *Malebranchiste* Abbé Houtteville insisted in 1722 that the new practical toleration and freedom of opinion in France had progressed too far and was actively assisting the disastrous advance of Naturalism, fatalism, materialism, and 'Spinosisme'.⁸ But increasing

secularization also generated a mounting tension between ecclesiastical mechanisms of control—the role of the Churches having been paramount in the past—and the expanding administrative apparatus and ambitions of the State. In France in 1702, there was a sensational dispute between the ecclesiastical and secular arms when Bossuet himself, to his evident distress, was required, but refused, to submit a publication of his own against Richard Simon to the royal censorship: the bishops found themselves ceasing to be the agents, and themselves becoming the objects of royal book supervision.⁹

In the France of Louis XIV there were frequent book-burnings by the regional *parlements*, numerous edicts suppressing particular books, and regular inspections of bookshops by the police, as well as stringent checks of travellers' baggage at the frontiers. Certainly, there were illicit editions within France, and censorship was not sufficiently rigorous to stop an incessant stream of forbidden books percolating from outside into the libraries of nobles, savants, officials, and clergy. But it was incisive enough to render the French market for libertine and dissident books largely dependent on external sources of supply and surreptitious methods of distribution. One consequence was that highly placed persons needed foreign contacts, especially with Holland where most clandestine book production and export was concentrated, to procure illicit reading matter, and even then success was far from guaranteed. In October 1682, the former editor of the *Journal des Sçavants*, the Abbé Gallois, having vainly sought copies of Spinoza and Simon's *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament* in Paris, requested the celebrated scientist Christian Huygens, at The Hague, to help. Huygens made no mention of the Richard Simon but agreed

to send Spinoza's works from Holland if he could devise a suitable stratagem, such as concealing the volumes in the bags of the Dutch ambassador about to depart for Paris: 'car vous n'ignorez pas les deffences et les exactes recherches que l'on fait sur vos frontières en matière de livres jusqu'à fouiller dans les valises des voyageurs.'¹⁰ The following year Bayle, virtually all of whose writings were to be banned in France,¹¹ wrote from Rotterdam, advising his brother that it was almost impossible to find anyone willing to accept forbidden books on Dutch ships bound for France as there was considerable risk involved and the skippers feared confiscation of their cargoes along with the books.¹²

Among the most celebrated episodes of Louis XIV's book censorship were the banning of the great exegetical works of Richard Simon, the refusal of the lieutenant-general of police in Paris in 1681 to authorize Pierre Bayle's first major work, the *Pensées diverses* (despite his having written in the guise of a Catholic apologist), the latter's subsequent flight to Holland with the manuscript hidden in his baggage, and the banning of Bayle's *Dictionnaire* of 1697.¹³ The suppression of Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* in 1678 is especially remarkable, since the book had already been licensed by the chief *censeur des livres* at the Sorbonne, and the *supérieur général* of the Oratoire, and 1,300 copies printed and bound when Bossuet intervened at the highest level—with Chancellor Le Tellier. A prohibition order, issued by the *Conseil d'en haut*, was signed by Colbert on 15 June 1678, upon which the lieutenant-general of police in Paris seized and burnt the entire stock.¹⁴ This reverse, and his expulsion from the Oratoire the same year, isolated Simon within French cultural life, and obliged him henceforth to rely

on publishers in Holland, as well as entailing the permanent exclusion of his publications from France, at least officially. This did curiously little, though, to mitigate his strong distaste for Dutch liberty. Rather, he continued to disparage Dutch freedom of expression as corrupt and unprincipled, inspired 'par une raison d'intérêt et d'avarice'.¹⁵ Meanwhile Bossuet, while helping extend French intellectual censorship, had to obtain forbidden books for his own use circuitously from abroad. Having been instrumental in suppressing Simon, and then Le Clerc's reply to Simon, a book he judged 'encore plus injurieux à Sainte Écriture' than Simon's, he had to go to considerable lengths to procure copies for his own use via Geneva.¹⁶

The censorship system prevailing in France until Louis XIV's death in 1715 was unwieldy and, involving as it did compromises between competing jurisdictions, entailed considerable overlap and lack of clarity. Illicit literature from Holland seeped in by sea, in particular via Rouen, and also by various land routes.¹⁷ Numerous sources attest to this extensive penetration, even of France's most closely guarded spiritual strongholds. In 1690 the worried abbess of the famous convent of Fontevault, near Tours, alerted Bishop Huet to the growing spirit of rebellion in Northern French nunneries and monasteries, ascribing this frightening development explicitly to the flow of forbidden books from Holland, which, she says, was teaching even the most mediocre inmates of the cloisters to discard all authority and prefer to examine and judge every intellectual issue in a critical light for themselves.¹⁸

Nevertheless, pressure of censorship meant that forbidden books entered France only with difficulty and at considerable

cost, which, in turn, resulted in their availability being largely restricted to aristocratic and high official or ecclesiastical circles, or else a few large cities, notably Paris and Rouen. It has been suggested that we should not take an 'overly highbrow, overly metaphysical view of intellectual life in the eighteenth century' and remember that 'a lot of trash somehow got mixed up in the eighteenth-century idea of philosophy.'¹⁹ But while erotic material was undoubtedly more integral to what was regarded as *philosophique* in the eighteenth century than is the case today, what the evidence for the more crucially formative early eighteenth century proves is, in fact, precisely the opposite—the strikingly high proportion of genuinely philosophical works featuring in the illicit trade.

A notable success for the Paris police was the arrest in 1705 of Joseph Huchet, librarian and secretary to a royal official, Antoine de Courtin, resident in the Place Royale, then, as now, among the more select quarters of Paris. Huchet had been caught when the authorities learnt from an informer that he kept a depot for 'all the books of Holland' in Courtin's town house.²⁰ With his seized books and correspondence, he was sent to the Bastille. Until the outbreak of war in 1702, Huchet had been receiving his illicit supplies of books from a *libraire* in Rouen named Dedun, who had imported them by sea, hidden among other cargo, from Rotterdam.²¹ Since the outbreak of war, Huchet had obtained his books overland via a *libraire* in Liège named Jean-François Bronckhart, who concealed them in coaches.

Interrogated by the lieutenant-general of police, the marquis d'Argenson, in person on 6 July 1705, Huchet admitted receiving crates of forbidden books from Holland and Liège, which he stored in rooms belonging to the

duchesse de Choiseul and other noblemen and ladies.²²

Originally from Alençon, he had arrived in Paris, where he had since lived for over twenty years, at the age of 18 to study philosophy at the Jesuit college of Clairmont under 'Father Martineau'. Further enquiries implied additional *magasins de livres* concealed in the Hôtel de Sully and the Hôtel de Condé, and he was asked what he did in those aristocratic

establishments which he had been seen entering frequently.²³

He admitted being on friendly terms with the staff at the former, where the duchesse de Verneuil had kindly provided him with a room for his books; at the Hôtel de Condé he had no store-room, though he was on excellent terms with the secretaries and especially the 'superintendant des bastimens' of Monseigneur the Prince. Parcels of books consigned to him from Liège had apparently been arriving directly at the door of the Hôtel de Sully, where they were taken care of by Monsieur de la Forêt, *officier* of the duchesse de Verneuil. Everything suggested that Huchet's clientele was aristocratic and bureaucratic, his own employer, he admitted, being an avid connoisseur of 'mauvais livres de Hollande'.

Huchet's supplies came from Holland and the term 'livres de Hollande' was used in the interrogations as a generic term for forbidden literature in general. His storerooms contained an abundance of Catholic theology, especially Janseniana, and also erotica, two favourite bawdy novels being *Venus dans le cloître* and *Le Moine secularisé*, as well as scandalous chronicles, though these were not necessarily 'trash', the most sought after being Bussy-Rabutin's *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*, a prose classic eagerly read by the French aristocracy of the day but at the time available only from Holland.²⁴

Another main component, Huchet's lists reveal, were runs of

learned periodicals in French, particularly Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque Universelle*, the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, and the *Histoire des Ouvrages des Savants*. Finally there were philosophical books proper, especially the *Dictionnaire* of Bayle which, for decades, was published exclusively in Holland and—almost as frequent—that of Moréri, beside works of Fontenelle, Saint Evremond, and Pascal, particularly the *Lettres provinciales*, a text on the papal Index since 1657 and banned and publicly burnt in Paris in 1660. Additional key items were Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* and its companion on the New Testament,²⁵ Bayle's *Pensées diverses* and *Commentaire philosophique*, again works available only from Holland, and works of Le Clerc, Jaquelot, and Abbadie, as well as the notorious *Voyages* of Lahontain. There were also a few banned items in Latin, notably the clandestine Amsterdam Socinian compilation, *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* by Frans Kuyper, and, though much less common than Bayle or Le Clerc, a solitary English work—Locke's *Essay* in French translation.

Uncovering a network of depots in high society town houses was a triumph for d'Argenson. Accustomed to surveillance, the *libraires* avoided keeping *clandestina* in their shops, which meant d'Argenson and his *commissaires* needed accurate tip-offs, or uncommon luck, to catch them out. A Paris police document of January 1702 mentions a pedlar caught selling forbidden literature who agreed to talk but, it transpired, knew nothing useful. He implicated the Paris *libraires* Guilan, Rémy, Bellay, and Langlois as traffickers. But this in itself, the *commissaire* reported to d'Argenson, 'c'est nous donner avis que la Seine passe à Paris.' For these same men had been raided by the police

many a time and were entirely suspect 'mais l'on ne trouve jamais de magasin chez eux, ils l'ont ailleurs, et c'est ce qu'il faut découvrir.'²⁶ The shops mentioned were raided again all the same and more scraps of incriminating evidence gleaned—letters in code about the forbidden book trade between Rouen and Paris and, at the shop of the incorrigible Rémy, who had already twice seen the inside of the Bastille, a few *clandestina*.²⁷

Two brothers brought to the Bastille for selling forbidden books in September 1712, Charles and Jacques Cocquaire, had, like Huchet, studied philosophy under the Jesuits, in their case at Rennes. Settling in Paris, Jacques had been a *domestique* in aristocratic town houses for many years, and later earned his bread teaching Latin and mathematics. He knew philosophy and he knew forbidden books. His brother served in the dragoons during the Nine Years' War (1688–97) and, after temporary service in aristocratic households, had been a minor official commandeering forage for the cavalry in Flanders during the new war. In this capacity he was well-placed to engage in the illicit book traffic but had been caught consigning boxes of 'livres de Hollande' to his brother in Paris.²⁸

One of the most notable coups of the Paris police in this field was the uncovering in 1739 of the illegal traffic conducted by the *maître d'hôtel* of the Venetian ambassador, a certain Charles Stella. His correspondence revealed that he dealt in the usual prohibited varieties—Janseniana, erotica, satirical chronicles,²⁹ and appreciable quantities of 'philosophical' books, and that his chief supplier was Pieter de Hondt (1696–1764), a well-known publisher since 1726 at The Hague.³⁰ His hidden depot was seized and several

collaborators uncovered, including a printer who had worked in Holland and was also sent to the Bastille, and the Abbé Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy (1674–1755), a disreputable but clever intriguer, one of the foremost connoisseurs of clandestine books of the age.³¹ Stella's lists reveal the centrality in the traffic of the late 1730s of d'Argens' works, his depot containing numerous copies of the latter's *Lettres cabalistiques* and *Lettres juives*. Other principal items were Beverland's *Peché originel*, the Spinozistic novel the *Voyages de Jacques Massé*, Arpe's *Apologia* for Vanini, and, most significant in terms of radical philosophical content, *La Vie et l'esprit de Mr Benoît de Spinoza* and Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*.³²

In France there was, over time, a growing trend for the secular rather than ecclesiastical arm to preside, and the royal administration rather than the *parlements*. The stringency of the censorship, moreover, was considerably relaxed by stages after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713. During the last months of Louis' reign, in 1714–15, there was a post-war influx of foreign visitors and a flurry of printing activity in Paris,³³ stimulated by some easing of supervision under the direction of the Abbé Bignon. He, however, retired from the directorship of the *censure des livres* early in 1715, affording the Jesuits, the visiting librarian of Wolfenbüttel observed, what could later be seen as their last ray of hope of gaining control.³⁴ In 1714 there was even an attempt to bring out an edition of Bayle's *Letters* in Paris, though permission for this was finally refused.³⁵ After 1715 there was unquestionably more scope for publishing philosophically, scientifically, and even theologically controversial books. It

was doubtless for this reason, and especially in the hope of ending the ban in France on Bayle's *Dictionnaire* that, in 1720, Marchand dedicated the third edition, his new four-volume Rotterdam version of that great work, to the French regent, the duc d'Orléans.³⁶ The new regency government, headed by the freethinking duke, did indeed wish to render it easier—partly for intellectual and political, but also for plain economic reasons—for less than entirely orthodox works to be sold in France and reduce the censorship functions of the Church. This was gradually contrived in part by instituting a new middle category of books which were neither licensed by the ecclesiastical or secular authorities nor expressly forbidden. But this development placed French writers in an often perplexing dilemma; for there was still a crucial, if not always clear, borderline between what was permissible and what was not, and appreciably more freedom to publish in the United Provinces than France.³⁷ However, as d'Argens remarked in 1738, if one tried to smuggle books by French authors published in Holland into France, these were still subject to searches and likely to be seized at the frontiers: 's'il en pénètre plusieurs, c'est par ruse et par finesse.'³⁸

The system of tacit exemptions was used with growing frequency towards the middle of the eighteenth century. In high official circles a desire to increase the number of permissions for works the Crown had no particular wish to admit that it tolerated became widespread.³⁹ By 1732 it had even become possible to prepare a Parisian edition of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*.⁴⁰ Interference with Jansenist, Quietist, and Protestant theological works noticeably diminished. Yet lack of clarity about what was allowed and what was not served to aggravate as much as ease friction. For not only was the

system readily abused, with booksellers claiming particular books had been tacitly permitted when they had not, but it encouraged jurisdictional clashes between royal officials and the Parlement of Paris, the most spectacular of which concerned the disputed permission and privileges of the *Encyclopédie* during almost a decade and a half from 1745 to 1759, a predicament worsened by an extraordinary amount of official wavering and lack of consensus over whether to permit that great undertaking or not.⁴¹

In France, then, the largest and most important book market in Europe, a degree of liberalization set in from 1715, albeit to a markedly lesser extent than in England after 1695. Although something of the sort also happened elsewhere, as in Venice, it is arguable that in most cases where initiative in censorship and intellectual supervision passed from ecclesiastical into secular hands, as in several Italian states, Austria, and, eventually, Spain and Portugal, the transition brought no real widening of freedom of thought. Indeed, if anything, the result was more rigour, since the new mechanisms of control, upholding existing structures of authority, was more efficient than the old. As for the United Provinces, a country which, before 1688, had been the freest in Europe and where censorship had from the outset been operated by the secular arm—the provincial assemblies and city governments, albeit often at the prompting of the public Church—there was little indication during the early eighteenth century of significant relaxation of the laws of 1653, 1656, 1674, and 1678 enacted to suppress Socinian, other anti-Trinitarian, and Spinozistic publications.⁴²

ii. Philosophy and Censorship in Central Europe

The most striking feature of the general evolution of censorship in Europe between 1650 and 1750, leaving aside political censorship, which was and remained stringent everywhere, is the marked shift, accompanying the secularization of procedures, away from a theological focus to suppression of proscribed secular, 'philosophical' ideas. In this respect, arguably, Dutch censorship strategy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, which primarily targeted radical philosophical authors, pointed the way for the subsequent development of European censorship as a whole. Whether in Protestant or Catholic lands, the chief objective ceased to be the imposition of one or other confessional stance and instead now became the suppression of Naturalism, fatalism, materialism, and Spinozism, along with works harmful to 'good morals'.

In Switzerland, disarray among the cantons over Cartesianism, and subsequently Newtonianism, by no means precluded convergence of aims and tightening of procedures, from the 1670s onwards, with regard to radical and deistic ideas. In 1674 the *consistoire* at Geneva sounded the alarm after copies of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* were discovered in the hands of local students.⁴³ Subsequently there were frequent references to 'mauvais livres' entering from abroad, that is, Socinian works, erotic books, attacks on the divine authorship of Scripture, and—most reprehensible of all—'Spinosa, Hobbesius et de semblables ... ceux qu'on appelle déistes'.⁴⁴ Little or none of this material was published in Switzerland. Most emanated from the Netherlands, booksellers in Geneva and Lausanne handling such *clandestina* obtaining supplies both from source and via

the Frankfurt book fairs.⁴⁵ Energetic efforts were made to stop the traffic. In June 1683 the Geneva city government initiated an enquiry, trying to unmask the *libraires* who were importing such forbidden books.⁴⁶ A new and stricter system of *Zensur* started at Zurich in 1698 introduced unprecedentedly strict procedures for inspecting bookshops, printers, and bookbinders.⁴⁷

In Germany, censorship rested chiefly in the hands of the individual princely and city governments which, in Catholic areas, were often themselves ecclesiastical régimes. In addition, it was considered useful particularly among the mass of smaller states to maintain the system of censorship headed by the Imperial *Bücherkommission* based in Frankfurt, which monitored the book fairs, traditionally the main entry gate for foreign publications sold in Germany. Admittedly, interference from Vienna and accusations of anti-Protestant bias produced a degree of friction between the commission and the book trade which may have contributed to the decline of the Frankfurt book fairs from the 1670s.⁴⁸ But the Imperial Book Commission nevertheless continued to play a notable role in German cultural life, particularly in suppressing such notorious deistic compilations as the 'Wertheim Bible' which, as we shall see, created a considerable stir throughout central Europe in the mid-1730s.

After 1670, German publishing, and the book trade were increasingly dominated by Leipzig. Whereas in 1650 Frankfurt still handled twice as many books as the Saxon city, in the 1670s Leipzig overtook and, by 1700, handled twice as many books as Frankfurt. The shift arose chiefly from the disruptive impact of war in the Rhineland and also changes in methods of advertising and distributing books internationally.

In particular, the advent of the erudite journals provided a new method of advertising books, which reduced the incentive for publishers to travel long distances to display their wares.⁴⁹ This disadvantaged Frankfurt, where the book trade traditionally involved the physical presence of booksellers visiting the fairs, and worked in favour of Leipzig, which became the foremost publishing centre not just of Protestant Germany but all central Europe. To supervise the Leipzig book trade, the electors of Saxony relied on the electoral *Bücherkommission*, set up after the Reformation in 1569, a joint board of representatives of the university, the Lutheran consistory, and city government, charged with identifying harmful publications and inspecting the bookshops.⁵⁰

Yet the decline of the fairs, and the rise of Leipzig, did not mean imports of foreign-produced books became less important. Stimulated by the journals, imports from abroad, while entering increasingly via the seaports, especially Hamburg, held steady or increased. It is true that very few books were imported from England or France, but this is because in the first case book prices were much higher than on the continent, and in the second, because of the severe restrictions on publishing. It is also true that consignments from Italy and Antwerp never recovered after the Thirty Years' War. But exports of Dutch publications in Latin, French, Dutch, and German to Germany expanded and fundamentally influenced German cultural life, especially in those areas—erotica, philosophy, science, and unorthodox theology—most likely, in the Early Enlightenment context, to attract the attention of the censorship authorities.⁵¹

During the second half of the seventeenth century German book censorship was, to a large extent, still confessionally orientated. Censorship strategy was determined by churchmen whether Lutheran, Calvinist, or Catholic and its prime purpose was to exclude works deemed dangerous from a theological standpoint. Indeed, before 1700 few philosophically, scientifically, or politically radical works appeared in Germany, and the few that did, such as Knutzen's manifestos of 1674 and Friedrich Wilhelm Stosch's Spinozistic *Concordia Rationis et Fidei* (1692), were relentlessly suppressed.⁵² After 1700, the appearance of radical works (published and in manuscript) became more frequent while, at the same time, the confessional emphasis in censorship receded albeit more rapidly in Protestant than Catholic lands.

In Saxony, censorship was thoroughly overhauled in the late 1690s, with the discarding by August the Strong (Elector of Saxony, 1694–1733; king of Poland as 'August II', 1697–1704 and 1709–33) of his family's former Lutheran allegiance as a result of his conversion to Catholicism in order to secure the Polish throne.⁵³ The public Church in the electorate remained Lutheran, but the Court in Dresden ceased its former active promotion of the Lutheran cause. All three major confessions recognized in the Empire under the articles of the Peace of Westphalia were now free to publish and bring in books from outside, provided they eschewed inflammatory polemicizing against each other. Theologians eventually disappeared completely from the censorship commission in Leipzig.⁵⁴ Henceforth, electoral censorship aimed to eradicate only politically undesirable texts, erotica,

unorthodox fringe theology, and radical philosophy advocating Naturalism, fatalism, and Spinozism.

A still more startling step away from traditional censorship criteria followed the accession of Frederick the Great in 1740. The advent of a would-be *roi philosophe* and admirer of Voltaire, on the throne of the most powerful state in northern Germany, a ruler who personally loathed and despised traditional confessional thinking and priorities, inevitably had a profound impact on cultural life, and by no means only within the confines of Prussia itself. In Frederick's kingdom theological censorship all but ceased and, while political censorship remained exceedingly tight, a measure of intellectual freedom was introduced.⁵⁵ This, however, applied more to debate and publications held in Latin or French than the vernacular language of the country. Frederick drew the line at the propagation of radical and irreligious philosophy in the language of the common people.

Meanwhile, the relative effectiveness of book censorship in Saxony, Prussia, and other large German principalities owed much to the heavy concentration of book production and the book trade in only a few cities—especially Leipzig, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Nuremberg—and a tiny number of university towns, mainly Halle and Jena. Leipzig in 1700, a city of 28,000, housed eighteen publishers and booksellers, and a whole community of printers, bookbinders, and illustrators.⁵⁶ By contrast, most central and east-central European cities, including Vienna and Prague, then had remarkably few bookshops by the standards of Amsterdam, The Hague, London, Paris, or Venice. Munich and Hanover were simply not places to buy books; Berlin reputedly had but

a single bookshop and Koenigsberg, a university town, only three.

Broadly then, intellectual censorship in Protestant Europe was still a formidable force in 1750 but was now firmly under State control and chiefly aimed at suppressing non-providential deism, Naturalism, materialism, and other radical strains in the local vernacular, whether German, Dutch, French or English, as well as works expressing political or social ideas regarded as seditious and notions about sexuality deemed incompatible with 'good morals'. By contrast, secularization of the censorship machinery occurred appreciably later in Catholic central Europe. In Catholic states the censorship authorities were inevitably preoccupied chiefly with book imports from abroad, or from German Protestant lands, since book production was remarkably meagre compared with the output in Leipzig and other Lutheran cities. This was primarily because confessionalization in Catholic Germany, Austria, and Bohemia-Moravia had created a culture much less orientated to books and the printed word than was the case in Lutheran and Calvinist areas. One result of this difference was that control of the book trade itself tended to gravitate into Protestant hands. Even in Vienna, centre of a burgeoning Catholic Habsburg empire where papal and Italian influence was strong, and a rigorous Jesuit-controlled censorship in force, at least eight of the twelve booksellers in the city in 1730 were Protestants.⁵⁷

The Jesuits, entrusted with academic and book censorship in Austria since the onset of the Thirty Years' War, when Ferdinand II had charged them with the eradication of Protestant intellectual influence from his lands, had no wish to relinquish their grip over this powerful cultural device.⁵⁸

However, by the 1740s, favoured though they were by the devout Empress Maria Theresa, this surviving stronghold of clerical power was coming increasingly under siege from secularizing forces of the moderate Enlightenment at Court, led by Count Kaunitz. The turning-point was the Jesuits' decision in 1750 to follow Rome, Turin, and other conservative Catholic capitals in banning the import and sale of Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*. Montesquieu, backed by French diplomacy and elements at the Austrian court, protested. The empress was embarrassed by the adverse publicity the affair provoked and eventually, in 1753, agreed to transfer the responsibility for book and academic censorship to a new State censorship commission chaired by Gerard van Swieten, the Dutch Catholic disciple of Boerhaave, brought in earlier to reform Vienna University.

This body, no less than the Leipzig book commission, eloquently illustrates the tendency of the moderate Enlightenment in most of Europe to reform censorship in a manner calculated to ease confessional rigidities and end the sway of theology, but without effectively widening the scope of intellectual freedom. It was never indeed the intention of leaders of the moderate Enlightenment in central Europe that their cultural and educational reforms should entail less, or no, intellectual censorship. Leibniz, for instance, had no doubt the escalation in publishing needed careful watching and regulation. He considered publishers and booksellers little more than unscrupulous businessmen keen to profit from whatever would sell, no matter how insidious or worthless. Forceful censorship was essential, in his opinion, if society was to be plied chiefly with 'useful' books, that is, works apt to contribute positively to the physical and spiritual well-being of mankind, a criterion designed to exclude a great deal,

including radical philosophy.⁵⁹ Leibniz was indeed fascinated by the possibilities of positive censorship, and during the 1660s he toyed with plans to publish a twice-yearly guide to new publications, listing the 'good' books and condemning the 'bad'. He remained a firm supporter of empire-wide censorship, and of the Imperial Book Commission which, indeed, he desired to see strengthened, and provided with catalogues of approved works, in the compiling of which he wished to participate.⁶⁰

In choosing Van Swieten, a protégé of Kaunitz, to direct the Austrian state censorship, Maria Theresa was committing her territories to a particular type of enlightened cultural policy. For Van Swieten was equally committed to far-reaching reform along moderate lines and preserving Austria from radical influences. Obstruction of the entry into Austria of Montesquieu, Leibniz, Wolff, Thomasius, Newton, and Locke ceased, these being the safe writers. But openly deistic, Naturalistic, and erotic works were rigorously banned.⁶¹

During the years of his chairmanship, Van Swieten personally listed hundreds of books as 'damnatur' in his register of prohibited titles. Moreover, in his eyes, Voltaire fell on the wrong side of the borderline between 'Christian' and deist Enlightenment and joined Hume, Diderot, and Spinoza in the banned category. Voltaire paid him back in his usual fashion with some scathing remarks in print.

iii. Philosophy and Censorship in Southern Europe

In Italy, meanwhile, one of the fiercest battles of the Early Enlightenment was in progress. So pervasive was the power and influence of the Church in Italian cultural and intellectual life in 1650 that an observer might well have judged its

dominance all but impregnable. Yet appearances proved deceptive. By the early eighteenth century it became obvious that the Enlightenment was in reality a force too pervasive and ubiquitous for the Papacy and the Inquisition to curb. So rapidly did ecclesiastical power weaken that by 1750 the Church authorities had effectively lost their age-old control of the machinery of censorship in such key states as Venice, Naples, and Tuscany, and intellectual censorship itself functioned in new ways and directions.

The trial of the 'atheists' in Naples, in the 1680s, signalled the start not just of a conflict over Cartesianism and the status of philosophy in relation to theology, but a general attempt to intimidate the new Neapolitan philosophical coterie and curb intellectual freedom itself.⁶² The Inquisition ban on Leonardo di Capoa's controversial *Del Parere*, in 1693, for example, was certainly an attack on Neapolitan Cartesianism but, equally, a resounding rejection of Di Capoa's call for 'liberty to philosophize' and daring praise of the 'philosophers of Holland' who defend that freedom.⁶³ The expulsion of the Spaniards, and the establishment of a rival Austrian Habsburg regime in the viceroyalty in 1707, introduced new political and dynastic tension in Naples and also renewed existing disagreements between the secular authorities and the Papacy. But while these proved enduring and hard to resolve, as far as the Austrian authorities were concerned, the quarrel had no deep cultural or intellectual ramifications. It had nothing to do with ideas, religion, or attitudes to life and was purely a contest about ecclesiastical revenues and jurisdiction. Yet to rebuff papal claims, the new régime required appropriate arguments justifying limits on ecclesiastical power, and this inevitably encouraged the expression of political theories,

philosophical concepts, and concepts of history inimical to papal, Inquisition, and ecclesiastical, pretensions in more than a purely jurisdictional sense.⁶⁴

The new viceroy tacitly allowed publication of Cartesian books and employed the services of philosophically minded jurists such as Costantino Grimaldi. This, in turn, inevitably injected an element of ideological and philosophical conflict which was no part of the Austrian government's agenda but proved inherent in the situation. Thus when Grimaldi published a two-volume work, sponsored by the Austrian authorities, on ecclesiastical taxation in Naples, and this was banned by the Papacy in 1709, the whole issue of ecclesiastical censorship itself became the focus of 'philosophical' scrutiny. In 1710 Grimaldi penned a critique of the Roman Inquisition, asking by what right the ecclesiastical authorities exercised censorship over political and jurisdictional matters, which then circulated in manuscript. This was the question about which the Austrian authorities encouraged discussion. But Grimaldi and his friends had wider concerns and his manuscript, entitled 'Aviso critico', not only accuses the Roman Inquisition of infringing the legitimate powers of the new Neapolitan regime,⁶⁵ but insists that ecclesiastical censorship can be justified only with respect to matters of faith and morals and, even then, should be supervised by the secular authority, as in the Venetian Republic. Lambasting the papal Inquisitors for their bigotry and ignorance—and praising the French Crown for operating a secular system of censorship—Grimaldi holds that determining the truth or falsity of propositions other than those expressly embodied in the Church's doctrines resides entirely outside the Church's jurisdiction.⁶⁶ Indeed, judging

the truth or falsity of propositions which are not strictly theological, he concludes, is solely the responsibility of philosophy and science.

Hence Austrian protection for those at the head of the philosophical ferment in Naples rested on a contradiction which was eventually bound to become clear and generate a head-on collision between political authority and intellectual liberty. The episode which definitively revealed this underlying contradiction started with the publication at Naples in 1723 of one of the outstanding works of the age—Giannone's *Historia civile del regno di Napoli*, a work often styled the first of the great Enlightenment histories, which were to culminate in those of Voltaire, Hume, and Gibbon.⁶⁷ Readers did not have to look far to discover the 'philosophical' message in Giannone's history. He describes Naples as a prosperous and vigorous society in the Middle Ages, attributing its subsequent slide into ruin and impoverishment to a combination of Spanish misrule and ecclesiastical manipulation and exploitation. The, in his view, excessive and highly damaging donations of money, land, and other property to monasteries and ecclesiastical foundations, Giannone ascribes to the 'ignoranza e la superstizione' of the people who, in their anxiety to rescue their souls from Purgatory, were easily induced by the clergy to give unstintingly to the Church.⁶⁸

Both Giannone's name and that of his publisher appeared on the title-page. The work was published in 1,100 copies. Though it lacked the usually requisite ecclesiastical approbations, Giannone expected the Austrian authorities to shield him from the inevitable clerical backlash. But here, he quickly discovered, he was mistaken. After a brief lull while

the book's significance sank in, there was uproar in the city. The friars and the papal nuncio, incensed by the implication that the Church had deliberately fomented belief in false miracles in order to increase its hold over the credulous, orchestrated a general outcry. There were disturbances in the streets. From the pulpit the people were told that Giannone had denied the 'miracles' of Naples' patron saint, San Gennaro.⁶⁹ The saint was consequently angry and liable not to perform his annual 'miracle' of liquefying his congealed blood behind the glass of the reliquary containing his hands in Naples cathedral, an annual event without which, Montesquieu noted,⁷⁰ the populace of Naples was apt to be plunged in consternation and despair. The viceroy, Cardinal Althann, had instructions to defend the interests of the Austrian Court but also to seek improved relations with the Papacy. Consequently he attempted neither to quell the commotion nor protect Giannone. The most he would do was provide a pass enabling the embattled *philosophe* to flee the viceroyalty by boat. From Trieste Giannone proceeded to Vienna, where he was given a sympathetic reception and lived in exile for many years.⁷¹

Giannone's history was placed on the papal Index in April 1723, and both author and publisher were excommunicated.⁷² Through his nuncio in Vienna, the Pope also demanded Giannone's arrest by the Emperor but was refused. Charles VI (ruled 1711–40) and his ministers chose instead to provide Giannone with a small pension, enabling him to subsist on the fringes of the Austrian Court.⁷³ Nevertheless, the whole episode, and especially the emotional reaction of the Neapolitans, appreciably strengthened the Pope's hand in his battle with the Austrian authorities over Church revenues and

jurisdiction in the viceroyalty. This was reflected, among other things, in Grimaldi's ill-fated attempt to repeat his earlier success in publishing intellectually daring works in Naples without Inquisition approval and in defiance of the Church. His first three volumes against Benedetti having sold out by 1710, and the fourth and fifth volumes remaining unpublished, circulating only in manuscript, Grimaldi had obtained permission from the secular authorities to bring out his entire five-volume defence of the New Philosophy and 'freedom to philosophize'. But there was no prospect of obtaining the normally requisite ecclesiastical approval. Accordingly, Grimaldi decided to print the work clandestinely in his own home, again citing a false place of publication, this time 'Lucca', but now placing his real name on the title-page.⁷⁴ Despite the Giannone affair, Grimaldi remained confident that his extensive propaganda services on behalf of successive viceroys ensured protection against ecclesiastical retaliation. He was deeply shocked therefore, when, in September 1726, after the Jesuits succeeded in getting his work banned in Rome, the viceroy decided to prohibit his text in Naples too.⁷⁵ His entire stock of copies was seized and destroyed.

Little changed to improve the prospects for the Neapolitan philosophical coterie over the next years. The defeat of the Austrians in southern Italy, and the reimposition of a Bourbon regime closely linked to Spain in 1734, revived the quarrels over ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Naples but did nothing to ease the position of the enlightened intellectual avant-garde.⁷⁶ Indeed, their prospects worsened. Giannone, whose *Historia civile* was banned by the new ruler, the future Charles III of Spain, as by the old, was refused permission to return.⁷⁷

Grimaldi, having thus far had only his books banned by Althann, was now himself expelled from Naples in the wake of Giannone. Moreover, the jurisdictional quarrels between Rome and the régime in Naples were largely settled by the Concordat of 1741. In exchange for improved relations and a resumption of co-operation, the Papacy agreed to accept curtailment of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and fiscal privileges, as well as relinquishing control over censorship, the book trade, and the university. Secularization of censorship in Naples was largely completed in 1746 when the Bourbon régime, the first government in Italy to do so, abolished the local tribunal of the Roman Inquisition. This was certainly a step towards modernization, but a great many 'philosophical' books, including those of Giannone and Grimaldi, remained as firmly banned as before.

But if ecclesiastical censorship ended in Naples and Tuscany as well as Savoy and Venice, it was still a significant factor in the 1750s in several smaller states, such as Parma and Modena, as well as the sizeable territory making up the Papal States themselves. If it was beyond the power of the Pope to keep modern science and philosophy out of Rome, it was certainly not beyond his capability to curb discussion and propagation of new ideas in his own state. When Leibniz arrived in Rome in 1689, he campaigned discreetly behind the scenes, trying to persuade the cardinals and the Holy Office to lift their prohibitions on Cartesianism and heliocentrism and embrace the safer elements of the New Philosophy and science. He received quiet encouragement from a distinguished scholarly circle, mostly linked to the Accademia Fisico-Matematica, a scholarly coterie founded in 1677 by Cardinal Giovanni Giustino Ciampini (d.1698), an ally of the ageing Queen Christina of Sweden, who donated some of the

group's scientific instruments and in whose palazzo the academy met,⁷⁸ Ciampini together with other eminent *savants* in Rome, such as the scientist Alfonso Borelli, the classicist Gianvicenzo Gravina (1664–1718)—a disciple of the Cartesian hermit of Scalea, Caloprese—and the historian of religion, Bianchini, had carved out an inner space for regular philosophical and scientific debate, albeit secluded behind a thick veil of discretion and conventional theology.⁷⁹ But neither Leibniz's endeavours nor the Accademia's support could significantly alter the wider Roman context.

The group in Rome could thus quietly discuss but not publish or propagate new philosophical and scientific ideas. In 1700 Gravina wrote an oration on the stages in the evolution of human knowledge, entitled *Oratio de sapientia universa*, in which he triumphantly affirms the liberation of 'philosophy from Aristotelian slavery' by Bacon, Gassendi, Galileo, and Descartes.⁸⁰ But he could not publish it in Rome and, like numerous other Italian philosophical writings of the period, it circulated in manuscript until it was eventually published in Naples. The same constraints applied to a new scholarly and scientific private academy which evolved in Rome around Celestino Galiani (1681–1753) in the years 1708–20. Galiani was an erudite monk converted from Aristotelianism to Cartesianism in 1703, who then, in around 1713, discarded the Cartesian-Malebranchiste legacy in favour of Newton and Locke, whose *Essay* he read shortly before 1710.⁸¹ Subsequently, as Bishop of Taranto from 1731, he was a leader of the Catholic Enlightenment in Naples where, since early in the century, he had had links with Valletta, Grimaldi, and Vico.

Carefully secluding themselves from watchful eyes, the new academy, like its predecessor, inwardly promoted a moderate Enlightenment of ideas to replace the intellectual structures of the past, which would simultaneously serve as a reliable buttress for the Church in its war against non-providential deism and atheism. A living bridge between the two academies was Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) whose *Storia universale provata* (1697), inspired by Bossuet and Huet, seeks to overthrow the new Bible criticism of La Peyrère, Spinoza, and their followers. He was especially drawn to Huet's idea that not only the ancient Jews and Christians, but all the peoples and religions of antiquity—the Chinese, Peruvians, and most of the Greeks included—believed in divine Providence and the Creation of the universe from nothing.⁸² Even the Flood, he insists, is recorded not only in Scripture 'but in the traditions of every civilized nation'.⁸³ Later, in 1713, Bianchini visited England and met Newton, whose philosophy he enthusiastically embraced, believing it the best antidote to the radical ideas undermining belief in the divine authorship of Scripture, miracles, and the God-ordained role of the Church.⁸⁴

From the second decade of the new century Galiani, Bianchini, and their allies in Rome sought, above all, to propagate the new English ideas. But there were substantial obstacles to doing so. After a brush with the Inquisition in 1711, Galiani vowed to remain quiet and refrain from ever publishing his own work. The only way for a philosopher to succeed in Rome, he assured friends, was to share one's thoughts merely with a few trusted allies, 'taking care not to expose them to the masses'.⁸⁵ He was to stick to this strategy all his life, being content to play an inconspicuous role behind

the scenes, convening small-group discussions, circulating manuscripts, and corresponding privately in Italy and abroad. A key ally was his Maltese friend and teacher, Abbot Domenico Bencini, a pupil of Gravina and lecturer in polemical theology at the College De Propaganda Fidei, an expert on the history of religion and the Bible, one of whose tasks was to train young ecclesiastics to fight the new breed of philosophical heresies challenging the authority and doctrines of the Church. Bencini's views are notable for his constant stress on the danger posed by Hobbes, Spinoza, and other 'atheists'. In his chief work, the *Tractatio Historico-Polemica* (Turin, [1720]), Bencini strives, above all, to overturn the Spinozist theory of the fraudulence and purely political character of organized religion.⁸⁶ Although Spinoza's *Tractatus* had been on the Index since 1679,⁸⁷ Bencini has no doubt that Spinoza and the *Spinosisti* who deny revelation and miracles, and claim 'that everything narrated in Scripture which is true happened according to the laws of nature and that all things happen necessarily', constitute the chief threat to religion, morality, and civil society in his time.⁸⁸ If the deists claim Moses, Christ, and Mohammed are the three great Impostors, the three real deceivers of mankind, counters Bencini, are Herbert of Cherbury, Hobbes, and Spinoza.⁸⁹ Following Huet, Bencini affirms on linguistic grounds that Moses, not Ezra, as Spinoza holds, wrote the Five Books and that all the apparent discrepancies identified by Hobbes and Spinoza can in fact be adequately explained without prejudicing Scripture's status as divine Revelation and that, whatever the *Spinosisti* say, the Decalogue is not a political device invented by Moses and was truly given to man by God.⁹⁰ The expression 'Spinosisti', as used by Bencini,

denotes a large cohort of philosophical radicals whose intellectual base derives from, or is fundamentally linked to, or has broad affinities with Spinoza's system. This broader matrix includes the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* (of Lodewijk Meyer),⁹¹ and what he terms the '*Mundus Fascinatus*' meaning Bekker's *Betoverde Weereld* which, he says, supplements Spinoza by denying that Satan, demons, angels, spirits, and witches can influence the minds and bodies of men.⁹²

Except only the Papal States among larger territories, ecclesiastical control of intellectual life and book censorship crumbled last in the Iberian Peninsula. But here too, beginning in the 1740s and ending in the 1760s, enlightened ideas—and perhaps even more the increasingly obvious impotence of the traditional machinery to respond effectively to new intellectual challenges—powered the rapid dismemberment of the old system. But again, this by no means involved a shift towards intellectual freedom. Nor was this even the intention. A plan to institute a Spanish royal academy of sciences, drawn up in 1750, envisaged vesting strong censorship powers in the new body—in a style reminiscent of Leibniz—to prevent the publication of books deemed 'pernicious, useless, puerile, unworthy of public attention, contrary to good morals, against good ideas, or contrary to the rules of the sciences and arts'.⁹³ While in both Spain and Portugal the Inquisition remained outwardly in place, if not intact, and as a cultural and spiritual symbol continued to be defended by many, arrests and executions became increasingly rare from the 1740s onwards, and the Holy Office was progressively stripped by the two Iberian Crowns of effective power to censure books, intellectuals, and

academic curricula. In effect, control of censorship was transferred to the governmental sphere.

