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**University College Cork**




# Early Modern Masters of Suspicion

Andrea Di Carlo

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Philosophy

Head of Department: Prof Don Ross
Supervisor: Dr Jason Dockstader

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis interprets Niccolò Machiavelli, Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, and John Milton, casting them as Masters of Suspicion. The category of 'Master of Suspicion' was introduced by Ricœur (1970) to describe how Marx, Nietzsche and Freud approached their respective economic, epistemological and medical contexts. After a recap on the thinking of Ricœur's own Masters of Suspicion, I will move on to analyse the thinking of Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton, whom I define as "early modern Masters of Suspicion", Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton. In the same way Ricœur analysed the context of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, I will do the same with Niccolò Machiavelli, Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, and John Milton. Machiavelli claimed that politics should not be driven by moral constraints; politics, as such, is a realm independent of morality. Montaigne created a new philosophical and literary genre, the essay, to examine a world that needed to reconsider its foundations. Unlike Machiavelli, he believed that different moral ideas could come together. Bacon claimed that scientific inquiries should not constrained by dogmatic interpretations of Aristotle. As a consequence, he set out to outline a novel method of scientific investigation. I argue in this thesis that Milton, like Machiavelli, Montaigne and Bacon, acted in a similar manner. He reassessed long-standing ideas of sovereignty by showing that even medieval political practices should be reconsidered in the midst of the English Civil War. He emphasised the necessity, like Montaigne, of a more personal "realm" where he could study himself and the changes of his time. Like Bacon, Milton believed that the epistemological obstacles of dogmatic Aristotelianism had to be overcome to allow science to freely flow. By framing Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, Milton as Master of Suspicion, this thesis reconsiders their reception by exploring new possible avenues of research on their political, moral and scientific ideas.

KEYWORDS: John Milton, Masters of Suspicion, Paul Ricœur, Niccolò Machiavelli, Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon

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## Introduction

### Ricœur and the Masters of Suspicion: Gains of this Approach

In his work *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970), Paul Ricœur introduces his notion of Masters of Suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud). Their philosophical enterprise is predicated on accounting for "[…] two interpretations of interpretation, the one as recollection of meaning, the other as *reduction of the illusions and lies of consciousness* (emphasis mine) (Ricœur, 1970, p. 32). Ricœur argues that a sound hermeneutical approach should reveal the hidden meanings of words. Therefore, Ricœur focusses on a textual analysis of their works, as the hermeneutic strategy he outlines is a linguistic one. He argues (Ricœur, 1970, p. 34) that their philosophical enterprise is more about revealing novel ways to interpret the world, because our consciousness can mislead us. On Ricœur's account (1970, p. 33), Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud

> […] clear the horizon for a more authentic world, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of a "destructive" critique, but by an invention of a new art of *interpreting* (emphasis in the original); […] they triumph over the doubt as consciousness by an exegesis of meaning.

Masters of Suspicion, therefore, cast doubt on the conventions of their epoch. Ricœur (1970, p. 34) goes on to claim that

> […] Freud entered the problem of false consciousness via the double road of dreams and neurotic symptoms […]. Marx attacks the problem of ideologies from within the limits of economic alienation, now in the sense of political economy. Nietzsche, focusing on the problem of "value"- of evaluation and transvaluation- looks for the key to lying and masks on the side of the "force" and "weakness" of the will to power.

The three of them question the economic, moral, and psychological assumptions of their time. According to Ricœur, what Masters of Suspicion do is to show what is hidden in the real meaning of words. Distrust is what characterises their philosophical enterprise, as it is always possible to retrieve

new meanings. Their approach is both destructive and constructive at the same time because they focus on establishing "a new institution […] between the latent and the patent" (Ricœur, 1970, p. 33). Texts do not immediately lay bare their meaning, but they instead require more interpretative effort. Ricœur is committed to outlining a new philosophy of doubt. He (1970, p. 35) claims that they "[…] begin with suspicion concerning the illusions of consciousness, and then proceed to employ the stratagem of deciphering […]". Thus, once a new meaning has been identified, their philosophical enterprise involves expanding upon on a novel interpretation of words. This philosophical practice aims to dissemination of knowledge and show that texts are not clear-cut as it could otherwise seem.

I argue that this attempt to show what is latent, to reveal the real meaning of things is what characterise the philosophical enterprise of those thinkers I label as early modern Masters of Suspicion: Niccolò Machiavelli, Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, and John Milton. All of them, in their philosophical work, demystify long-standing meanings to make room for new interpretations. As a consequence, by mobilising the notion of Masters of Suspicion, I will be able to show how the hermeneutic strategy employed by the three nineteenth-century philosophers can yield significant results, even if it is retrospectively applied to early modern philosophers.

I will show how Machiavelli's political philosophy Skinner's and McCormick's interpretation of Machiavelli do not help to make sense of Machiavelli. His commitment to liberty and to economic equality is only apparent. What Machiavelli aims to do is to lay bare the complexity of politics between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century.

Despite the argument made by Paganini, Popkin, and Pupo, Montaigne's self-analysis is not a sceptical one. Neither is it predicated upon moral relativism (as Lévi-Strauss famously argued). It is more grounded in philosophical freedom. I contend that it is possible to interrogate such freedom by showing the real meaning of his reflections. Discussing the New Worlds, travelling, self-analysis, and religious allegiances will reveal the necessity to override the above-mentioned interpretations.