In Portugal where, by the late 1740s, a full-scale public controversy over philosophy, science, and education had erupted, the inadequacy and bafflement of the Inquisition in the face of this new phenomenon of philosophical debate was manifest. Those who urged reform were moved as much by its ineffectiveness as any desire to curb its power to persecute, though at least a few enlightened nobles, most notably D. Luis da Cunha (d.1749) who drafted wide-ranging plans for the reform of Portugal's institutions in 1748, were genuinely revolted by the Inquisition's arbitrary and secretive procedures, use of torture, obscurantism, and continuing obsession with the alleged threat of 'Judaism'.⁹⁴ Among those urging change, the Oratorian Luis António Verney (1713–92), chief spokesman of the moderate Enlightenment in Portugal, and an ardent advocate of Locke and Newton, insisted, like Leibniz, Thomasiaus, and Van Swieten, on the need for vigorous censorship to ward off dangerous ideas but, equally, that Portugal's censorship must acquire a new and secular basis.⁹⁵ From 1750, Portugal's powerful chief minister under King José I (reigned 1750–77), Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (1699–1782), later *marquês de Pombal*, endeavoured to reform Portugal and its overseas empire. Having served as Portuguese envoy in London and then, for five years (1744–9) in Vienna, where he witnessed the advent of the Austrian Enlightenment and knew Van Swieten, he undoubtedly had some grasp of the wider European context.⁹⁶

Such was the prestige of the Inquisition, though, among bishops, clergy, and much of the general population, that 'enlightened' Portuguese aristocrats, such as Luis da Cunha

and Pombal, saw little prospect of simply abolishing it;⁹⁷ indeed, as regards formal procedures, it was not until 1768 that there was a real break with the past. In that year Pombal set up a new state censorship commission, the Real Mesa Censória, consisting of a *presidente* and seven commissioners of whom only one was an Inquisitor.⁹⁸ Controlled and funded directly by the Crown, the commission consisted partly of secular officials and partly of ecclesiastics with instructions to pursue the traditional censorship goals of the Inquisition—namely eradicating heretical, Jewish, and Muslim books, as well as books apt to corrupt morals—but also to shoulder the new task of suppressing the ‘perverse philosophers of recent times’, especially deistic and atheistic authors.⁹⁹ In the first two years of its existence, the Real Mesa drew up a comprehensive catalogue of the books it thought fit to prohibit. The works of Spinoza, Rousseau, Diderot, d’Argens, La Mettrie, Blount, Collins, Toland, Tindal, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Beverland—indeed, virtually the entire radical Enlightenment—were expressly prohibited.¹⁰⁰ Other anti-Christian writers, notably Voltaire and Hume, were, of course, also banned, as were Locke’s *Essay* and *Reasonableness of Christianity*.

In Iberia, the restructuring of the machinery of censorship and intellectual control under the impact of the Enlightenment produced a context only marginally less stifling intellectually than the one replaced. The new science and medicine had gained official approval and were being encouraged. But the spirit of philosophical enquiry was still being discouraged, only now in new terminology and with new mechanisms of control. The Inquisition had become redundant for all practical purposes, but it was still important to State and

Church in both Iberian kingdoms that the aura surrounding the Inquisition, and with it the culture of censorship and strict intellectual control, should be respected. The final bitter irony for Portugal's *esprits forts*, as well as foreign champions of the Enlightenment, was Pombal's forthright decree of December 1769, banning all books which criticize the Inquisition, a tribunal reviled and vilified throughout Europe by men of the Enlightenment, moderate and radical, but in Spain and Portugal still for reasons of State, and to protect the prestige of the Church, designated 'util e necessaria'.¹⁰¹

The decree sought to justify forbidding criticism of the Inquisition on the basis of the official new enlightenment philosophy of the two crowns. 'Natural Religion', proclaims the edict, is insufficient to uphold that most essential and necessary bond and unifying force in society—belief in an omnipotent God, the 'Supreme Creator' of heaven and earth, who reveals His truth and 'mysteries' only partly through the 'light of natural reason'. Hence revealed religion remains 'absolutely and indispensably necessary for being able to think and feel fittingly about God'.¹⁰² Accordingly, the calumnies about the Portuguese Inquisition circulating abroad, accounting it 'cruel e sanguinaria' when in fact it acts benignly and is authorized by Pope and Crown, are 'abominable', harmful, and must be curbed. The decree required all copies of such works as Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, Van Limborch's history of the Inquisition, and Basnage's histories, containing 'biased and scandalous' stories about the Holy Office, to be surrendered on pain of severe punishment to the Real Mesa within thirty days.¹⁰³

iv. Freedom of Thought, Expression, and of the Press

The history of European censorship between 1650 and 1750 thus clearly demonstrates that the moderate Enlightenment, however far-reaching institutionally and intellectually the changes it brought about, largely rejected freedom of thought, the principle of 'libertas philosophandi' (freedom to philosophize) which Spinoza, in contrast to Hobbes, Locke, and the official stance of the *Encyclopédie*, proclaimed as one of his chief objectives. To most scholars and academics of the age rigorous censorship had to be not just maintained, but upgraded and modernized, because belief in a providential God appeared indispensable as a binding and unifying force in society and consequently 'atheistic' ideas had to be forcefully suppressed. As the Swedish Wolffian, Samuel Klingenstierna, declared in an oration at Uppsala in 1743, the State must suppress three classes of damaging books—those that damage 'good morals', those that harm the State, and, above all, those that attack 'religion', because denial of God means destroying all obligation, duties, and civil pacts, the very underpinning of society itself.¹⁰⁴

Klingenstierna's argument espouses Locke's principle denying 'atheism (which takes away all religion) to have any right of toleration at all'¹⁰⁵ and it is indeed striking how little inclination one finds among the founding fathers of the moderate Enlightenment to promote the case for unrestricted intellectual freedom and a free press. For freedom of conscience and of religious practice, the pivot of Le Clerc's, van Limborch's, and Locke's toleration, no matter how liberally defined, by no means leads to, or necessarily implies, unrestricted access to ideas and arguments, and, still less, to the unimpeded right to express ideas freely.¹⁰⁶ Even

Bayle, whose doctrine of toleration is, in general, broader than Locke's, is extremely reticent when it comes to freedom of the press which, indeed, he nowhere seriously urges.¹⁰⁷

It is thus invariably the case that arguing for full freedom of expression of ideas, access to ideas, and liberty of the press during the Enlightenment is a radical and not a moderate position.¹⁰⁸ Koerbagh, Blount, Toland, Leenhof, Tindal, Mandeville, d'Argens, and others are plainly in favour, though they only make isolated remarks on the subject. The one sustained philosophical basis for such a position is that of Spinoza, so that, here again, there is sufficient reason to classify such a stance as essentially 'Spinozist' in tendency if not always in inspiration.¹⁰⁹ It is owing to the radical philosophical positions he has already adopted on man, nature, and society that Spinoza can insist that the 'state can pursue no safer course than to regard piety and religion as consisting solely in the exercise of charity and just dealing and that the right of the sovereign, in both the religious and secular spheres, should be restricted to men's actions, with everyone being allowed to think what he will and say what he thinks'.¹¹⁰

Consequently, despite the end of ecclesiastical control over censorship, mid-eighteenth-century Europe still presented, in the eyes of radical thinkers, a thoroughly dismal prospect. D'Argens, speaking through his fictitious Chinese observer of the European scene in the late 1730s, remarks that were the great philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome so often discussed in his day to return to life, they would all be pounced upon and suppressed by authority and the people—burnt in Spain and Italy, he suggests, and incarcerated in Paris and Vienna: 'Thales, Anaximander,

Anaximenes, Pherecydes, Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Epicurus', he observes, would all meet an unenviable fate.¹¹¹ Furthermore, held d'Argens, while it was the clergy who opposed Descartes, tried to render Locke odious, and persecuted Malebranche, it was assuredly the common people who make all this possible and who chiefly obstruct the advance of 'philosophy' by gullibly and uncritically adopting the views of those they consider the guardians of religion while simultaneously despising the greatest philosophers without knowing anything of their work.¹¹²

Only with the further progress of toleration and freedom of thought, and the progress of 'philosophy', would it eventually prove possible to disarm the clergy and strip them of their influence over the people. Thankfully, declares d'Argens, a start had been made in Holland, and it is to that land Europe is principally indebted for the publication 'des ouvrages des plus grands hommes'. Indeed, he adds elsewhere, without the liberty afforded by the Dutch, half the works of Bayle could never have seen the light of day. Had he lived elsewhere than in Holland, this great *philosophe* would either never have dared write them or else would have been suppressed by a crowd of monks.¹¹³

6

LIBRARIES AND ENLIGHTENMENT

i. The 'Universal Library'

Libraries, especially large libraries, esteemed for rare books and manuscripts, may be described as the workshop of the early Enlightenment both moderate and radical. It was assuredly in Europe's libraries—princely, academic, aristocratic, and private—that the opening up of fresh horizons and many revolutionary new insights of the period originated. Furthermore, while the Radical Enlightenment, when propagating ideas and distributing forbidden books, remained a clandestine, forbidden movement, in the refined ambience of Europe's great libraries it could unmask bibliographically, gaining an allotted work-space and a fortified base. But this was a base which evolved only after the middle of the seventeenth century with the advent of the newly burgeoning collections on philosophy and science. For such a development required a totally new perception of books and libraries. Only after the Thirty Years' War, and the onset of the intellectual crisis, did a changed and dramatically widened culture of reading, publishing, and bibliophilia develop, which then, in turn, helped drive the revolution in ideas.

Until the mid-seventeenth century, marking the end, broadly speaking, of Europe's confessional era, European libraries and librarianship were shaped by the two great cultural impulses of the sixteenth century—the Renaissance and the Reformation. It sufficed for any prince, patrician, ecclesiastic, or nobleman eager to impress contemporaries

with his magnificence, status, or love of learning, to display some of the Greek and Roman classics in fine bindings, a few humanistic works, and a selection of theological and pious texts expounding whichever confession he professed. Court, civic, university, and aristocratic, as well as ecclesiastical libraries were invariably small and usually doctrinally narrow. To have amassed large quantities of literature describing different faiths and contrary theological traditions, or heresies of one's own Church, or philosophies other than those taught in the colleges, would have seemed superfluous if not positively suspect. Furthermore, accounts of distant parts of the world and non-European peoples and cultures were scarce and seldom sought after. Science and philosophy beyond what was in the classics were found mainly in the personal libraries of university professors, who, however, acquired little that was not in Latin and narrowly academic. Even the grandest libraries of the confessional era, such as the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, built and adorned in the 1550s, were designed to hold only very restricted numbers of books, most of the Marciana's wall-space being covered with large murals, including several by Tintoretto and Veronese.

Dramatically different was the 'universal' library, institutional and private, of the post-confessional era. An entirely new phenomenon, it evolved rapidly into a potent cultural force which, in the case of libraries owned by individuals, whether nobles, professionals, academics, or clergy, culminated during the first half of the eighteenth century before beginning to decline from around 1750.¹ After that, so great was the output of books and periodicals, it was no longer feasible for any but rulers, large institutions, and the wealthiest nobles to seek true comprehensiveness in the

ordering of their libraries.² Thus the classic age of the 'universal library' lasted from around 1670 to 1750. Its advent was often fairly rapid in the case of leading princely, aristocratic, and the best private scholarly libraries, but noticeably slower in civic and university collections, and slowest of all in ecclesiastical libraries.

The first prominent *érudit* fully to express the ideal of the post-confessional, Early Enlightenment library was Gabriel Naudé (1600–53), one of the century's most renowned intellectual 'libertines'.³ Having organized several large libraries in France and, for cardinals, in Rome, Naudé's ideas on bibliography and librarianship were largely shaped by his own experience. While briefly, late in life, he also tended Queen Christina's books in Stockholm, the real summit of his career was as keeper of Mazarin's library, which, in the 1640s under his care, became the largest and most impressive in France. The Bibliothèque Mazarine, open to *érudits* for research from 1643, was indeed the first of the *grandes bibliothèques* of the new era. The guiding conception behind the Mazarine, however, was rooted in Naudé's libertine philosophical vision. Steeped in the Italian philosophical heretics of the Renaissance—Pomponazzi, Campanella, Cardano, and Vanini—and a confirmed Pyrrhonist as well as an admirer of Montaigne and a friend of Gassendi, Naudé was unrivalled for his breadth of erudition and bibliographical grasp.

Naudé's treatise on libraries and librarianship, the *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, first published in 1644 (and published in an English translation by John Evelyn in 1661), advocates, in line with his libertine principles, the ideal of the non-polemical, non-confessional, 'universal' library. He insists on 'universality' rather than theological specificity as

the true guiding principle for a library of stature.⁴ Moreover, the 'universality' he invokes encompassed not just all religions and philosophies but also science and all knowledge.

Authority and tradition need to be balanced against innovation and new research. True bibliophiles must acquire the output of all the best modern, as well as ancient, authors, invariably selecting the best editions both in the original language and, where appropriate, French or Latin translation to facilitate the perusal of works in less familiar languages, such as Greek and Arabic. Libraries of any standing should acquire the writings of 'all those who have innovated or changed things in the sciences' for to ignore innovation is to leave our minds weak and enslaved to outmoded notions.⁵ In astronomy, he recommends Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo because these are the men who had transformed that science. In theology, it is no extravagance, he insists, to include heretical writers because Protestant texts have to be refuted and Catholics have always been permitted to own the Talmud and Koran, works which 'vomit a thousand blasphemies against Jesus Christ and our faith and are more dangerous than those of the

Protestants'.⁶ If the inevitable consequence is the proliferation of much larger libraries than in the past, Naudé urges collectors and librarians to ensure cohesion by shelving books by discipline, starting with the oldest authorities and commentaries on their writings, and proceeding by stages to the most recent, thereby conveying a coherent sense of the development of each branch of learning.⁷ He reproaches the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, the great library instituted by Cardinal Borromeo in Milan, one of the few regularly open to the public in his day, for shelving books 'indifféremment', that is, without regard to intellectual order.

Neither the contents nor the use of a *grande bibliothèque* can be adequate or orderly unless the head librarian is a genuine scholar with the requisite erudition to assemble, classify, and order books systematically. A great library must be accessible to readers. But this is impossible without crucial facilities, especially a well-planned and conscientiously maintained catalogue and sufficient supervision by salaried assistants to keep regular opening hours, which should be announced. Naudé judged that there were then only three libraries in all Europe affording the kind of regular access he recommends, namely the Ambrosiana, the Angelica in Rome, and the Bodleian in Oxford. These, however, were not necessarily the best and most comprehensive European libraries. Hitherto, the foremost—Naudé ranks highest the Vatican, the Medici library in Florence, Venice's Marciana, the Antoniana in Padua, and the Bibliothèque du Roy, founded by Francis I in Paris—lacked regular opening hours and were closed to most readers. By the time his treatise was published, however, the great collection he had created, the Mazarine, outstripped all the rest, though it was soon temporarily dispersed during the French civil conflict of the Frondes (1648–53).

Needless to say, there was no sudden comprehensive change across the board. The disruptive impact of the Thirty Years' War and the Frondes exerted an inhibiting effect which lasted some years. Furthermore, many rulers and nobles with long-established libraries, as well as ecclesiastics, universities, and municipalities, showed little inclination down to, and even beyond, the early eighteenth century to discard the old pattern of the small, confessionally based library anchored in authority and tradition. In 1750 there were still many libraries of the old type. As late as 1770 middle-

sized German Jesuit libraries, such as those of Düsseldorf and Münster, typically boasted only 4,000 to 6,000 volumes, mostly by Jesuit authors, and they still wholly lacked Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Locke, let alone Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, and Rousseau.⁸ Yet during the early eighteenth century many hitherto traditional, confessionally orientated libraries seemingly felt compelled to break with the past and conspicuously to step up spending on acquisitions and facilities. The libraries of the great Benedictine and Augustinian abbeys of Bavaria and Austria, bastions of confessional thinking though they were, in the 1720s began buying furiously in science, philosophy, and other new disciplines, several of their libraries rising above 15,000 volumes by the 1740s.⁹

If the great libraries of Italy presided down to the early seventeenth century, it was the *grandes bibliothèques* of France and Germany which predominated during the Early Enlightenment. Mazarin reconstituted his collection of 40,000 books after the Frondes and, on his death, left it to his new foundation, the Collège Mazarin, or Collège des Quatre Nations, the site of his huge Baroque tomb as well as his 'spiritual' and educational legacy, situated opposite the Louvre on the banks of the Seine. Accommodated from the late 1660s in what, under Colbert's direction and designed by the royal architect, Louis Le Vau, was reckoned among the finest buildings in Paris, the Bibliothèque Mazarine remained one of the foremost Parisian collections, open to readers from all over Europe throughout the age of the Early Enlightenment and beyond.

It was rivalled—but in comprehensiveness, if not rarities, scarcely surpassed—only by the Bibliothèque du Roy. Having

acquired many of Mazarin's manuscripts and Fouquet's 'superbe bibliothèque', the French royal library, by the time Louis XIV's personal rule began in 1661, overflowed with duplicates, unidentified items, and uncatalogued rarities. All this, and the library's accelerating growth, prompted the king, on Colbert's recommendation, to introduce major structural changes. Systematic shelving and cataloguing began, under Colbert's direction, in January 1668.¹⁰ Naudé's chief precondition, a scholarly, full-time, professional librarian capable of conceiving and ordering a 'universal' library, was satisfied in the person of Nicolas Clément (c. 1647–1712), a Lorrainer, previously Colbert's librarian, whom even Richard Simon acknowledged exhibited a 'merveilleuse connoissance des livres ... de cette magnifique bibliothèque'.¹¹ But being of undistinguished birth, Clément, however superbly qualified, had to remain content with the lesser title of 'sous-bibliothécaire'.

By 1683 Clément had finished his catalogue of the royal manuscripts and begun his seven-volume folio index of the king's printed books ordered by subject. The library meanwhile grew steadily and strengthened its 'universal' character, helped by the issuing of instructions to French envoys abroad to keep an eye on the book trade and acquire novel, special, and rare items for the king. By 1688, reportedly, the royal collection comprised 10,000 manuscripts and over 43,000 printed books. At this point Clément embarked on a new and more sophisticated catalogue, featuring a double classification system, with eventually thirteen volumes listing books by subject and nineteen by author.¹² After Louis' death, the regent, Philippe, duc d'Orléans, resolved to move the royal library to the present site of the Bibliothèque Nationale, in the rue de Richelieu.

Supervised by the then librarian, the pleasure-loving but erudite Abbé Jean-Paul de Bignon (1662–1743), the mighty collection was transferred to its spacious new quarters in 1724. But while the French royal library possessed dazzling strengths, especially in rarities and oriental manuscripts, its great weakness (which Bignon did little to rectify), was its acquiring modern works almost exclusively in French, Latin, and Italian, eschewing English, German, Dutch, and other non-Latin tongues.

Learned readers of the Early Enlightenment, French or foreign, researching in France invariably concentrated chiefly on Paris. ‘It has been truly said,’ remarked the Danish *savant*, Ludvig Holberg, who spent fourteen months exploring the Parisian libraries in 1714–15, and subsequently returned several times, ‘that there are more libraries in Paris than are to be found in the whole of the rest of the kingdom,’ noting that besides such ‘public’ libraries as the Mazarine and Saint Victor, there were several ample monastic libraries ‘access to which may be easily obtained’.¹³ Holberg also regularly frequented the ‘excellent library’ of the Abbé de Bignon, the royal librarian and a court preacher of exceptional eloquence, who rose to become *président* of the Académie des Sciences. In the early eighteenth century his personal library was reckoned one of the best in France until, to the dismay of many, it was closed, packed away, and shipped off to Holland, where it was sold in 1725. Comprising nearly 30,000 books, this collection took The Hague booksellers Pierre de Hondt and Jean Swart (who were allowed to use part of the Binnenhof for the purpose), eight weeks to auction.¹⁴

A few fine libraries evolved in French provincial cities, but even these often ended up in Paris. Among these was the

late seventeenth-century collection of over 15,600 printed volumes and 450 manuscripts assembled by Louis Emery Bigot (1626–89), a leader of the *noblesse de robe* of Rouen, which was then inherited by heirs in Paris. This library was catalogued by the young Prosper Marchand in 1706, for the Parisian booksellers who auctioned it.¹⁵ The choicest private libraries in Paris often belonged to key officials and members of the *noblesse de robe*, among them that of Bertrand de Chauvelin, the royal keeper of the seals, consulted sometimes by Saint-Hyacinthe and other early eighteenth-century *philosophes*,¹⁶ and that of Bernard de Rieux, *président* of the Parlement of Paris, who, despite helping to direct the royal censorship, assembled an outstanding collection of forbidden manuscripts and clandestine printed literature, including everything by Spinoza.¹⁷ Yet the court nobility—unlike the often deeply conservative mass of the provincial nobility—also produced some of the great bibliophiles of the age. The famously astute Marc-René, marquis d’Argenson (1652–1721), appointed *lieutenant-général* of police in Paris in 1697, may have enforced book censorship in Paris for over twenty years but was also an avid collector of rare books, censored or not. His younger relative, René-Louis de Voyer, marquis d’Argenson (1694–1757) was a close friend of the radical *philosophe* Boulainvilliers and acquired many of his manuscripts; his splendid library, inherited by his son the marquis de Paulmy, was transferred in 1755 into the building later known as the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, which remains today one of the principal historic libraries of Paris.¹⁸

Initially, even the Bibliothèque du Roy and the Mazarine, as well as Europe’s other foremost libraries such as the Bibliotheca Augustiana at Wolfenbüttel, the imperial library

in Vienna, and the electoral library in Berlin (from 1701 the Prussian Royal Library), relied on bequests, gifts, and sporadic purchases rather than planned acquisitions based on a regular income. Only from the late seventeenth century onwards, commencing with Wolfenbüttel and the Bibliothèque du Roy, did planned acquisitions and an assigned income become the rule for Europe's *grandes bibliothèques*.¹⁹ As both the size and the use of libraries increased, not only was there pressure to spend more on books and library staff, but also to provide seating and desks, extend opening hours, and even install heating and lighting.²⁰ Moreover, as the concept of the universal library developed and great collections became less rare, the impulse to transfer the books into grander, more impressive buildings, which began with the relocation of the Mazarine, inexorably gathered momentum. The famous Rotunda (see Plate 10) built to accommodate the books at Wolfenbüttel was inaugurated in 1704, while the imposing new quarters for the Bibliothèque du Roy were completed in 1724, just ahead of the magnificent new Hofbibliothek in Vienna, reconstructed between 1722 and 1729 to designs by Fischer von Erlach, where the Neapolitan radical *philosophe* Giannone was one of the first and most avid readers.²¹ In 1738, by which date the imperial library had been swollen by the acquisition of the famous collections, acquired after their deaths, of Prince Eugene of Savoy and Baron Hohendorf, the latter's 7,000 books acquired at auction in The Hague in 1720, the emperor's collection had reportedly grown to nearly 200,000 titles.²²

First-rank 'universal' libraries, even by the middle of the eighteenth century, were inevitably few and far between. Paris was the only place they were to be encountered in France, the

Bodleian was the nearest thing in Britain, while in the entire Holy Roman Empire scarcely more than four could be specified, namely Wolfenbüttel, Vienna, Berlin, and Dresden. The first of these, the Augustiniana, probably the largest in Europe, from the mid-seventeenth century to the early eighteenth, was founded by Duke August of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel (d. 1666), a bibliomaniac prepared to spend much of his state revenue on books. As early as the mid-1660s, his library reportedly comprised 130,000 volumes, many purchased in Holland by the duke's resident, the libertine historian Lieuwe van Aitzema.²³ After Leibniz became director at Wolfenbüttel, as well as the smaller Court library at Hanover, in 1676, the great library was open to all respectable readers irrespective of confessional background. Montesquieu, who visited Wolfenbüttel in 1729, declared the 'bibliothèque ... une véritable belle chose'.²⁴ Vienna and Berlin, meanwhile, though lagging somewhat behind until the early years of the new century, were also impressive. The Berlin Hofbibliothek grew by 1694, reportedly, to around 90,000 printed items in over 20,000 bound volumes.²⁵

Leibniz emerged as the leading advocate of the 'universal' library concept in Germany, and later, through his links with Czar Peter the Great, also in Russia.²⁶ He proudly styled the Augustiniana, in 1695, an 'assemblée des plus grands hommes de tous les siècles et de toutes les nations qui nous disent leurs pensées les plus choisies'.²⁷ Keen to enhance the library as an instrument of research and intellectual exploration, he emulated Clément in stressing the need for comprehensive subject catalogues, as well as those of authors and titles.²⁸ A reorganized general catalogue, compiled under his direction,

was installed in 1699. It was likewise he who secured an assigned regular income for the library, though his plea for heating and lighting in winter in at least one room, as in Berlin, ‘car le froid et le soir servent de prétexte en hyver pour ne rien faire’, was rejected on grounds of the increased fire risk.

The magnificent court library at Dresden was largely the creation of Elector Augustus II of Saxony (ruled 1694–1733) who, from 1697, was also King of Poland. This famous collection, supplemented in 1718 with the books of the recently deceased Duke Moritz Wilhelm of Sachsen-Zeitz, featured numerous rarities and Near Eastern manuscripts acquired in Poland and at Constantinople, besides a comprehensive run of western publications. In 1728, in prompt emulation of Paris and Vienna, this collection was also transferred to grander surroundings, being installed in three pavilions of the famous Dresden Zwinger.²⁹ The library’s European standing was further enhanced in 1743, with the publication of a three-volume catalogue of its treasures compiled by its erudite librarian, Johann Christian Götze (1692–1749).

Increasingly, it was expected that *grandes bibliothèques* should demonstrate their preeminence by publishing their catalogues, a process culminating in the 1740s with the appearance of the catalogue of the Bibliothèque du Roy.³⁰ The resulting volumes were themselves scholarly research tools of the first order. The three covering the royal holdings in theology, brought out in 1742, for example, disclose that the king possessed not just virtually all Catholic theological literature but much of the output of the Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Greek Orthodox, and fringe Protestants as well,

besides rich holdings of Islamic and Jewish books and a choice assortment of 'Athées, Impies et Libertins', including an entire section of 'Spinosistes' under which category appeared, among others, the writings of Charles Blount.³¹ Strikingly, the French king's bookshelves featured no fewer than five copies of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, two in Latin and three in French.

A 'great library', insisted Leibniz, is characterized above all by universality and comprehensiveness. Consequently, it must be up-to-date, reflecting not just past progress in each branch of learning but the current state of knowledge and debate. Since few collections could measure up to such a standard, even the most assiduous researchers often encountered greater problems in finding the materials they required than Leibniz deemed acceptable.³² In part the difficulty was met, for the affluent at least, by a growing fashion for leisurely European library tours, such as that which Denmark's foremost man of letters, Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), undertook at the age of 20, in 1714–15, in particular to Paris and Rome. In Paris, Holberg read especially in the Mazarine where, he later recalled, Bayle's *Dictionnaire* was the work in greatest demand, being seized each day at opening time with 'extraordinary avidity' by whichever eager researcher could reach the prized volumes first.³³

To supplement the *grandes bibliothèques* readers, even in Paris, had to rely also on the major private libraries. Mindful that there were very few of these which were truly comprehensive, Leibniz also encouraged the formation of small, select libraries which, if thoughtfully planned, could still in some degree be 'universal'. That wealthy bibliophiles

should be capable of assembling a selection of books accurately reflecting the current state of ideas without the advice of an *érudit* such as himself was hardly to be expected. Accordingly, to show what such a small 'universal' library would be like, Leibniz penned a select bibliography for the enlightened reader comprising just 2,500 titles.³⁴ Later, in Berlin, the learned Huguenot pastor, Jean-Henri Samuel Formey, following his example, in 1746 published his recommendations on how to form a 'bibliothèque peu nombreuse mais choisie'. Any reader wishing to appraise contemporary philosophical debate, judged Formey, needs the works of Wolff, Leibniz, Locke, Malebranche, Fontenelle, and Jean Le Clerc in particular.³⁵ Furthermore, given that Christianity was now under relentless attack from deistic and Naturalistic *philosophes*, the small 'universal' library must include what he deemed the three most effective defences of revealed religion against Naturalism, fatalism, and materialism, which, he says, were Abbadie's *Traité*, Houtteville's *Religion Chrétienne*, and Burnet's *Défence de la religion*.

In Italy, meanwhile, libraries which had led Europe in the sixteenth century fell conspicuously behind during the later seventeenth, though Montesquieu, visiting the Marciana and the Ambrosiana in 1728, praised the facilities at the former and was struck by how well the latter was maintained, its rich store of manuscripts, accessibility to the public, and provision of paper, ink, and pens for readers.³⁶ Yet both had entered a stagnant phase with scant buying of foreign books. While few libraries anywhere could match the priceless holdings of the Medici at Florence, and acquisitions continued under Cosimo III after 1670, the new ruler's zeal to purge heterodox,

libertine, and Protestant works from the library, and to preclude further procurement of 'forbidden books', deprived the collections of their 'universal' character. Some of the great Italian libraries did create reserved stores of 'prohibited works' but practised a rigorous censorship, refusing access to readers lacking dispensations from the Inquisition. Holberg spent four months in Rome early in 1716, exploring the public libraries, where he found the staff exceptionally obliging, not only responding promptly to every request but even furnishing pens, ink, and paper without charge. 'No-one was permitted, however, to read forbidden works without the permission of the Inquisitors,' he records, and since 'almost every book I asked for belonged to the prohibited category', he obtained little that he wanted.³⁷ Once, he recalls, he received Bayle's *Dictionnaire* from an attendant, a simple, unlettered monk who was afterwards 'severely reprimanded for his negligence by the librarian, a Dominican father and member of the College of Inquisitors'.³⁸

The United Provinces were similarly a land lacking a great 'universal' library, despite being the country most visited by European bibliophiles and *érudits* buying for themselves and others, and the best place to locate bibliographical rarities. The books on sale included not only the published output of the Republic but the contents of numerous libraries transported from France, Germany, and the Habsburg southern Netherlands. Effectively, Holland was the headquarters of the European book trade. Between 1700 and 1750 no less than 1,037 book auctions took place in The Hague alone.³⁹ Much of what was sold remained in the Republic but was dispersed among innumerable medium-sized and small libraries owned by the country's large élite of

officials, regents, lawyers, physicians, academics, publishers, and preachers. What was comprehensively lacking were federal, provincial, or civic collections of real size and distinction.

ii. The Crisis of the Universities

The library of the University of Leiden, perhaps the nearest approximation to a major public collection in the Netherlands, had impressed visitors in the early seventeenth century mainly on account of its unrivalled stock of Near Eastern and other oriental manuscripts. But in common with academic authorities throughout Europe, the curators were remarkably slow to embrace the new 'universal' library concept, preferring until the late 1680s to keep to the old pattern of buying only in Latin and sticking to time-honoured authorities. The transformation of the Leiden library into a comprehensive, Early Enlightenment resource began only in 1689 with the purchase, in London, of the library of the libertine scholar Isaac Vossius, whose 4,000 books included numerous rarities and modern philosophical, theological, and scientific works.⁴⁰ It was, in fact, only in 1689 that the library acquired even such essential 'moderns' as Galileo, Descartes, and Newton.

The slow and difficult transition of the European university library to the new model stemmed partly from intellectual and confessional inertia but probably still more from the wider social and cultural crisis of the universities evident in England from the 1660s for over a century and virtually throughout the continent during the late seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century. Since the Reformation and Counter-Reformation until the early seventeenth century,

Europe's universities and university life had expanded dramatically almost everywhere, driven by the two great cultural and social impulses of the age—confessionalization and the bureaucratization of the monarchical State. Much larger numbers of young men trained in theology and law were needed than had been the case previously, to staff the expanding apparatus of Church and State.⁴¹ Many new universities were founded while older ones grew,⁴² albeit confined academically within a narrow range of disciplines overwhelmingly dominated by theology and law.⁴³ But then, after 1650, a combination of social and especially cultural factors plunged Europe's universities into the deepest and most prolonged crisis in their history. The confessionalization process was over and the hegemony of theology in academic life was beginning to recede.⁴⁴ Furthermore, while the monarchical State inexorably expanded, needing ever more officials, officers, and diplomats, the universities proved unable, despite a further growth in legal studies, and an incipient revolution in academic medicine, beginning in the 1660s, to offer teaching and facilities in most of the new subjects gaining ground in society and general culture. At most universities one simply could not study history, geography, chemistry, physics, biology, the new medicine, or modern languages systematically, and in many no modern philosophy either. To fill the gap there was a growing shift both to private tutoring for young noblemen and sons of officials, especially in modern languages, literature, Latin, mathematics, and science, and the establishment of specialized colleges, often mainly for nobles, training future army and naval officers, as well as special schools teaching medicine, surgery, mining, engineering, and architecture.

Hence the essence of the deep crisis in Europe's universities was lack of curricular flexibility and the funds with which to restructure and diversify teaching. There was no great secret about the causes of the crisis, which indeed were obvious enough. As a report to the senate of Heidelberg university stressed in March 1680, student numbers were falling, and would continue to do so, because of the paucity of professors and the inadequacy of teaching in older and especially new fields of study.⁴⁵ The problem was not to grasp what was undermining Europe's universities but to find the resources with which to transform them into larger, more diversified, and better funded institutions reflecting the changing requirements and expanding horizons of Early Enlightenment society.

In the circumstances, it was simply impossible for such an immense restructuring to be tackled, given the large number of universities,⁴⁶ in more than a handful of specially favoured, élite institutions. Consequently, after 1680 most universities not only ceased growing but steadily contracted. Nothing could have been less typical than the remarkably successful inauguration of the new Brandenburg-Prussian university of Halle, in July 1694, amid fanfares and in the presence of the Elector, 700 students, and academic celebrities such as Christian Thomasius and Franz Buddeus.⁴⁷ For except for Halle, Jena, Leipzig, and later the new Hanoverian university of Göttingen, the German universities overall were inexorably declining. Total student numbers at the now thirty-four German universities fell uninterruptedly from the 1680s throughout the eighteenth century, often, as at Greifswald and Erfurt, quite steeply.⁴⁸ Dwindling prestige and student numbers induced even the most inert to try

desperately to upgrade their libraries. The collection at Greifswald, in Swedish Pomerania, was typical in this respect: small, confessionally rigid, restricted to old authors, and comprising a mere 1,100 volumes in 1713; it nearly quintupled in size to 5,286 volumes by 1748, and markedly expanded its range. Yet still the university continued to decline.⁴⁹

Lack of adequate libraries were one of the most glaring deficiencies. But the formation of a modern 'universal' library was logistically complex and extremely costly, and apart from rare exceptions, notably Oxford, where endowed funding proved decisive, the resources were simply unavailable. Even at Oxford, where there was an alarming lack of books in modern languages, ensuring planned, balanced growth proved to be no simple matter. Having begun in 1602 with 2,000 volumes the Bodleian by 1674, when the first catalogue was compiled, had reached the not unimpressive size of 20,000 books and manuscripts.⁵⁰ A report of 1697 extolled the Bodleian as the 'glory of our university and kingdom in its kind', an attraction which draws 'hither strangers even from countries beyond the seas to their benefit and to the honour and profit of the nation' but also warned of the dangers of failing to maintain purchasing momentum.⁵¹ The reputation not just of Oxford but of the kingdom was at stake. Besides spending on 'new accessions which are new helps and encouragements to learning', particular priorities were to complete the 'great catalogue', put the Bodleian's estimated 2,995 manuscripts in proper order, and ensure 'every book, shelf, etc. be well brushed and dusted once a year'.⁵²

When Halle was inaugurated in 1694 it was not yet considered essential to concentrate bibliographical resources

in the university library.⁵³ The elector's advisers expected Halle's advantageous location, and the numerous eminent professors attracted from elsewhere, would suffice to ensure success. It was then still regarded as normal for a leading academy to rely chiefly, for its bibliographical resources, on its professors, who would bring their own books with them. Thus, in its early years Halle's luminaries included Jakob Thomasius who, at his death, in 1684, owned 8,441 books, his son Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) who amassed more, the theologian Friedrich Benedikt Carpzow (d.1699) who boasted 15,512 volumes and the theologian Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten (1706–57), a famous bibliophile who possessed 17,500 titles.⁵⁴ But attitudes changed noticeably in the early eighteenth century. It came to be recognized that a university required library strength beyond that of its professors if it was to attain the intellectual universality upon which its standing was now seen to rest. It was the vision and energy of Burchard Gotthelf Struve (1671–1738), during the years he was librarian (1697–1704) there, and the local prince's support, which made possible the ambitious restructuring and expansion which transformed Jena's library into a renowned public collection drawing scholars from across Protestant Europe, the factor which in turn enabled Jena to remain at the forefront of German universities.⁵⁵

However, it was at Göttingen that the ideal of the 'universal' library was most impressively realized in the academic context. An entirely new university founded in 1734 by George II, king of England, Scotland, and Ireland and Elector of Hanover, in part as a mercantilist measure to draw prestige, students, and the trade they brought with them away from the three great east-central German

universities—Leipzig, Jena, and Halle. It was planned from the outset that Göttingen's library should eclipse all other academic libraries in Germany, and announced in the Hamburg press, as early as 1732, that the new foundation would boast a large, well-furnished reading-room designed as an integral part of the main university building.⁵⁶ The concept, scope, and facilities of the library, predictably, were strongly influenced by the legacy of Leibniz.⁵⁷ On opening, in 1734, it already contained 12,000 volumes purchased by the State from private collections, including that of the renowned bibliophile Von Uffenbach, in Frankfurt. Boosted by its assigned annual income, as well as gifts, Göttingen's holdings rose to 16,000 volumes by 1746 and around 30,000 by the late 1750s.⁵⁸

In Sweden–Finland the issue of university libraries was a pressing one, in view of the comparative rarity of noble and other major private libraries, especially after the royal library in Stockholm was devastated by fire in 1697. In the late seventeenth century the only major aristocratic library in Sweden belonged to the chancellor of Uppsala university, the richest nobleman in the land, Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie (1622–86) who amassed some 8,000 books. Apart from the royal library, no other collections could aspire to 'universal' status. Even the rich and famous general Carl Gustaf Wrangel (1613–76), a noted bibliophile by Swedish standards, left a mere 2,400 volumes at his castle at Skokloster.⁵⁹ Gradually, Uppsala university library came to be viewed as the major Swedish collection for scholars and researchers. In 1669, La Gardie donated a collection of medieval Icelandic and other rare manuscripts and subsequently transferred more of his books to the university library. But it was only around 1700,

when it began to be systematically reorganized and expanded as a modern 'universal' library, that it emerged as the foremost library of the Swedish monarchy. Rehoused in the Gustavianum, the principal building of the university, the library grew under the competent care of its librarian, Eric Benzelius the Younger (1675–1743), a scholar with wide European connections, who subscribed to the new learned periodicals, instituted planned regular acquisitions, bought at Dutch book auctions and even in Paris, and compiled a new catalogue, rendering Uppsala by 1720 one of the largest and best academic libraries in Europe.⁶⁰

iii. Shelving the Two Enlightenments

In an age in which the *grandes bibliothèques* were few and far between and even those that existed might suddenly be annihilated—the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 eliminated most of the royal library there, the flames reportedly consuming 70,000 books⁶¹—the private 'universal' library was of crucial importance. After around 1750, the diversification of knowledge and the proliferation of publications outstripped what even the most zealous individual bibliophile could acquire, and the ideal of the 'universal' library fell into desuetude except for large institutional collections. But until around 1750 the large private library covering all fields was one of the prime motors of the Enlightenment. Some of the choicest were found in places where there was no Court, no university, and no great aristocrats. At Hamburg, for example, were the famous collections of Johann Albert Fabricius (1668–1736), a professor at the civic gymnasium who amassed 32,000 volumes, most said to be enhanced with 'good annotations' in his own hand, Michael Richeys (d.1761), who likewise

possessed over 30,000 books, the noted Hebraist, Johan Christian Wolf (1683–1739) with 25,000, and Johann Friedrich Mayer (1650–1712), over many years the chief spokesman of Lutheran orthodoxy in the city, who had 18,000 books.⁶² Most of these Hamburg collections included radical works, though few could compete in this respect with the highly expert anti-Epicurean and anti-Spinozist deist Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) who possessed Spinoza, Beverland, Bredenburg, and Cuffeler in Latin, Dirk Santvoort and Wyermars in Dutch, and—most unusually—Toland, Collins, and Mandeville in English.⁶³

In Dresden the Court library may have been the chief attraction for the erudite, but only slightly less imposing, bibliographically speaking, was the library of 30,000 titles amassed by the Lutheran superintendant, Valentin Ernst Loescher (1673–1749), who owned copies of practically every impious work of the age. Smaller but more specialized in ‘prohibited books’ on which he was an acknowledged expert, was the library of Johann Christian Gottfried Jahn who possessed, besides the complete works of Vanini, Spinoza, and Leenhof, Meyer’s *Philosophia*, Koerbagh’s *Bloemhof*, Cuffeler’s *Specimen*, Wyermars’ *Den Ingebeelde Chaos*, Boulainvilliers’ *Vie de Mahomed*, Lenglet Dufresnoy’s *Refutation*, and a remarkable collection of clandestine philosophical texts in manuscript.⁶⁴

The very fact that such private libraries as those of Löscher and Jahn in Dresden contained extensive collections of radical philosophical literature, printed and manuscript, which were the objects of careful research, illustrates the ambiguous role of the ‘universal’ library as an instrument of the incipient Enlightenment. Such libraries were centres of

study but also meeting-places for groups of *érudits* who discussed the books they found there and the ideas they contained, and stimulated in each other an involvement with radical, as well as mainstream, Enlightenment thought. The notorious connoisseur and collector of clandestine philosophical literature, Peter Friedrich Arpe, author of the *Apologia pro Vanino* (Apology for Vanini), published at 'Cosmopolis' (i.e. Rotterdam) in 1712, who originated from Kiel, seemingly acquired his taste for such material while studying at Copenhagen and mixing in the prestigious intellectual circles attached to the Danish capital's main private libraries.⁶⁵ Among those whose books he regularly perused was Christian Reitzer (1665–1736), a jurist possessing most of the republican works of Johan and Pieter de la Court, and hundreds of other volumes in Dutch.⁶⁶ a champion of Cartesianism and freedom of thought with a large library, including numerous 'forbidden' works, and Frederik Rostgaard (1671–1745), professor of classical philology at the university, whose 8,187 books, auctioned in 1726, included two manuscript copies of Bodin's *Colloque Heptoplomères*, the 1534 edition of Pomponazzi's *De Immortalitate Animae*, Beverland's works, Cuffeler's *Specimen*, Wachter's *Spinozismus*, and several other Spinozistic works.⁶⁷

Copenhagen was indeed a major focus of early Enlightenment bibliophilia, although the university library, one of the most extensive in Europe, with over 10,000 volumes as early as 1662, was decimated by a fire which swept through the university in October 1728.⁶⁸ Denmark's foremost bibliomaniac was assuredly Count Otto Thott (1703–85) who, as a student in 1725, accompanied Holberg

on forays into the Parisian libraries. Thott purchased books everywhere and on every subject, his library eventually totalling an estimated 120,000 volumes, the posthumously published catalogue of which ran to twelve volumes.⁶⁹ It included one of the most extensive collections of forbidden philosophical books and manuscripts to be found anywhere in eighteenth-century Europe.⁷⁰

Perhaps nowhere else, though, was the contribution of the private 'universal' library to the progress of the early Enlightenment, moderate and radical, more crucial than in Italy, where the impact of censorship, the unavailability of foreign books, and the decay of the great libraries all conspired to create a situation in which a few medium and large private libraries containing rare foreign works and 'libri prohibiti' provided the indispensable channel through which flowed the philosophical ferment of the late seventeenth century, and later. In Naples in the 1680s and 1690s, the library of Giuseppe Valletta served as the headquarters and discussion forum of the philosophical *novatores*.⁷¹ More impressive still, and vital to the nurturing of the Early Enlightenment in Florence, were the 25,000 books and 2,873 manuscripts belonging to Magliabechi, a bibliomaniac who sought, read, wrote about, and discussed books to the point of neglecting everything else, even his personal appearance.⁷² A bibliographical titan, who influenced many without ever having published a book himself, and in whose honour a celebratory medal was cast, portraying him seated, holding a book, Magliabechi, like Naudé and Leibniz, considered universality—the encompassing of the whole of human thought and knowledge—the test of a *libreria grande*. Even a small, select library, he urged Cardinal Francesco Maria de'

Medici when, in 1695, the latter was planning such a collection for the Villa di Lampeggio, must have a 'universal core' if it is to be of any standing. He advised the cardinal to shelve all the Greek, Roman, and Arabic philosophers one would find in a great library plus Bacon, Gassendi, Descartes, and Bayle besides such (officially banned) works as Campanella's *Opera philosophica*, Hobbes' *Opera omnia*, and the works of Malebranche.⁷³

A key toehold for the Radical Enlightenment in Italy from the 1720s until the middle of the century, located originally in Rome and then in Florence, was the library of the legendary deist, freemason, and open homosexual, the Baron Philip von Stosch (1691–1751). Son of a Brandenburg burgomaster, he spent the years 1706–15 studying at Frankfurt an der Oder, Wittenberg, Leipzig, Jena, Leiden, Oxford, Cambridge (where he spent some months studying with Richard Bentley), and Paris, where he became friendly with Bignon. Subsequently, Stosch cultivated his antiquarian, artistic, and bibliographical interests mainly in Rome. A paid agent of the English Crown who, among other activities, spied on the Stuart Court in exile, he was obliged to leave Rome as an undesirable influence, following the election of Pope Clement XII in 1730 but, as we have seen, he was permitted to settle in a Florence just emerging from the stagnation of the age of Cosimo III. While residing in Italy, Stosch, defying the Inquisition, imported forbidden books by sea, via Livorno, from the Dutch Republic, obtaining at least some from Charles Levier at The Hague, whom he evidently knew. The importance of his library lay not in its overall size of some 7,000 books, but his collection, unrivalled in Italy, of 'libri prohibiti': he possessed everything by Spinoza, most of Toland, Collins, and Mandeville, besides Fontenelle, Lahontan, La Mettrie,

Bekker's *Betoverde weereld* in French, and several key radical works in Dutch, including Koerbagh's *Bloemhof* and Leenhof's *Hemel op Aarde*.⁷⁴ After his death, his library was catalogued and auctioned in Florence in 1759. The library accrued to the Bibliotheca Marucelliana, a recently opened public institution in Florence, still in use today; but, of course, only the books which were not banned were shelved for public use, the forbidden material being inconspicuously tucked away in the librarian's home.⁷⁵ Early eighteenth-century Italy was a land where much was veiled, forbidden books concealed, and great public libraries seemed, as Le Clerc put it, describing the Ambrosiana, 'more set off with statues, pictures and other ornaments ... than by any great number of its books'.⁷⁶ Yet for connoisseurs, initiates, and those sufficiently resolute, furnished with Inquisition dispensations or not, everything was discreetly available near at hand—behind closed doors.

iv. Lexicons and *Dictionnaires*

An appreciable factor enhancing the comprehensiveness, philosophical, theological, and scientific, of Early Enlightenment libraries, especially those of smaller and medium sizes, even those comprising a mere few hundred books, were the multi-volume encyclopaedias, *dictionnaires*, and lexicons which were one of the most striking manifestations of the intellectual revolution of the period. Encyclopaedic works yielding expert summaries of wide swathes of new and older knowledge provided an invaluable guide to the present state of research and thought within reach of all with the money to procure such relatively costly items. The vogue began in 1674 with the publication of Louis

Moréri's *Grand Dictionnaire*, gained momentum with Bayle's *Dictionnaire* of 1697, continued with Ephraim Chambers' two-volume *Encyclopaedia* of 1728, and culminated finally in the celebrated *Grande Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert. Constantly revised and expanded, chiefly at Amsterdam, Moréri's compilation, among the foremost of these works, went through no fewer than twenty editions down to 1759.⁷⁷ A triumph of the genre, visually as well as intellectually, and a major contribution to the advancement of toleration, was the thirteenvolume *Ceremonies et coùtumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, published at Amsterdam in 1723. Compiled by Jean-Frédéric Bernard (c. 1683–1744) and magnificently illustrated by the engravings of Bernard Picart (1673–1733), the work embodied an immense effort to record the religious rituals and beliefs of the world in all their diversity as objectively and authentically as possible.

The first Dutch-language encyclopaedia, aimed at *savants* and the relatively uneducated alike, appeared at Amsterdam between 1733 and 1737.⁷⁸ In Germany Early Enlightenment enthusiasm for lexicons and encyclopaedias developed into a veritable mania. 'Lexicons are now so much in vogue' remarked a German periodical, in 1714, 'that soon one will be buying and selling them as one does snuff.'⁷⁹ Esteemed for their lively and stimulating, if far from always systematic or concise mix of theology, philosophy, history, geography, and science, the dictionaries of Moréri and Bayle showed publishers what the public thirsted for. In 1709 a Leipzig consortium brought out an amended (and unattributed) German version of the sixth edition of Moréri, revised at Amsterdam by Le Clerc, under the title *Allgemeines*

Historisches Lexicon, with a preface by Buddeus. By 1750 this Leipzig version had itself gone through six editions.⁸⁰ Its initial success was followed by that of a dictionary of *savants*, the *Compendiöse Gelehrten-Lexicon* (1715), and an encyclopaedia of arts and sciences—Johann Theodor Jablonski's *Allgemeines Lexicon der Künste und Wissenschaften*, published by Thomas Fritsch of Leipzig in 1721, besides Johann Georg Walch's *Philosophischen Lexicon* of 1726.⁸¹ Dwarfing all these, however, was the stupendous project of Johann Heinrich Zedler (1706–63), the *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, a gigantic encyclopaedia in sixty-four volumes, published at Leipzig, which began to appear in 1731 but, owing to logistical difficulties and cost, was completed only in 1750.⁸²

The depth and extent of the impact of the early Enlightenment on European society and culture is powerfully revealed by the content of these massive works which were expressly produced for a broad market, an audience of scholars and philosophers certainly, but also the new élites of officials, diplomats, patricians, professionals, and courtiers, and even their wives and daughters. They demonstrate that in fifty or sixty years 'philosophy', or what we today would call philosophy, science, and technology, were widely acknowledged to have fundamentally changed the world. At the same time, the lexicons were, in themselves, an effective weapon in the further battle against superstition and ignorance, being strongly pervaded by the views on toleration, and the condemnation of bigotry and fanaticism, typical of Bayle, Le Clerc, Bernard, Marchand, Buddeus, and other key compilers of the lexicalological literature.⁸³ No less prevalent

in the lexicons, and consequently soon in society generally, was an uncompromising reverence for new philosophy, science, and research, and the suffused, ubiquitous disparagement of older ideas and scholarship.

The lexicons and *dictionnaires* enabled anyone with access to them to acquire a knowledge of any dimension of the Early Enlightenment, including radical thought, which was summarized and discussed in varying levels of detail in all these compendia. Still worse, some thought, was the way in which one of the most influential and sought-after of the *dictionnaires*, that of Bayle, went out of its way to point out the pervasive presence of atheistic, deistic, and materialistic philosophies throughout the whole history of human thought, seemingly almost with the deliberate intention of coaxing readers to focus their minds on radical arguments. Equally impossible to ignore was Bayle's contention that 'Spinozism', in one form or another, has always infiltrated human minds. 'Il n'y a presque point de siècle où le sentiment de Spinoza n'ait été enseigné,' he maintained, adding that 'cet impie n'a que le malheureux avantage d'être le premier qui l'ait réduit en système selon la méthode géométrique.'⁸⁴ Thus Bayle highlights and not infrequently makes positive comments about such thinkers as Zeno of Elea, Xenophanes, Melissus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, and Democritus among the ancients, while at the same time unfailingly pointing to the links with Spinoza. Hence Democritus, though his views on motion in matter are declared almost as absurd as Spinoza's, is nevertheless styled by Bayle 'l'un des plus grands philosophes de l'antiquité'.⁸⁵ Similarly, Xenophanes' view of God is judged an 'impiété abominable, c'est un Spinozisme plus dangereux que celui que je refute dans l'article de

Spinoza'.⁸⁶ Nor was Bayle any less insistent regarding the pervasive role of 'Spinozism' in Renaissance thought. It was Bayle, for example, who transformed the image of Giordano Bruno in European culture from that of a heretical mystic into that of a precursor of radical deism, a philosopher whose thought 'est au fond toute semblable au Spinosisme',⁸⁷ a notion amplified subsequently, following Bayle, in the dissertation on atheism of 1711, by Veyssi re de la Croze, librarian of the Hofbibliothek in Berlin.⁸⁸

Whether or not the 'philosopher' of Rotterdam was deliberately unsettling readers, stimulating interest in atheistic philosophy, and reminding people about Spinoza at every turn, a fraught question about which there was considerable disagreement, it was generally agreed that Bayle's *Dictionnaire* was extremely problematic and in some ways damaging from a Christian standpoint. Relentless in demonstrating the incoherence and irrationality of every point of view, all systems were seemingly demolished by his corrosive rational criticism. Bayle relentlessly uncovers the inconsistencies of others, 'mais de principes,' objected Formey, 'vous en chercheriez vainement chez lui, s'il en a un, c'est celui de n'en point avoir.'⁸⁹

Their capacity to serve as potential vehicles of radical thought, and Bayle's special brand of critical rationalism, were often perceived as negative aspects of the lexicons from which readers should be shielded. These were doubtless among the reasons for the banning of the *dictionnaires* of Mor ri and Bayle in France under Louis XIV. With the passage of time though, such objections came to be outweighed in most people's minds by the perceived benefits of spreading awareness of new knowledge and science. But

however one weighed good and bad in the lexicons, undeniably they turned into a philosophical engine of war which massively invaded the libraries, public and private, of the whole continent. Their influence was ubiquitous and could not be reversed.

v. The Early Enlightenment in National Context

With regard to key themes, and the timing and intensity of debates, the Early Enlightenment was an impressively unified process across Europe, indeed a remarkable demonstration of the essential cohesion of European history. Nothing could be more mistaken than to suppose that national arenas evolved in relative isolation from each other or that national contexts were decisive in shaping the broad pattern of intellectual development. But, somewhat paradoxically, even while Europe's intellectual and social élites were to some extent culturally cosmopolitan, they were nevertheless in some ways also remarkably parochial. This conjunction of universal intellectual concerns and tendencies with, in particular, an extremely limited exposure to most foreign languages and books, created a highly peculiar combination of cultural universality and narrowness which suffused every part of the Early Enlightenment and frequently obtrudes even in the greatest figures. Vico, for instance, a universal thinker of impressive range, though steeped in Latin, professed (not altogether accurately) never to read anything in modern languages other than his native Italian.⁹⁰

The prevailing pattern in reading, intellectual debate, and library acquisitions was to embrace Latin and French in addition to the local tongue (where the latter served as a significant vehicle of book culture) but not anything else.

Latin remained fundamental to European culture throughout the period, though it was occasionally noticed by the early eighteenth century that its use was declining gradually everywhere in favour of French.⁹¹ Hence British libraries of any stature would be plentifully stocked with books and manuscripts in Latin and French as well as English, but astoundingly lacking, except to a small degree Greek, Hebrew, and Italian, in anything else. In this respect (if no other) Locke's personal library of over 3,000 volumes was entirely typical. Over a third of his books were in English and another third in Latin, with a further 18 per cent in French.⁹² The rest, amounting to under 5 per cent, mostly comprised works in Greek and Italian, leaving Dutch, German, and Spanish almost totally excluded, despite his having lived and worked for six years in the Netherlands and knowing some Dutch. Indeed English, Scottish, Irish, and English-speaking American intellectual culture was virtually completely devoid of acquaintance with books and periodicals in other Germanic languages. The early eighteenth-century catalogues of Saint Andrews University Library, to give a Scottish example, contain almost nothing in modern languages other than English and French.⁹³

France, even at the height of the Enlightenment, was equally parochial and selective regarding books, periodicals, and library acquisitions. Overwhelmingly, French libraries featured books and periodicals in French and Latin with practically nothing even in Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, related languages readily understood, let alone English, Dutch, or German, languages little taught or known, though a fashion for studying English arose around 1720 and gained some momentum in the wake of the *anglomanie* of the 1730s

and 1740s. Typical was the library of Jean-Jacques Dorthous de Mairan (1678–1771), a high-society *érudit* reputed to expound science in fashionable circles with the ease and grace of a Fontenelle and who, in 1740, succeeded him as secretary to the Académie des Sciences in Paris. Mairan, in the course of his successful career, amassed 3,400 books which were auctioned after his death in 1771. Over one third were in Latin and the rest mainly French; despite his (post-1720) Newtonianism and interest in Italian science, he owned scarcely a handful of publications in English and Italian and practically nothing in German, Dutch, or Spanish.⁹⁴

Similarly, in Italy almost all private libraries and even the great collections, including that of a bustling trading republic such as Venice, the Biblioteca Marciana, procured books predominantly in Italian and Latin with a sprinkling in French. The consequences of this exclusion of books in other major languages were then compounded by the fact the Italian erudite journals usually reviewed only foreign works which appeared in Latin.⁹⁵ Yet the wide prestige the Italian language had formerly enjoyed north of the Alps had, by this date, largely dissolved. Italy was a force in the Early Enlightenment, or as Le Clerc put it in 1718, still produced ‘plusieurs livres utiles’ in the context of contemporary intellectual debate, but there was little appreciation of this in most of northern Europe, since hardly anyone any longer read Italian or bothered to obtain Italian books.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that there was still a zone of Italian cultural influence where Early Enlightenment books and ideas emanating from Italy played the leading role before 1750, extending from Vienna in the north and to the Levant, Spain, and Portugal in the Mediterranean.

By contrast Scandinavia, the Baltic, and northern Germany presented a completely different scenario. The only country in Europe outside the British Isles, the library catalogues suggest, where English functioned as a major cultural language down to 1750 was Denmark-Norway, where many libraries contained scientific and philosophical works in English, that of the erudite Christian Worm (d.1738), Bishop of Sjaelland, for example, including English editions of Boyle, Locke, Thomas Burnett, John Edwards, Richard Bentley, and John Tillotson.⁹⁷ But in the rest of Scandinavia and the Baltic, where there was also no local tongue which functioned as a regular vehicle of intellectual discourse, neither French nor English was particularly strongly represented before the 1730s. Here, besides Latin, it was incontrovertibly German and Dutch which served as the two preponderant modern languages of cultural exchange. The fact that Dutch generally outweighed English as a medium of cultural exchange in the north may be deeply perplexing to the modern reader accustomed to a world in which English overwhelmingly predominates. But over the centuries the Hanseatic cities had been culturally as well as commercially dominant in the north, and the Low German of the Hanseatics, which was closer to Dutch than what is now termed 'German', had been the lingua franca over a vast area. This meant that, certainly down to the mid-eighteenth century, Dutch books were more frequently bought and sold, and more widely understood in Scandinavia and the Baltic than books in English, among nobles as well as merchants, academics, and professionals. This pattern was more marked in Sweden-Finland than Denmark-Norway but nevertheless applied in the latter too. Not untypically, the Danish Count of Daneschield in Samsoe, whose library of 8,000 books was

auctioned in Copenhagen in 1732, and who had a taste for political thought, had his Hobbes in Latin and Locke in French but the brothers de la Court, among others, in Dutch.⁹⁸

Northern Germany was similarly more receptive to Dutch than English or French and for the same reason—the continuing prevalence of Low German. At this time the Dutch still called their own language *Nederduitsch* (or Low ‘Deutsch’), as distinct from High German, but made little distinction between Dutch and Low German, a tendency replicated in German and also English usage, seventeenth-century Englishmen distinguishing between ‘High Dutch’ (i.e. German) and ‘Low Dutch’ (i.e. Dutch plus Low German) rather than between Dutch and German as we do now. Consequently, throughout the area from the Rhineland to East Prussia, the Dutch language and its books tended to circulate more and be more readily available than publications in English or French. Admittedly, French was very widely used in Court and diplomatic circles and, by the early eighteenth century, was becoming more familiar in scholarly and mercantile circles. Yet, not infrequently, even the largest libraries were remarkably thin in French as well as English editions, though few collections were quite as extreme in this respect as the huge library of 42,000 titles built up in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century by the chancellor of the Court of Gottorp, near Kiel, Johann Adolph Kielmann von Kielmannsegg, and his son, the Baron Friedrich Christian. The Bibliotheca Kielmanseggiana, auctioned at Hamburg in April 1718, almost entirely comprised works in Latin, German, and Dutch, with practically nothing in French or English.⁹⁹ Typically, the Kiel professor Andreas Ludwig Koenigsmann, a figure immersed in the philosophical wars of

the period, whose library was auctioned in Copenhagen in October 1729, owned Locke's *Essay* and Toland in Latin, Collins in French, and generally few books in English, but possessed the *Nagelate Schriften*, Spinoza's posthumous works in their Dutch version, as well as Pieter Balling's *Licht op den Kandelaar*, and other radical as well as moderate works in Dutch.¹⁰⁰

Dutch libraries, despite the primacy of the Netherlands in Europe's book and periodical trade, were scarcely any less parochial. Libraries belonging to those with claims to erudition consisted principally of works in Latin and Dutch, increasingly also with an admixture of French but rarely anything else. The hundreds of libraries belonging to Dutch professionals, academics, preachers, and regents auctioned at The Hague, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam between 1650 and 1750 contained very little in English, German, or southern European languages. The Dutch situation was complicated, though, from the early 1680s, by the Huguenot influx from France, bringing in numerous *savants* and preachers bibliographically limited in a different way, being mostly unwilling, even after decades of residence in the United Provinces, to read anything except French or Latin.

Geographically, the European Early Enlightenment was an impressively widespread phenomenon. But if significant developments can be seen everywhere on the continent, even well before 1700, from Portugal to Russia and from Ireland to Naples, it is undoubtedly true that certain key national contexts, actually five—France, Britain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—generated nearly all the major impulses and intellectual innovations driving this great cultural transformation. This raises the issue of whether and, if so, how, to rank the various countries generating the

Enlightenment. For, taking Europe as a whole, the pace and intensity of change varied appreciably from country to country and period to period, so that even though the five principal givers and receivers all contributed to this vast reworking of fundamental ideas and values, and learnt from each other, there were nevertheless striking imbalances at different times in the tally of giving and receiving.

It used often to be held that ‘the Enlightenment’ was essentially French and centred on Paris. Nowadays, it is not infrequently claimed that ‘continental Europe looked to England as the source of the Enlightenment,’¹⁰¹ a view sometimes expressed not only by Anglophone but also German and Italian—if rarely by French—scholars.¹⁰² Another notion which has recently become influential is that there was not one Enlightenment but many different national Enlightenments, that the Enlightenment ‘occurred in too many forms to be comprised within a single definition and history, and that we do better to think of a family of Enlightenments, displaying both family resemblances and family quarrels’.¹⁰³ But all considered, it seems best to discard all these perceptions and return to the idea of a single European Enlightenment, except now it should be seen as a European Enlightenment that most emphatically was not inspired by any single nation, be it France, England, or the Netherlands, but rather had its centre of gravity in north-western Europe and particularly in the inner circuit linking Amsterdam, the other main Dutch cities, Paris, London, Hamburg, and Berlin, albeit with a subsidiary southern base in Naples, Venice, and Florence. Consequently, what chiefly needs to be stressed is that Britain and France were far from being the only major sources of ‘enlightened’ ideas and that it is indispensable, if

one is to avoid serious distortion, to analyse the ebb and flow of ideas within a much broader European context than has been usual in the past.

THE LEARNED JOURNALS

i. Changing Europe's Intellectual Culture

The dictionaries and lexicons were a ubiquitous and irreversible engine of enlightenment. But from the 1680s, it became clear that there had arisen an even more powerful machine undermining traditional structures of authority, knowledge, and doctrine—namely the erudite periodicals. Possibly no other cultural innovation, observed Scipio Maffei (1675–1755), one of the chief heralds of the Venetian Enlightenment, in 1710, had exerted so immense an impact on Europe, over the previous four decades, as these journals.¹ Everywhere, awareness of new ideas and knowledge, new books and debates, had been enhanced and enriched. It was, indeed, no exaggeration to maintain that, through the journals, Europe had, for the first time, amalgamated into a single intellectual arena. Henceforth, debates, controversies, the reception of new books and theories and their evaluation, were not just facilitated and accelerated but also projected beyond the national contexts hitherto determining the reception of new publications and research and thereby transformed into an international process of interaction and exchange.

Contemplating the rise of this powerful new cultural device in 1718, the inaugural preface of a leading learned periodical, *L'Europe Savante* of The Hague, observed that the journals' success had come neither quickly nor easily.² Rather, for many years progress had been hampered by

appreciable obstacles. While the first example of the genre, the Parisian *Journal des Scavants*, established in 1665, had rudimentarily performed the functions of the later journals—publicizing and evaluating new books, reporting scientific advances and scholarly debates, and providing obituaries of recently deceased *savants*—it also encountered formidable official and ecclesiastical obstruction and had been obliged to steer conspicuously clear of the more contentious theological and philosophical issues.³ Moreover, apart from the London *Philosophical Transactions* (also founded in 1665), designed to publicize the scientific work of the Royal Society, a journal similarly silent on the wider philosophical questions, no new erudite review subsequently appeared anywhere in Europe for nearly two decades until the founding, in 1682, of the *Acta Eruditorum* of Leipzig. The *Acta*, edited by Otto Mencke (1644–1707), backed by an annual subsidy from the Elector of Saxony, and published in Latin to boost its international appeal, proved highly successful, and despite appearing on the papal Index in 1702 was widely admired in Catholic as well as Protestant lands. It was openly adopted as their model by the three founders—Maffei, the crypto-radical Antonio Vallisnieri, and Apostolo Zeno—of the Venetian *Giornale de Letterati*, launched in 1710.⁴ The *Acta*'s enduringly high prestige, throughout the half-century it was operative until 1731, was primarily due to the excellent quality of its regular reviewers, especially Mencke himself, Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel (1659–1707), von Seckendorf, and the venerable Buddeus who, between 1694 and 1707 contributed over 100 reviews, as well as Leibniz.⁵

After 1682, fresh learned periodicals appeared in brisk succession.⁶ The first of the Dutch-based ones, and also the first of the genuinely 'critical' journals, the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, edited by Pierre Bayle, appeared in March 1684, followed in 1686 by the *Bibliothèque Universelle* (1686–93) of Jean Le Clerc, a venture financed by four leading Amsterdam publishers. Soon after appeared the *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans* (1687–1709). As general periodicals proliferated, a new variant emerged in the late 1690s with the advent of the review serving a particular region, the original model for which was the *Nova Literaria Maris Balthici*, founded at Lübeck in 1698, its style of linking local scholarly developments with the wider arena then being expressly adopted by the *Nova Literaria Helvetica* founded at Zürich in 1703.⁷

While French and Latin predominated, there was also soon a demand for book news and reviews in German and Dutch. In 1688, at Leipzig, Christian Thomasius, much impressed by the recently founded reviews in French, especially Bayle's,⁸ brought out the first issue of his ground-breaking *Monatgespräche*. According to Thomasius, the journals, by giving books greater publicity than in the past, were encouraging people to read and debate them.⁹ That a journal devoted to reviewing the latest scholarly books and controversies could not just appear, but flourish, in German, sufficiently illustrates that the intellectual revolution had by this date penetrated well beyond the restricted circles of professional academics, lawyers, physicians, and clergymen who had monopolized erudite discussion in the past and confined it to Latin.¹⁰ Other German-language journals

appeared subsequently and again with success. A new Latin periodical, at Rostock, declared in 1721 that, while the French and Dutch had established the learned periodical as such, it was the Germans who established the vernacular review addressing a wider, essentially 'national' audience.¹¹

Periodicals of regional character led a more precarious existence, and proved less durable, than those more European in scope. In France, Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, publishers of reviews in the vernacular could at least count on a substantial pool of educated, urban dwellers to swell their readership. Elsewhere, where urban culture was less developed, or where, as in Spain, Portugal, and to some extent Italy, intellectual debate in the vernacular had traditionally been discouraged by the ecclesiastical authorities, and the cultural context was therefore less favourable, learned periodicals faced continual difficulties in finding sufficient readers, as well as sometimes painful dilemmas of language and cultural perspective. The first issue of the *Dänische Bibliothec*, published at Copenhagen in 1738, lamented the lack of publicity given to Danish–Norwegian erudition in the wider world over many years, since the demise of the Lübeck *Nova Literaria*, and wished to correct this, while at the same time aspiring to spread awareness of wider intellectual developments in Denmark–Norway and, for this purpose, would have liked to review foreign books and debates in Danish.¹² But publication in Danish would hamper broadcasting Danish erudite news abroad, while Latin would obstruct the creation of a non-professional 'national' readership at home. The only solution, seemingly, was to publish in German.¹³

So numerous were the periodicals needed to service a cultural impulse as wide-ranging as the Early Enlightenment that, by 1718, according to *L'Europe Savante*, around fifty had come into existence in German, Italian, Dutch, and English, as well as French and Latin; and while some proved ephemeral many became firmly established.¹⁴ Successful, durable journals, however, did not spread evenly across the continent. On the contrary, they became heavily bunched together, a circumstance which clearly demonstrates the formidable nature of the obstacles impeding the erudite press and the difficulty of creating conditions conducive to the flourishing of such vehicles of critical thinking. France, for example, proved generally unwelcoming. Even after the ecclesiastical authorities were reconciled, and the *Journal des Scavants* was relaunched in 1666, under the editorship of Abbé Jean Gallois, an *érudit* admirably qualified, being diligent, keenly interested in new scientific research and theories,¹⁵ assured of Colbert's support,¹⁶ and expert in English, German, Spanish, and diverse oriental languages as well as Latin, the publication faced continual difficulties throughout his editorship, until 1674;¹⁷ and while subsequently Gallois' mediocre successor, the Abbé de la Roque, editor from 1675 to 1687, did little to improve matters with his prolix reviews, anti-Protestant bias, and incompetence in philosophy,¹⁸ the basic reason for the French review's failure to win much prestige at home or abroad, which remained obvious under La Roque's successor, Louis Cousin, editor from 1687 to 1701, was the sheer difficulty of obtaining new books for review from abroad, even from Catholic capitals such as Rome, Venice, or Vienna, let alone Protestant centres such as Amsterdam, The Hague, Leipzig, or

London. Royal and ecclesiastical censorship combined with stringent border searches proved an insurmountable impediment.¹⁹ In 1684, while praising the newly established Leipzig and Amsterdam journals for their achievement in spreading awareness of new books all over Europe, including France, La Roque openly despaired of competing effectively with them. German books were all but unobtainable in France. Books from Holland 'qui est le lieu du monde où il s'en imprime le plus', could be procured only with extreme difficulty, owing to the authorities' wish to debar 'livres qui viennent d'un pays où l'on a la liberté de tout dire et de tout écrire'.²⁰ Furthermore, distribution to the rest of Europe from France, as from England, was slow and erratic.²¹

During the early eighteenth century there were barely two or three regular reviews of international standing appearing in France, one of which was the Jesuit *Mémoires de Trévoux*. Yet Britain too was completely marginalized as far as the European erudite periodical press was concerned. Nowhere was freer as regards censorship laws and procedures, but even after the *anglomanie* took hold in the 1730s and 1740s, knowledge of the English language on the continent was sparse and there was scant demand for English publications as such;²² moreover, with a rapidly expanding book market of their own to service, English publishers showed little inclination to emulate their Dutch counterparts' habit of publishing great quantities of material in French. Efforts were made to establish French-language reviews elsewhere, notably Hamburg, where several issues of the *Journal de Hambourg* edited by Gabriel d'Artis (c.1660–c.1732) appeared in the mid-1690s, containing among other things, lively discussions of the Bekker controversy. and also, at a

later stage, in Berlin.²³ But no other country came near competing with the impressive output of French-language journals in the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, more reviews in Latin appeared in Germany, building on the success of the *Acta*, notably at Halle, Jena, and Bremen. A Latin journal, the *Bibliotheca Librorum Novorum*, also appeared in the Netherlands, at Utrecht in 1697, but the Dutch review in Latin proved as unsuccessful as the French journal in Britain and Germany. After only five issues, the Utrecht *Bibliotheca* ceased publication in 1699. Hence, a virtually fixed division of labour had set in by the end of the seventeenth century, with Holland the headquarters of the French-language periodicals and northern Germany for those in Latin and German. But with Latin receding and French gaining as Europe's chief medium of intellectual discourse, this left the United Provinces in an unrivalled position.

From 1684 onwards down to the mid-eighteenth century, the United Provinces always produced more and more important journals than any other European country and its advantages as the base of this vital sector of the Early Enlightenment were indisputable. On launching his *Bibliothèque Universelle* in 1686, Le Clerc acknowledged that many readers would question the wisdom of initiating yet another review when those already established at Paris, Leipzig, and Rotterdam were deemed by many 'admirable'. But there had also been widespread criticism, he urged, especially as regards inadequate coverage of new books and controversial issues—no doubt he had Paris and Leipzig chiefly in mind—as well as complaints of bias.²⁴ Le Clerc planned to avoid these shortcomings and not only review

comprehensively but also supply extensive excerpts. He expected to surpass his rivals, he indicated, in part simply because he was working in Amsterdam where 'all books' were to be found, the booksellers backing the venture being the 'mieux fournis et les plus fameux de l'Europe'.²⁵ Another advantage, he noted, was that one could more easily ventilate intellectually or theologically sensitive issues in the Dutch Republic than elsewhere 'comme on se trouve en un pais de liberté'.²⁶ The Dutch regents permitted a general religious toleration and he vowed faithfully to emulate the 'justice et l'équité de ces sages magistrats, en rapportant sans préjugé les sentimens de toutes les sociétés chrétiennes'.²⁷

Bayle had deliberately eschewed such rhetoric, promising merely to criticize no ruler and to speak 'avec respect des Catholiques', hoping thereby to avoid proscription of his journal in France and other Catholic lands, but in vain.²⁸ His journal was forbidden in those countries, as was Le Clerc's. Nevertheless both authors were eventually highly esteemed by *savants* in France and Italy, some of whom had dispensations to read books denied to most of the laity, as well as northern Europe, and gained an authentically pan-European status. Moreover, where Bayle retired from editing in 1687, after just four volumes, his rival, Le Clerc, soldiered on for decades his unflagging output of long, penetrating, and balanced reviews in a tone reckoned less judgemental than Bayle's,²⁹ winning him respect and considerable influence everywhere, including Naples and Rome,³⁰ despite near universal hostility to his theological views. In 1693, the *Bibliothèque Universelle* ceased after twenty-five volumes, but he subsequently resumed reviewing, embarking on his

Bibliothèque Choisie (1703–13) and later his *Bibliothèque Ancienne et Moderne* (1714–26). All together, during his career with the three titles spanning nearly forty years, Le Clerc produced no less than eighty-three volumes.³¹ Visiting him in 1726, the year of his retirement from editing, aged 79, Holberg found him ‘notwithstanding his advanced years, in full possession of both bodily and mental vigour’.³²

The *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, having created an entirely new style of incisive ‘critical’ reviews,³³ lapsed for a decade following Bayle’s departure. It was subsequently revived by Jaques Bernard, a Huguenot and, before emigrating from France, a pastor, who excelled in philosophy and studied, among others, under the young Le Clerc at Geneva. The revived *Nouvelles* was again a success, remaining under Bernard’s competent editorship from 1699 to 1710 and then again from 1716 to 1718.³⁴ Also highly reputed, the *Histoire des Ouvrages des Savants*, based in Rotterdam and launched following Bayle’s retirement, was edited by Henri Basnage de Beauval, a former lawyer of Rouen who produced it for twenty-two years (1687–1709). Like Bernard, Basnage emulated Bayle and Le Clerc in writing most of the reviews himself.³⁵ A protégé of Bayle, Basnage, though far less erudite, was an equally tireless champion of toleration and ‘enlightened’ intellectual impartiality. In his eyes, intolerance and bigotry were the pure fruit of ignorance and superstition: ‘l’ignorance,’ he held, ‘est la cause de la plus part des maux qui affligent le genre humain.’³⁶ Venerating the high-mindedness and impartiality of Bayle and Le Clerc, he too promised to eschew all bias

towards Catholic and other theological standpoints with which he disagreed.³⁷

By contrast, the major early eighteenth-century French-language journals published in Holland, such as the *Journal Littéraire* (1713–37) of The Hague and the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée* (1728–53) based at Amsterdam, shared out the burden of writing reviews and notices among whole panels of *savants*.³⁸ The *Journal Littéraire* became the internationally acknowledged model of a respected, erudite periodical of a consistently high standard, employing multiple authors. This publication, wrote Veyssière de la Croze, librarian to the Prussian king, to Marchand in 1731, ‘est à mon avis le meilleur de tous les journaux’.³⁹ By the 1720s, the one-author method perfected by Bayle, Le Clerc, and Basnage de Beauval had become simply too onerous and inflexible. But regular team-work of consistent quality was a requirement which, in turn, posed a host of personal, logistical, and organizational difficulties. The short-lived *Journal Historique de la République des Lettres*, though originally conceived as a team effort, was soon effectively left to Marchand alone to produce but, for precisely this reason, lapsed after a mere three volumes (1722–3).⁴⁰

Another important review in the Netherlands, and for many years the only one published in Dutch, was the *Boekzaal van Europe*, founded and edited in Rotterdam by Pieter Rabus (1660–1702).⁴¹ Commencing in 1692, this periodical followed much the same procedure as the French-language journals, appearing every two months and offering long book reviews and erudite news. Bayle, who continued to watch the periodicals’ progress with interest, noted in 1694

that this publication 'a beaucoup de débit'.⁴² A total of fifty-seven volumes were produced by Rabus, a lawyer and teacher from a liberal Anabaptist background, whose model was Bayle's *Nouvelles* and who, until his death in 1702, strove indefatigably to provide high-quality intellectual debate and judgement in the vernacular for the learned and less learned alike.⁴³ The journal resumed after his death under a new editor, renamed the *Boekzaal der Geleerde Weereld*.

Eventually, mused Bayle, proliferation 'de cette sorte d'écrits fera qu'on ne les voudra plus lire' since readers would find the same reviews and debates uselessly replicated everywhere.⁴⁴ But as the years passed and more journals appeared, there was little sign that such apprehensions were well-grounded. Nor was there any tendency for Dutch predominance in the field to slacken. In 1746 the Berlin *savant*, Jean-Henri Samuel Formey, observed that of nearly thirty erudite journals current in Europe enjoying an international reputation, only two were based in France, several in Germany and Italy, one in England, and no less than eighteen in the United Provinces.⁴⁵

In Italy the obstacles hampering erudite periodicals remained formidable throughout the Early Enlightenment period. If Italians produced fewer books of philosophical and scientific interest than the English, Le Clerc noted in 1718, this was not due to intellectual deficiencies 'mais à cause du peu de liberté qu'il y a de publier ce qu'on veut'.⁴⁶ Neither the first *Giornale de' Letterati* published at Rome between 1668 and 1683, nor its mediocre successor, the *Giornale Veneto de' Letterati* of Venice (1671–89), nor the several short-lived attempts after that, exerted much impact.⁴⁷ All

were fatally enfeebled by the proximity of the Inquisition and difficulties in procuring foreign books.⁴⁸ Bolder, more successful, and more important, was the mildly anti-Jesuit and initially pro-Cartesian second *Giornale* (1710–40) established by Maffei, Vallisnieri, and Zeno at Venice.⁴⁹ Maffei's preface to the first issue in 1710 declared the thirteen-year gap since the last *Giornale* lapsed in 1697 a calamitous and also 'shameful' one, since there was then no other Italian periodical devoted to reviewing new scholarly writings and debates.⁵⁰ The renewed venture was widely welcomed, though Leibniz and other connoisseurs abroad were not overly impressed, and its success was mainly due to its shifting the focus away from international currents and debates to books published in Italy.⁵¹

The new review lasted thirty years, albeit becoming increasingly sporadic. If it studiously avoided the more troublesome intellectual issues and practiced much self-censorship, as was unavoidable in Italy at the time, it was nevertheless a potent factor in the progress of the Italian Enlightenment. Backed by its network of collaborators in Florence, Bologna, and Padua, the journal expressed the new 'enlightened' ideals of the age, not least by assuring readers it was permissible in Catholic lands to learn from northern, in particular, the Dutch erudite journals, including the *Bibliothèque Choisie* edited by the 'eruditissimo Giovanni Clerico [i.e. Jean Le Clerc]', provided readers, mindful these periodicals were written by Protestants, were continually on their guard against 'dangerous' notions.⁵² Starting in a discreetly Cartesian-*Malebranchiste* vein, the *eruditi* producing the journal edged towards a Leibnizian-Wolffian

stance during the early years of its existence.⁵³ This reflected a wider tendency in the Venetian Republic during the second decade of the century, a time when Leibniz intensified his efforts to advance his philosophy there, with the help, among others, of Fardella and successive Leibnizian mathematicians, Jakob Herman (1707–13) and Niccolò Bernouilli (1716–19), at the University of Padua.

The Dutch French-language journals fulfilled a European role. Even so, their coverage was always weighted somewhat in favour of Dutch publications and, in some respects, debates.⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, the publishers who backed the journals, such as Leers, the Wetsteins, who financed the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*, and others, were concerned not only to publicize the views of their editors,⁵⁵ but also to promote sales of books they published or distributed. Thus Leers, for example, did not forget to append a note to the inaugural preface of the *Histoire des Ouvrages des Savants*, reminding readers that his shop was plentifully stocked with all titles reviewed in the journal.⁵⁶ While large quantities of books were imported to the United Provinces from France and these were also extensively reviewed, the proportion of books reviewed produced in France was usually less than that published in the United Provinces (whether in French, Latin, or Dutch) while, for the rest, only English and German books received even a modicum of regular coverage. Barely any attention was given to publications from Italy, Spain, Portugal, or Scandinavia. While data for the main Dutch journals shows that approaching 50 per cent of the books discussed were published in the United Provinces, with another 20 or 25 per cent produced in France, English books

accounted for scarcely more than 10 per cent and German titles still less.⁵⁷

Consequently, until around 1720, British and German books and disputes enjoyed only a very modest, subordinate profile internationally, notwithstanding the debates surrounding Newton and Locke, which eventually had a crucially important impact on the continent. That there was a pressing need—noted by Leibniz as early as 1702⁵⁸—for a specialized French-language review providing comprehensive coverage of developments in British philosophy and science gradually became generally apparent. But it was not until 1717 that such a vehicle, the *Bibliothèque Angloise* of Amsterdam (1717–28), was launched. ‘On peut dire en général,’ remarked the journal’s editor, Michel de La Roche, in his inaugural preface, ‘que les livres anglois ne sont guères connus hors de cette isle’ and that those issuing in French translation were simply too few to convey an adequate picture of the current state of ideas and science in Britain. Reviewing La Roche’s inaugural volume, *L’Europe Savante* entirely agreed, lamenting the scarcity of knowledge of English, despite the recent advent of a fad for learning that language, and the even greater rarity of knowledge of English books in France and throughout continental Europe.⁵⁹ Both the *Bibliothèque Angloise* and its successor, the *Bibliothèque Britannique* (1733–47) with which Prosper Marchand was closely connected in its later years, assigned around 90 per cent of their space to reviewing English publications,⁶⁰ thereby contributing appreciably to the onset of the *anglomanie* which swept Europe in the 1730s and 1740s. Meanwhile a not dissimilar realization of the need to publicize German and Swiss book news led, in 1720, to the

launching of a parallel organ, the *Bibliothèque Germanique* (1720–59), a review edited by Huguenot *érudits* mainly in Berlin but with the extensive participation of Dutch-based Huguenots, again notably Marchand.⁶¹ This journal came to be somewhat dominated in the 1740s and 1750s by the leading Wolffian writing in French, Formey. A shorter-lived but potentially comparable, and by no means unsuccessful, specialized publication was the Neo-Cartesian *Bibliothèque Italique*, produced at Geneva in the years 1728–34, with which the liberal Calvinist theologian Jacques Vernet was associated, and which was linked to the Early Enlightenment movement in Venice, especially Maffei and Vallisnieri.⁶²

The erudite journals were incontestably one of the most potent agents driving the Enlightenment in its vital formative phase down to 1750. Overwhelmingly orientated towards recent developments in the world of thought, scholarship, and science, they did much to shift the focus of the cultivated public's attention away from established authorities and the classics to what was new, innovative, or challenging, even when such innovation arose in distant lands and unfamiliar languages. In an age when barriers of language and the vagaries of the book trade frequently impeded the circulation of books internationally, it was especially the journals which spread awareness of new discoveries, ideas, and controversies around Europe. As the Abbé de la Roque noted in 1684, where previously it took years for French readers to learn about new books appearing in Germany, since the advent of the Leipzig *Acta* and Bayle's *Nouvelles*, *savants* knew about what mattered within weeks.⁶³

A second aspect of the journals' cultural sway was their unceasing advocacy of the new 'enlightened' ideals of

toleration and intellectual objectivity. Bayle, Le Clerc, Basnage de Beauval, Bernard, Rabus, Marchand, and numerous lesser figures were all tireless champions of religious and intellectual freedom—albeit usually within definite limits—toleration for them being not just a guiding principle in confessional and political matters but inherent in their craft of erudite journalism and their wider vision of the unbiased intellectual life. Their quintessential task they saw as the propagation of a new ideal of impartial judgement, balanced presentation of views, polite debate eschewing all bigotry and invective. So powerful was this impulse it led at times to an excessive proneness to detachment, almost a fear of taking sides or embracing a clear position. It is assuredly no accident that precisely when the journals exerted their maximum influence on Europe, that is, between 1680 and 1750, the decisive shift in western and central European (as well as North American) civilization occurred, away from confessional culture to denigration of dogmatism, intolerance, superstition, bigotry, and ignorance. Doubtless such a fundamental change sprang from a complex interplay of social, cultural, and intellectual factors. But within this wider context, the cumulative impact of the journals on the fashionable attitudes of the age was unquestionably a factor of the first order.

A third major effect was the contribution of the journals to fragmenting the deeply rooted notion, championed by kings, parliaments, and Churches alike, that there existed a universally known, accepted, and venerated consensus of truth. The only point the periodicals collectively conveyed with absolute clarity was that knowledge of truth, theological, philosophical, and scientific, was in a complete state of flux and had become a swirling vortex of rival views and theories

struggling to explain a burgeoning and increasingly bewildering mass of data. Whatever one's personal faith, the informed reader could only conclude that all semblance of consensus in Europe had collapsed, and a relentless pan-European war of philosophical and scientific systems had begun, the outcome of which no one could predict. The journals with their simultaneously confident, but yet hesitant, culture of impartiality, balance, and toleration, and frequently non-committal, inconclusive reviews, were totally destructive of the Baroque impulse—contracting but still residually prevalent in most of Europe around 1700—to insist that unity and cohesion could be restored through a more rigorous assertion of authority and confessional doctrine. The new ideal of unbiased detachment and deferring judgement, propagated by the periodicals, could always readily be justified by pointing to the need for more research and data, and the lack of 'certain evidence'.

Fourthly, and no less fundamentally, the journals proved to be one of the most powerful agents shaping and propagating the 'moderate, Christian Enlightenment', and simultaneously, defining and banishing to the margins the rival Radical Enlightenment. For their perennial summons, one might almost say their *raison d'être*, was to seek a middle course—however perplexing and strewn with rocks the disconcertingly wide, poorly charted, and far from readily navigable channel between—on the one hand, assailing superstition and ignorance, and on the other, upholding the essentials of faith and the legitimacy of God-ordained authority. If prejudice and obscurantism were the declared enemy, on one side, no less contrary to the professed values of the journals, and harmful to society in their view, was the challenge of philosophical Naturalism, fatalism, atheism,

materialism, and Spinozism which, almost without exception, every review unwaveringly condemned. 'L'athéisme et la superstition,' insisted Basnage de Beauval in February 1696, 'sont deux extremités également éloignées de la vraie religion.'⁶⁴

ii. The Journals and the Radical Enlightenment

That the journals invariably pledged to fight radical ideas was inevitable in the context of the age. For no dynasty, government, parliament, or municipality would tolerate anything less than overt and implacable hostility to trends universally deemed godless, pernicious, and destructive of the social and moral order. One can state with some certainty, however, that not all the editors, much less the contributors, privately conformed to such views. If the number of open adherents of radical ideas was always minuscule, owing to stringent condemnation and the heavy price to be paid for being associated with such views, there was also a constant likelihood the ranks of those professing to fight radical ideas included *érudits* who inwardly renounced what society insisted on. Such men themselves might easily come under a question mark. Bayle, in particular, was regarded as suspect by some.

However, while in general the dividing line between the Christian Enlightenment of the moderates and the proscribed tenets of the radicals seemed clear enough, there were nevertheless over the years more than a few extremely troublesome borderline cases which blurred the picture, lending radical writers room for manoeuvre and gravely embarrassing the journals' editors. One obvious dilemma resulting from the editors' vows to combat 'superstition' and radicalism with equal determination was the problem of how

to react to Bayle's *Dictionnaire* of 1697, with its countless paradoxes, 'obscenities', and discussions of 'atheistic' thinkers.⁶⁵ Beyond its relentless critical rationalism (interpreted by some as scepticism), no one seemed entirely sure what the message of that immensely fascinating and widely read work was. But neither could one fail to notice that it was to some extent a powerful vehicle for radical ideas, owing to Bayle's penchant for discussing the opinions of numerous ancient and modern fatalistic and Naturalistic thinkers in a frequently circuitous and disconcerting manner. In the words of one of his critics, Jaques Saurin, a prominent Huguenot preacher at The Hague, Bayle was a genius who lived a sober, austere life, but used his pen 'à attaquer la chasteté, la modestie, toutes les vertus chrétiennes' and, while adamantly professing his allegiance to the Reformed faith, repeated the objections to Christianity of all the world's greatest heretics 'leur prêtant des armes nouvelles, et réunissant dans nôtre siècle toutes les erreurs des siècles passez'.⁶⁶

Another unavoidably prickly batch of issues concerned the Devil, demons, angels, and spirits. The historical research of Van Dale, seconded by Fontenelle, revealing systematic priestly manipulation of the credulous and supposedly gullible common people in classical times may have posed no great difficulty.⁶⁷ Bayle, Le Clerc, and Basnage de Beauval, among others, firmly took the side of these writers against their Jesuit, Lutheran orthodox, and other opponents, who insisted that the Devil and lesser demons had operated the ancient oracles. The learned periodicals pronounced the sanctuaries of the ancient world to have been (by and large) fraudulent.⁶⁸ But what guidance should they offer in the case of the Bekker

controversies, where the issue was whether Satan and demons influence the affairs of men at all? In the Netherlands and northern Germany, where the Bekker controversies chiefly raged, there was plainly some support for his sweeping attack on traditional notions about Satan and spirits, yet most churchmen, and most of the public, indignantly denounced Bekker's claims as back-door Spinozism. This placed the journal editors in a thorny dilemma. While it was impossible, on the one hand, to side with fanatics and obscurantists championing crassly superstitious views about evil, magic, and witchcraft—Bekker, after all, had some eminently reasonable arguments and was also plainly being victimized by bigots—neither could one responsibly condone the total denial of diabolical power and magic, added to which his cause had incontrovertibly been espoused by freethinkers and crypto-Spinozists. Moreover, it was impossible to criticize the vehemence of the ecclesiastical authorities in such an important matter without gravely offending the civic and provincial authorities.

Among the city governments most hostile to Bekker was that of Rotterdam, where a pro-Voetian faction for the time being dominated the city hall, and where Rabus' journal, the *Boekzaal*, was published. Rabus' editorial policy was to support Bekker, albeit in the most judicious, indeed rather veiled, terms.⁶⁹ The city's Reformed consistory were nevertheless outraged and initiated a vigorous campaign against the journal, exerting sufficient pressure on the burgomasters, over the winter of 1693–4, to bring its very existence into question. In the event the periodical survived. But one can hardly say that it survived intact. Subsequently, Rabus was obliged to practice stiffer self-censorship, as well as showing the Reformed authorities greater deference. Even

in more liberal Amsterdam, Le Clerc saw the need for an uncommon degree of discretion. Having delayed many months before making any pronouncement at all, he dedicated a thirty-page review to the first two volumes of Bekker's *Betoverde Weereld* (The World Bewitched) in September 1691, informing readers abroad that the uproar 'fait beaucoup de bruit dans ces provinces' and that many people unfamiliar with the Dutch language had been asking what it was all about. 'C'est ce qu'on n'a pas cru devoir refuser,' he explained apologetically, 'à leur curiosité.'⁷⁰ Obligated to explain Bekker's views 'le plus fidèlement qu'il sera possible', Le Clerc assured readers that while agreeing in part 'on ne prétend pas en approuver par tout la doctrine.' Basnage de Beauval, who published his initial review earlier, in May 1691, was even readier to mince words. Like Le Clerc, and any journal editor of the time, Basnage was bound to judge Bekker's case, denying the existence of magic and demonic forces, partially valid, but equally compelled to insist that he goes too far; 'nier que le Diable puisse avoir aucune part à tout ce qui se passe dans le monde, c'est à l'égard de bien des gens presque autant que si l'on arrachoit Dieu de son ciel.'⁷¹

The journals appeared on the scene too late to be faced by the dilemma of having to review the works of Spinoza, Meyer, Koerbagh, Van den Enden, and Beverland. Other illicit works, such as the more radical texts of Fontenelle and much of the *oeuvre* of Boulainvilliers, circulated before 1750 mostly in manuscript, or in other cases were all but entirely suppressed and failed to circulate at all, as with the Biblical criticism of Yves de Vallone and Giannone. But there were also works, published from the 1680s onwards, which had an unmistakably radical content and which journal editors might have ignored but which, not infrequently, they discussed,

explaining their contents, somewhat frigidly to be sure, but nevertheless more or less objectively. In such cases the occasional word of disapproval was doubtless usually genuine. However, in cases where editors are known to have been themselves deists and adherents of the Radical Enlightenment, it is possible to suspect that the journals were being deliberately used as a forum for airing radical views.

One of the more noteworthy of the short-lived journals, for example, *L'Europe Savante* (1718–20) was a Franco-Dutch production, produced by a group of deistic Catholic savants—Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe (1684–1746), and his friends, the three brothers Jean Lévesque de Burigny, Gérard Lévesque de Champeaux, and Louis-Jean Lévesque de Pouilly, and the librarian of the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Pierre François Le Couroyer—eager to profit from the freer atmosphere prevailing in Paris since the death of Louis XIV in 1715, to promote deistic ideas both in France and the Netherlands, albeit discreetly, with the encouragement, it is thought of the Baron Hohendorf, then in the Austrian Netherlands and in contact with Saint-Hyacinthe, as well as Marchand and other journal editors.⁷² The journal was published by a Huguenot firm in The Hague, but some of the editorial work was carried out in Paris, where the three brothers were, though it seems that Saint-Hyacinthe, in Holland, was the principal editor. Among the books reviewed by *L'Europe Savante* in its first year was Collins' *A Philosophical Inquiry, concerning Human Liberty* (1717), published by R. Robinson of Saint Paul's Church Yard in London. The journal provided an unbiased account of Collins' Spinozistic rejection of free will and argument that all human action is necessarily determined, including his assertion that in the ancient world it was the Epicureans who believed in

free will and were the largest group among the 'atheists' who 'étoient partisans de la liberté' while the Stoics, 'qui formoient la secte la plus nombreuse des Déistes, soutenoient la nécessité'. Among the Jews of antiquity it was the allegedly irreligious Sadduceans who claimed that man is free while 'les Esséniens et les Pharisiens, à qui Jésus-Christ ne reprochoit que leur hypocrisie, croioient que l'homme étoit nécessité'.⁷³ The review explains how Collins builds a system of morality on his doctrine of necessity, claiming that if man is not necessarily driven to act as he does 'par l'esperance du plaisir, et par crainte des peines, il n'a plus les idées de morale, il n'a plus de motifs pour se soumettre aux Loix'.⁷⁴ The reviewer's objections to Collins' exposition of a Spinozistic moral system are remarkably mild. At the crucial juncture he simply comments that the 'author' circumvents the difficulty of explaining how such a system could be compatible with reward and punishment in the hereafter.⁷⁵

The journals, then, were one of the most powerful agents of cultural and intellectual change during the Early Enlightenment era. In the main they served as a pillar of the Christian moderate Enlightenment and an engine of war against both traditionalist notions and radical views. However, beyond setting broad perimeters and extolling toleration and objectivity, they never forged a coherent consensus of what, in philosophical, theological, and scientific terms, the essentials of the moderate mainstream Enlightenment actually were. At the same time, they helped define the clandestine Radical Enlightenment, which was beyond the pale of respectable opinion, but nevertheless failed to segregate it with absolute clarity from the moderate, mainstream Enlightenment, leaving residual but crucial

unclassified areas of vagueness. Furthermore, adamant professions of impartiality made it impossible altogether to ignore highly contentious and radical works, the content of which then had to be explained without too obvious a show of disapproval. This in turn left room for insinuating judgements and reviews which leave an ambivalent impression or may not have been intended to undermine radical positions at all. Thus it is possible to argue that the journals in some degree also served to propagate the Radical Enlightenment.

PART II
THE RISE OF PHILOSOPHICAL
RADICALISM

SPINOZA

Spinoza, then, emerged as the supreme philosophical bogeyman of Early Enlightenment Europe. Admittedly, historians have rarely emphasized this. It has been much more common, and still is, to claim that Spinoza was rarely understood and had very little influence, a typical example of an abiding historiographical refrain which appears to be totally untrue but nevertheless, since the nineteenth century, has exerted an enduring appeal for all manner of scholars. In fact, no one else during the century 1650–1750 remotely rivalled Spinoza's notoriety as the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, morality, and what was everywhere regarded, in absolutist and non-absolutist states alike, as divinely constituted political authority.

Admittedly, in Britain many (but by no means all) writers deemed Hobbes more widely pervasive than Spinoza as a promotor of freethinking, irreligion, and incredulity. But given Hobbes' politics, and his attitude to ecclesiastical power and censorship, as well as his being (by his own admission) philosophically less bold and comprehensive, he simply was not, and could not have been, the source and inspiration for a systematic redefinition of man, cosmology, politics, social hierarchy, sexuality, and ethics in the radical sense Spinoza was. When placed in a full historical context, Spinoza evidently had no real rival even in England as the chief progenitor and author of 'that hideous hypothesis', as Hume (ironically?) called it, the 'doctrine of the simplicity of the

universe, and the unity of that substance, in which [Spinoza] supposes both thought and matter to inhere',¹ eliminating divine Providence and governance of the world, in other words, the Naturalistic, materialist, one-substance undercurrent culminating in La Mettrie and Diderot.

But is it likely, one might well object, or even conceivable, that any single seventeenth-century author, let alone an aloof, solitary figure raised among a despised religious minority who lacked formal academic training and status, can have fundamentally and decisively shaped a tradition of radical thinking which eventually spanned the whole continent, exerted an immense influence over successive generations, and shook western civilization to its foundations? Can one thinker meaningfully be said to have forged a line of thought which furnished the philosophical matrix, including the idea of evolution, of the entire radical wing of the European Enlightenment, an ideological stance subscribed to by dozens of writers and thinkers right across the continent from Ireland to Russia and from Sweden to Iberia? The answer, arguably, is yes. For even the last, the mid-eighteenth-century, phase in the formation of the Radical Enlightenment, the probing towards the concept of evolution from inert matter, and of higher from lower forms of life, was derived, as its foremost champion, Diderot, stressed, directly from the doctrine that motion is inherent in matter, a concept generally regarded with horror and universally acknowledged in Enlightenment Europe as quintessentially Spinozist. The claim that Nature is self-moving, and creates itself, became indeed the very trademark of the *Spinosistes*. Thus the origins of the evolutionary thesis seemingly reinforce Einstein's proposition that the modern scientist who rejects divine Providence and a God that governs the destinies of man,

while accepting 'the orderly harmony of what exists', the intelligibility of an imminent universe based on principles of mathematical rationality, in effect believes 'in Spinoza's God'.²

Fundamental shifts in the mental world of western civilization no doubt originate in vast social forces and a multitude of cultural influences. But the examples of Erasmus and Calvin remind us how a few wholly outstanding individual minds may, at crucial moments, through their thoughts and writings, lend decisively formative expression to rising impulses across an entire continent. Spinoza, furthermore, appeared on the scene just as the implications of the New Philosophy and the rise of the mechanistic world-view were first becoming widely evident, providing new, exhilarating perspectives inconceivable just a few years before. Of course, the Naturalist and materialist philosophies of ancient Greece and Rome had persisted in the consciousness of western man in a widely suffused if strongly repressed, furtively cultivated, fashion, perceptible but heavily camouflaged, in the writings and conversation of the *libertins érudits*. But it was only in the 1650s and 1660s that prospects for reviving and reformulating such notions in conjunction with the mechanistic reasoning of Galileo and Descartes arose. Before then there was little opportunity to promulgate a bold, comprehensive, modern Naturalism, albeit less owing to official repression, such as the burning of Bruno and Vanini and the condemnation of Galileo, than because until Galileo's insights had been universalized by Descartes to produce the new rigorously mechanistic world-view, the indispensable conceptual apparatus—mathematical rationality as the sole and exclusive criterion of truth—remained lacking.

Bayle, then, showed consummate judgement in commencing his seminal article on Spinoza in his *Dictionnaire*, by stressing that the building-blocks of Spinoza's system were not new, but that he considered Spinoza the first 'qui ait réduit en système l'athéisme, et qui en ait fait un corps de doctrine lié et tissu selon les manières des geomètres'.³ By joining up, and integrating in a powerfully coherent system, recent insights with concepts which had reverberated disparately and incoherently for millennia, Spinoza imparted order, cohesion, and formal logic to what in effect was a fundamentally new view of man, God, and the universe rooted in philosophy, nurtured by scientific thought, and capable of producing a revolutionary ideology. Hence, as we shall see, it was Spinoza more than any other thinker who provided the *esprits forts* of the early and mid-eighteenth century with most of their intellectual heavy guns.

By 1750 innumerable authors, French, German, Italian, Scandinavian, Iberian, Swiss, and English, as well as Dutch, had indignantly denounced Spinoza as the most pernicious and dangerous thinker of the era. Typically, Buddeus styled him, in 1717, the 'chief atheist of our age' (*atheorum notstra aetate princeps*).⁴ But by that time Spinoza had been universally decried as the prince of atheists, Christendom's chief foe, the 'new Mahomet' for almost half a century. Nor was his infamous reputation confined to the world of learned and purely academic publications. Hence Thomasius could assert in 1688, in his *Monats-Gespräche*, a periodical addressed to a broad reading public, that in Germany it was commonly known in society who Spinoza was and that this had been the case ever since the publication of the *Tractatus* in 1670.⁵ Exactly like Machiavelli and Hobbes, but unlike

almost every other writer, Spinoza was usually referred to by the hundreds of Early Enlightenment authors who cite him by his surname alone.

But while Spinoza's notoriety mainly dates from after 1670, he was already acknowledged well before this among a small network of northern European *érudits* as ranking among the leading philosophical minds of the time. Indeed, there are hints that the later Spinoza legend began to evolve even before publication of his first book, his geometrical exposition of Descartes, in 1663. Thus, in the summer of 1661 while travelling through the Netherlands, Henry Oldenburg,⁶ whose appointment as secretary of the London Royal Society was then pending, thought fit (despite a pressing schedule of high-level scholarly and scientific business) to go out of his way to visit, and spend many hours with, an aspiring young philosopher who had thus far published nothing and was devoid of academic links and international recognition. That he should seek him out in his modest house at Rijnsburg (near Leiden) suggests that Oldenburg was following the advice of persons who, even then, judged Spinoza one of the key thinkers of the age.⁷

It is indeed astounding that most of Spinoza's mature system should already have been clearly worked out and formulated by the time of Oldenburg's visit. Spinoza had set out his core ideas, a stance to which subsequently he unwaveringly adhered, in particular in his *Korte Verhandeling* (1660–1).⁸ In this text he states his famous doctrine that every substance must be infinite, that one substance cannot produce another, and that therefore there is only one substance. Consequently, whatever exists belongs to that one substance which is God, while Extended and Thinking Nature are hence

merely two attributes of the same thing. Accordingly, 'God is, in relation to his effects or creatures no other than an immanent cause,' that is, the totality of everything, while causality and creation are inherent in, and not external to, that one substance.⁹ God's Providence is redefined as 'nothing but the striving we find both in Nature as a whole and in particular things, tending to maintain and preserve their being'.¹⁰

Natura naturans, the active or creative power of Nature which is God is distinguished from the actuality and creatures of nature, or *Natura naturata*.¹¹ Motion is declared inherent in matter and 'has been from all eternity and will remain to all eternity, immutable', the differences between one body and another arising naturally from the different proportions of motion and rest in each body.¹² Everything which happens occurs necessarily; there 'are no contingent things'; and nothing can be otherwise than it is.¹³ Hence there are no miracles and no divinely given commandments. 'Good' and 'evil', accordingly, are not moral absolutes and do not exist in Nature, being purely relative notions concerning man. Spinoza promulgates his 'geometric' theory of the passions and expounds his theory of knowledge as grounded in sensation and built from our perceiving what is true and what is false through mathematical proportions and relationships so that while we make mistakes, and frequently believe things which are not true, we cannot believe erroneously such that truth can not be demonstrated to us 'through truth itself, as falsity is also [made] clear through truth'.¹⁴ The eternal, unbreakable link between ideas and reality is such that all our notions are in some sense true, so that they are adequate or inadequate rather than strictly true or false. The seeming

paradox that man is determined necessarily but nevertheless possesses liberty, through reason which is intrinsic to his *conatus*, or striving to conserve his being, is introduced. Finally, the existence of disembodied spirits and apparitions, including Satan and demons, is categorically ruled out.¹⁵ Effectively, little is missing, apart from Spinoza's political philosophy and theory of the origin of religion.

Not only had Spinoza arrived at the essentials of his system by 1660, he was also perfectly aware of the radical implications of his ideas and the violent reaction they were likely to provoke. Since his philosophy stood in total contradiction to the tenets of Judaism and all forms of Christianity, as well as Cartesianism and the mainstream of the western philosophical tradition since the end of antiquity, it was obvious that his philosophy could only be propagated clandestinely. Already in the *Korte Verhandeling*, Spinoza urges his friends in Amsterdam for whom he had written this outline not to be shocked by the novelty of his system 'for you know only too well that it is no objection to the truth of a thing that it is not accepted by many,'¹⁶ and to judge his system on its intellectual merits and not any other basis: 'and since you are also aware of the character of the age in which we live, I would ask you urgently to be very careful about communicating these things to others.'¹⁷ His admonition was not meant to dissuade his disciples from propagating his ideas but to urge them to proceed with great caution, choose only promising ground, and when expounding his system 'have no other aim or motive than the salvation of your fellow man and make as sure as possible you do not work in vain'.¹⁸

Even before he left Amsterdam in 1661, Spinoza had emerged as a leader, perhaps the leader, of the 'atheistic' circle

which by then had taken shape in the city. A visiting Danish savant, Olaus Borch, who kept a travel diary of his 1661–2 visit to Holland, where he had come to research, meet scholars, and hear lectures by the Leiden professors Heereboord, Heidanus, and Dele Boe Sylvius, noted in May 1661 that ‘here are some atheists in Amsterdam several of whom are Cartesians, among them a Jew who is an impudent atheist.’¹⁹ In September 1661, after Spinoza had left Amsterdam and settled in Rijnsburg in quest of the tranquillity he needed to develop his philosophy, and shortly after Oldenburg’s visit, Borch jotted in his diary that ‘at Rijnsburg there is a Christian who is an apostate Jew, in fact practically an atheist who does not respect the Old Testament and considers the New Testament to be of no more weight than the *Koran* and Aesop’s *Fables* and that, for the rest, this man lives in an exemplary and irreproachable fashion, his only occupation being the manufacture of telescopes and microscopes.’²⁰ Apparently it was already by this date part of the legend surrounding Spinoza that in his home he kept his Bible shelved next to the ‘Koran and the Talmud’.²¹ Later that month Borch gathered some additional snippets in learned conversation, notably that the near atheist of Rijnsburg was called ‘Spinoza’, that he was extremely redoubtable in philosophical debate, and that he ‘excelled in Cartesian philosophy, indeed in many things surpasses Descartes himself with his distinct and cogent concepts’.²² That Spinoza by 1661 could not only persuasively pick holes in Descartes in the presence of leading scholars but deploy his own system effectively, if in veiled terms, in conversation, is eloquently confirmed by Oldenburg’s response. Spinoza had been characteristically cautious in their conversations and

Oldenburg failed to perceive the essentials of his system. But he grasped enough to realize that Spinoza had somehow invalidated Descartes' doctrine of two substances, redefining the relationship of 'extension' and 'thought', and that he harboured fundamental criticisms of Bacon's empiricism as well as of Descartes.²³

But if Spinoza was already by 1660 a mature and formidable philosopher deploying a complete new system, had disciples of his own, and could convince Oldenburg he had outflanked Cartesianism, crucial questions arise regarding Spinoza's intellectual development prior to 1660. First, if one assumes, as most scholars do, that he started his philosophical odyssey after or around the time of his expulsion from the Amsterdam Portuguese Jewish community at the age of 23, just four years before, in 1656, without previously having had any conventional higher education or even much Latin, how could he conceivably have reached such impressive heights so swiftly? The answer is undoubtedly that he did not embark on his philosophical project in 1656 but long before then, as is clearly indicated by a variety of evidence. Thus, his Collegiant friend, Jarig Jelles,²⁴ who knew him for most of his adult life from at least as early as 1654–5,²⁵ affirms in his preface to Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma* (1677), that long before Spinoza freed himself from the 'worldly obstacles and hindrances which generally obstruct the quest for truth', a reference to his abandoning commerce and Judaism in 1656, he had immersed himself in philosophy, and especially Cartesianism, rebelling inwardly against what his teachers in the synagogue schools had taught him.²⁶ Jelles stresses his 'burning desire to know', generating an indefatigable intellectual quest while he was still outwardly an observant

Jew 'in which the writings of the famous Renatus Descartes, which came into his hands at that time, proved of great assistance'.²⁷ Similarly, the eighteenth-century historian of Amsterdam Sephardic Jewry, David Franco Mendes, who was undoubtedly relying here on folklore within the community, stresses that even as a boy—that is, many years before his expulsion—Spinoza vacillated in his Jewish belief, owing to philosophical influences among which was Cartesianism.²⁸

But the clearest proof that Spinoza grappled with philosophy, as distinct from theological questions, for many years before his sensational break with the rabbis, elders, and congregation in 1656, is that he tells us so himself in his earliest surviving work,²⁹ the *Improvement of the Understanding* (c.1658). Here he dwells on the protracted gestation period between the effective commencement of his career as a philosopher and his (much later) break with Judaism and the Jewish community. He explains that in his youth he exhaustively considered what the 'highest good' in human life is. But for a long time, despite inferring that 'everything that usually arises in everyday life is vain and futile', he was nevertheless deterred from devoting himself wholeheartedly to philosophy by the practical consequences of discarding the lifestyle in which he had been raised, judging it 'inadvisable ... to abandon something certain for something uncertain'.³⁰ In the Amsterdam Sephardic circles in which his father, Michael d'Espinosa (c.1588–1654), a moderately affluent merchant trading chiefly with Portugal who had been a member of the governing board of elders (*parnasim*) of the synagogue, and he himself, mixed, the 'advantages which are acquired through honour and riches and which I would be compelled to do without were I to devote

myself seriously to something different and new' were abundantly evident. Also he saw that 'if the highest happiness does lie in those things' and he irrevocably renounced them, he would have no way of recovering the 'highest good': 'equally, if it does not reside in such things and I devoted myself to them, then again I would not attain the highest happiness.'³¹ Consequently, he long pondered 'whether it might be possible to achieve my new way of life, or at least certainty about it, without changing the order and form of my ordinary existence'. 'Often I tried this,' he says, 'but in vain.'³² Philosophy and the requirements of business, religion, and status, he discovered, simply do not mix.

Nevertheless, a great deal more time elapsed before Spinoza finally abandoned his efforts to lead a double existence, combining outward conformity to faith, family, and status with a private immersion in philosophy. If he discarded the former, he had concluded, he would be sacrificing a lifestyle which is intrinsically shallow and uncertain for a higher good, uncertain not in nature 'but only with regard to achieving it'.³³ Yet despite being convinced of this now, still he wavered, finding, he admits, that rank, honour, money, and comfort are not so easily dispensed with. It is not enough to grasp the futility of what most men seek: 'for although I saw all this sufficiently clearly in my mind, I could not, on that account lay aside all desire for money, pleasure, and esteem.'³⁴

Spinoza was finally helped to the irredeemable break which fundamentally transformed his own life and eventually, through philosophy, the whole of western thought and culture, by a sequence of shattering blows to the family business.³⁵ In the early 1650s, his father's firm was virtually also his, since

he was the eldest son after the death of his elder brother, Isaac, in 1649, and his father was frequently bedridden and, early in 1654, died.³⁶ The surviving data for his father's payments of community tax (*finta*), and his own subsequent payments between 1654 and his expulsion in 1656, contributions assessed on the basis of merchants' turnover, plainly illustrate the progressive decay of the business during his father's last years and the two years (1654–6) Spinoza himself presided over the firm now styled 'Bento y Gabriel d'Espinosa'.³⁷ The reasons for this commercial disintegration are not hard to discover. During the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–4)—and during the eighteen months beforehand when over a hundred Dutch ships were seized by the English on the high seas³⁸—numerous Amsterdam businesses were bankrupted and the firm of Spinoza was evidently among these.

A veritable catalogue of disaster beset the family firm, beginning in 1650 when a ship called *Den Prince*, homeward bound from the Canaries, carrying wine for Michael among others, was confiscated on the high seas by the English.³⁹ A cargo of sugar from Dutch Brazil, on an Enkhuizen vessel, the *Nachtegael*, consigned by Michael to his correspondents in Rouen, was taken by the English in the early summer of 1651.⁴⁰ Two Dutch vessels homeward bound from Portugal, with cargoes of olive oil for his account, the *Fortune* and the *Pieter and Jan*, one from Aveiro, the other from Lisbon, were seized by English warships later in 1651 and escorted into London. Michael sought restitution of his goods through his London agent, but owing to the severe tension between England and the Dutch Republic, followed by the outbreak of

war, presumably without any positive result.⁴¹ Next, in September 1651, the ship *'t Witte Valck* was intercepted by Barbary corsairs off Cape Saint Vincent, the pirates plundering 'diverse merchandise belonging to Michael Spinoza, Jewish merchant at Amsterdam', his losses this time being estimated by the Dutch consul at Salé at 3,000 guilders.⁴² After the formal outbreak of war with England, the Spinozas, like all Amsterdam merchants, curtailed their overseas dealings drastically. Nevertheless risks were taken and more cargoes lost both to the English and to Barbary corsairs. An Amsterdam ship, *'t Vat*, having successfully eluded the English on its outward voyage in June 1652, calling at Nantes and then Oporto, reached the Algarve, where it was to load olive oil, figs, and almonds for the Spinozas, but was caught and pillaged by Moorish corsairs in full view of the port of Faro, Michael again losing his whole cargo.⁴³ By 1655 the business was ruined, and Spinoza saddled with sizeable debts to his, and his father's, correspondents in Rouen, two powerful figures in the Portuguese crypto-Jewish community there, Duarte Rodrigues Lamego and Antonio Rodrigues de Morais.⁴⁴

That the mature Spinoza, despite his republicanism, was no friend of the English Commonwealth which replaced early Stuart absolutism is plain enough. No doubt he had intellectual grounds for his undisguised disdain for the Cromwellian regime: if a people is 'accustomed to royal rule and constrained by that alone', he declares, in reference to the English monarchy, it is extremely difficult to remove a king, however tyrannical, without appointing another in his place.⁴⁵ 'A sad example of this truth,' he affirms, 'is provided by the English people' who removed their king 'but with his

disappearance found it quite impossible to change their form of government' and 'after much bloodshed resorted to hailing a new monarch by a different name—as if the whole question at issue was a name.' Cromwell, insists Spinoza, maintained himself in power 'by extirpating the royal line, killing the king's friends, or those thought to be so', going to war against neighbours and 'destroying the peace lest tranquillity encourage murmuring and so that the people should divert their thoughts away from the king's execution to fresh matters that would engage their full attention'.⁴⁶ Too late Englishmen realized that, instead of saving their country, they had changed 'everything for the worse'. But while all this fits with the rest of his political thought, one can hardly believe, given the circumstances, that such fierce disparagement of Cromwell and the English Revolution is not also prompted by a measure of personal animus stemming from the disastrous losses Spinoza and his family had suffered at English hands.

The indications that Spinoza's philosophical odyssey, including his intellectual rebellion against revealed religion, began not in 1656 but a considerable time before undoubtedly has important implications for our understanding of the historical origins of Early Enlightenment radical thought. In the first place, the evidence implies that Spinoza's expulsion from the synagogue had little or nothing to do with any change in his ideas as such and was therefore only in an outward, superficial sense caused by theological heresy. It also means Spinoza's philosophical rebellion can not have been inspired, as has been repeatedly claimed in recent years, either by the most prominent other Jewish heretic in Amsterdam in the later 1650s, Juan de Prado (*c.*1612–*c.*1670), previously a crypto-Jew in Spain who had encountered deistic influences among crypto-Jewish friends in Andalusia,⁴⁷ but

who did not arrive in Holland, where he continued his career as a deist, until 1655, or by the eccentric, Millenarian Bible critic of probable Marrano descent, Isaac La Peyrère,⁴⁸ who likewise arrived in Amsterdam only in 1655.⁴⁹ If we accept that for several years, probably as many as five or six before 1655, Spinoza was simultaneously a resolute philosophical rebel and outwardly an observant Jew, neither Prado nor La Peyrère can have precipitated his intellectual rebellion. While Jelles may have contributed to his early formation by encouraging his preoccupation with philosophy, and with Cartesianism especially, the only personage who seems likely to have guided him powerfully in a specifically radical direction at this early stage, as two early biographies of Spinoza both affirm, was his ex-Jesuit Latin master, Franciscus van den Enden (1602–74).

While Spinoza himself never mentions Van den Enden anywhere in his books or letters, other evidence proves conclusively that there was a close link between the two at this juncture in Spinoza's life, and that Van den Enden in some way helped direct Spinoza's early philosophical development. According to his principal biographer, Colerus, the budding thinker 'had the famous Francis vanden Ende for his master, who instructed him in the Latin tongue and first instill'd in him those principles which were the foundation of his future greatness', a claim frequently echoed in the early eighteenth century.⁵⁰ Maximilien Lucas, author of the earliest account of Spinoza's life, likewise notes that, besides Latin, Van den Enden taught Spinoza mathematics, Cartesian philosophy, and a little Greek.⁵¹ Willem Goeree, a radical writer in his own right, later commented that, as a young man, he had known Van den Enden, frequented the same company

as he, and 'more than once eaten and drunk with him' but learnt little that was edifying, so that he could readily imagine 'Spinoza too picked up few good principles from this master who was very generous in peddling his godless convictions to young and old alike and boasting he was rid of the fable of faith.'⁵² Adriaen Koerbagh, he adds, 'through contact with this man did not absorb anything good ... as is plain from all those offensive entries in his Dictionary, or stinking

Bloemhof.⁵³ The early eighteenth-century Amsterdam Anabaptist physician, Johannes Monnikhoff, whose brief account of Spinoza's life is based on Colerus and other early published sources but also incorporates some oral lore about Spinoza still current in Amsterdam in his day, claims it was Spinoza's parents who originally sent him to the ex-Jesuit to learn Latin as a youth, and that, unknown to his father, Van den Enden also 'inculcated into him such ideas as afterwards provided the basis of his philosophy'.⁵⁴

It would seem, then, that neither La Peyrère's Bible criticism nor Prado's deism nor any internal heretical tendencies within Amsterdam Sephardic Judaism of the mid-1650s guided Spinoza's early philosophical formation or planted the seeds of his spiritual rebellion. Rather, we may infer that Spinoza was caught up in the general intellectual turbulence in Holland precipitated by Cartesianism, and it was specifically Van den Enden who first pointed him in a radical direction, either at the beginning of the 1650s or, as seems far more likely, in the late 1640s, when Spinoza was in his late teens. But this, in turn, raises the question of what Monnikhoff's 'provided the basis' really signifies. Did Van den Enden merely encourage the youth in a rebellious and irreligious direction while teaching him Latin and the

rudiments of Cartesianism, or was Van den Enden himself a cogently innovative thinker who preceded Spinoza in outlining the rudiments of what became the backbone of the European radical tradition? Unquestionably, there are affinities between Spinoza's and Van den Enden's ideas in the 1660s, when the radical philosophical coterie which later formed the Spinozist 'sect' or movement in the city first arose, and these have prompted at least two modern scholars to argue that Van den Enden was a kind of 'proto-Spinoza', the mastermind behind the Spinozist movement, and the first to formulate the fundamentals of Spinoza's system. The evidence of Van den Enden's own writings show these affinities are indeed extensive and striking and, it seems certain, as the poet Pieter Rixtel, a former student of Van den Enden, indicates in a poem dated March 1666, that by then Van den Enden understood 'God' as a philosophical category identical to Nature.⁵⁵

Yet there is no evidence that in the 1640s or 1650s, as a consequence of involvement with Cartesianism, Van den Enden did formulate a systematic, mechanistic, atheistic philosophy; and it seems rather implausible when all the circumstances are carefully weighed that he was really much more than a lively stimulus to Spinoza's early intellectual formation. Certainly there is no reference to any coterie of philosophical 'atheists' in Amsterdam before around 1660–1 and not the slightest indication of anyone being 'converted' to atheistic views by Van den Enden prior to Spinoza. Still more significant, none of Van den Enden's surviving writings containing recognizably radical ideas with notable affinities with Spinoza's thought antedates 1661, by which time Spinoza was a mature philosopher whose system had already been complete probably for several years. Van den Enden

himself affirms that he wrote no political theory, the field in which he chiefly excelled, before 1661 and by then he had at his disposal not just Spinoza's ideas and Machiavelli's, but several published writings of Johan and Pieter de la Court, laying the basis for a vigorous, unprecedentedly radical, Dutch republicanism.

Furthermore, as we shall see, except for Machiavelli, Van den Enden's main sources were all of recent provenance, published or in circulation at the end of the 1650s and the beginning of the 1660s.⁵⁶ Judging from his earlier interest in alchemy and Van Helmont's mystical speculations, it seems likely that Van den Enden had himself only recently discovered Descartes when the young Spinoza first came to him for Latin lessons, and that it was only subsequently that he developed his rigorous 'geometric' Naturalism. This would imply that Van den Enden's radicalism only slightly preceded Spinoza's in its inception and subsequently developed *pari passu*, or even in the wake of Spinoza. In any case, by 1660 at the latest he had clearly been far outstripped in his command of the intricacies of the New Philosophy by his young protégé.

Even so, Van den Enden was probably in an outward sense the leader of the 'atheistic', 'Cartesian' circle active in Amsterdam before Spinoza's departure in 1661, being the oldest, best known, and most forceful, as well as authoritative, person among the group. In April 1662, Borch noted, 'there are atheists here and especially Cartesians such as Van den Enden, Glasemaker, etc.', adding that while these 'atheists' speak a lot about 'God' what they mean by God is 'nothing other than the whole universe as lately became clear from a certain text in Dutch composed with much artifice, the name of the author of which has been suppressed'.⁵⁷ Borch is not

referring here to any of Van den Enden's writings, which he does mention further on, but, scholars agree, he is almost certainly referring to the *Korte Verhandeling*, which is known to have been circulating in manuscript in Amsterdam in the months following Spinoza's departure from the city.⁵⁸

According to the son of his publisher, Jan Rieuwertsz, in conversation with two young German savants sent from Halle to glean more information about Spinoza's life by Christian Thomasius in 1704, the persons with whom Spinoza chiefly associated in Amsterdam following his expulsion from the synagogue, from 1656 until 1661, were the older Rieuwertsz—later Spinoza's publisher in whose bookshop he would often have browsed—Van den Enden, Jan Hendrik Glazemaker,⁵⁹ the skilful translator of Descartes (and later Spinoza) into Dutch, Jarig Jelles, Pieter Balling,⁶⁰ and Lodewijk Meyer. From these men Spinoza learnt much. Yet as early as 1656, not only would he obviously have known considerably more Bible criticism, as well as far more Hebrew than any of the others, but in other respects too he was apparently disinclined to show the deference of a beginner. Indeed, Rieuwertsz remarked that Spinoza, after his departure from the Jewish community, was already sufficiently confident of his intellectual powers and philosophical skill to attempt to persuade not just Collegiant acquaintances but also Van den Enden to adopt his views.⁶¹

Consequently, it would seem that Spinoza's expulsion from the synagogue in 1656, however decisive as an event in his life and as a factor shaping his future, has nothing to do with his intellectual formation as such. In 1654–5, the synagogue records show, Spinoza continued as before as regards Jewish observance and synagogue attendance,

conducting himself as a regular member of the community.⁶² Only from late 1655 did he cease paying his dues and conducting himself as an observant Jew. Almost certainly, the crucial confrontation between Spinoza, backed by Juan de Prado, on one side, and on the other, Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira, and doubtless nearly everybody else present, over the fundamentals of Jewish belief, in a communal evening study class which the Amsterdam Sephardic poet Daniel Levi de Barrios later described in 1683 as an epic encounter in which the 'wise' Morteira championed religion 'against the thorns [in Spanish: *espinos*] in the meadows [in Spanish: *prados*] of impiety', an event which can not have occurred prior to Prado's arrival in 1655, in fact took place late that year.⁶³

Ruined financially, Spinoza had now definitively made up his mind to cross the Rubicon—discarding respectability, social standing, and commerce and devoting himself wholeheartedly to philosophy. By publicly repudiating the fundamentals of rabbinic tradition and authority in so formal and provocative a manner, the young thinker virtually demanded to be expelled, indeed made it impossible for the synagogue authorities not to expel him. By severing his ties with the congregation in such a dramatic fashion, openly challenging the rabbis and the synagogue elders over the essentials of Jewish belief while shortly afterwards abandoning the family business, together with its remaining assets and debts, to his younger brother Gabriel, he emancipated himself spiritually and philosophically, not just by breaking with organized religion and social status but also extricating himself from a deepening morass of legal

difficulties and debts relating to his failed business and family predicament.⁶⁴

The precise reasons adduced by the community elders for his excommunication remain unknown. But it is plain from the form of excommunication used in July 1656, one of altogether exceptional vehemence and severity only very occasionally deployed in early modern times,⁶⁵ that he was proscribed for no ordinary deviance, sacrilege, financial irregularity, or heresy but open, systematic, premeditated, and blatant doctrinal rebellion of a fundamental kind that simply could not be ignored or smoothed over. Levi de Barrios later noted in 1683, as subsequently did Franco Mendes, that Spinoza was excommunicated due to his 'evil opinions'.⁶⁶ As the text of the ban itself indicates, nothing could have been easier for Spinoza, had he so wished, than to avoid excommunication. The door was left wide open for him to compromise, retract, and resume his seat in the synagogue. As far as the community elders (*parnasim*) and rabbis were concerned, he could with the greatest ease in the world, had he been willing to make some gesture of submission and repentance, revert to being a philosopher only inwardly. The *parnasim*, declares the text of his excommunication, had long known of the 'evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza' and 'endeavoured by various means and promises to turn him from his evil ways' but had only received 'daily more and more reports of the abominable heresies he practised and taught and his monstrous deeds, and, having many trustworthy witnesses who have confirmed all this in the presence of the said Spinoza', the elders ruled, 'with the rabbis' agreement, that the said Spinoza should be

excommunicated and cast out from among the people of Israel'.⁶⁷

The 'monstrous deeds' were presumably violation of the sabbath and other offences against Jewish observance and dietary laws; but what were the 'abominable heresies'? These can perhaps be reconstructed from several clues, including the precious testimony submitted to the Inquisition in Madrid in August 1659 by a Spanish-American friar, Fray Tomas Solano y Robles, captured by the English on a Spanish vessel sailing from South America to Seville, who, after leaving London, had spent eight months, from August 1658, in Amsterdam prior to embarking for Madrid. In Amsterdam Friar Tomas stayed in a hostelry much frequented by Spaniards and Portuguese where he had several conversations about religion with a 'certain Espinosa', a native of Holland 'who had studied at Leiden and is a good philosopher', and the latter's associate, Dr Juan de Prado, a physician.⁶⁸ This is the only contemporary reference to Spinoza having studied for a time at the University of Leiden, but it may well be accurate, as there is very little evidence about this particular phase of his life and later numerous hints suggest that he knew personally various key figures in the Dutch academic world of the day.⁶⁹ Assuming this report is correct, his Leiden studies would most likely have taken place in the period from late 1656 to early 1658. More important though, the friar also commented on Spinoza's and Prado's opinions. He informed the Inquisitors that both men, of whom Spinoza, though the younger, was plainly the more formidable philosophically, 'had professed the Law of Moses' but been expelled from the synagogue because they had forsaken Judaism for 'atheism'. They had admitted to the friar that they were circumcised and

had 'observed the law of the Jews' but subsequently changed their views because it seemed to them 'the said law is not true, that the soul dies with the body, and that there is no God except philosophically,' that is, no providential God.⁷⁰ Henceforth, since they believed the soul dies with the body 'they had no need of religion.' The synagogue records independently confirm that Prado denied, or was held to deny, the Creation, Revelation, and divine Providence, as well as immortality of the soul.⁷¹

Almost certainly these were not only already Spinoza's views in 1656 but for some years before. That his inner philosophical quest encompassed denial of the soul's immortality, divine Providence, and a God who rewards and punishes seems to be confirmed by the unquestionable fact that in 1656 Spinoza wrote a long and incisive treatise (now lost) in Spanish, defending his views against rabbinic authority which, according to Levi de Barrios, 'seemed at first like a vase of gold but, on closer scrutiny, turned out to be flowing with poison', a work in which he argued the Jews were no longer obliged to observe the Mosaic Law. Unless one supposes that he worked out the ideas in this treatise and elaborated this text wholly within the short space of time between the autumn of 1655 and his expulsion, an unconvincing assumption given his public clash with Morteira, it seems safe to conclude Spinoza inwardly denied that the Jewish Scriptures were divine Revelation, and therefore repudiated the essence of Judaism, long before 1656.⁷² For his part, Prado was unquestionably Spinoza's ally and comrade in unfurling the banner of deistic revolt against the rabbis in the years 1655–8, besides being a source of interesting information about crypto-Judaism and cryptodeism

in Spain. Having spent many years in Spanish universities, he may well have added something to the formulation of Spinoza's insights.⁷³ But knowing as he did far less about modern philosophy than Spinoza, and lacking knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and commentaries, it seems highly unlikely that he could have influenced the post-1656 development of Spinoza's thought in any significant way.

In the autobiographical passage of the *Improvement of the Understanding*, Spinoza stresses the great difficulty he experienced in sacrificing status, money, and honour for the sake of his career in philosophy. It took many years to complete this step, and when he did, he was in part pushed to do so by the bankruptcy of his business. Yet there is also a crucial sense in which he never did so. Clearly, Spinoza was far from believing the true philosopher, a person such as himself, by temperament lacks the acumen to amass power, wealth, and status. Writing to Jelles in February 1671, Spinoza recounts the story of the ancient Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus, who grew so exasperated at being constantly chided for his poverty by friends that he decided to demonstrate that it was through choice, not necessity, that he lacked possessions. To prove he knew how to acquire what he judged unworthy of his effort, he engaged all the olive presses in Greece, having ascertained that the olive crop that year would be excellent; and when the olives were gathered he hired out dearly presses he had rented cheaply, thereby accumulating great wealth within a year, which he then distributed with a generosity equal to the shrewdness with which he gained it.⁷⁴

Spinoza undoubtedly considered himself both worldly and shrewd, and while, from 1656, he invariably displayed a lofty

lack of interest in money and property, one can scarcely say the same regarding position and reputation. On the contrary, having dedicated himself fully to philosophy, he endeavoured not just to find the 'highest good' for himself but also, he intimates at the end of the *Korte Verhandeling*, to teach the path to 'salvation' to others, his object being, to paraphrase Marx, not just to meditate but to change the world, a goal in which eventually—and in a most extraordinary manner—he succeeded. Bayle remarks that Spinoza's friends claimed after his death that 'par modestie il souhaita de ne pas donner son nom à une secte.'⁷⁵ But whether or not he believed this to be true, Bayle notes that Spinoza unquestionably aspired, as Toland and others also remarked later, to found a (necessarily) clandestine philosophical 'sect' through the endeavours of which his philosophy, like that of his adolescent hero Descartes, would ultimately transform the world.

VAN DEN ENDEN: PHILOSOPHY, DEMOCRACY, AND EGALITARIANISM

i. Democratic Republicanism

Van den Enden, Borch noted in his journal in April 1662, was a Cartesian and 'atheist' who denied the sacred mysteries and whose 'religion, indeed, is nothing other than sound reason, nor does he believe Christ to be God'; he added that Van den Enden had been forbidden by the city government to dispute any longer publicly in Amsterdam, since his discourse smacked of 'atheismum'.¹ Borch's jottings also reveal that, by the early 1660s, Van den Enden was accustomed to propagate his doctrines clandestinely, circulating his manuscript writings among trusted followers and sympathizers. His subsequent contribution to the growth of the radical tradition, moreover, was altogether remarkable.

His chief work, the *Free Political Institutions (Vrye Politijke Stellingen)*, published in 1665, was mostly written between 1662 and 1664.² This uncompromising, muscular book is noteworthy for its egalitarianism, emphatic democratic tendency, and vitriolic anticlericalism. It is less a work of original thought, though, than an adept *mélange* of ingredients borrowed from Machiavelli, Johan and Pieter de la Court, Aitzema, Pieter Cornelisz Ploekhooy, Spinoza, whose *Korte Verhandeling* he certainly knew and used, and possibly Van Velthuysen, but strikingly not Hobbes.³ All his material, except Machiavelli, had only very recently been published or

circulated in manuscript. He himself remarks that in championing democratic republicanism, the quest for a true and just commonwealth based on equality, he had been preceded, to his knowledge, by two writers in the Dutch language, an allusion doubtless to Johan de la Court,⁴ in the first place, and secondly either the latter's brother, Pieter, or the Collegiant Ploekhoy.⁵ Van den Enden, evidently, was a man who mulled over what he read and knew how to select and weld his materials into a cohesive and impressive whole.⁶ Nor was he wholly devoid of originality. For assuredly he struck a new note of militancy, scorning the 'foul self-seeking and vainglory' of those who praise monarchy as a godly form of government and insisting that a true republicanism can only be cogently conceived and advocated as part of a wider set of principles relating to religion, philosophy, and education, as well as government.

Unlike the brothers De la Court who expound their impassioned anti-monarchism at great length, insisting on the innate inferiority and baseness of monarchy, a system based on hierarchy, flattery, and oppression, Van den Enden takes the perversity and arbitrariness of kings and princes for granted and concentrates rather on developing his ideas for reforming education, advancing equality, and enlightening the people. For only in this way, he urges, can the superstition, greed, and obsequiousness which form the preconditions for monarchy be assailed and overcome.⁷ Like the brothers De la Court and Spinoza, Van den Enden too is steeped in Machiavelli, whose *Discorsi* influenced him profoundly. But he is nevertheless noticeably more critical of the great Florentine than they, condemning in particular his statecraft of artifice, manipulating the apprehensions and credulity of

the common people to secure power, but precluding thereby the very process of enlightenment which alone, in his view, can open the way to a just and free commonwealth.⁸ If equality and enlightenment, in the sense of understanding the truth of things, are essential prerequisites for an enduring, well-ordered commonwealth, then a viable republic is inconceivable without, in particular, the drastic curtailment of organized religion which, according to Van den Enden—like Machiavelli, Vanini, and Spinoza—is nothing but a political device contrived to discipline and control the people through utilizing their ignorance and credulity.⁹

Basic to Van den Enden's revolutionary philosophy of education is his insistence on removing key areas of knowledge such as medicine, jurisprudence, science, philosophy, and theology from the hands of closed élites of supposed (but in fact bogus) experts who use arcane terminology and Latin to erect impenetrable walls to shut others out of their specialities and thereby control the business of law, medicine, religion, and so forth for their own profit and power. Van den Enden aims to render this knowledge accessible by projecting it in the public sphere, in everyday language and straightforward terms, readily understood by the common people. Moreover, the 'people' here clearly means women and girls as well as men and boys, even though women and servants, in Van den Enden's democratic vision, as in Spinoza's, are excluded from participation in decision-making and voting.¹⁰ As in the brothers Koerbagh and Meyer, advocacy of popular enlightenment as the foundation of republican freedom here entails a markedly more optimistic view of human nature and capabilities than one finds in Spinoza.¹¹ Van den Enden, in effect, assumes the automatic

onset of a harmonious coexistence of private interest and the common good in the people's commonwealth, closely related, as has been pointed out, to the concept of 'general will' developed later by Diderot and Rousseau.¹²

Essential components of Van den Enden's radical egalitarianism are the ideas of Plockhoy, who was closely associated with his first foray into the domain of political thought, the *Short Account* (1662) of 'New Netherland's situation, virtues, natural advantages and suitability for colonization',¹³ a text which reflects the fervent commitment to settlement in North America prevalent among some fringe religious groups in Dutch society before the conquest of the colony by the English in 1664. A Zeelander from Zierikzee, who first made his mark among the Amsterdam Collegiants in the late 1640s, Plockhoy had long been an ardent advocate of equality and unrestricted religious toleration.¹⁴ Attracted to the social radicalism which flourished briefly in England during and after the Civil War, he migrated there and, in 1659, published a pamphlet, *The Way to Peace and Settlement of these Nations*, imploring the now tottering Cromwellian régime to enact a fuller, more comprehensive religious freedom than it had yet been willing to countenance. A second tract, published in May 1659, entitled *A Way Propounded to Make the Poor in these and other Nations Happy*, unveils plans for forming a new kind of co-operative society on the outskirts of London, with eventually a daughter community 'about Bristoll, and another in Ireland where we can have a great deal of land for little money'.¹⁵

A pious Collegiant, Plockhoy taught Van den Enden no religion, philosophy, or political thought. But he undoubtedly contributed to his fervent egalitarianism and transmitted to

him elements of his ideas on co-operative labour and lifestyle, concepts not without some significance in the history of socialism. Thus, nearly three centuries later, the Manchester Co-operative Union in 1934 acknowledged that if 'our cooperative movement must have a father or a founder Peter Cornelius Ploekhoy has an excellent claim to that distinction'.¹⁶ Ploekhoy's aim was to create a 'little commonwealth' separate from the rest of society, an élite of work and spiritual values based on co-operative principles in order that 'we may the better eschue the yoke of the temporall and spirituall pharaohs, who have long enough domineered over our bodies and souls and set up again (as in former times) righteousness, love and brotherly sociableness, which are scarce any where to be found'.¹⁷ The co-operative was to share ownership, risk, capital, and work, and no form of hierarchy or leadership of any kind would be allowed. Profits would be shared among the members equitably and because only a quarter of the women were required for cleaning and cooking when groups of families live together in communal complexes or settlements, over three-quarters of the women and girls, he urges, would be free to engage in the same manual labour as the men. It remained unclear, though, a feature exploited by Ploekhoy's enemies, how concomitant erosion of the family unit and strict monogamy would be prevented.¹⁸

In Ploekhoy, the principle of equality plainly applies to women as much as men, though he does not stress this particularly, and derives from his fervent Collegiant, anti-Church convictions, his insistence on Christ's 'abolishing amongst his disciples all prehemineny or domineering of one over another', so that the 'gifts and meanes of subsistence in

the world (for necessity and delight) should be common'.¹⁹ Van den Enden doubtless endorsed his requirement that clergy of whatever kind must be debarred from their ideal American commonwealth and that in its religious assembly there should be 'no prehemidency, or sole privilege ... of offering anything or of speaking first'.²⁰ Consequently, such a co-operative would need to vet prospective new members to ensure only 'honest, rationally, impartial persons', that is, personalities free from rigid confessional allegiances as well as vice, were admitted. Those too mired in ordinary confessional thinking to be suitable as full members were to receive wages, and find their own accommodation, 'till they are fitted and prepared to be members of our society'.²¹ The best kind of people, according to Plockhoy, were 'husbandmen', 'mariners', 'masters of arts and sciences', and 'useful handy craft-men', especially 'smiths of all sortes', carpenters, bricklayers, 'weavers of all sortes', bakers, brewers, shoe-makers, hat-makers, soap-boilers, rope-makers, sail-makers, net-makers, physicians, and so on.

Plockhoy's utopian vision is predicated on the rejection of all social hierarchy. 'Every one in the world which by his office or title is differenced from others,' he insists, 'conceives he is quite another thing and in himself better than others and must be reputed for one that is set together and composed of some finer substance, and designed to a sweeter life, yea to an higher place in heaven than others'.²² Deference to noble status, for Van den Enden and Plockhoy alike, is sheer ignorance and superstition. Doubtless noble lineage 'puffeth up', contends Plockhoy, but 'what else is it but a meer name, the vanity whereof who sees it not? The very foundation of it is nothing else but the noyse of the tongue and the report of

others'.²³ 'For princes are not born on purpose,' he held, 'to reare up stately palaces, the learned are not born for the writing of many unprofitable and for the most part frivolous books; the rich are not born to boast of their gold, silver and christal vessels; the rest of the people are not born for so many various unprofitable handy-crafts,' labouring so that the rich and powerful might enjoy a sweet life off their labour.²⁴ Honest, well-meaning, and unprejudiced men and women were to work in Plockhoy's utopia, sharing the fruits of their toil untroubled by rulers, nobles, lawyers, or clergy, an 'honest' week's work for members being fixed by him at thirty-six hours.²⁵

With the Restoration of monarchy in England in 1660, Plockhoy despaired of realizing his utopian dreams there and returned to Amsterdam, where he and his followers, the 'Plockhoyisten', approached Van den Enden late in 1661, for his assistance as their spokesman and advocate in negotiations with the city government over a charter for establishing a Plockhoyist colony at Zwanendael, on the Delaware estuary, in New Netherland.²⁶ Van den Enden obliged with his customary fervour, bombarding the regent committee delegated by the city government to administer the Delaware settlements with memoranda proclaiming the advantages of Plockhoy's scheme, and proposing a detailed political constitution for the new society Plockhoy and his adherents aspired to found. The resulting text, in 117 articles, provided the basis of his subsequently published *Short Account*.²⁷ Echoing Plockhoy's call for complete toleration in the new society, Van den Enden fervently, if paradoxically, stipulates that conserving such spiritual and intellectual freedom necessarily entails exclusion from the colony of all Reformed

preachers, devout Catholics, 'parasitic Jews', Quakers, Puritans, and 'rash and stupid believers in the Millenium besides all obstinate present-day pretenders to Revelation'.²⁸ More coherently, he also uncompromisingly denounced slavery and exploitation, extolling political and legal equality of status.²⁹

Though less than enthusiastic about these ideas, the regents wished to accelerate New Netherland's colonization and a charter was agreed, funds advanced, and preparations made for the voyage. In July 1663, a group of forty-one Ploekhoeyisten disembarked at their new home on the Delaware. The co-operative had little time to consolidate, though, as all New Netherland, including New Amsterdam (New York), was overrun by the English the following year. It would seem though, that the prophet of co-operative labour never returned to Europe, but remained in North America with most of the others. Old, destitute and blind, he settled in 1694 among the Dutch and German Mennonites of Germantown, Philadelphia, where he died, presumably not long after.³⁰

That Van den Enden also influenced Ploekhoey emerges from the latter's *Short and Clear Project* (1662), written to advertise the attractions of the new society, a text echoing much of Van den Enden's pamphlet. The foundation of Ploekhoey's new commonwealth was to be 'equality for all' firmly anchored in democratic decision-making based on voting, with major decisions requiring a two-thirds majority of free male citizens.³¹ Furthermore, this was an equality which dissolved not only confessional but also racial barriers, for Van den Enden and Ploekhoey held decidedly radical views regarding the Indians of New Netherland, a noble people, they

insisted, without affectation, who eschew utterly 'telling lies, swearing, slandering and other such like unrestrained passions' and are thoroughly worthy of emulation by Europeans.³² Here again, Van den Enden foreshadows Lahontan and Rousseau.³³ Indeed, there can be no clearer instance of the revolutionary resonance of the cult of the 'noble savage' which, from Van den Enden on, was to be one of the *leitmotifs* of Europe's radical philosophical tradition. In his *Free Political Institutions*, Van den Enden weaves this into a general theory of the rationality and equality of all peoples—except only for the Hottentots of South Africa, should it prove true as alleged, he says, that they lack human reason.³⁴ As for the Indians of North America, Van den Enden, undeterred by his never having laid eyes on them, confidently attributes to them an indomitable and exemplary love of naturalness, freedom, and equality.

ii. Revolutionary Conspiracy

A notable feature of Van den Enden's thought is his deep preoccupation with France. If, as he maintains, education is the key to enlightenment, and enlightenment the key to creating a republic which serves the common good and provides freedom for all, then language is strategically crucial: 'as a general language, in any given part of the world', asserted Van den Enden, the most widely current—as, for example, the French language in Europe—'must be promoted and thoroughly inculcated and taught to young and old alike, in the cheapest and most convenient manner, and to women as well as men, girls as well as boys'.³⁵ But besides spreading their message in the language best suited to the purpose, Van den Enden, like Spinoza, was acutely conscious of the need

for French connections and for avenues of access to French culture.

It had in fact been Van den Enden's practice, possibly ever since the Frondes (1648–53) to cultivate links with French noblemen opposed to the growth of royal absolutism. That massive insurgency involved many segments of the population and while it was mostly no more than a venting of anger and resentment against Mazarin, and his allies at the French Court and in the provinces, nevertheless sporadically, as in Bordeaux, also produced expressions of republican sentiment. Moreover, the upheaval bequeathed an emotional and psychological legacy which not only helped inspire later bouts of rebellion such as the Révolte des Gentilshommes of 1657–9 in several parts of the north, including Normandy, and such peasant insurrections as that of May 1658 known as the *guerre des Sabotiers*, and of 1662 in the Boulonnais, of which, the king's ministers suspected, disaffected nobles were the real instigators, but seemed also to afford a basis for a wider, more ideological campaign against royal absolutism.

Holland was the favourite place of refuge for French noble, religious, and intellectual dissidents, fleeing the ire of Louis XIV (as well as of English and Scottish malcontents plotting against the Stuart monarchy in Britain) and consequently it was also the best place to forge links between political disaffection on the one hand, and the great new destabilizing force of the early Enlightenment—radical philosophy—on the other. One might object that malcontent French nobles, however enthralled by the anti-authoritarian, libertine tendencies of the new philosophical radicalism, were hardly likely to endorse its egalitarian, social levelling and democratic rhetoric. But, in fact, Van den Enden found that there were French dissident nobles eager not just to conspire

against Louis XIV but also to cultivate his particular brand of radical philosophy and democratic republicanism.

Van den Enden, a brilliant teacher of Latin and other subjects, who spoke French, Spanish, and other tongues fluently, tutored and became friendly in Amsterdam with several French nobles. His closest French ally over many years was Gilles du Hamel, sieur de la Tréaumont (d.1674), who had fought in the Frondes, partly for and partly against the Crown, and later been implicated in the Révolte des Gentilshommes. A political fugitive, he resided in Amsterdam during the years 1665–9.³⁶ In the years 1653–9 he also seems to have backed Condé and worked for the Spanish governor-general in Brussels. Besides La Tréaumont, Van den Enden established ties with several other French nobles, notably Guy-Armand de Gramont, comte de Guiche (1637–74), a libertine intriguer disgraced at the French Court in 1665, who left Paris in April that year ‘pour aller en Hollande’.³⁷ Guiche, Van den Enden later confessed to the French authorities, was often present at the meetings in which he and La Tréaumont discussed republican political theory, and schemes for reforming the Dutch Republic, but not when they plotted how to foment sedition in France.³⁸ The conspiratorial object of Van den Enden’s and La Tréaumont’s conferences was to liberate Normandy from the French Crown and convert it into a Van den Enden-style republic.

Van den Enden’s fervent espousal of the French dissident cause cost him his life. Increasingly at odds with the Amsterdam city government, and doubtless feeling less welcome after the trial of Adriaen Koerbagh by the Amsterdam magistracy in 1668, in which both he and Spinoza were cited as malign influences in the city, Van den Enden

may well have considered emigration for some time before he actually left in 1671. Official pressure, it seems, helped precipitate his departure. According to a later radical source, Van den Enden 'fut tellement décrié à Amsterdam, à cause de son athéisme, qu'il fut obligé d'en sortir et de chercher fortune en France'.³⁹ But Van den Enden himself, later claimed, under interrogation in the Bastille, that he was summoned to Paris by 'plusieurs personnes de qualité' who had frequented his company in Amsterdam 'qui lui disoient que son beau talent ne devoit être enseveli en un si petit espace que la Hollande, et qu'il devoit venir en France'.⁴⁰ He was referring here to La Tréaumont and Guiche, both of whom had returned to France and with whom Van den Enden now resumed contact.

His zest for education, philosophy, and political intrigue all undiminished, the aged schoolmaster settled in the Parisian quarter of Picpus, where he reopened his Latin school, calling it apparently the 'Temple des Muses'. A noted *savant*, he became acquainted with various French *érudits*, including Arnauld, and was visited, among others, by Leibniz.⁴¹ Meanwhile, La Tréaumont was urging the feasibility of accomplishing 'en France l'exécution de cette république libre dont ils avoient discouru en Hollande' by stirring up revolt in Normandy, commencing with Quilleboeuf, a small port to which men, arms, and munitions could readily be shipped in from the Spanish Netherlands and which he knew intimately, having twice helped to capture it, in 1649 and 1657.⁴² Several nobles joined the conspiracy, including Louis, the Chevalier de Rohan (1635–74), a veteran of the Frondes, who agreed to put himself at the head of the dissident group. Guiche too may have been implicated, but having gone off to participate,

under Condé, in the French invasion of the Dutch Republic in 1672, and been one of the heroes of the 'passage of the Rhine', died of fever in the Palatinate later in the war.

Following the Spanish entry into the conflict on the Dutch side in 1673, Rohan and La Tréaumont solicited the help of the Spanish governor in Brussels with Van den Enden acting as go-between. The governor, the Conde de Monterrey, received a secret missive from the conspirators, revealing that they were planning a major insurrection against the French Crown, commencing in Quilleboeuf, and requesting a substantial subsidy and his promise that, once the port was secured, he would immediately dispatch 6,000 Spanish troops bringing arms for 20,000 Norman insurgents.⁴³ As part of the proposed collusion, Spain would permanently occupy Quilleboeuf and be declared protector of the 'république libre' the insurgents designed to establish in Normandy.

Early in September 1674 Van den Enden, now aged 72 but apparently not yet too old for cloak-and-dagger intrigue, travelled to Brussels to confer with Monterrey. Barely had he returned to Paris, on the evening of 17 September 1674, than he heard, on sitting down to dine, that Rohan had been arrested at Versailles, on the king's orders, after Mass on 11 September. Abandoning his dinner, he rose and fled but was caught the following day on the city's outskirts and conveyed, like Rohan, to the Bastille. Meanwhile, royal commissioners of police, accompanied by troops, had burst into La Tréaumont's lodgings in Rouen. Resisting arrest, the latter fired two shots at his assailants before being mortally wounded in the affray. As he lay dying, his rooms were searched and all his papers seized. Among the latter were found French translations of Van den Enden's published and unpublished works. During the next days several other

aristocratic conspirators, including the Chevalier de Préaux and his mistress, Madame de Villars, taken from her château eight leagues from Rouen, were arrested in Normandy and brought to the Bastille.

The elderly ex-Jesuit was alternately interrogated and tortured several times between mid September and late November 1674. Louis himself was informed by Louvois of the Dutch schoolmaster who had plotted to overthrow his monarchy with philosophy. The conspiracy had evidently been revealed to the authorities by a young nobleman lodging and studying Latin with Van den Enden, who had observed the 'grande liaison' between him, La Tréaumont, and the Chevalier and, having 'reconnu Van den Enden pour un homme qui n'avoit point de religion, et qui parloit avec trop de liberté de la personne du roi', reported all this to the police. During his interrogation on 21 November, Van den Enden was asked to explain his republican ideas, which he did at some length, claiming that hitherto the literature of political thought had produced three different categories of republic, namely that of Plato ruled by a philosopher-king, that of Grotius, by which he presumably meant oligarchical systems such as those of Venice and the Dutch Republic, and the utopia of Thomas More.⁴⁴ In contrast to these concepts, Van den Enden claimed to have introduced a novel type of republic into political theory 'qu'il avoit proposée aux États de Hollande pour l'établir dans la Nouvelle-Hollande, dans l'Amérique', that is, the people's 'free republic' or democratic republic, a commonwealth based on the common good and the freedom of all the citizenry, and it was this new political concept he had taught La Tréaumont among others. The Norman nobleman had been greatly taken with his democratic

republic and 'en a voulu faire une semblable pour la Normandie'.⁴⁵

La Tréaumont may indeed have been a genuine convert to Van den Enden's revolutionary democratic republicanism, or at least have seen the seditious potential of his republican theories, since the police found at his several lodgings 'quelques projets de la manière de cette république et des placards qui devoient estre envoyez proprement en Normandie et ensuite dans toutes les autres provinces du royaume'.⁴⁶ For modern scholars, a particularly tantalizing item among the papers seized by the police was a French translation, presumably prepared by Van den Enden himself, of the complete text of the *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, only the first part of which had been published in 1665, and the rest of which is now lost; the police, once their investigations were complete, burned all the material they had seized.

The plans to foment insurrection and establish a 'free republic' in Normandy, Van den Enden confessed, not without pride, were inspired by his own ideas and writings. He had little to lose by admitting this as there was no prospect of his escaping execution. The dénouement followed swiftly. A few days later, the conspirators were led down, at four in the afternoon, into the inner courtyard of the Bastille, which was packed with people lined with royal musketeers. The crowd reportedly was totally silent before this 'grand spectacle' framed by a scaffold and gallows. One by one, Rohan and the others, including Madame de Villars, were brought, in descending order of seniority, to the scaffold and beheaded. Only Van den Enden, as the sole commoner among the condemned, was denied the more elevated form of execution reserved for those of noble blood.⁴⁷ With his fellow

conspirators all divided in two, the prophet of the 'free republic' was escorted to the gallows and unceremoniously hanged.

RADICALISM AND THE PEOPLE: THE BROTHERS KOERBAGH

i. The Theologian Philosopher, Johannes Koerbagh (1634–1672)

Van den Enden's chief contribution to the formation of radical thought and the Amsterdam 'atheistic' circle was undoubtedly his impassioned and revolutionary summons to 'enlighten' the common people, instilling the lessons of philosophy by novel, carefully devised methods of popular education. The tragic story of the brothers Koerbagh vividly illustrates the appeal of this new impulse and even more the strength of governmental and ecclesiastical reaction against it. Their trial may well have been the very first example in Europe of official suppression of the philosophical 'enlightenment' of the people, as distinct from traditional suppression of theological heterodoxy, blasphemy, and so forth, and, as such, was the first act of a drama soon to reverberate across all Europe.

Adriaen Koerbagh (1632–69), born in the same year as Spinoza, and his younger brother, Johannes, were sons of a ceramics manufacturer, originally from Bergen-op-Zoom, who settled, married, and prospered in Amsterdam. Their father died young in 1644, leaving his family in circumstances of sufficient affluence to free them in adulthood from the need to work for their bread. In these comfortable circumstances, both youths had the opportunity to study in depth and explore the world philosophically. Enrolling first in the philosophy faculty at Utrecht in 1653, they read the standard

philosophical literature of the day and doubtless witnessed something of the strife raging in the university over Cartesianism. Accustomed to the scholarly life—in all, Johannes spent more than ten years at university and his brother nine—both transferred to Leiden in 1656, Adriaen switching first to medicine and then law, and Johannes to theology.¹ The brothers probably first became acquainted with the circle around Van den Enden and Spinoza, including Lodewijk Meyer, Johannes Bouwmeester, and Abraham van Berckel² (1639–89), who were then all studying at Leiden, in the late 1650s. On completing his theological studies in 1660, Johannes passed his candidate's examination before the Reformed *classis* of Amsterdam and was enrolled as a trainee preacher of the public Church, signing the usual formula of credence in the articles of belief of the Reformed confession.³

Both brothers participated in Van den Enden's circle in Amsterdam during the early 1660s, two later radical writers, Adriaen Beverland and Willem Goeree, attesting that Adriaen Koerbagh learnt his atheistic ideas from Van den Enden.⁴ Other evidence shows the brothers were intimates of Bouwmeester and Van Berckel.⁵ It is not clear when and how they became friendly with Spinoza, but it is certain they knew him, Adriaen later disclosing, under questioning, that he had conferred with him about philosophical issues several times in the years 1661–3.⁶ An additional link with radical circles was the marriage of their sister, Lucia Koerbagh, in 1662 to Johannes van Ravensteyn (1618–81), an Amsterdam bookseller specializing in republican, Cartesian, and Cocceian literature, who knew Van den Enden and was the father-in-law, by his first marriage, to Jacobus Wagenaar, another

friend of Adriaen Koerbagh's and publisher of Van Berckel's translation of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, issued in Amsterdam in 1667.⁷

Johannes Koerbagh's familiarity with Spinoza's thought, at a time it was known only to a tiny circle, probably dates from around 1662, when he returned for a period to complete his studies at Leiden and when Spinoza was living in nearby Rijnsburg. Among other theology students there then were the later notorious Pontiaan van Hattem⁸ and Johannes Casarius (c.1641–77) who, while studying at the university, lodged at Rijnsburg in Spinoza's house.⁹ By the mid-1660s both brothers were living mainly in Amsterdam and both had become ardent advocates of Van den Enden's (and Meyer's) ideology of popular enlightenment. Adriaen Koerbagh's first publication, a dictionary of legal terms published in 1664, was a lexicon of lawyers' terminology and phrases, designed to explain legal usage in plain vernacular language.¹⁰ His fierce attack on lawyers recalls Gerard Winstanley's earlier styling of the legal profession across the Channel as 'England's jailors', implying that the law was the people's prison.¹¹ Lawyers, observed Koerbagh, charge exorbitant fees for piling up heaps of turgid documents couched in arcane terminology purposely incomprehensible to non-lawyers, rendering the public helpless victims of their wiles, a conceited, grasping clique, who, instead of serving the common good, cunningly exploit their supposed expertise to generate wealth and bogus status for themselves. But where Winstanley, in utopian fashion, aspires to abolish lawyers and legal procedure,¹² Adriaen Koerbagh, like Van den Enden and Meyer, seeks to enlighten the people by showing how

lawyers dupe them, and how to free themselves from thralldom to 'legalese', helping them master the workings of the law. The legal profession, they believed, can ultimately be marginalized and the people released from its tentacles. At the same time Koerbagh summons lawyers to acknowledge the errors of their corrupt and arrogant ways and abandon abstruseness, adopting instead plain, everyday language.

If lawyers are contemptible, profiting shamelessly from the public's gullibility, still worse and more addicted to the abstruse are the clergy. Adriaen Koerbagh's second work, also of 1664, appearing under his pseudonym 'Vrederyck Waarmond', was a political pamphlet published at Middelburg, roundly denouncing the evils of ecclesiastical interference in politics, a tendency fatal, he declares, to the common good. Just as the people were mercilessly abused before the Reformation, he asserts, by clergy practising such refined artifice, imposture, and pretence that men scarcely dared question the piety and sincerity of even the most debauched prelates and monks, so during the Dutch political crisis of 1617–18, Counter-Remonstrant preachers, hypocritically pretending religion was at risk, discredited the 'loyal patriots' headed by Oldenbarnevelt with a vile campaign of calumny and theological mystification, undermining legitimate political authority at ruinous cost to the public.¹³ Praising the States of Holland for their robust stance during the 'public prayers controversy' of 1663–4,¹⁴ Koerbagh denounces De Witt's Voetian opponents as 'machinateurs' and 'perturbateurs' who, to advance their own influence and standing, think nothing of subverting public order, the community, and the state.¹⁵

Much suggests the brothers worked closely together and held parallel views on philosophy, religion, and politics, as well as public enlightenment. By early 1666 Johannes Koerbagh's involvement with Socinian circles in Amsterdam and abrasive comments about the public Church made, among other places, at Collegiant meetings, increasingly came to the notice of Amsterdam's Reformed consistory. Both brothers were cited disapprovingly at a meeting on 10 June 1666, Adriaen for his disorderly lifestyle—he was then cohabiting with a girl out of wedlock by whom he had an illegitimate child—and Johannes for spreading godless opinions.¹⁶ A preacher sent to their house to investigate reported that Johannes Koerbagh held 'highly unsound and heretical opinions' about religion and was extremely obstinate in defending them. Both men eventually complied with summonses to appear before the consistory, where Adriaen was rebuked for keeping a girl in 'whoredom' and Johannes asked to justify his theological views. This he did at greater length, and raising more difficult issues than the assembly felt able to cope with at the time, it was decided to send one of their number, the preacher Petrus Leupenius, a specialist in combating Socinianism, to interview him at home.¹⁷ Requiring Koerbagh to explain himself in writing on five key points, Leupenius received in response a text entitled 'Jan Keurbach's Short but Upright Answer to five Questions put to him by Pieter Leupenius, minister of the Word of God in this city' which was then discussed by the full consistory and copied verbatim into its records.¹⁸

This outline is of some significance, revealing as it does the core Spinozistic tenets the brothers later expounded more fully in their most radical works. Asked first what he

understood by the concept 'God', Koerbagh replied that 'God' is the 'only, single, eternal, unending, omnipotent, omniscient and ubiquitous, independent, unchanging and supreme Being'. Asked next for his opinion of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Koerbagh replied he could not find the term 'Trinity' (*Drieeenigheid*) or any equivalent in Scripture and concluded therefore that no such doctrine can be inferred from the Bible. The notion 'there should be three distinct divine *personae* in the one Being of God' (in het eenvoudige weesen Godts), he added, 'can also not be demonstrated through clear and distinct reasoning'.¹⁹ Consequently, veneration of the man Jesus as if he were divine is mere 'superstition'.²⁰ Commenting, thirdly, on the status of Scripture, Koerbagh held the Biblical books had been composed by God-fearing men at different times to the best of their abilities.²¹ Asked what that meant, he refused to expand. Asked fourthly for his views on the resurrection of the dead, Koerbagh answered, again using Cartesian language, that he could derive no 'clear and distinct idea' about the matter. The last demand was for his views on Heaven and Hell. The concept of 'Heaven' in Scripture, he held, means nothing more than the blessed state of the chosen, while 'Hell' denotes the miserable condition of those not thus blessed.²²

Investigation of Johannes Koerbagh's views resumed on 27 July, at the house of another *predikant*, Dr Langelius. The preachers wanted to know what Koerbagh meant by calling God a 'single being' (*eenich weesen*). Since God is an infinite being, answered Johannes, there could not be any being, or any thing, apart from God, so that 'all created things are not beings but modifications or modes of being, limited or extended by rest and motion'.²³ Asked next to explain his

views on Creation, Koerbagh answered that 'nothing was created out of nothing and can not be so created,' adding that any true notion of God shows He is identical to His Creation. Appalled, Langelius rebuked the young man severely for his blasphemous words, which resulted in a dramatic change in his demeanour. He became contrite and submissive when harangued, and was eventually persuaded, or so the minister supposed, that after all, God is distinct from His Creation and did 'create the universe from nothing'. Finally, he even acknowledged that the teaching of the Reformed Church is the truth and that God is really 'three in one' (Deum esse trium).²⁴

Summoned again before the consistory on 5 August, Johannes heard of the assembly's deep dismay at his earlier heretical utterances and, even more, his offence of propagating such views among 'ordinary and common folk'.²⁵ He was warned to desist completely from such activity and that, if he defied the consistory, he would be brought before the civic magistrates and severely punished. Both brothers were indeed somewhat more cautious for a while. Nevertheless, fresh reports reached the consistory the following summer that Johannes Koerbagh was 'once again beginning to speak of the Holy Scriptures and catechism in a very blasphemous manner'.²⁶ Two members were sent to reprimand him afresh. Though he flatly denied having spoken of Scripture or the Church's doctrines disparagingly and again undertook not to do so, six months later the consistory learnt from two young theology students, who had infiltrated a recent Collegiant meeting on the Rokin, that Johannes Koerbagh had been present, seated among the principal personalities, and had addressed the gathering, praising the

Collegiants and affirming (in open violation of the law) that Christ is not the 'true God' but 'only an eminent teacher or prophet'.²⁷

Summoned anew, Koerbagh, technically still a 'candidate' for the Reformed ministry, was again sternly reprimanded, at which he flew into a rage, began berating the consistory 'not like a doctor of theology ... but a raving or possessed person', and was ordered outside until he had recovered his composure.²⁸ On his return, he was asked whether attending Collegiant meetings, and denigrating the Reformed confession and catechism, fitted with his having accepted and signed these formulations five years before. He had known no better then, he replied, but was wiser now. Exasperated by the pressure exerted on him, Johannes Koerbagh was becoming increasingly unwilling to veil his true feelings. Finally, the proceedings lapsed into a complete impasse when he was asked his opinion of the articles of the Netherlands Confession. Again becoming agitated, he remained adamant that he would not be drawn on such matters 'even if he were to be torn to pieces'.

ii. The *Bloemhof*

In January 1668 the younger Koerbagh appeared twice more before the Amsterdam Reformed consistory, each time again becoming recalcitrant and abrasive.²⁹ In late February the Church authorities learnt that either his older brother alone, or both Koerbaghs, had brought out, under the pseudonym 'Vrederick Waarmond', a book entitled *Een Bloemhof van allerley Lieflijkheyd sonder verdriet (A Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness without Sorrow)*³⁰ reportedly crammed with 'blasphemous remarks about God, our Saviour Jesus Christ,

the Son of God, and the divine and perfect Word of the Lord'.³¹ Since the publication was plainly illegal under Holland's anti-Socinian legislation of 1653, spokesmen were promptly dispatched to the city hall, where the most offensive passages were read to the burgomasters, who were suitably appalled and immediately ordered the book's suppression. The stocks of copies were seized from the bookshops.³² Some surfaced elsewhere later in April, however, notably in Utrecht, and there too the book was judged 'blasphemous' and confiscated.³³

Amid a general outcry, with the book being universally condemned—except, naturally, in radical circles—as a 'scriptum pessimum, blasphemum, atheisticum',³⁴ Adriaen was quickly identified as its author and warned by the city's chief police officer, the *schout* (sheriff), that he must on no account leave Amsterdam. Nevertheless, the atmosphere confronting him became so forbidding that he decided to try to evade trial and suddenly fled into hiding in the judicially autonomous county of Culemborg, taking refuge under the assumed name 'Pieter Wilte' with his ally Van Berckel who was already in hiding there, following the suppression of his Dutch edition of Hobbes.

Meanwhile in Amsterdam, Johannes appeared again before the consistory on 1 March, but now less than ever mindful of Spinoza's motto *caute* (with caution), he lambasted the dogma of the Trinity as a *contradictio in terminis*, a meaningless formula nowhere found in Scripture, and reaffirmed that the world can not have been created *ex nihilo*.³⁵ Growing increasingly caustic and insubordinate, he added, to the stupefaction of all present, that there 'is only one infinite Spirit and one infinite Body which are distinguished

solely in their respective modifications'.³⁶ When asked whether he had collaborated with his brother in writing the *Bloemhof*, he admitted having 'corrected some passages when it was in press', making it clear, though, that he saw nothing wrong with its contents.³⁷

The *Bloemhof*, a work on which the brothers had been working since 1666, was, by any reckoning, an unprecedentedly provocative book. It is true that not only Spinoza, Van den Enden, and the brothers Koerbagh, but also diverse Socinian leaders known to Johannes and Adriaen, such as Jan Knol, equally rejected the divinity of Christ and the Trinity. But none of these had done so in print as outspokenly as the brothers Koerbagh, rejecting the Trinity not just as meaningless obfuscation but one deliberately used by churchmen to tighten their grip on theology and their authority and prestige in society.³⁸ A 672-page dictionary of terms, especially foreign words and technical terms, current in contemporary Dutch usage, the book explains the allegedly 'real' meanings in accessible everyday language and also how these terms were routinely abused to dupe, mislead, and mystify the ordinary man in the street.³⁹ Fired with zeal to enlighten the populace, they charged all the ecclesiastical, legal, medical, and academic élites with contriving heaps of obfuscating terms and expressions to veil truth and reserve zones of specialized knowledge exclusively for the charmed circle of those equipped with the requisite professional training.⁴⁰ In his preface Adriaen calls on all 'lovers of the Dutch language' to help strip away this vast barrier of pernicious jargon and false expertise and replace it with plain Dutch equivalents, thereby making vital and useful knowledge available to all.

A comparatively small number of entries dealing with issues of theology, ecclesiastical power, and politics, as Leibniz notes in his *New Essays*,⁴¹ caused particular offence. The article on heresy and heretics, for instance, totally rejects the reality of any such concepts, claiming that these words are just another example of theological mystification.⁴² The idea of 'heresy' is, he urges, intrinsically an 'abuse of power' whereby churchmen appropriate jurisdiction to which they are not entitled, authority which properly belongs to the secular power. In fact, by manipulating the ignorance of kings and princes who, historically, have been lamentably lacking, Koerbagh insists, in the very knowledge rulers require if they are to rule responsibly, namely 'true' or real theology—that is, 'worldly wisdom' (i.e. philosophy)—ecclesiastics have always cunningly arrogated influence to themselves. The term 'angel', he says, which merely denotes 'messenger' in 'bastard Greek', instead of being rendered into ordinary language with this meaning, in the States Bible had been deliberately left in its foreign form so that 'ordinary folk should not understand it and therefore not come to realize its real meaning'.⁴³

Still more abrasively, in his article on 'Reformed Religion', Koerbagh judges the term a misnomer as applied to the public Church, since in fact it had never been 'reformed' but rather retained many of the deplorable defects characteristic of the Catholic religion. We would know if the 'Reformed' faith were really 'reformed', he affirms, for then it would be an entirely 'rational religion based on wisdom, truth, and reason' rather than meaningless obfuscation. Furthermore, a true religion would not need to be upheld by coercion and political authority 'like all other religions of the world that are known to me which need to be backed by the might of the

sword, fire, flames, gallows, and the rack'.⁴⁴ The great defect of the religions of the world, he maintains, is that each and every one seeks to impose its 'incomprehensible confession with ignorance and violence'. Moses, according to Koerbagh, was both power-hungry and ruthless.

The divinity of Christ is flatly rejected, Jesus being accounted nothing more than a remarkable man conceived normally, albeit illegitimately, and without our knowing who his father was, 1,167 years ago.⁴⁵ In line with the ideas of Spinoza—but not Hobbes, whose *Leviathan* plainly also influenced the Koerbags' thought, if less so than that of their ally Van Berckel⁴⁶—miracles are declared totally impossible, since 'nothing can happen against or above Nature'.⁴⁷ Moreover, not only 'angels', but also Satan, demons, sorcery, witchcraft, possession, exorcism, and divination are all dismissed as fabrications utterly devoid of truth or reality, devised solely to scare and manipulate the ignorant.⁴⁸

iii. The Trial of the Brothers Koerbagh

In mid-April the Amsterdam magistrates learnt that the fugitive, Adriaen Koerbagh, was living under an assumed name in Culemborg. Apparently in a manic mood, he was reportedly engaging all kinds of people in conversation and 'disseminating his obscenities also there'.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, since finishing the *Bloemhof* late in 1667, he had been writing a new book, *A Light Shining in Dark Places*, and, on fleeing Amsterdam, had brought the incomplete manuscript with him. This he managed to finish during the hectic weeks after his flight, in Culemborg and nearby Utrecht.⁵⁰ On 1 March when Johannes again appeared before the Amsterdam consistory

and again spoke in 'hard and discourteous terms', insisting the 'world was not created out of nothing', there was as yet no mention of any new text. But at some point during the next ten weeks advance copies of the first part of the new book began circulating in Amsterdam and Utrecht.

On 17 May the Amsterdam consistory heard that Johannes was now in prison, having been arrested by the magistrates on suspicion of involvement in the printing of 'a certain blasphemous book called *Een Ligt schijnende in duistere plaatsen*'. The consistory duly received one of the seized copies and extracts were read out to the assembly, which had certainly heard nothing comparable before. They reportedly listened 'with great consternation of the spirit'.⁵¹ The printed copies of the first part of the work had been clandestinely produced in Utrecht and then sent to Amsterdam in packets and stored. These were seized by the magistracy after the printer in Utrecht had become afraid at what he was printing and refused to heed Johannes' and Van Berckel's exhortations that he should continue. He had surrendered everything to the Utrecht magistrates, who passed the material on to Amsterdam, and Johannes had been arrested. The reading out of extracts to the Amsterdam consistory was probably the only hearing *Een Ligt* ever received until the twentieth century. Thanks to the action of the printer, the Dutch magistracies succeeded in completely suppressing the text. But it is nevertheless historically significant, representing as it does the thinking of the Koerbaghs in its most developed form. Indeed, it reveals the full measure of the revolution in popular culture and education the Koerbaghs and their allies aspired to engineer. *Een Ligt*, in short, was one of the first and, by any reckoning, one of the most far-reaching texts of the European Radical Enlightenment.

Although the Amsterdam consistory was primarily shocked by the vehemence of the attack on the Christian religion and 'mysteries', *Een Ligt* is essentially a political and educational rather than a theological work.⁵² It is a book about how and why organized religions are adopted by societies and the doctrinal and organizational forms the institutionalization of religion takes. The more powerful the clergy in any society, argue the Koerbaghs, the more they distort the original teachings of the founder of their faith in order to refine and extend their power. Hence the Catholic Church they designate the most magnificent and imposing of all Churches, and yet simultaneously, and for that very reason, the one with the most perverse and irrational doctrines.⁵³ The brothers define God as an eternal Being, consisting of infinite attributes, each of which is infinite in its kind, the truth about which, contrary to the dogmas of all revealed religion, has never been hidden or unrevealed but, on the contrary, has always been manifestly evident to all people in the world without exception 'through reason' by which alone the Word of God can be known.⁵⁴ Creation occurs only via the interaction and motion inherent in matter.⁵⁵ Here again Spinoza, and presumably the manuscript *Korte Verhandeling*, was their prime source of inspiration, though the work also shows obvious traces of Van den Enden, Lodewijk Meyer, Hobbes, and doubtless, in a lesser way, Van Berckel, Bouwmester, and others among their close intimates as well.⁵⁶ But while all the important concepts are derived from Spinoza, Van den Enden, Meyer, and Hobbes, the Koerbaghs unflinchingly reformulate their ideas in ways which render them more easily and effectively expressed in everyday language.⁵⁷

Enlightenment and knowledge of the kind the brothers Koerbagh wanted the people to imbibe they see as the key to human well-being, happiness, and freedom, in other words, the path to 'salvation'. By contrast, 'he who neglects to use his reason', they contend, 'lapses into every sort of ignorance and superstition from which all evil stems'.⁵⁸ A typically Spinozist feature of the Koerbaghs' thought is their insistence that whatever is true in theology is, *ipso facto*, identical to philosophical truth so that, by definition, there is no independent theological truth: 'everything that is true according to the world's wisdom is and must also be true in theology and everything that is true in theology must also be comprised within worldly wisdom, and is part of it, because in worldly wisdom is comprised the perfect knowledge of God'.⁵⁹

The rejection of Christianity in *Een Ligt* thus derives from a purely philosophical framework which denies, *a priori*, that any revealed religion can convey truths which lie outside or beyond the realm of philosophy. Jesus, holds Adriaen, was a man, not God, and it is utterly false and untenable to say he died 'for us'.⁶⁰ Admittedly Jesus died a fearful death on the cross, but this is because his teaching conflicted with that of the ruling clergy and scholars of the Jews, 'who fearing to lose their authority and credibility among the common people' persuaded the Roman authorities to crucify him. 'Can his dying bring us any happiness or salvation? That I can not see with any reason in the world.'⁶¹ Unlike the *Bloemhof*, *Een Ligt* includes a long refutation of the doctrine of the Trinity,⁶² in which the Koerbaghs insist on its irrationality, repeating that the only theology which carries weight with them is the sort based on such mathematical reasoning as says that two

and two make four.⁶³ As in Spinoza and Van den Enden, authority in spiritual, intellectual, and educational matters is assigned to the secular power alone. The Bible is declared confused and self-contradictory in many passages and the authors of the Old Testament books unknown, though Ezra (following Spinoza) is identified as the likeliest compiler.⁶⁴ As in the *Bloemhof*, the existence of Heaven, Hell, Satan, demons, angels, magic, divination, and witchcraft is altogether denied and miracles proclaimed completely impossible.

The arrest of Johannes and Van Berckel, and the seizure of the secret store of printed parts of *Een Ligt*, led to an intensified search for Adriaen, who by now had found a fresh hiding-place in Leiden. A price of 1,500 guilders was put on his head and, before long, his hideout was revealed to the magistrates by a 'friend' of the fugitive and Van Berckel in exchange for the money.⁶⁵ Two months after Johannes' imprisonment, his older brother was apprehended from his bed in Leiden, with his remaining books and papers, and handed over to the authorities in Amsterdam. Adriaen's first interrogation by the city's seven magistrates assembled with copies of the *Bloemhof* and *Een Ligt* arrayed before them, together with papers seized from both brothers' rooms, and with the Utrecht printer present, took place on 20 July. Koerbagh readily confessed to having written the *Bloemhof* and *Een Ligt*. When asked who else had participated in writing them, and with whom he had discussed their contents, he insisted that he had written both books himself without the assistance of his brother or Van Berckel.⁶⁶ He admitted knowing Van den Enden and, when asked about Spinoza, owned to visiting him a few times some years before, but

denied having discussed the intellectual content of his books with either. As regards collaboration with others, the most he would admit, when pressed, was that Van Berckel had corrected a few passages of *Een Ligt* and helped him find and deal with the printer. It was true that in Amsterdam since May 1667, he and his brother resided in the same house, belonging to their mother, and ate their meals together. But he claimed they had worked in different rooms and neither discussed nor collaborated in writing either book.⁶⁷ Further interrogations followed but nothing more was admitted or came to light.

Johannes too was questioned several times. He confessed to having discussed a few minor points with his brother but categorically denied being the joint author of either text.⁶⁸ Since it had previously been the younger more than the older brother who was known to be propagating forbidden doctrines in Amsterdam, and a Spinozist, neither the magistrates nor the consistory believed these disavowals, which do indeed seem incredible, given Johannes' obvious zeal for the same ideas as his brother professed and greater expertise in theology, Hebrew, and other relevant subjects. But both brothers stuck to this story and the only evidence against Johannes was circumstantial. The consistory's minutes recording his verbal denial of Christ's divinity and the Trinity was adduced, but here too, under Holland's anti-Socinian legislation of 1653, heavy punishment could be meted out only where there was clear evidence of writing, printing, or distributing anti-Trinitarian literature or indoctrinating others with anti-Trinitarian views, and this was lacking.⁶⁹ The magistrates were divided and discussed the matter for some time. Indeed, they came close to sentencing Johannes as well as Adriaen to

prison but, since he had been in gaol for several months already, in the end they decided to release him.

There was never any doubt, though, that Adriaen would receive a heavy sentence. The undisguised, systematic denial in print of the truth of the Christian religion, and open disparagement of theology, was an unprecedented crime and one which, in the circumstances of the time, could not be dealt with lightly. Debating the sentence, several magistrates urged a large fine and twelve or fifteen years in prison, after which, should he survive, twelve years' subsequent banishment from Holland. Finally it was agreed to moderate this to a 4,000 guilder fine plus 2,000 guilders costs, ten years' imprisonment in the Amsterdam *Rasphuis*, and, in case of survival, ten years' subsequent banishment from Holland.⁷⁰ It was decided, though, not to make a public spectacle of him or publish his sentence. A high proportion of the copies of the Koerbaghs' books had been successfully gathered in, including virtually all copies of *Een Ligt*, and all this material was now burnt. Taken away to his place of imprisonment, within months Adriaen was reportedly broken in both body and spirit. Johannes too, though he was the lucky one who was released, wrote nothing more and died young, outliving Adriaen by just three years.

PHILOSOPHY, THE INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE

i. Lodewijk Meyer (1629–1681)

The first of the great public intellectual controversies generated by the rise of radical thought erupted in 1666 with the appearance of a short anonymous book entitled *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*. The author of this sensational and inflammatory work—though his identity remained unknown during the furore and subsequently for many decades—was a prominent member of the philosophical coterie gathered around Spinoza and Van den Enden—the Amsterdam physician, Latinist, lexicographer, and man of the theatre, Lodewijk (Louis) Meyer (1629–81). From a Lutheran background, Meyer in temperament resembled Van den Enden more than Spinoza, being combative in debate and fond of conviviality, jesting, and women. A talented man with a strong sense of mission, he was erudite, in some respects a fervent Cartesian, and one of Spinoza's principal collaborators.¹

Meyer enrolled at Leiden in 1654, studying first philosophy and, from 1658, medicine at a time when Adriaen Koerbagh, whom he presumably saw regularly, also belonged to that faculty.² Probably he already knew Spinoza in the late 1650s, especially if we accept that the latter did sit in on lectures for a time between July 1656 and the summer of 1658.³ The principal Cartesians teaching philosophy at Leiden in 1657–8, at which point Meyer, Koerbagh, and

Spinoza were seemingly all present, were Heereboord, De Raey, and from 1658, the forceful and innovative Arnold Geulincx.⁴ All three young radicals presumably became acquainted with these prominent academics.⁵ Gaining Leiden doctorates in both philosophy and medicine in 1660, Meyer returned to Amsterdam, where he stayed for the rest of his life.

There his closest associate was a fellow physician, theatre connoisseur, and Latinist, Johannes Bouwmeester (1630–80), who had similarly read philosophy and medicine at Leiden during the 1650s and become friendly with Koerbagh. He too was close to Spinoza, who calls him ‘learned’ and his ‘very special friend’ in the sole surviving letter from an originally substantial correspondence between them, of June 1665. When visiting Amsterdam, Spinoza was evidently in the habit of discussing his philosophy at Bouwmeester’s lodgings. Though excessively diffident and lethargic—Spinoza urges him to ‘apply yourself with real energy to serious work, and prevail on yourself to devote the better part of your life to the cultivation of your intellect and your mind ... while there is yet time, and before you complain time, and indeed you yourself, have slipped by’⁶—Bouwmeester was undoubtedly an erudite and perspicacious critic. Spinoza, the letter shows, accounted him an expert Latinist, esteemed his judgements in philosophical matters, and wanted more of them. Bouwmeester, as Spinoza feared, never achieved much, however, other than supplying some entries for Koerbagh’s *Bloemhof* and rendering into Dutch, from Edward Pocock’s Latin—doubtless with Meyer’s and Spinoza’s encouragement—the Arabic pantheistic novel, the *Life of Hai Ebn Yokhdan*, published by Rieuwertsz in 1672. In 1677, the

year of Spinoza's death, Bouwmeester was one of the team, together with Meyer, Pieter van Gent, and Georg Hermann Schuller, which prepared his posthumous works for publication.⁷

Initially, Meyer manifested his radical zeal chiefly through literary and lexicographical work. As early as 1654 he edited a new edition of a lexicon called Hofman's *Nederlantsche Woordenschat*, a dictionary of foreign terms in current usage, giving their meaning in plain Dutch. He subsequently expanded it several times until, reaching its fifth edition in 1669, and now renamed *L. Meijer's Woordenschat*, it had assumed an imposing bulk. Divided into three sections—'bastard' terms, technical terms, and outmoded words no longer in everyday speech—its purpose was to elucidate foreign, Latin, and technical terms in current usage as variously applied in 'philosophy, mathematics, classics, botany, medicine, law or theology'.⁸ His aim, he states, is to make the sciences and technical subjects 'known to his countrymen in their mother tongue', purging Dutch of superfluous jargon and foreign interpolations to produce a medium suitable for conveying the loftiest, most complex matters comprehensibly to the common man.⁹ He rebukes professional scholars for hindering the acquisition of the vast amount of useful knowledge yielded by science by veiling everything in Latin, technical terminology, and pedantry in order to keep knowledge from the common people and monopolize it themselves.

Though an accomplished if slightly eccentric Latinist,¹⁰ Meyer regrets the fact that Latin was still so predominant in intellectual life since, he says, men must study nine or ten years to master that tongue sufficiently to digest academic

works. Still more deplorable, he urges, was the burgeoning growth of a legal terminology incomprehensible to anyone lacking lengthy training in legal studies and Latin, thereby effectively debarring laymen from understanding the law and rendering them the defenceless pawns of grasping lawyers. Only by explaining technical, imported, and 'bastard' phraseology in everyday language, and supplying better lexicons to promote familiarity with specialized usage, could law, medicine, and other essential topics be rendered accessible, and the contemptible tyranny of money-grabbing professionals who fleece the people by controlling key specialities be overthrown.

Meyer, like Spinoza, Van den Enden, and the brothers Koerbagh, positively gloried in the power of philosophy and science to transform the world.¹¹ Though often called an ardent Cartesian, his total discarding of Descartes' two-substance doctrine shows that he is not in any meaningful sense a Cartesian.¹² Nevertheless, he considered Cartesianism a potent tool not just for demolishing outmoded intellectual structures but for helping to create a new universal outlook, shaped by science and scholarship, which would fundamentally change daily life and society. All that survives of a much wider correspondence between him and Spinoza are three letters dated 1663, concerning the forthcoming publication of the latter's geometric exposition of Descartes. But these suffice to prove Meyer was then the chief intermediary between Spinoza in Rijnsburg, and the radical philosophical circle in Amsterdam, as well as between the philosopher and his publisher, Rieuwertsz. They also show that Spinoza was in the habit of consulting Meyer, as well as

Bouwmeester, about the formulation and presentation of his ideas.¹³

Meyer wrote the preface to this the only book his friend ever brought out under his own name, evidently to Spinoza's satisfaction, though he requested him to delete a polemical passage out of keeping with the general impression he wished to convey. 'I want everyone readily to accept that this book is meant for the benefit of all men,' he urged, 'and that in publishing it you are motivated only by a wish to spread the truth and that you ... invite men, in a spirit of good will, to take up the study of the true philosophy and that your aim is the good of all'.¹⁴ Meyer says in his preface that it was he who had urged the project on Spinoza while offering 'my help in publishing it should he require it'.¹⁵ He fervently extols Descartes' mathematical method as the key to philosophical truth, and praises Spinoza's skill in setting out his system in 'geometric order', but also points out that there were parts of Descartes that Spinoza 'rejects as false and concerning which he holds a different opinion', apparently agreeing that Descartes' principles 'do not suffice to solve all the very difficult problems that occur in metaphysics' and that 'different foundations are required, if we wish our intellect to rise to the pinnacle of knowledge'.¹⁶ Rather daringly, he illustrates the difference between Descartes and Spinoza by remarking that, in the latter, the 'will is not distinct from the intellect, much less endowed with that liberty which Descartes ascribes to it', even hinting that Spinoza does not consider the mind a separate substance from the body.¹⁷

ii. The *Philosophia*

The clandestine printing and distribution of Meyer's most challenging text, the 115-page *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, subtitled *Exercitatio paradoxa*, in 1666 was plainly the work of Rieuwertsz.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, given the book's sensational content, there was an immediate outcry throughout the United Provinces, precipitating a major commotion of great importance in Dutch culture, which reverberated also in Germany, the Baltic, and to a lesser extent, Italy and England. Reaction to this 'rationalistischer *anti-Scriptuarius*' as the East Prussian librarian Michael Lilienthal later dubbed the unknown author,¹⁹ was vehemently hostile but transcended mere rejection of the anonymous writer's arguments. Critics grasped that the book raised, in a new and daring manner, issues of overriding importance, and that it could not simply be brushed aside or decried, but had to be answered.²⁰ Meyer himself appreciated the novelty of his project and genuinely believed that by seeking to overthrow the entire edifice of theology as traditionally conceived, he was affording mankind a vast benefit.²¹

Anxious to spread the debate to the vernacular and 'enlighten' the people, Meyer followed up the Latin version the following year with a slightly expanded 137-page Dutch translation he prepared himself, and which was again published clandestinely by Rieuwertsz. Vigorously suppressed by the city governments, this vernacular edition seems never to have been subsequently reissued. The Latin version, by contrast, reappeared in 1674, frequently distributed bound together with Spinoza's *Tractatus*.²² Later,

during the High Enlightenment in 1776, a remarkable third, Latin edition appeared at Halle, with extensive critical notes and a new preface (but again without any attribution to an author) by Johannes Salomo Semler, one of the founders of modern Protestant Bible criticism.²³

Meyer's basic thesis is that Scripture is frequently 'obscure and doubtful' in meaning and that there is no way to interpret it correctly except by means of 'philosophy' which he defines, praising Descartes while disparaging Aristotelianism,²⁴ as the 'true and certain knowledge of things' and the only valid instrument for resolving perplexities in theology.²⁵ Thus, since philosophy teaches 'nothing can be made from nothing,' there can have been no Creation of the sort recounted in Scripture.²⁶ Where theologians dispute bitterly over the doctrine of the Trinity, some considering it a sacred 'mystery' and others a 'monster, a vast jumble of accumulated contradiction', philosophy settles the matter by showing the dispute to be both meaningless and superfluous.²⁷ From Wittichius and the Cartesio-Cocceians, he appropriates and gives a new twist to the maxim 'Nulla verae philosophiae dogmata theologicis esse contraria', that no conclusions of 'the true philosophy' can be contrary to theology,²⁸ in effect completely merging theology into philosophy. From this, he claims, all mankind will immeasurably benefit; for the enthronement of philosophy will render redundant and eventually end the previously interminable wrangling of theologians which, over the centuries, has everywhere caused incalculable strife, instability, and misery.²⁹

While his argument clearly tallies with that of a hard-hitting, radical tract entitled *De Jure Ecclesiasticorum*,

anonymously published at Amsterdam in 1665, claiming all spiritual and worldly authority, as well as property claimed by ecclesiastics, or attributed to them by others, is appropriated 'unjustly and in an impious manner', since only the secular power can legitimately exercise public authority and as there is not the slightest basis in either the Old or the New Testament for any ecclesiastical authority, a text later ascribed, almost certainly correctly,³⁰ by Colerus and others to Meyer, hardly any one seemingly perceived the connection between the *Philosophia* and *De Jure* at the time.³¹ However, the probability that *De Jure* is from Meyer's pen strengthens the likelihood that one of his prime objectives also in his *Philosophia* was to discredit and weaken as much as possible, and in all fields, the sway of the public Church.

Meyer's thesis that 'philosophy' is the only and 'infallible rule' by which to interpret Scripture³² yielded a hermeneutics differing appreciably from Spinoza's, but also exhibiting striking affinities with it.³³ Theology, Meyer and Spinoza broadly agree, is not an independent source of truth, and only philosophy can teach what is true. Both writers consider the Bible a purely human and secular text, meaningful judgements about which can only be made by philosophers. Yet the two thinkers apply reason to Bible hermeneutics differently, leading Spinoza into an undeclared debate with his ally, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, without anywhere mentioning him by name.³⁴ Where Spinoza offers an elaborate theory of what religion is, and how and why religion construes the world as it does, creating a new science of contextual Bible criticism, analysing usage and intended meanings, and extrapolating from context, using reason as an analytical tool but not expecting to find philosophical truth

embedded in Scriptural concepts, Meyer is less concerned with what religion is than showing how Scripture's picturesque allegories and, in his view, hesitant stumbling towards truth point to, or can be aligned with, philosophical truth.³⁵ Thus where the Bible, for Spinoza, is not a guide to reality, for Meyer it has an inner core of meaning approximating to philosophical truth.³⁶

Publication of the *Philosophia* at 'Eleutheropolis' (i.e. Amsterdam) deeply disquieted the Dutch Reformed Church, universities, and most dissident and fringe Churches, demonstrating the profound impact of radical ideas on the late seventeenth-century consciousness and their capacity to inflame existing tension between traditionalist and reforming impulses in mainstream culture. What began as an outcry against the *Philosophia* rapidly became an internecine quarrel among vying theological factions over exegetical methodologies, the function of reason in Bible interpretation, and the status of philosophy. Inevitably, the uproar generated a strong pressure to unmask the author of so impious and provocative a text and reveal the sources of such 'godless' ideas.³⁷ The favourite suspect, initially, was Lambert van Velthuysen, a Utrecht regent steeped in Cartesian philosophy and much reviled by orthodox Calvinists, but he was cleared, transferring the beam of suspicion to others, including Spinoza. But to the exasperation of almost everyone, nothing definite about the perpetrator could be discovered. Only after Meyer's death in 1681 did his circle of friends divulge the identity of the man who ignited one of the greatest, and most convoluted, intellectual battles of the age, though the question was still being used to tease the public in 1697, the

Spinozistic novel, the *Life of Philopater*, alluding to the author of the *Philosophia* mysteriously as 'L. M.'³⁸

Even after Colerus definitely concluded that Spinoza had not written it, reporting that those who knew affirmed Meyer to be the author, confusion persisted, especially outside the Netherlands, and during the eighteenth century the text was still often ascribed to Spinoza, although several key *savants* such as Leibniz, Loescher, Wolf, and Trinius all correctly attribute it to Meyer.³⁹ The discerning Leibniz knew considerably more, and earlier, than most foreign *érudits* about both the *Philosophia* and the clandestine intellectual milieu from which it emerged. During his visit to Amsterdam in 1676, he made a point of getting to know Meyer. Decades later, in his *Théodicée* (1710), the great German thinker recalled that 'in 1666 Lodewijk Meyer, a physician of Amsterdam, published anonymously the book entitled *Philosophia Scripturae Interpres*, by many wrongly ascribed to Spinoza, his friend; the theologians of Holland bestirred themselves and their written attacks on this book gave rise to great disputes among them.'⁴⁰

The book indeed provoked general revulsion, especially among the Reformed consistories and preachers' district assemblies, or *classes*. On 24 July 1666 the *classis* Haarlem debated the problem of 'licentious books', specifying the *Philosophia* as the single most offensive and pernicious then circulating. Extracts were read out to the assembly by its *visitatores librorum*. It was agreed to raise the matter urgently at the forthcoming gathering of the North Holland Synod so that it should be apparent there how completely this book was filled with 'godlessness and blasphemy'.⁴¹ At Leiden the book was formally condemned by both Cocceius and Wittichius in

the name of the theology faculty.⁴² In Friesland there was a considerable outcry led by Johannes van der Waeyen (1639–1701), later a prominent Cocceian but then still Voetian. The theologians of Friesland complained to the standing committee of the provincial States with the result that, late in 1666, Friesland became the first Dutch province formally to suppress a text produced by the Amsterdam Spinozist coterie.⁴³

In Utrecht the response was no less agitated, the Reformed consistory urging the city burgomasters and, through them, in December 1666, the States of Utrecht, to follow the ‘praiseworthy’ example of Friesland and prohibit so despicable a work in their province too.⁴⁴ The burgomasters asked for the most ‘atrocious’ passages to be collected in files, which were circulated among the city regents and the provincial States. In this way, virtually the entire regent and the noble élite of Utrecht studied the more offensive of Meyer’s formulations.⁴⁵ Nor did they disagree with the preachers that the work was subversive and intolerable. The States of Utrecht, the consistory heard on 18 March 1667, had duly instructed the magistracies throughout the province to seize all copies from bookshops and prevent its further sale, since the book ‘violates the placards of the States General, and this province, against all Socinian and similar writings’.⁴⁶ As yet there was no province-wide ban in Holland, but the book was certainly seized from the bookshops in individual towns, and a general pressure was kept up by the consistories for a formal provincial prohibition. Thus, at the time of the French invasion, in June 1672, the consistory and *classis* of Haarlem identified four books as being especially appalling, ‘soul-destroying’, and apt for vigorous suppression, namely

Spinoza's *Tractatus*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, and the 'fameus boeck *Philosophia Scripturae Interpres*'.⁴⁷

At Amsterdam, meanwhile, some of the liveliest reaction was among the Collegiants, Rieuwertsz' own milieu, where Meyer himself, like Spinoza and the brothers Koerbagh, had numerous acquaintances. In the Dutch version Meyer speaks contemptuously of the public Church whose 'fortresses' his arguments had, like a conquering army, 'stormed and devastated',⁴⁸ but more respectfully of the Socinian and anti-Trinitarian fringe whom he—albeit carefully differentiating his philosophical from their theological stance⁴⁹—summons to join him as friends in an unbreakable alliance against the common foe. None the less, Meyer chides them for their unwillingness to interpret Scripture wholly in accordance with 'reason', their invoking the Holy Ghost to assist and enlighten them, so that they too languish in confusion and theological strife of their own making. What Socinians and such Remonstrants as truly revere the memory of Episcopius should do, he urges, is follow him in making philosophy the sole and 'infallible measure' of Scripture.⁵⁰ Meyer adamantly denies there is any divine inspiration, or 'inner light', distinct from the 'natural light of reason', to aid man in this quest.⁵¹

For years the Collegiants had been subject to growing friction within their own ranks between their rationalizing, avowedly Socinian, and more conservative, Trinitarian wings, and while the latter reacted to Meyer's call indignantly, and the former more sympathetically, his intervention could only exacerbate their dissension.⁵² Meyer declares philosophy the sole criterion of truth, proclaiming whatever contradicts the

judgements of 'the true philosophy' misleading and false. To some extent Collegiants of all hues were bound to protest. The Anabaptist Messianist Jan Pietersz Beelthouwer (c. 1603–c. 1669), who in discussion had learnt to admire Spinoza's as yet generally still unknown exegetical principles, nevertheless emphatically rejected Meyer's contention that the Biblical prophecies are unclear and ambiguous, and his insinuation that the divine spirit does not infuse Scripture.⁵³ Ironically, Beelthouwer even invokes 'the most learned Spinoza' against the *Philosophia*, suggesting, as does other evidence, that Spinoza had been and remained extremely discreet and cautious in discussions and in his dealings with the Collegiants.

Meyer was assailed much more vehemently by another Collegiant acquaintance of Spinoza, the Millenarian Spiritualist Petrus Serrarius (1600–69), who presumably knew the identity of his antagonist. Being a firm anti-Socinian, Serrarius was profoundly disconcerted by a book which he nevertheless recognized to be of immense significance.⁵⁴ In January 1667 he wrote to his close ally in spiritual matters, the Scots Millenarian and anti-Cartesian, John Dury, then in Basel, informing him of the uproar in the Netherlands over the *Philosophia*. Dury took the matter with due seriousness, losing no time in communicating this dramatic news to other friends, notably Switzerland's foremost Bible exegete at the time, Johann Heinrich Heidegger, at Zürich. No sooner had his impassioned tract against the *Philosophia* appeared than Serrarius dispatched copies to Basel, several of which Dury posted on to Zürich.

Serrarius expends all his spiritual fervour against the bid to enthrone philosophy in place of divine inspiration and the

Holy Ghost. Clothing his admonitions in impressive Biblical and Millenarian imagery, he proclaimed the limitations of any philosophy, and Cartesianism in particular. Granting Descartes' excellence in mathematics, he flatly denied that his mechanistic conception of the world is the key to truth physical and spiritual.⁵⁵ Whatever the *Philosophia* claims, the true meaning of Scripture, he insists, is grasped only through the 'inner light' and the guidance of the Holy Ghost.⁵⁶ To mistake philosophy for divine wisdom, 'natural light for the divine light, what is innate in man for what is received from God', he urges, is idolatry; for whoever takes that path prefers philosophy to Christ. He likens Cartesianism to the adulterous woman in Proverbs 7 who dares not show herself in broad daylight, which he interprets as the blessed age of the early Church. Only now, as dusk falls, in our corrupt era, does philosophy reveal herself and go out, like a harlot, to tempt men. Superficially, she is alluring. For who does not love philosophy, the love of wisdom? But underneath, she is a brazen whore. Has she not seduced the writer of the *Philosophia*, who runs after her like an ox to the slaughterhouse? Has she not lured him from the family of the Lamb of God to bow before the new Golden Calf of reason?⁵⁷

iii. The Wolzogen Disputes

The commotion entered a new phase with the publication in 1668 of a 274-page critique of Meyer's *Philosophia*, entitled *De Scripturarum Interprete*, by the liberal Calvinist professor Louis Wolzogen (1633–90). This work, accounted by Leibniz the principal 'Cartesian' reply to Meyer,⁵⁸ a copy of which graced Spinoza's own tiny library,⁵⁹ provoked extraordinary acrimony on all sides, markedly aggravating the antagonism

between the vying ideological blocs within the Reformed Church by further pitting the Cartesio-Cocceians against the Voetians over the true method of interpreting Scripture and the relationship of philosophy to theology.⁶⁰ If virtually all Dutch theologians considered the *Philosophia*, noted Bayle later in his *Dictionnaire*, 'pernicieux et pis que Socinien', such was the outcry against Wolzogen 'que l'on cria contre sa réfutation autant ou plus que contre le livre même qu'il réfutoit'.⁶¹

Born to a family of Austrian Calvinist refugees in the same year as Spinoza, Wolzogen acquired excellent French studying at the Reformed academies of Saumur and Geneva. Subsequently he became a preacher with the French-speaking Reformed Church, first at Groningen, then Middelburg and, from 1664, Utrecht, where he doubled as a university professor. A veteran of the 'collège des sçavants', a noted Cartesian discussion group in Utrecht, headed by Frans Burman and including Velthuysen, Graevius, and Mansvelt, Wolzogen, who apparently knew Meyer well,⁶² was judged by his detractors altogether too worldly for a preacher, sporting as he did a powdered wig and indulging in profane amusements such as playing cards.⁶³ He avidly followed the latest intellectual debates. Moreover his library, auctioned in Amsterdam after his death, included numerous heterodox theological and philosophical works, such as La Peyrère's *Praeadamitae* and Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*, as well as De la Court, Beverland, Van Dale, Bekker, and Aubert de Versé.⁶⁴

The furore into which Wolzogen plunged in 1668 profoundly affected the whole of the rest of his life. The aim

of his *De Scripturarum Interprete*, which appeared with approbations from the university curators and Utrecht city government, is clearly to segregate the legitimate use of reason in Bible hermeneutics from the illicit subordination of Holy Writ to philosophy advocated by the *Philosophia*.⁶⁵ Above all, his goal is to rescue Cartesio-Cocceian exegetical methods from the disastrous association with the *Philosophia* which the Voetians were doing their utmost to affirm. If the *Philosophia*'s arguments were to prevail, he agrees, then theology and ecclesiastical authority would collapse.⁶⁶ But his efforts to demonstrate a wide gulf between the respective positions of the *Philosophia* and the Cartesio-Cocceians landed him in a morass of difficulties, not least with regard to the troublesome issue of Socinianism. Although he denounces Socinianism, as anyone in his position had to do, he nevertheless held that the Socinians were right to eschew Biblical interpretations which conflict with reason, claiming that Socinian views resembled those of the *Philosophia* far less than the latter claimed.⁶⁷ 'Reason', he contends, cannot conflict with God's Word as revealed in Scripture and is essential to construing Scripture correctly.⁶⁸ His problem was that, while purporting to repudiate the *Philosophia*, he actually approximates to Meyer in several respects, in particular, entirely agreeing with his cardinal principle that philosophical truth cannot be contrary to theological truth.⁶⁹

Wolzogen argued that reason should prevail in theology and Bible exegesis, but subject always to two indispensable provisos: first, one must only admit as 'natural truths' in theology propositions demonstrated by philosophy and science beyond all doubt, and secondly, one must exclude

from truths identical in theology and philosophy the central 'mysteries' of the Christian religion which, by definition, transcend our reason.⁷⁰ Both the *Philosophia* and the Socinians violate these fundamental rules, he held, and are therefore greatly at fault. None the less the Socinians, he argued, err less reprehensibly than the *Philosophia*; for there remains a vast gulf between advocating the total subordination of Scripture to 'philosophy', like the *Philosophia*, and eschewing interpretation which contradicts reason, while otherwise explaining Scripture from Scripture, showing considerable reverence for the sacred text, as the Socinians do.⁷¹

While Wolzogen sincerely attacked the *Philosophia* for subordinating the Christian mysteries to philosophical criteria, his book nevertheless antagonized innumerable theologians for conceding too much ground to 'reason' and virtually vindicating the Socinians.⁷² Wolzogen faced a hail of criticism from every part of the United Provinces for propounding errors not far removed from those he purported to refute, some of his assailants even suggesting he was in secret league with the writer of the *Philosophia*.⁷³ At Utrecht his assailants included Voetius and Essenius, in Zeeland Georgius de Raed, in States Brabant the most eminent professor of the high school at 's-Hertogenbosch, Reinier Vogelsang (c.1610–79), and in Friesland Van der Waeyen.⁷⁴ Furthermore, he was fiercely attacked within his own Walloon community by two strictly orthodox Calvinist preachers, Jean de Labadie and Pierre Yvon, at Middelburg.⁷⁵ A judgement produced by hostile colleagues at Deventer and

published by his foes at Middelburg in 1669 accused Wolzogen of barely disguised Socinian tendencies.⁷⁶

Wolzogen fought back tenaciously, and if his adversaries were many, and drawn from a broad theological spectrum, he also had formidable friends, who stood to lose much themselves should he be crushed and therefore came to his aid, selectively supporting his arguments and vouching for his orthodoxy. The exegetical methods and basic premises of the Cartesio-Cocceians, an entire intellectual current within the public Church and universities, were in the dock.⁷⁷ Hence Cocceius himself, Wittichius, Heidanus, Burman, and, in Friesland, the redoubtable Balthasar Bekker, all rallied to Wolzogen's side. Bekker wrote from Franeker in March 1669, responding to Wolzogen's pleas for help, assuring him he had read his treatise through twice, thoroughly approved his views and, furthermore, was convinced 'God will aid you in the future in persevering with as much courage and steadfastness as you have hitherto.'⁷⁸ It was a display of resolve under theological fire that Bekker himself would have occasion to recall in still more embattled circumstances over twenty years later.

Among other consequences, the Wolzogen furore provoked a major split within the Walloon Church, as became painfully clear at its synod at Naarden in 1669.⁷⁹ Fortunately for Wolzogen, Labadie's ultra-orthodox rigour and bullying tactics alienated much of the middle ground, enabling the Cartesio-Cocceians to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Wolzogen's orthodoxy as a Reformed minister was narrowly upheld, an outcome Labadie and his adherents strove to overturn at the next annual gathering of the synod, at Dordrecht in March 1670. According to Labadie, Wolzogen's

exegetical principles had been condemned by the universities of Utrecht, Franeker, and Harderwijk, and the high school at 's-Hertogenbosch, and should be forbidden by the Walloon Church. Wolzogen's adherents argued that only certain professors at those institutions had denounced his views, not those academies as such.⁸⁰ It was put to the vote. Again Wolzogen narrowly survived.

iv. The 'New Religion' of Philosophy

Where Wolzogen and his critics agreed was in classifying the *Philosophia* as something fundamentally new and revolutionary in the world of ideas and religion. With unprecedented boldness, it advocated nothing less than the total dissolution of theology and the hegemony in human affairs of the 'new system of philosophy'. In the Dutch text, Meyer says slightly more about this 'new system' than in the original Latin, explaining that it had been introduced first by Descartes but had now been modified, improved, and broadened 'by others who wish to follow in his footsteps and bring into the light the issues of God, the rational soul, man's highest happiness, and other such things'.⁸¹ Most readers doubtless found this sweeping but vague contention thoroughly exasperating, but to the handful of initiates it was plain that Meyer was alluding to himself, Van den Enden, the brothers Koerbagh, Bouwmeester, and especially Spinoza.⁸² In the thought-world of the *Philosophia*, philosophical principles as developed by these—to the public still largely unknown—men, and not the doctrines of the Churches and universities constituted ultimate and supreme truth.

Assuredly, few readers at the time grasped Meyer's meaning, or the full scope of his intellectual, educational,

social, and political agenda. Nevertheless, there was a widespread feeling that the *Philosophia* represented more than just an outrageous assault on authority and religion, a realization that it was part of something wider and, if largely submerged for the moment, ultimately still more menacing, a suspicion strengthened, with the publication in January 1670 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Here, Spinoza claims that only those who fail to see the basic distinction between theology and philosophy dispute which prevails over the other.⁸³ Where the *Philosophia* insists that theology must be reduced to philosophy, Spinoza professes to assert—complying with the States of Holland edict of 1656—the complete separation of theology and philosophy: ‘neither is theology dependent on reason, nor reason on theology.’⁸⁴ But few contemporaries were deceived by what was really just a tactical ploy. In Spinoza, theology is assigned a social function but no part in revealing the truth about Man, God, and the world.⁸⁵ Only philosophy can do that. By asserting, like Meyer, that Scripture is full of obscurity, that the Hebrew wording is uncertain, and its vowels and accents were added later, that Biblical prophecy is nothing but the result of an overactive imagination,⁸⁶ that the prophets held contradictory beliefs and prejudices and agree only in the sphere of moral ideas, and finally, that the language of Scripture ‘was adapted to the understanding and preconceived beliefs of the common people’, Spinoza subverted theology, merging it with philosophy just as comprehensively as Meyer.

When, therefore, Spinoza concludes his chapter on the separation of theology and philosophy by deploring the ‘absurdities, disruption and harm that have resulted from the

fact men have thoroughly confused these two branches, failing to distinguish correctly between them, separating one from the other',⁸⁷ he is not in fact upholding the separation of spheres introduced by De Witt and the Cartesio-Cocceian camp. Rather he totally subverts theology's autonomy, eliminating its role in teaching men truth and the path to salvation. Hence, for both Spinoza and the *Philosophia*, 'the true method of interpreting Scripture,' as he expresses it in his famous maxim, 'does not differ at all from the method of interpreting nature but rather precisely accords with it.'⁸⁸ In other words, true theology is philosophy and, despite significant differences in method and argumentation, the final conclusions of Spinoza and Meyer, equating true theology with the sound conclusions of philosophy and science, are broadly the same. Both writers agree that Scripture is a man-made, not a God-given, text, that truth lies in philosophy alone, and that theological acrimony damages society, is pointless, and should be avoided.

A further effect of the strife over the *Philosophia* was that a key middle group of Reformed theologians, led by the Huguenot professor Samuel Maresius (Des Marets) (1599–1673) at Groningen, who, mindful of the threat to the unity of the public Church, had previously steered a middle course between the Cartesio-Cocceian and traditionalist camps, were now so disconcerted that they repudiated their earlier provisionally favourable view of Cartesianism.⁸⁹ Appalled by the *Philosophia*, in 1667 Maresius staged a series of disputations among his students, designed to demolish its arguments. Convinced that Cartesianism itself was the source of the venom, by 1669 he was fully committed to the anti-Cartesian drive in the Netherlands and was using his

appreciable influence in Switzerland to stiffen the anti-Cartesian campaign also in progress there.⁹⁰ He then published his critique in 1670, under the title *De Abusu Philosophiae Cartesianae* (Concerning the Abuse of the Cartesian Philosophy), a book which did much to shift the emphasis in the European debate about Cartesianism away from Descartes' system to its radical offshoots which, according to Maresius, were from the outset inherent in it.

Fiercely critical of Wittichius, Heidanus, Burman, and Mansvelt, as well as Wolzogen, Maresius roundly blamed the Cartesians and their Cocceian allies for the mounting turmoil engulfing theological studies and the entire Reformed Church in Germany, Switzerland, and elsewhere, as well as the Netherlands, though he claimed that the Swiss Reformed Church was proving more successful than its counterpart in the Netherlands in checking the ferment.⁹¹ The writer of the *Philosophia*, he grants, by wholly subordinating theology and Scripture to philosophy, had ventured far beyond Descartes and the academic Cartesians.⁹² This clandestine author and his like were *pseudo-Cartesiani*, 'abusing' the New Philosophy, whom any reasonable observer should differentiate from *genuini Cartesiani*.⁹³ Yet it was too easy for the Cartesians simply to disown those perverting their master's system as dangerous delinquents for whom they were not responsible. For the insidious seeds, he alleged, lie deep in Cartesianism itself, the beginnings of the tendency to erode Scripture's authority and theology's supremacy being clearly discernible in the writings of Wittichius, Burman, Wolzogen, and their following, and not least in the corrosive effect of Cartesian philosophy on belief in angels and demons.⁹⁴

The Cartesio-Cocceians had to reply, their chosen spokesmen being Wittichius and especially the author of a series of pamphlets lambasting Maresius and his supporters under the pseudonym 'Petrus van Andlo', a polemicist later identified by Bayle, among others, as the Utrecht professor, admirer of Wittichius, and writer of a long refutation of Spinoza, Regnerus van Mansvelt (1639–71).⁹⁵ 'Van Andlo' ridiculed Maresius' new stance, and public *rapprochement* with his old enemy Voetius, claiming the Cartesianism taught in the Dutch academies, so irresponsibly disparaged by Maresius at Groningen, was in fact the only means to overcome the atheistic threat and shore up the authority of Holy Writ and the Reformed Church, including belief in angels and demons.

Shaken by Van Andlo's counterblast, Maresius dashed off a 67-page 'vindication of his dissertation', claiming that he was not trying to discredit all Cartesians as Van Andlo charged, but simply to curb the abuse of Cartesian principles in theology.⁹⁶ This tract, appearing at Groningen late in 1670, reveals that Maresius had been making enquiries to uncover the intellectual background of the *Philosophia* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. The latter, he had discovered, was penned by 'Spinoza, ex-Jew, blasphemmer and formal atheist', whose atrocious views, Van Andlo notwithstanding, stem from Cartesianism and constitute as dire a threat to the Christian faith as had ever been known.⁹⁷ That Maresius closely followed the intricacies of the controversy over the *Philosophia* was also reflected in his own library which, when auctioned after his death, included almost everything published concerning the *Philosophia*, Wolzogen, and the *Tractatus*.⁹⁸ Nothing is more pernicious than Spinoza's Bible

criticism, held Maresius, insisting that its principles are derived directly from Cartesianism, albeit spiced with Machiavelli and Hobbes.⁹⁹ Van Andlo and his friends disclaim responsibility; but was it not they who first began the campaign for 'freedom to philosophize', arrogantly disregarding the strictures of the academic senates and guidelines fixed by the provincial States, with the consequence that there was now such excessive 'freedom to philosophize' that the very foundations of authority and orthodoxy were daily crumbling?¹⁰⁰ Van Andlo purports to defend Cartesianism, but he seems, suggested Maresius, with his unyielding advocacy of philosophy, 'rather a disciple of Spinoza than an adherent of Descartes'.¹⁰¹

Mansvelt retorted angrily with his 72-page 'observations' on Maresius' 'vindication', published at Leiden early in 1671. Contesting Maresius' charge that Cartesianism undermines belief in angels, demonstrating the soundness of Cartesianism regarding all Biblical categories of spirits and demons, he assured readers that, far from being a crypto-Spinozist masquerading as a 'Cartesian', he had never spoken to Spinoza, or even seen him, and utterly detested his 'absurd doctrines'.¹⁰² Maresius replied again in a pamphlet entitled *Clypeus Orthodoxiae*, where he alludes to new enquiries intended to unmask this mysterious 'Petrus van Andlo' who, without provocation, had so shamefully attacked him. He had failed to identify the culprit but assured readers that 'he is no member of the Reformed Church but belongs to the same circle as the anonymous writer of the *Philosophia* ... if indeed he and the latter are not one and the same.'¹⁰³ Van Andlo's purpose, he surmised, in thus widening the furore over the *Philosophia*, was to inflame passions sufficiently to

precipitate a schism among the well-intentioned and thereby advance the cause of his 'Socinianism or Libertinism'.¹⁰⁴

Maresius depicts the intellectual predicament of the Reformed Church and universities in the direst terms. Academic life in the Netherlands, he held, was seething with detestable 'doctrines unheard of hitherto until today', and saturated with libertinism and 'indifferentism', which had surged up with unprecedented force since the advent of Cartesianism in the middle of the century. These evil impulses had then gained fresh momentum from the *Philosophia*, which Marsius did not believe was by Spinoza but someone else, and still more, from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Spinoza was openly challenging Christ's Church, promoting libertinism and undermining all authority, and doing so by building on the pernicious principles of Descartes and Hobbes.¹⁰⁵ Spinoza was leading the attack. But it was, held Maresius, Cartesianism which had sapped the Church's defences and opened the gates, enabling Spinoza to mount so appalling a threat. Moreover, even now, with the danger clearly manifest, the Cartesians continued to erode the authority of Holy Writ instead of springing to its defence. God, affirms the sacred text, commanded the sun and the moon to stand still in the sky so that Joshua could finish his battle, 'You maintain', he admonished his opponents, that this passage of Scripture conflicts with 'your clear and distinct philosophical concepts' and is not to be believed literally. But how will your 'philosophy' save you when the writer of the *Philosophia* resumes his wicked campaign, invoking Descartes' principles against the core mysteries of the Christian faith?¹⁰⁶

A notable feature of the Maresius–Mansvelt exchange is the awareness it shows that the *Philosophia* and *Tractatus* were penned by different authors, but writers connected and part of the same philosophical underground.¹⁰⁷ This was also grasped by others, including observers abroad who, like Leibniz, realized that the controversies surrounding the *Philosophia* were something new and of profound significance for all Europe, some of whom, indeed, had personal knowledge of the clandestine philosophical coterie in the Netherlands which was beginning to exert so powerful an influence on the wider European scene. Among these was the Danish ex-scientist, Nicholas Steno, who probably knew Meyer as well as Spinoza and, in a pamphlet published at Florence in 1675, claimed that the turmoil in Protestant lands generated by the *Philosophia*, and the Wolzogen disputes, proved that Protestantism, with its misconceived summons to base theology on Scripture alone, ultimately produces nothing but the gravest confusion and perplexity. Only the Church of Rome, he held, can provide veritable spiritual guidance and reveal the true path to salvation.¹⁰⁸

v. The *Philosophia* in England

In England too there were reverberations from the furore over the *Philosophia*. At Oxford, and especially among the so-called Cambridge Platonists, elements of the academic community were in touch, often via Locke's future friend, Limborch, with developments in the Netherlands. Other dons, and also the occasional erudite parish clergyman, simply pieced together what was happening by perusing recent foreign theological literature published in Latin. Unquestionably, the foremost English response to the

Philosophia was that of a Puritan clergyman deprived of his living by the Crown in 1662, the Cambridge-educated John Wilson,¹⁰⁹ in his *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, published in London in 1678. Appalled by the arguments of Wolzogen, who, 'having', as he put it, 'undertaken the patronage of the Protestant cause against this adversary [i.e. the *Philosophia*] doth so shamefully throw down his arms and run out of the field,'¹¹⁰ Wilson had decided to enter the fray himself. He took up his pen, he explains in his preface, aware from the 'publisht writings of some reverend divines abroad what mischief this discourse, and some others, whose publication it occasioned, have already done in the Netherlands; so I am not without just fears, that those unfounded notions and corrupt principles that are, by this means, scattered abroad, may be quickly (if they be not already) propagated amongst our selves'.¹¹¹

From his reading, Wilson perceived that the 'whole design of the [*Philosophia*], and of that other tract that is prefixed to its latter edition (written, as is supposed, by the same author) is utterly to undermine and overthrow the credit of the Scriptures'.¹¹² It is plain, he adds, the *Philosophia* deems the Bible 'of no use to instruct us in any thing we know not, nor yet to confirm us in what we know', since 'all the use he allows it is only this, that by reading therein we may be occasion'd and excited to consider of the things there treated of, and examine the truth of them by philosophy: and as much as this might be said of the Jews' *Talmud*, or the Turks' *Alcoran*.'¹¹³ The *Philosophia* professes to offer the means to solve all the difficulties of theology. But whence comes this strange notion, demands Wilson, that such questions can be resolved by philosophy? 'I have indeed oft wonder'd what

should betray any to this fond and irrational conceit of resolving the agonies of distress'd consciences,' he remarks, 'till I met with a piece of new divinity in a late Belgick tractator'—referring here expressly to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*—'and then I began to suspect out of what chimney came all this smoke.'¹¹⁴ The central contention of the *Tractatus*, he says, is the idea that the prophetic revelations issue from the 'imagination', that the 'Prophets in their narrations, and in all matters of speculation (that is whatsoever was not matter of moral duty) did disagree among themselves; and consequently that what is said by one, is not to be explained by the words of another,' an assertion 'which (with other passages of like import) does at once call in question the whole truth and consequently the divine authority of the Scriptures.'¹¹⁵

This was an exceedingly worrying new development. 'The Belgick Exercitator,' asserts Wilson, 'rises higher in denying the Scriptures perspicuity, than any that I have ever met with: and with confidence affirms the Scripture to be universally obscure, and that no part of it is, of itself, clear and plain; and therefore denies, that one part of Scripture can be expounded by another.'¹¹⁶ But what lies behind such abominable blasphemy? 'Whose design it is that the author of that Theologico-Political Tractat drives, except that of the great enemy of mankind, I know not: but he sufficiently manifests a vile esteem of the Holy Scriptures, and a desire to beget the like in others: for he takes very earnest pains with the utmost of his art and skill, to rake up and exagitate their seeming disagreements, as real contradictions, casting a great deal of scorn upon all expositors, as fools or madmen, that attempt to reconcile them.'¹¹⁷ It is not easy, remarks Wilson, to classify

this new menace. The 'Belgick tractator', he thought, discourses 'in this and sundry other odious passages, which I abhor to mention', in a way which 'doth apparently tend to promote the cause of the Antiscripturalists, besides the help it affords (which is not a little) to the Romish interest'; admittedly, grants Wilson, he 'would seem, by some expressions here and there, to intimate his dislike of the Pontifical party', but 'we know it is consistent enough with the politick principles of men of that way, to speak much more than he hath done, against that very cause that they are studiously projecting.'¹¹⁸

But while the 'Belgick tractator' was indeed, as Wilson supposed, the 'chimney' from which the *Philosophia's* smoke emanated, there were still vital parts of the puzzle missing. In particular, demands Wilson, 'where is that philosophy that the Exercitator [of the *Philosophia*] cries up for so certain and infallible? Where is it? In the clouds? Sure it never was extant among men, save in the crazy conceits of some self-admirers.'¹¹⁹ It may be the *Philosophia's* 'grand design ... utterly to cashier the Scripture as useless and unprofitable' and put in its place philosophy and the principles of reason, claiming these are 'undoubtedly true, free from danger of error, and therefore cannot deceive, being grounded upon unmoveable foundations' but 'as I said before, where is this philosophy to be found?'¹²⁰

Aside from the system of Descartes which the Exercitator says has been superceded, Wilson detects few real indications other than the *Philosophia's* rebuttal of the doctrine of Creation out of nothing, affirming the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* (nothing is made from nothing).¹²¹ Arguing thus, avers Wilson, 'he must necessarily maintain the eternity of

preexistent matter.’¹²² Yet, plainly, the Exercitator contemptuously rejects Aristotle’s philosophy.¹²³ In all likelihood, infers Wilson, the underlying principles are nothing but intellectual confusion and chaos dressed up to appear rational by dint of sheer effrontery. The Exercitator pretends the new philosophical method of Bible interpretation ‘being sure and infallible, will, if it be taken, forthwith banish all disputes about the sense of the Scriptures, and thereby restore peace to the Christian world. But I wonder how this should be effected by philosophy, which is itself so full of disputes, and the professors whereof are at such variance among themselves. Let them first reconcile their own differences before they undertake so great an enterprise elsewhere.’¹²⁴

Ultimately, concludes Wilson, the author of the *Philosophia* offers no help at all to mankind. His arguments are so feeble that ‘I cannot but wonder at his confidence. But he who hath no better weapons, must fight with a bull-rush. And it is now become the mode of polemick writers that have prurient wits, to sharpen their dull arguments with high confidence in themselves, and a proud contempt of their antagonists: in both which this author excels; but it is such an excellency, for which no wise or sober man will envy him.’¹²⁵ The danger was a real one, but one that could be readily defeated by means of solid, careful argument. Wilson ends with the pious hope that theological tracts such as his own would ‘effectually vindicate the Scriptures, this Blessed Book, from the scorns and reproaches of atheists and Antiscripturalists’.¹²⁶

vi. German and Scandinavian Reverberations

If in Italy and England the *furor* surrounding the *Philosophia* did not go unnoticed, in Germany and the Baltic it was regularly cited, over many decades, by anti-Cartesian traditionalists as the culmination of a process by which the hidden but innate dangers of Cartesianism became manifest. For not only had the *Philosophia* invoked Descartes while claiming to supersede him but, as Leibniz puts it, many opponents ‘held the opinion that the Cartesians, in confuting the anonymous philosopher, had conceded too much to philosophy’.¹²⁷ Thus, for example, a leading Lutheran authority, August Pfeiffer¹²⁸ at Lübeck, in his treatise on Bible hermeneutics, designates the *Philosophia* as the culmination of Cartesian arrogance and crassness, the point at which a total and irresolvable clash of theology and philosophy was revealed.¹²⁹

The most influential of all late seventeenth-century academic attacks on Cartesianism in Germany and Scandinavia, the *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena* (1677), written by Petrus van Mastricht whilst teaching at Duisburg in Cleves—albeit dedicated to William III and published in Amsterdam—reserves some of its most vehement passages for the *Philosophia* and the Wolzogen affair.¹³⁰ Its chief aim—ironically also one of Spinoza’s objectives, advancing from the other side—is to ruin the project of Wittichius and his followers to reconcile theology and philosophy (including Galilean science) by means of Cartesianism. Unlike Maresius, but like Voetius, Mastricht judges Descartes’ entire system, beginning with his procedural principle of ‘universal doubt’—the ‘*primum Cartesianismi fundamentum*’—a catastrophe for mankind and the Reformed

Church, which had destroyed the traditional role of philosophy as a handmaiden to theology and foisted the godless and arrogant ‘magistracy’ of philosophy on theology.¹³¹ Everywhere one encountered furious disapproval of the *Philosophia*. But had not Wittichius, Velthuysen, Burman, and Wolzogen—Van Mastricht’s four particular *bêtes noires*—while not going as far as the author of that execrable text, or expressing themselves as impudently, nevertheless also, like him, proclaimed ‘reason and philosophy’ instead of Holy Writ the true and divine Revelation, the only source of absolute certainty?¹³²

Mastricht considers the *Philosophia* and the writings of Spinoza, ‘atheus quidem, sed Cartesianus’ (an atheist certainly, but a Cartesian) the most dangerous and pernicious of all intellectual threats to mankind. By any reckoning Spinoza is the chief enemy.¹³³ But it is no use simply decrying Spinoza and the *Exercitator Paradoxus*, as he calls the writer of the *Philosophia*. For in reality there is no great gulf between Wittichius’ and Wolzogen’s methods of Bible exegesis and Spinoza’s principle that Scripture speaks ‘secundum erroneam vulgi opinionem’ (according to the erroneous opinions of ordinary folk) or the *Exercitator*’s contending ‘philosophiam infallibilem esse Scripturae Interpretem’ (philosophy to be the infallible interpreter of Scripture). In Mastricht the *Exercitator Paradoxus* is systematically deployed to flay the Cartesio-Cocceians. In his view, Wittichius, Velthuysen, Burman, and Wolzogen were pushing the common people, indeed all of society, down the path to ruin, just like the *Exercitator paradoxus* and Spinoza, by devaluing belief in divine Providence and the divine inspiration of Scripture and, like them, undermining the people’s faith in demons, angels, and other spirits, teaching

the world that 'clear and distinct ideas' are the 'unica omnis veritatis norma' (the only criterion of all truth).¹³⁴ This is the same, he insists, as enslaving theology to philosophy.

Petrus van Mastricht was a Calvinist theologian. But in his capacity as a foremost critic of Cartesianism, neither Lutheran divines nor Catholic polemicists hesitated to adopt his arguments or quote his telling phrases. Thus the theology faculty at Uppsala adduced him as their principal authority in their efforts to persuade the Swedish Crown to condemn Cartesianism in 1687,¹³⁵ while the Neapolitan Jesuit, Benedetti, fulsomely approved of Mastricht's views, at least in this domain.¹³⁶ Michael Foertschius (1654–1724), dean of the Jena theology faculty, in his survey of the principal theological disputes of the age in 1708, identifies Mastricht as the most powerful reply to the 'abominable' *Philosophia*, Wolzogen, and Wittichius alike.¹³⁷

Numerous collections of publications concerning the affair of the *Philosophia* were assembled in Germany and the Baltic. In Bremen, Gerhard van Mastricht, Petrus' brother and the town syndic, had copies of the *Philosophia*, Serrarius' *Responsio*, and nearly everything of Maresius, besides Spinoza's *Tractatus*.¹³⁸ The Lutheran *Generalsuperintendent* of the Swedish-administered former bishoprics of Bremen and Verden, Johannes Dieckmann (1647–1720), whose library was auctioned at Bremen in 1721, owned copies of the *Philosophia* and Spinoza's *Tractatus*, grouping these together with Wolzogen's works and those of Wittichius and Maresius.¹³⁹ The library of Gustav Schroedter, 'Adessor' of the Lutheran Church at the Holstein court of Gottorp, auctioned at Altona in 1724, contained the *Philosophia*,

Serrarius' *Responsio*, and Wolzogen's treatise, together with a variety of tracts 'contra Wolzogen'.¹⁴⁰ Few such collections, however, matched that of the Wolfenbüttel town and court physician—as well as botanist, numismatist, and general *savant*—Johann Heinrich Burckhard (1676–1738) whose library was auctioned there in 1738 and who had assiduously accumulated practically everything relevant to the disputes surrounding Wolzogen and the *Philosophia*.¹⁴¹

But the clearest proof that the *Philosophia* functioned as a regular focal point of intellectual debate in the Lutheran world, from the 1670s until well into the eighteenth century, is that it became established, like Spinoza, as a stock fixture of academic disputations on Bible hermeneutics. Refuting the 'new atheists' in this period became basic to theological training in the German and Baltic universities and, when professors exercised students in defending the integrity of Scripture, the writer of the *Philosophia* regularly joined Spinoza, Hobbes, and La Peyrère as one of the four standard antagonists to be overthrown. Thus, in a series of three set-piece public disputations 'contra atheos et naturalistas' staged at Rostock in May 1702, though Hobbes and Herbert of Cherbury also featured in the proceedings, the two chief targets were predictably Spinoza and the 'author of the *Philosophia Scripturae Interpres*'.¹⁴² Four principal propositions were defended during this three-day display of Baltic erudition: first, the Five Books of Moses were upheld as 'truly and authentically the work of Moses' against 'Spinozam, Hobbesium et Peyrerium'; secondly, the claim that Scripture 'approves' the erroneous notions of the ignorant common people was disproved against 'Wittichiam et Spinozam'; thirdly, the contention 'philosophy is the

interpreter of Scripture' was proven fallacious, against the 'author of the *Philosophia*', with the addendum that Wolzogen's refutation of the latter is totally inadequate; while, finally, it was shown that only the literal meaning of the Bible is valid, against the 'Cocceians' and especially the 'author of the *Philosophia*'. The event was pronounced a triumph for the Aristotelian anti-Cartesians then still predominant at Rostock, the final upshot being that reason is not the 'universal law' and 'philosophy must acknowledge the supremacy of theology' (*philosophia imperium theologiae agnoscere debet*).¹⁴³

Yet, of course, discerning minds were not so sure. As so often, Leibniz showed particular skill in summing up and placing it all in context. He noted that the commotion surrounding the *Philosophia* was never actually resolved: there is, he concluded, 'no indication that any precise rules have yet been defined which the rival parties accept or reject regarding the use of reason in the interpretation of Scripture'.¹⁴⁴ Rather, the disputes over Bible exegesis, he remarked, became merged in the wider conflict about the relationship between faith and reason: 'afterwards in Holland people spoke of "rational" and "non-rational" theologians, a party distinction often mentioned by M. Bayle, who finally declared himself against the former.'¹⁴⁵

MIRACLES DENIED

No other element of Spinoza's philosophy provoked as much consternation and outrage in his own time as his sweeping denial of miracles and the supernatural. In fact, Spinoza stands completely alone among the major European thinkers before the mid-eighteenth century in ruling out miracles. Hobbes had ventured to cast doubt on them, stressing that 'ignorant and superstitious men make great wonders of those works, which other men, knowing to proceed from nature ... admire not at all,' underlining the 'aptitude of mankind, to give too hasty beleefe to pretended miracles'.¹ But equally, Hobbes grants there have been, and may be, miracles, that 'a miracle, is a work of God (besides his operation by way of nature, ordained in the Creation) done, for the making manifest to his elect, the mission of an extraordinary minister for their salvation,' and that only the public Church can rightly judge what is, and what is not, a miracle.² It is worth noting in passing that Hobbes does not rule out magic either, acknowledging the likelihood, affirmed by the account of Pharoah's magicians in the Book of Exodus, that wondrous events can also occur through the operations of magic.³

Between the rise of Christianity and the mid-eighteenth century then, only Spinoza categorically denies the possibility of miracles and supernatural occurrences wrought by magic. Equally, he was by far the best-known denier of miracles. Thus, the Lutheran professor Johann Heinrich Müller, in his inaugural lecture on the subject of miracles in the university of Altdorf (Nuremberg) in 1714, declared among those who

bring miracles into question 'Benedictus Spinoza, the most renowned restorer and propagator of the myth that God is not distinct from the universe, is by far the most prominent.'⁴ According to Spinoza, he notes, neither the Incarnation nor the Resurrection, nor any miracle attributed to Christ, ever occurred, and nor did any other miracles recounted in Scripture: indeed, according to him there have never been any 'miracles'. The Wolffian Wittenberg professor, Friedrich Christian Baumeister (1709–85), writing in 1738, speaks of 'Spinoza Atheorum pessimus' (Spinoza the worst of atheists), in the first place because he explains Biblical miracles as natural effects 'concerning the causes of which we are ignorant'.⁵

Since miracles were seen as the 'first pillar' of faith, authority, and tradition by theologians at the time, Spinoza's rejection of the possibility of miracles seemed to bring all accepted beliefs, the very basis of contemporary culture, into question.⁶ As with much else in Spinoza, broad hints, virtually a sketch of his teaching, are found in his *Cogitata Metaphysica*, published in 1663 as a supplement to his exposition of Descartes. Here, as in the earlier *Korte Verhandeling*, Spinoza maintains there is nothing which is contingent, that 'possibility and contingency' are mere defects of our understanding, and that 'as nothing happens except by the divine power alone, it is easy to see that whatever happens, happens by the power of God's decree and His will.'⁷ Since there can be no change of mind, or inconsistency, in God, it follows that 'He must have decreed from eternity that He would produce those things which He now produces' and as what God decrees is necessary 'a necessity of existing has been in all created things from eternity.'⁸ Again, several

pages later, rather daringly, Spinoza reiterates that there can be no change 'in God' or 'God's decrees': 'for every change which depends on the will occurs in order that its subject may change into a better state' and since 'this can not take place in a perfect Being, there being no change except for the sake of avoiding some inadequacy, or acquiring something good which is lacking, neither of which can take place in God, we conclude that God is an immutable Being.'⁹ 'For if men understood clearly the whole order of Nature,' asserts Spinoza, 'they would find all things just as necessary as are all those handled in mathematics.'¹⁰ In this early work, published under his own name, Spinoza could not make his denial of miracles too obvious, so he deliberately muddies the water by acknowledging that 'there is the *ordinary* power of God, and his *extraordinary* power' and that the '*extraordinary* is exercised when He does something beyond the order of Nature e.g. all miracles, such as the speaking of an ass, the appearance of angels, and the like'. But he then immediately qualifies this, saying 'however, concerning this last it is possible, not without reason, for it to be greatly doubted; for it seems a greater miracle if God always governs the world with one and the same fixed and immutable order.'¹¹

Very different in tone and style, if not content, is Spinoza's treatment of miracles in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of 1670. The uncompromising formulations of the soon notorious chapter VI 'On Miracles', or 'impious sophistries' as Henry More called them,¹² were to reverberate for decades through every land in Europe, echoed by the numerous attempts to refute them, echoes amplified among other publications by Müller's oration at Altdorf, which includes lengthy verbatim quotations from Spinoza's text.¹³

The chapter begins with a clear hint that Spinoza, one of whose purposes in publishing the *Tractatus* was to weaken the authority and prestige of the public Church with a view to making it easier for his allies and himself to publish their books, aspires not just to interpret the world but change it.¹⁴ Spinoza openly derides the credulity of the multitude and the nonsensical nature of what most people believe. Indeed, in the entire history of modern thought, only Marx and Nietzsche have so openly and provocatively repudiated almost the entire belief-system of the society around them, as Spinoza does here. Most people, he insists, 'have no sound conception either of God or Nature, confuse God's decisions with human decisions, and imagine Nature to be so limited they suppose man to be its chief part'.¹⁵

Since 'the universal laws of Nature are God's decrees,' he argues, it follows from the necessity and perfection of the divine Nature that 'if anything were to happen in Nature contrary to her universal laws, it would also be necessarily contrary to the decree, intellect and Nature of God or, if anyone were to assert that God performs an act contrary to the laws of Nature, he would at the same time have to maintain that God acts contrary to His own Nature' which is absurd.¹⁶ From this it follows, argues Spinoza, that the notion of 'miracle' can only be understood with respect to men's beliefs 'and means simply an event whose natural cause we—or at any rate the writer or narrator of the miracle—cannot explain in terms of any other normal happening'. Hence, a 'miracle' is simply something the cause of which cannot be explained according to philosophical 'principles known to us by the natural light of reason'.¹⁷ Consequently, none of the 'miracles'

or other supernatural happenings recounted in the Bible were, in fact, miracles or supernaturally caused.

Since 'miracles' are purely mental constructions in men's minds, with no objective reality, it follows that neither Biblical 'miracles', nor any other 'miracles' that might be claimed, 'afford us any understanding of God's essence or His existence, or His Providence, and that, on the contrary, these are far better understood from the fixed and immutable order of Nature'.¹⁸ There may be much that we do not understand. But it is what we do understand 'clearly and distinctly' which provides the opportunity to attain a 'higher knowledge of God and shows with great clarity God's will and decrees so that those who have recourse to the will of God when there is something they do not understand are merely trifling; this being no more than a ridiculous way of acknowledging one's ignorance'.¹⁹

Crucial here is Spinoza's insistence that there is no difference between an 'event contrary to Nature' and a supernatural event. He grants that some authors claim there are events which do not contravene Nature but which nevertheless cannot be produced, or brought about, by Nature, and hence claim the supernatural is not necessarily contrary to Nature. Later, for the Newtonians and others, the distinction between 'above Nature' and 'contrary to Nature' was to be fundamental. But 'if there were to occur in Nature anything that did not follow from her laws,' replies Spinoza, 'this would necessarily be opposed to the order which God maintains eternally in Nature through her universal laws.' This would be contrary to Nature and Nature's laws and, consequently, 'such a belief would cast doubt on everything and lead to atheism.'²⁰

Accordingly, for Spinoza, miracles 'above nature', no less than 'miracles' contrary to Nature, are an absurdity, and when Scripture speaks of a 'miracle' this can 'mean nothing else, as we have said, but a natural event which surpasses, or is believed to surpass, human understanding'.²¹ Significantly, he employs his conceptions of 'miracle' and 'Nature' to redefine what 'philosophy' and 'philosophers' are. Stressing the difficulties Biblical prophets encountered in reconciling the order of Nature 'with the idea they had formed of God's Providence', he holds that it is only 'philosophers who seek to understand things not from miracles but from clear conceptions' and hence only philosophers who locate salvation, or 'true happiness solely in virtue and peace of mind' and strive to 'conform with Nature, not make Nature conform to them'.²² For philosophers know that God directs Nature in accordance with universal laws and not in accordance with human nature. The clear implication is that those who acknowledge miracles, refusing to base their conception of the universe on the unalterable laws of Nature, are merely deluded visionaries and not 'philosophers'.

By negating God's Will and Intelligence, Spinoza leaves no room for traditional notions of divine Providence. But he adroitly retains the phrase, redefining 'Providence' to signify something altogether different, that 'God's decrees and commandments, and consequently God's Providence are, in truth, nothing but Nature's order, that is to say when Scripture tells us this or that was done by God or God's Will, nothing more is meant than that it happened in accordance with Nature's law and order, and not, as the common people believe, that Nature temporarily suspended her action, or that her order was suspended'.²³ This is plain, given that men are driven by superstition, not the quest for truth, and

consequently, holds Spinoza, appropriating Wittichius' maxim, incensing liberal and conservative Protestants alike in the process, Scripture explains things in accordance with the ignorant beliefs of the common people without attempting to 'teach things through their natural causes or engage in pure philosophy.'²⁴ Thus when in Genesis 9: 13 God tells Noah He will set a rainbow in the clouds, this action is definitely nothing other, contends Spinoza, than the reflection and refraction of the sun's rays in droplets of water in the sky. Similarly, when wind and fire are called messengers and ministers of God, in Psalm 104: 4, and other similar passages, clearly 'God's decree, command, edict and word,' he maintains, 'are nothing other than the action and order of Nature.'²⁵

The Bible thus employs poetic language, according to Spinoza, to explain things which ultimately, but only very distantly, correspond to the truths which philosophers expound. In doing so, Scripture is concerned not with proximity to the truth but using 'such method and style as best serves to excite wonder and consequently to instil piety in the minds of the multitude'.²⁶ Hence, whenever we encounter something in the Bible which appears to have happened supernaturally, or contrary to Nature's order, this should not perplex us in any way: rather 'we may absolutely conclude everything narrated in Scripture which truly happened, happened according to the laws of Nature by which all things happen necessarily.'²⁷ Regarding the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea to escape Pharaoh's army, recounted in Exodus 10: 14–19, he infers that an easterly wind blew with great vigour all night long and that when we are told, after the crossing, that the sea returned to its former depth at Moses' bidding

(Exodus 15: 10), Scripture itself indicates, he points out, that this came about 'because God blew with his wind, that is a very strong wind'.²⁸ This crucial circumstance is, however, omitted from the main narrative, in order, says Spinoza, to heighten the wondrous effect of the 'miracle' on the multitude.

From this it follows, he continues, that if we are to interpret the accounts of marvellous events and miracles in the Bible correctly, one must first acquire the right kind of philological and historical expertise, 'one must know the beliefs of those who originally related, and left us written records of them' and learn to distinguish between what the people believed and what actually impressed itself on their perceptions. For if we do not, then we shall ourselves inevitably confuse the beliefs of the time with the people's understanding of what impressed itself on their senses and be unable to distinguish between what really happened and what were 'imaginary things and nothing but prophetic representations'.²⁹ For many things are related in the Bible as real, and were believed to be real, but which were nevertheless merely imaginary, or understood through poetic imagery such as that God, the 'Supreme Being, came down from Heaven and that Mount Sinai smoked because God descended upon it surrounded by fire'. Precisely because the wondrous events related in Scripture were believed to be real, and were couched in terms adjusted to the ignorant and superstitious minds of the multitude 'proinde non debent ut reales a philosophis accipi' (they should not therefore be accepted as real by philosophers). Spinoza rounds off the chapter with a further point concerning the metaphors and figures of speech habitual in Biblical Hebrew. 'He who does not pay sufficient attention to this', he warns, 'will ascribe to Scripture many miracles which the Biblical writers never

intended as such, thus completely failing to grasp not only happenings and miracles as they really occurred but also the meaning of the writers of the Sacred Books.³⁰

In his chapter on miracles, as Spinoza remarks himself, he proceeds differently than in most of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, principally using philosophical and only secondarily philological and historical arguments, rather than vice versa, as elsewhere.³¹ Consequently, he reveals here more of the metaphysical system which underpins his assault on revealed religion and which, to his mind, finally precludes all possibility that miracles can occur. He returned one last time to this life-long theme, now fully revealing his philosophy, in the appendix to [Part I](#) of his masterpiece, the *Ethics*. In general, Spinoza's style here is more austere and detached than in the *Tractatus*, but when he reverts to the theme of miracles something of the rebelliousness and emotion which fired his youth surge up once again. He has shown, he claims, that 'things could not have been produced by God in any other way, or in any other order, than how they have been produced' (*Ethics* 1, Prop. XXXIII) and that therefore there never have been, and never could be, any wondrous happenings or miracles.³² However, most people refuse to accept this and persecute whoever points it out: 'one who seeks the true causes of miracles and is eager, like a scholar, to understand natural things and not wonder at them like a fool, is generally denounced as an impious heretic by those the people revere as interpreters of Nature and the gods.' This they do because they 'know that if ignorance, or rather stupidity, is removed, then foolish wonder, the only means they have of justifying and sustaining their authority, goes with it'.³³ Here, in embryo, is the concept of priestcraft as a

system of organized imposture and deception, rooted in credulousness and superstition, which loomed so large in the subsequent history of the Enlightenment and was to receive massive amplification in the books on ancient oracles and priestcraft published by Blount, Van Dale, and Fontenelle in the 1680s.

Spinoza's attack on miracles made an immediate and profound impression everywhere, in England and Italy no less than in Germany and France. In his powerful and moving reply, written in Florence in 1671 (though not published until September 1675),³⁴ the great Danish scientist-prelate, Nicolas Steno, implored the unnamed 'Reformer of the New Philosophy' to heed the insuperable risks and dangers he was creating for the whole of humanity, including himself, and consider 'how you throw everything into confusion' (*omnia turbes*).³⁵ Spinoza's aim was to reform the 'New Philosophy' and introduce an entirely new criterion of truth and conception of human salvation and happiness. But what of those who lack the intellectual grasp to understand his concepts? Was he not consigning those 'unfit for your philosophy to a way of life like that of automata destitute of soul, born with a body only'?³⁶ Spinoza, 'a man who was once my good friend and even now, I hope, not unfriendly towards me (for I am persuaded the memory of our former close relationship still preserves a mutual love)', should on proper reflection yield to the entreaties of those who, like Steno himself, desire with all their hearts that he will reconsider while there is yet time and draw back from the fatal brink. It was of the highest importance, he urged, that Spinoza should open his eyes before it is too late and see that one 'finds only in Christianity a true philosophy, teaching of

God what is worthy of God and of man what is proper to man, guiding its adherents to true perfection in all their actions'.³⁷

Steno, an accomplished scientist skilled in Cartesian and Spinozist terminology, knew the supposedly scientific basis of Spinoza's objections to miracles and why he refused to acknowledge them, and tries to show that experience daily contradicts his philosophy. It is a true and continuing miracle, he insists, one we see every day around us, that sinners who have spent thirty or forty years, or more, in the gratification of their appetites 'should, in a moment, abandon all such wickedness and become the most holy examples of virtue'.³⁸ This collective miracle is subsumed and culminates in the spiritual glory of the Catholic Church. If he will but lay aside all prejudice and think objectively as his own philosophy 'will readily persuade you to do' and explore the teaching and promises of the Church, he will, urges Steno, assuredly find a higher and better truth. Steno's open letter was reviewed the year after its publication in Florence, in the *Giornale de' Letterati*, at Rome in 1676. The editors wished to publicize this powerful retort to the New Philosophy, and assertion of the Church's spiritual power, without, however, drawing attention to Spinoza's philosophy. Consequently, in the *Giornale's* review there is no mention of Spinoza, the person to whom Steno so movingly appeals being designated merely as 'someone' who believes everyone is free to think what he wishes in matters of faith.³⁹

Among those who joined in Steno's entreaties in Italy, writing to Spinoza from Florence in September 1675, was Albert Burgh (1650–1708), an Amsterdam regent's son whom the philosopher knew well personally. Burgh had studied at Van den Enden's school and, as a student at Leiden in the late

1660s, emerged as an impressively erudite young scholar, skilled in classics and philosophy who, as he says in the letter, admired Spinoza 'for the penetration and acuteness of your mind' and as a 'lover of truth, and indeed a most eager one'.⁴⁰ A declared disciple of Van den Enden, Spinoza, and their circle, he travelled to Italy in 1673, promising Spinoza 'to write to you should anything worthy of note occur during my journey'.⁴¹ Keen to practise his philosophical debating skills, he encountered a priest in Venice who, however, answered his libertine arguments with such effect that there, and in Padua, he underwent a conversion and discarded his Spinozist convictions. Soon afterwards, with the encouragement of Steno (but to the distress of his Protestant family), he embraced the Catholic faith while in Rome. The news caused a sensation in Amsterdam and reached Spinoza, who 'could scarcely believe it when it was told me', well before the arrival of the promised letter.⁴² Subsequently, Burgh became a Franciscan friar.

Burgh's epistle is one of the longest and most significant subsequently published in the *Opera Posthuma*. Though more emotional in tone than Steno's missive, it uses similar arguments and, indeed, may well have been written in concert with Steno. Burgh begins by mentioning his having recently sent a detailed account of his conversion, from Florence to Professor Craanen at Leiden, and expects Spinoza would learn more of what happened from him, an interesting sidelight on the philosopher's personal proximity to certain leading 'Cartesian' professors. For Burgh the overriding issue is the nature and criterion of truth. 'What does all your philosophy amount to,' he demands, 'except sheer illusion and chimaera? ... Do you dare consider yourself greater than all those who have ever arisen in the ... Church of God, the

patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, doctors, confessors and virgins, the countless saints and even, blasphemously, our Lord Jesus Christ himself? Will you ... mere ashes and food for worms, in your unspeakable blasphemy claim pre-eminence over the incarnate and infinite wisdom of the Eternal Father?'.⁴³ A philosophy claiming our universe is determined necessarily by geometric relationships is proven to be false by our everyday experience. Our reality is infused by the supernatural. Reason cannot explain the 'things done in witchcraft and in spells cast simply by the utterance of certain words, or by merely carrying on one's person those words or inscriptions marked out on some material, or the amazing behaviour of those possessed by demons'.⁴⁴

But miracles are the central issue. Burgh replies to Spinoza's denial of the miraculous much as Bossuet, Huet, Denyse, and Houtteville did later, and essentially on the same lines as Limborch, Le Clerc, and subsequently, Locke. The proof lies in the eyewitness testimonies and the tradition of the Church. The Christian miracles are their own confirmation and cannot be doubted. Whatever philosophical arguments Spinoza may adduce, he cannot negate the 'countless miracles and portents which, after Christ, his Apostles and Disciples, and later many thousands of saints performed, through the omnipotent power of God, witnessing and confirming the truth of the Catholic faith and which, through that same omnipotent mercy and goodness of God, are performed even nowadays throughout the world. And if you cannot contradict these, as most certainly you cannot, why go on clamouring? Submit, see your errors and sins, embrace humility and be born again.'⁴⁵ If only he would consider the matter properly, how can Spinoza dare deny the significance of the consensus

of countless numbers of men, 'thousands of whom greatly surpassed you, and still do, in doctrine, erudition, and true solidity of understanding, as in the perfection of their lives, who all unanimously, and with one voice, affirm that Christ, son of the living God Incarnate, suffered, was crucified, and died for the sins of mankind, rose again, was transfigured and reigns in Heaven with the eternal Father in unity with the Holy Spirit, as God' and that through Christ and 'subsequently the Apostles in his name, and the rest of the saints, through divine and omnipotent virtue, countless miracles were performed in the Church of God, and are still, which not only surpass human understanding but run counter to ordinary perceptions.'⁴⁶

Spinoza, contends Burgh, attempts to argue against a prodigious accumulation of evidence transmitted across the centuries. His enterprise against miracles and the truth of Christianity is as futile as denying there was an ancient Roman civilization in the world when innumerable remnants of it remain and countless histories have been written about the Romans.⁴⁷ The glorious founding of the Christian religion is a matter of 'factual truth'.⁴⁸ The Roman Church is an uninterrupted sequence of testimony and authority stretching from the time of Christ, through every generation, until today. This is proof in itself but, besides this, Christ's Church spread throughout the world in an astoundingly short time, despite the endeavours of Roman emperors to prevent it, and their cruelly torturing and putting to death innumerable Christians. Consider, he urges, the durability of the Church, which has outlasted not only pagan religions and dynasties 'but the opinions of all philosophers'.⁴⁹ He admonishes Spinoza to consider the Apostles and their disciples and successors.

'These were men regarded by the world as unlettered who yet confounded all philosophers, although the Christian doctrine they taught conflicts with ordinary sense, exceeding and transcending all human reason.'⁵⁰ Although the Apostles and disciples were deemed 'abject, vile and ignoble men', in time even the Roman emperors became Christian and the Church grew until the 'ecclesiastical hierarchy attained that vastness of power such as may be admired today'.⁵¹ Furthermore, all this was achieved through charity, gentleness, patience, and trust in God, not through arms or the clash of mighty armies.

These, 'the greatest miracles', are also facts; and if Spinoza requires yet more proof, he should ponder the Church's 'antiquity', its 'immutability whereby its teaching, and the administering of the sacraments just as ordained by Christ himself and the Apostles, is preserved intact' and its 'infallibility whereby it determines and decides all things pertaining to the Faith with supreme authority, sureness and truth, in accordance with the power bestowed on it to this end by Christ himself'. He should contemplate also its 'unity' and the fact that no soul can, on any pretext, be separate from the Church 'without its immediately incurring eternal damnation, unless it be reunited to the Church before death by repentance' as well as the Catholic religion's 'vast extension, whereby it is spread throughout the world which cannot be said of any other faith or philosophical doctrine'.⁵² Final confirmation may be found, he adds, echoing Steno, in the countless Catholics of both sexes who have 'lived admirable and holy lives, and through the omnipotent power of God wrought many miracles in the adored name of Jesus Christ' and also in that daily there are more conversions 'of very many people from a wicked life to a better, truly Christian, and holy life'. Such a combination of humility and submission with good

works and holiness proves the 'most perfect heretic or philosopher that ever was can scarcely deserve to rank with the least perfect Catholics.' All this demonstrates beyond doubt that 'Catholic doctrine is the wisest and ... superior to all other teachings of this world.'⁵³

Burgh concludes by admonishing Spinoza to reflect 'on the miserable and restless lives of atheists, though they may sometimes put on a very cheerful appearance and try to present themselves as living a joyful life, completely at peace in their hearts'. If Spinoza were to persist in his 'abominable errors ... what else do you expect but eternal damnation?' He begs him to reflect on how horrifying this is before it is too late. 'Think what little reason you have to mock the whole world except your wretched admirers; how foolishly proud and inflated you have become thinking of the excellence of your talent and by men's admiration of your utterly vain, indeed completely false and impious, doctrine.'⁵⁴ Summoning him to come to his senses and 'acknowledge the stupidity of your wisdom and that your wisdom is madness', Burgh explains that part of his 'Christian purpose' is 'to ask you not to persist in ruining others as well as yourself' and that he should consider that 'the Lord who, having called you so many times through others, is now calling you, perhaps for the last time, through me.'⁵⁵

Spinoza's reply is incisive but also tense with barely controlled passion. Burgh asks how he knows his philosophy is the best of philosophies. Spinoza reverses this, demanding how Burgh knows he has found the best of religions.⁵⁶ As for the common consent of thousands of men and the unbroken tradition of the Church, Spinoza dismisses this as the 'same old song as that of the Pharisees'.⁵⁷ The Jews, he counters,

can 'just as confidently as the Roman Church produce their innumerable witnesses who with no less perseverance report what they have merely heard from others as if they had experienced it themselves' and 'with equal arrogance boast that their church, continuing to this day, endures unchanged and unshaken despite the bitter hatred of pagans and Christians: of all religions they are best defended by [the argument] of antiquity.'⁵⁸ Moreover, the 'miracles they recount are enough to wear out a thousand narrators' and they have more martyrs by far than any other nation.⁵⁹ As for the glory and magnificence of the Catholic Church, Spinoza readily grants that it is singularly well-organized for power and profit, and he would believe it 'more suited to deceiving the people, and coercing the minds of men, than any other were it not for the Mohammedan Church which surpasses it by far', not only in its extent, and control over its faithful, but in its unity.⁶⁰ 'Nor since that superstition began, have there been any schisms in their church.'⁶¹ He ends by exhorting Burgh to return to his senses, and discard 'destructive superstition' in favour of 'reason', reminding him he should peruse some Church histories and 'see how falsely they relate much about the Pope and by what events, and with what artifice, the Roman pontiff finally gained supremacy over the Church six hundred years after the birth of Christ.'⁶²

Both Burgh's missive and Spinoza's reply were published in 1677, in the *Opera Posthuma*, and became a famous, and for many infamous, encounter in the Republic of Letters, pored over by cardinals, Protestant pastors, Cambridge dons, and courtiers alike. At Utrecht the Vicar Apostolic of the Dutch Catholic Church, Jan van Neercassel, remarked in September 1678, in a letter to the papal nuncio in Brussels,

that there is 'scarcely anything more pernicious against the Christian and Catholic religion than the letter Spinoza sent that most noble young man, Albert Burgh, in Italy'.⁶³ At Hanover Leibniz, who learnt of Steno's letter shortly after Spinoza's death, commented in detail on both Steno's and Burgh's missives for his prince, the Duke of Brunswick.⁶⁴ At Cambridge, Henry More, who loathed Spinoza's philosophy above all for its rejection of miracles and the supernatural, including the demonic, identified the letter to Burgh as perhaps the most loathsome of all his writings, abominating his mockery of 'a divine justice which permits the Devil to deceive men with impunity but does not allow men, deceived and ensnared by the Devil, to go unpunished'.⁶⁵ On the contrary, answers More, Satan will be brought to account and it is 'a beautiful part of divine justice and Providence that human souls be tested and tried'.⁶⁶ Moreover, whereas Leibniz was in part sympathetic to Spinoza's championing of philosophic reason, More utterly scorns his preferring his contemptible philosophy, and the 'inane glory of quibbling' to the 'peace and salvation of the human race'. 'Oh Philosopher totally without shame and intellect,' he calls him, 'or rather most impudent impostor and hypocrite!'⁶⁷

But it was perhaps especially in Italy, where Burgh and Steno acquired splendid reputations, that the clash reverberated most strongly in Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples alike. The most explicit of all Spinoza's texts attacking organized religion, directed against the Catholic Church specifically, the reply to Burgh made an indelible impression, consummating Spinoza's status as the foremost denier of the miraculous and, as Genovesi expresses it, 'head of the most pernicious modern Deists'.⁶⁸ Taking the name 'Brother

Franciscus de Hollandia' Burgh became a *consultore* of the Roman Inquisition, advising on the problem of Jansenism in the Low Countries and doubtless also on the spread of Spinozism.⁶⁹ Very likely, together with Steno, he was one of those who advised Cardinal Barberini and the Inquisition in 1677, on the need to prevent the publication of Spinoza's *Ethics* and the subsequent banning of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* by the Holy Office in March 1679.⁷⁰ Above all the denial of the Resurrection ('Resurrectio Christi allegorice est intelligenda'), stated also in Spinoza's letters to Oldenburg, continued subsequently to draw appalled attention. Cardinal Gotti, among others, reiterated the stock reply: the truth of the testimony of the Evangelists cannot be doubted, for good measure echoing Henry More's designation of Spinoza—'You, the most impudent of mortals'.⁷¹

SPINOZA'S SYSTEM

Spinoza's prime contribution to the evolution of early modern Naturalism, fatalism, and irreligion, as Bayle—and many who followed Bayle in this—stressed, was his ability to integrate within a single coherent or ostensibly coherent system, the chief elements of ancient, modern, and oriental 'atheism'.¹ No one else in early modern times did this, or anything comparable, and it is primarily the unity, cohesion, and compelling power of his system, his ability to connect major elements of previous 'atheistic' thought into an unbroken chain of reasoning, rather than the novelty or force of any of his constituent concepts which explains his centrality in the evolution of the whole Radical Enlightenment. It should not be overlooked, though, that some of his other contributions, notably his Bible criticism and revolutionary doctrine of substance, were highly innovative and, in themselves, exerted a vast international impact.

With his system Spinoza imparted shape, order, and unity to the entire tradition of radical thought, both retrospectively and in its subsequent development, qualities it had lacked previously and were henceforth perhaps its strongest weapons in challenging prevailing structures of authority and received learning and combating the advancing moderate Enlightenment. It was a system which reached its fullest and most mature expression only with the completion of his *Ethics* in 1675, but which, as we have seen, was in essentials extant as early as 1660.

Spinoza's starting-point in the *Ethics* is a set of propositions about the nature of reality or substance, including the contention that 'every substance is necessarily infinite' (I Prop. VIII) which proceed in seemingly logical progression to his famous tenet, the 'foundation of his whole impious doctrine', as Spinelli calls it,² that 'Except God, no substance can exist or be conceived' (I Prop. XIV). Where Descartes' unassailable first step is his 'cogito, ergo sum', Spinoza's is his assertion that our idea of the totality of what is, of an infinite and eternal being—God (or Nature)—is clear, consistent, self-contained, and undeniable.³ Since everything that exists, he contends, exists in God (or Nature), and substance, as he defines it,⁴ is what is absolutely independent in itself, there can be only one substance and therefore only one set of rules governing the whole of the reality which surrounds us and of which we are part. Whatever has been 'determined by God to produce an effect', he argues, 'cannot render itself undetermined' (I, Prop. XXVII). From this he infers that every individual thing which is finite 'can neither exist, nor be determined, to produce an effect unless it is determined by another cause' which, also being finite and determined, must in turn be determined by another cause similarly finite and determined, and so on to infinity. Hence, it follows logically that 'in nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way' (I Prop. XXIX). Hence also the chain of necessity is infinite, and infinitely complex, and only partially knowable through human science, not because elements of the chain are conceptually beyond the reach of human reason but because science cannot empirically take account of the whole of such a sequence.⁵

It is at this point that Spinoza introduces his distinction between *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*, the first designating what exists independently in itself and conceived through itself, namely 'God, insofar as he is considered to be a free cause', that is, nature understood as the creative power or potential of Nature,⁶ the rules governing the working of the universe, the latter denoting, by contrast, the actuality or determinate state of nature: 'by *Natura Naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes.' From this, Spinoza deduces that 'actual intellect, whether finite or infinite, like will, desire, love etc. pertain to *Natura Naturata*, not to *Natura Naturans*' (I Prop. XXXI), meaning that all manifestations of mind or minded-substance are part of Spinoza's single thinking-extended substance and therefore governed by the same set of rules—the laws of nature—as any other part of *Natura Naturata*. Hence it follows that 'will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary one' (I Prop. XXXII) and similarly that 'will and intellect are related to God's nature as motion and rest are, and as are absolutely all natural things which by Proposition XXIX must be determined by God to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.' This yields Spinoza's proposition that God does not produce any effect by freedom of the will and that 'will does not pertain to God's nature any more than do the other natural things but is related to him in the same way as motion and rest, and all other things which, as we have shown, follow from the necessity of the divine nature and are determined by it to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.'⁷

From here Spinoza proceeds to one of his most celebrated propositions: 'things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order, than they have been

produced' (Res nullo alio modo, neque alio ordine a Deo produci potuerunt, quam productae sunt)⁸ (I, Prop. XXXIII). In his appendix to [Part I](#) of the *Ethics*, Spinoza claims to have demonstrated that while God is the 'free cause of all things', and the only free cause, all things have been predetermined by God, not through the freedom of his will 'but from God's absolute nature, or infinite power'.⁹ It should be noticed that, contrary to what is often asserted, this is not in any meaningful sense 'pantheism'.¹⁰ Since nothing is contingent, men too are determined in their conduct. That men suppose themselves to be free Spinoza ascribes to their consciousness of their desires and appetites while failing to perceive 'those causes by which they are disposed to wanting and willing, being ignorant of those causes'.¹¹ In reality, he contends, men always act, and are determined to do so, towards an end or goal, that is, they seek what they perceive to be to their benefit. Furthermore, seeing as they do 'both in themselves and outside themselves—many means that are very helpful in seeking their own advantage such as that eyes are for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish', they are psychologically disposed to imagine that all natural things exist and were created 'as means to their own advantage'. This makes men believe there is some agency at work that created all these things for their use: 'for after they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves'.¹² Hence men inferred 'there was a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature' and concluded that the 'gods direct all things for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honour.'¹³

It is easy to see from this, he argues, why men then develop different accounts of God, or the gods, and their desires and intentions, and also why men seek 'different ways of worshipping so that God might love them above the rest and direct the whole of nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed'.¹⁴ Religion is hence at bottom a psychological procedure, natural in origin and thought-processes, which became transformed into 'superstition' and set down deep roots in men's minds. Destructive and disturbing occurrences such as storms, earthquakes, diseases, and so forth were then explained as effects of divine wrath and resentment at men's supposed wrongdoing, disrespect towards the gods, and inadequacies in their worship and beliefs. Despite the fact, holds Spinoza, that the evidence of everyday life proves this false and that fortunate and unfortunate occurrences affect pious and impious alike without any distinction, the superstitious prejudice that what happens is directed by divine will in reference to men's thoughts, actions, and conduct became too deeply rooted to be erased. It is far easier to maintain that the ways and judgements of the gods far surpass men's understanding. Nor indeed would there have ever been any change in man's propensity to cloud his mind with 'superstition' and 'inadequate ideas' had not 'mathematics which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures, shown men another standard of truth'.¹⁵ In reality, 'Nature has no end set before it, and all final causes are nothing but human fictions.'¹⁶

However, most people do not grasp these fundamental truths and so 'when they see the structure of the human body they are struck by foolish wonder and because they do not

know the causes of so great an art, they infer that it is constructed not by mechanical, but by divine, or supernatural art and constituted in such a way that one part does not injure another.¹⁷ Thus anyone who seeks the natural causes of what most men consider to be supernaturally devised, and to 'understand natural things and not to wonder at them, like a fool', is generally condemned as a heretic.¹⁸ A further consequence of man's superstitious and ignorant disposition to imagine that everything that happens, happens on his account, is to judge that what is most valuable or significant in each thing, or happening, is what is most useful or advantageous to him and rate as most excellent those things by which he is most pleased. Hence men derived their abstract notions of 'good' and 'evil', as well as ideas such as warm, cold, beautiful, ugly, and so forth in terms of what seemed good, warm, or beautiful to them and, at the same time, believing themselves free and answerable for their conduct to the gods, likewise propounded the concepts of 'good' and 'evil', praise and blame, sin and merit, in relation to their attitudes and deeds. But because the things men imagine vary and conflict, it is by no means surprising, Spinoza notes in passing, 'that we find so many controversies to have arisen among men, and that they have finally given rise to scepticism'.¹⁹ 'We see, therefore, that all the notions by which ordinary people are accustomed to explain nature are only modes of imagining and do not indicate the nature of anything, only the constitution of the imagination.'²⁰

The second part of the *Ethics*, and the second stage of Spinoza's system, concerns the relationship of body and mind and the workings of the mind. It begins with definitions of 'extension' and 'mind' and the propositions that 'Thought is an

attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing' (II, Prop. I) and equally that 'Extension is an attribute of God, or God is an extended thing' (II, Prop. II). The connecting link with the reasoning set out in [Part I](#) is the proposition (II, Prop. VII) that 'the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.' This is a difficult and challenging assertion which the modern reader is hardly likely to accept without serious question.²¹ But Spinoza's rigid and dogmatic parallelism of mind and body does have a certain cogency if one takes him as meaning that his doctrine of one substance necessarily entails a parallel manifestation of extension for every mental manifestation, whether or not the latter is expressed in the form of an adequate or inadequate idea, or is even merely a whim, sensation, or primitive form of sensibility.²² The two chains of phenomena are conceptually but not actually separate, being distinct aspects of one and the same reality, and therefore they cannot interact or influence each other. But they are inherently linked in terms of cause and effect.

If all bodies belong to the same substance, as Spinoza contends, then the individuation of bodies has to be explained, and this he does by arguing that all bodies 'are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance'.²³ His view that all motion is inherent in matter and that there is no such thing as static 'extension', as Descartes thought, does indeed provide a conceptual tool with which he can explain the vast differences in texture, penetrability, weight, etc. between different kinds of solids, liquids, and gases. The fact, moreover, that a body which moves or is at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body which has likewise been determined to

motion or rest by another, and so on to infinity,²⁴ means that under the attribute 'extension' the entire universe consists of an interaction of mechanically related bodies. All modes by which a body is affected by another, holds Spinoza, follow partly from the nature of the body affected and partly from the affecting body.²⁵

The human mind as the sensibility of the body, and therefore part of the individual body, 'does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affection by which the body is affected' (II, Prop. XIX), that is, our mind, and indeed any mind, is in essence awareness of the impact of other bodies on the body, in other words, feelings, impressions, and emotions. Because the human mind, he argues, is the idea itself, or awareness of the human body, it cannot know itself 'except in so far as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body'. Nor indeed can the human mind perceive any external body as it actually exists, except through its ideas of the impressions of its own body. This leads to the key doctrine that the 'ideas of the affections of the human body, in so far as they are related only to the human mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused' (II, Prop. XXVIII). Incorrect or false ideas, consequently, are no less based on reality than correct ideas but flow from the inadequate, mutilated and confused nature of our sense perceptions. With this Spinoza believed he had explained why most men's ideas are muddled or false and why mankind only slowly gropes its way to reason and, ultimately, philosophy.

Sense perception is thus the basis of all ideas, but in itself leads only to false ideas. Men suppose themselves to be free because they are conscious of their desires and actions but

ignorant of the causes by which they are determined to desire and act as they do. Similarly, even when we know the real distance of the sun from the earth, we still imagine it to be closer to us than it is, says Spinoza, because the effect on our bodies is what determines our perception of the sun. True and false ideas, therefore, are equally 'real' and can only be differentiated from each other by introducing the criterion of mathematical measurements, proportions, and logic. Only reason can provide us with 'adequate' ideas and a demonstration based on reason, according to Spinoza, is one that uses mathematically verifiable measurements and calculation to differentiate what is true from what is false. Truth is thus the criterion both of itself and what is incorrect; 'he who has a true idea at the same time knows he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing' (II, Prop. XLIII). Given that mathematical proportion is Spinoza's sole criterion of truth, the difference between truth and falsehood must be exact and absolute. From this, the precise logic of mathematical rationality, it follows, holds Spinoza, that 'it is of the nature of reason to regard things as necessary, not as contingent' (II, Prop. XLIV) and that this necessity of rational demonstration is the same as the necessity of things and corresponds to the necessity of God's eternal nature. Since the mind is the sensibility of the body, it follows that 'there is no absolute, or free will and that the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so on to infinity' (II, Prop. XLVIII). Thus nature determines the mind in the same way it does physical things.

Since false ideas consist of real impressions involving incomplete or truncated ideas, they may well be followed by more men, and more adamantly, than true ideas. However,

because they are inadequate, false ideas must always in every human mind be 'uncertain' in Spinoza's special technical sense, precisely because they are 'inadequate' and can be disproved by reasoning that those who hold false ideas, however obstinately, could in certain circumstances be brought to understand. False ideas are 'uncertain' even in the most dogmatic mind in the sense that no viable proofs can be adduced to defend them: 'for by certainty we understand something positive, not the absence of doubt.'²⁶ An idea in so far as it is an idea, according to Spinoza, must involve an affirmation or negation about something real which is either true or false in the sense of being a demonstrably adequate or inadequate interpretation of real facts.

Spinoza concludes [Part II](#) of the *Ethics* with a crucial further step, his doctrine that 'in the mind there is no volition, or affirmation or negation, except that which the idea, in so far as it is an idea, involves' (II, Prop. XLIX), that is, that there is no volition which is not an idea, leading to the corollary that 'will and the intellect are one and the same.'²⁷ This doctrine of ideas and the will, he says, teaches us that we act only from God's command and that we do this the more, the more perfect our actions are, and the more we understand God (or Nature). 'This doctrine, then, in addition to giving us complete peace of mind, also teaches us wherein our greatest happiness, or blessedness consists: viz. in the knowledge of God alone by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise.' From this, he says, we can see clearly how far men stray from a true valuation of virtue who expect to be rewarded by God for their good deeds. The doctrine, in his view, also teaches us to be calm and steadfast in the face of fortune and be prepared for both beneficial and adverse experiences. 'For all things follow from God's eternal

decree with the same necessity as from the essence of a triangle it follows that its three angles are equal to two right angles.'²⁸ Such a doctrine also contributes to social life, he maintains, in that it teaches us to hate, despise, or mock no one, and envy no one, and also that we should be content with what we have and be helpful to our neighbour 'not from unmanly compassion, partiality or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand'.²⁹

The third part of the *Ethics* concerns man's emotions and conduct. He begins by saying that reason can grasp the irrationality, inadequacy, and absurdity of what men do, and why they do it, since nothing in nature happens owing to any defect in it, for nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same. 'So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, viz. through the universal laws and rules of nature.'³⁰ Hence human emotions such as hate, anger, envy, love, and so forth, considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and force of nature as other particular things. Spinoza's technical term for emotion is 'affect' and in accordance with his stated principles he understands by 'affect' (*affectus*) 'affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and, at the same time, the ideas of these affections.'³¹

In explaining his theory of the emotions, Spinoza reminds us that mind and body are not an interaction but a single identity. Hence the 'body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion, rest or anything else (if there is anything else)' (III, Prop. II). The central doctrine around which he organizes this part of

his system is the concept of *conatus*, that is, natural effort or inclination, the driving tendency as it were of every existing body. According to Spinoza 'no thing can be destroyed except through an external cause' (III, Prop. IV) and 'each thing, as far as it can, strives to persevere in its being' (Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur) (III, Prop. VI). This is more than just a natural instinct for self-preservation. Rather, what is meant is the striving to persist in one's own essence or nature: 'the striving by which each thing strives to preserve its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing' (III, Prop. VII). This means beings and things are able to do nothing other than what follows necessarily from their determinate nature. Hence appetite or desire in man is simply a manifestation of the *conatus*, the endeavour of the human mind to persevere in its being.³²

Man's nature is such that 'the mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting' (III, Prop. XII). When, on the contrary, the 'mind imagines things that diminish or restrain its or the body's power of acting, it strives, as far as it can, to recollect things that exclude their existence' (III, Prop. XIII). These propositions, holds Spinoza, are the key to understanding what love and hate are.³³ Love is nothing but joy (or pleasure = *laetitia*) with the accompanying idea of an external cause, and hate is nothing but sadness (or pain = *tristitia*) with the accompanying idea of an external cause.³⁴ Hence one who loves necessarily strives to have present and preserve the thing he loves; while one who hates strives to remove and destroy the thing he hates. He who imagines that what he loves is destroyed will be saddened, while he who imagines it is preserved will rejoice; and conversely, he who imagines

that what he hates is destroyed will rejoice. This leads to the conclusion that 'we strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy [pleasure] and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness [pain]' (III, Prop. XXVIII). Because *laetitia* (joy-pleasure) and *tristitia* (sadness-pain) are the primary emotions relating to the *conatus*, the individual's drive to conserve himself, 'among all the affects that are related to the mind in so far as it acts, there are none that are not related to *laetitia* or desire' (III, Prop. LIX).

Desire, maintains Spinoza, is appetite together with consciousness of it and appetite he deems the very essence of man in so far as he is predetermined to do what preserves and promotes his being. 'Joy [pleasure] is a person's passage from a lesser to a greater perfection' while 'sadness [pain] is a person's passing from a greater to a lesser perfection.'³⁵ In the fourth and penultimate part of the *Ethics* Spinoza focuses on the consequences of the inadequacy, or 'slavery', which results from man's inability to moderate or restrain his emotions. It is a form of bondage, he says, to be under the sway of emotion because the 'man who is subject to affects is under the control not of himself but of fortune in whose power he so entirely is that often, though he sees what is better for himself, still he is forced to follow what is worse.'³⁶ It is here that Spinoza introduces his celebrated doctrine of the relativity of good and evil. Since, as Spinoza believes he has proved in [Part I](#), God (or Nature) exists for the sake of no end, having neither freedom nor intelligence (or goodness), the terms 'good' and 'evil' signify nothing of an intrinsic or absolute character 'nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to

one another.'³⁷ Indeed, he argues, the same thing can be alternately good, bad, or neutral, depending on circumstances, as cheerful music is respectively to the melancholy, mourners, and the deaf. Relatively, though, in relation to man these terms do assume meaning: 'by good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful to us ... by evil, however, I shall understand what we certainly know prevents our acquiring some good.'³⁸ From this Spinoza deduces that 'knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an effect of joy [pleasure], or sadness [pain], in so far as we are conscious of it' (IV, Prop, VIII) which in turn yields his key doctrine: 'from the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil' (IV, Prop. XIX).

From this stems Spinoza's novel and seemingly paradoxical concept that 'virtue is human power itself, which is defined by man's essence alone, that is, solely by the striving by which man seeks to preserve his being. So the more each one strives and can preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue.'³⁹ One cannot, however, be said to be acting truly from virtue when one is determined to act on the basis of inadequate ideas. True virtue in man necessarily entails seeking to understand what really promotes the individual's self-conservation and advantage. This then leads directly to Spinoza's central ethical doctrine: 'acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living and preserving our being (these three signifying the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage' (IV, Prop. XXIV).

Since no one strives to preserve his being for the sake of anything else, there can be no rational or meaningful system

of morality except what is based on the striving to preserve one's being. But since we know nothing is certainly good or evil, except what helps or hinders our exercising our reason, only through reason can true virtue be pursued, and only by reason can men truly promote their own advantage. This leads to the proposition that 'knowledge of God is the mind's greatest good; its greatest virtue is to know God' (IV, Prop. XXVIII). When enslaved to, and torn by, their passions, men naturally oppose one another and lapse into conflict. But 'in so far as men live according to the guidance of reason, to that extent they must by nature always be in agreement' (Quatenus homines ex ductu rationis vivunt, eatenus tantum natura semper necessario conveniunt) (IV, Prop. XXXV).⁴⁰ It is when each man seeks his own advantage according to reason that men are most useful to one another and that social life flourishes most. For the more each person seeks his own advantage, and strives to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue, or what is the same, the greater is his power of acting according to the laws of his own nature, that is, of living under the guidance of reason.

Admittedly, men rarely do live 'according to the guidance of reason'. Instead they are so constituted that they are usually envious of, and burdensome to, one another. Nevertheless, everyday experience shows that by helping one another, men can more easily provide themselves with the things they need and by joining forces repel the dangers that threaten them. 'The greatest good of those who seek virtue is common to all, and can be enjoyed by all equally' (IV, Prop. XXXVI). If men lived according to the guidance of reason, everyone would possess this 'highest good' without injury to anyone else. But because men are, on the contrary, mostly ruled by their passions, they are drawn in contrary directions and into strife.

In order that men may be able to live harmoniously, and be of assistance to one another, it is necessary for each person to give up his or her individual natural right and thereby make one another confident that each will not attack or harm the next. Moreover, there is a mechanism in human nature by which this goal can be achieved. Because no 'affect' can be checked except by an emotion stronger than, and contrary to, the first, everyone can be made to refrain from doing harm only out of fear of suffering some greater injury than that harm.

Accordingly, society can be maintained provided it appropriates to itself the right everyone has by nature of avenging himself and of judging concerning 'good and evil'. In those circumstances, society acquires the power to impose a common framework of permitted and proscribed conduct, to make laws and to uphold them, maintaining those laws not by force of reason, which cannot restrain the passions, but by warnings, deterrents and penalties. Such a society, maintained by laws and the power it has of preserving itself, is called a state and those that live under, and are defended by its laws, citizens. Only in the context of the state, can it be and is it 'decided by common agreement what is good or what is evil'.⁴¹ Sin, consequently, is nothing but disobedience to the norms of society, and the laws of the state, and can be punished only by the agencies of the state. 'Since those things are good which assist the parts of the body to perform their function, and joy [pleasure] consists in the fact that Man's power, in that he consists of mind and body, is aided and enhanced, all things that bring joy [pleasure] are good.'⁴² However, unless tempered by reason and prudence, most forms of desire for joy (pleasure) are excessive and soon incur a contrary effect since things do not exist in order to affect us

with joy, and their *conatus* is not determined for our advantage, and because most joy (pleasure) is connected only to one part of the body; and also because when we follow our emotions we esteem most the pleasures of the moment and cannot appraise future consequences 'with an equal affect of the mind'.⁴³

The fifth and final part of the *Ethics* is concerned to show what 'freedom of the mind, or blessedness, is'.⁴⁴ It opens with some critical remarks dismissing Descartes' conception of the union of body and mind and 'all those things he claimed about the will and its freedom'.⁴⁵ Here Spinoza's key concept is that 'if we detach an emotion, or affect, of the mind from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the love or hate toward the external cause and the fluctuations of the mind arising from these emotions are removed' (V, Prop. II). Consequently, the more we know and understand an emotion better, the more it is under our control and the less does the mind suffer from it. This leads to the famous doctrine: 'in so far as the mind understands all things to be necessary, it has a greater power over the affects, or is less acted on by them' (V, Prop. VI). Thus, for example, to lay aside fear 'we must recount and frequently imagine the common dangers of life, and how they can be best avoided and overcome by presence of mind and strength of character.'⁴⁶

'It is common to everyone whose luck is bad and whose mind is weak', argues Spinoza, to brood on and express resentment towards those who have what they lack. Thus the poor man who is greedy does not stop talking about the vices of the rich and their misuse of money. The ambitious who are thwarted dwell on the emptiness and misuse of power and

status. A man rejected by his lover might well think of nothing but the inconstancy and deceptiveness of women. But with such thoughts one only distresses oneself and shows others one cannot live calmly with one's own lack of success. Against this tendency in our nature, Spinoza insists that man can cultivate his reason and learn to 'moderate his affects and appetites from the love of freedom'.⁴⁷ This produces Spinoza's argument that 'the mind can bring it about that all the body's affections, or images of things, are related to the idea of God' (V, Prop. XIV). The advantage in so doing is that love in one's affections is generalized to the maximum and hate minimized, for 'No one can hate God' (V, Prop. XVIII).

Spinoza having now 'completed everything which concerns this present life',⁴⁸ the final sections of the *Ethics* have an enigmatic, inscrutable quality, which many feel lacks the air of inevitability and logical cogency prevailing hitherto. Already in the *Korte Verhandeling* Spinoza enunciates his doctrine of the human soul as being in one sense mortal, that is, in so far as it is united with the body something that perishes with the body, but in another sense having a kind of immortality, that is, in so far as it is part of the cause of the soul's existence, that is, God (or Nature), it must, like the totality of everything, remain immutable and immortal.⁴⁹ This then reappears in the *Ethics* as the celebrated teaching that 'the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal' (V, Prop. XXIII). In explaining this, Spinoza stresses that we do not attribute duration to the mind 'except while the body endures', nevertheless 'since what is conceived with a certain eternal necessity through God's essence itself is still something, this something which pertains to the essence of the mind will

At the core of Spinoza's philosophy, then, stands the contention that 'nothing happens in Nature that does not follow from her laws, that her laws cover everything that is conceived even by the divine intellect, and that Nature observes a fixed and immutable order,' that is, that the same laws of motion, and laws of cause and effect, apply in all contexts and everywhere.⁸ Certainly, this is a metaphysical system which cannot be proved or disproved scientifically. But it is nevertheless also a 'scientific' theory conceivable only since the rise of the seventeenth-century 'mechanistic world-view', claiming as it does that the laws science demonstrates through experiment and mathematical calculation are universally valid and the sole criterion of truth. At a stroke Spinoza excludes 'miracles', the supernatural, magic, and divine Providence. At the core of the general appraisal of Spinoza as an 'atheist' in late seventeenth-century Europe is thus the evidently correct perception of writers such as Boyle, Henry More, Musaeus, Huet, and Loescher that Spinoza's denial of miracles, Providence, Satan, demons, angels, ghosts, and the immortal soul in man stems from his contention that everything in the universe that happens, or ever could happen, follows *ex fixo et immutabili Naturae ordine*, out of the fixed and immutable order of Nature.⁹ One vehement late seventeenth-century antagonist denounced Spinoza as the founder of a new idolatry: worship of the 'spectre' of 'mathematical certitude'.¹⁰ Hence Spinoza's conception of truth, and the criterion for judging what is true, is 'mathematical logic', and mathematical rationality universally applied provides, from Spinoza to Marx, the essential link between the Scientific Revolution and the tradition of radical thought.¹¹

logic and mechanical laws which, in his view, is simply not possible in good faith. One cannot honestly deny the logical force of the proposition that two and two make four. He gives the example of the earth's rotundity.¹⁴ Only science can prove the earth is round. One may well not believe it is round until shown the proofs. But it is impossible for someone who grasps the proofs to doubt or oppose them sincerely.

Science, consequently, is essential to acquiring meaningful knowledge about reality and therefore for human self-knowledge, happiness, and salvation. But science not only helps us grasp reality, and remove irrational fears and anxieties, it also improves human life in other ways by emancipating man from the anxieties and pressures arising from his basic bodily needs. 'Because health is no small means to achieving this end,' he asserts, as one who long suffered from chronic ill-health himself, 'the whole of medicine must be worked out and since, by ingenuity, many laborious things are made easy, and because we can gain time and convenience in life by it, technology is by no means to be despised.'¹⁵ 'Everyone will now see,' he wrote, 'that I wish to direct all the sciences towards one end and goal, namely that we should be brought to the highest human perfection and, thus, whatever in the sciences does nothing to bring us to our aim, should be rejected as useless.'¹⁶

The rise of the 'mechanistic world-view' commencing with Galileo and Descartes, and especially, the formulation and refinement of the laws of motion, itself intensified the growing conceptual antithesis in European culture and thought between the 'natural' and 'supernatural'. The sharpening of this antithesis, in other words, is a typical and general seventeenth-century phenomenon. Descartes, Hobbes,

supernatural causes reaching back over the millennia, as a striking phenomenon for which he would try to demonstrate wholly natural causes. He is known to have laboured hard on this topic, probably in the mid-1660s, and penned a treatise about it but, dissatisfied with the result, had himself, according to Jelles, destroyed the manuscript shortly before his death. In his catalogue of Spinoza's works of 1719, Charles Levier, the Spinozist publisher active at The Hague, styles this treatise the 'traité de l'iris, ou de l'arc-en-ciel, qu'il a jetté au feu'.²⁴ Yet, even now, it is not certain that the text is irretrievably lost.

Among those most aware of Spinoza's work with microscopes was the preeminent scientist of the Dutch Golden Age, Christian Huygens. In the 1660s the Dutch microscope, in the later seventeenth century the most advanced in the west, was still at a rudimentary stage, magnifying by at most thirty to forty times, but its potential significance as an instrument of scientific research was evident, and Huygens considered himself, Spinoza, and the Amsterdam regent-scientist, Johannes Hudde, the three leading specialists labouring to improve and extend its capabilities. Huygens got to know Spinoza personally in the early 1660s and conferred with him about scientific matters on numerous occasions, particularly in the mid-1660s.²⁵ It emerges from letters sent by Huygens from Paris to his brother in Voorburg during 1667–8, in which he generally refers to Spinoza with a pinch of social disdain, as 'nostre Juif', 'nostre Israelite', 'le Juif de Voorburg', or simply 'l'Israélite', that Huygens and Spinoza disagreed about microscope lense sizes and curvatures. In deliberating with his brother, Huygens did not hide the fact that Spinoza was in some respects even more proficient with