Unlike the argument put forward by Horkheimer and Adorno, Bacon's philosophy cannot be understood from a mere economic vantage point. Neither can it amount to just a strong critique of

Aristotelianism. Bacon's thought can be better appreciated by engaging with the way he tries to overcome dogmatic Aristotelianism. What characterises Bacon's thought is to design a new scientific methodology aiming to dislodge any dogmatism.

Ultimately, it will be possible to put forward a novel interpretation of Milton's politics by considering how he engaged with republicanism and royalism at the same time. I will show how endorsing competing ideologies is legitimate in the porous political background of the seventeenth century. I will show the importance of defining the presence of competing political ideologies in his thinking. Moreover, I will be able to show the significance of learning and travelling in Milton's thought. For Milton, travelling enhances the perception of new cultures and the ways we can integrate such worldviews into a Eurocentric perception. His focus on learning will enable us to question censorship and its consequences in our lives.

### 0.1 Machiavelli and Ricœur

To show how Machiavelli can be interpreted as a Master of Suspicion, I will discuss two of his most important recent interpreters, Quentin Skinner's influential account of liberty and John McCormick's reassessment of Machiavelli from a populist standpoint.

#### Quentin Skinner and Liberty

Quentin Skinner is one of the most important exegetes of Machiavelli's thought. Skinner prioritises the significance of freedom in his work. In his seminal work, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978), Skinner claims that Machiavelli focusses on "political liberty" (Skinner, 1978, p. 158). I maintain that this commitment to liberty is not something that had caused Machiavelli to write *The Prince*. I would argue that Machiavelli's key concern in *The Prince* is the establishment of long-lasting institutions and a solid leadership. As he (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 5) says in the dedicatory in *The Prince*, leaders have to be like "those who paint landscapes". They have to know their circumstances and what it the best course of action to retain power. A linguistic analysis of this quote, according to the Ricœurian hermeneutic insights, shows that painting equates with governing. The

metaphor of the artist, therefore, manages to capture the scope of Machiavelli's work. The other component of Skinner's account is highlighting the fact that Machiavelli cares for freedom. On Skinner's account (2008, p. 87), if "[…] the laws alone rule, and provided that we ourselves make the laws, then we may be said to be living as free-men in a free state". Machiavelli's Italy and its inhabitants were far from being a free state and free people. Machiavelli wrote at a time when Italy was not a unified country. Neither were its inhabitants free since they were governed by foreign leaders (usually either French or Spanish rulers). Furthermore, some territories were ruled by the Pope. Therefore, Skinner's intimations do not seem to capture the content of Machiavelli's writings It may be the case that liberty could become a component of such a political blueprint. However, this defence of liberty is not the main focus of Machiavelli's philosophy.

Beside freedom, Skinner focusses on the assumption that Machiavelli strives to achieve the common good. He argues that politicians who abide by Machiavelli's advice are the ones who are committed to attaining concord and peace within states. He argues that Machiavelli "endorses the traditional belief in the importance of the common good" (Skinner, 1990, p. 138). I argue that this argument, albeit influential, does not manage to capture the complex thinking of Machiavelli. He claims the opposite in *The Prince*. In *The Prince*, XV, he argues that the most important feature in politics is to consider "the effectual truth of the matter" (*la verità effettuale della cosa*)(Machiavelli, 2005, p. 53). Civil concord is not a priority for Machiavelli. The context will determine how leaders have to act and the strategies to achieve peace. It is not something set in stone and, more importantly, it is not imperative that peace be achieved. Machiavelli seems to contradict Skinner's assumption, as he takes a positive view on tumults and social disarray. In *Discourses* (I, 4), he claims (Machiavelli, 2003, p. 105) that

> […] those disturbances "that many people thoughtlessly condemn, and anyone who carefully examines the goal of these laws will find that they did not lead to exile or to violence against the common good, but instead brought forth laws and institutions for the benefit of civic liberty

Paradoxically, it is through social divisions that concord can be achieved. Therefore, social disarray is not a force for bad, but for good. The unfolding of history has to be studied before committing to a specific view. Truth, by abiding by a Ricœurian hermeneutic strategy, highlights what is better to do given the circumstances. If chaos, for a brief stint, better serves the cause of the state, then it should not be frowned upon. Beside freedom and achievement of concord, Skinner provides another problematic reading of Machiavelli in his *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1998). Therein, he maintains that the laws regulating a state "must be enacted with the consent of all its citizens […]" (cf. Skinner, 1998, p. 28). In a world that was dramatically changing, it is not possible to implement laws that could be agreed upon by all citizens. Moreover, he is does not seem to take into account the fact that Machiavelli's philosophical enterprise is not so clear-cut He (Skinner, 1998, p. 135) says that Machiavelli does not offer his advice "with complete consistency". Machiavelli's books help its readers to understand the complicated political landscape of early modern Europe. Ironically, he says that the prince should not be consistent, but wise (cf. Machiavelli, 2005, pp. 60-61).. He wrote a book for the aristocratic Medici family and, at the same time, conducted a historical reassessment of the Roman Republic. What is at stake, therefore, is the co-existence of an aristocratic and republican Machiavelli, two competing ideologies which oppose the possibility of concord. In this regard, Skinner (1978, p. 158) claiming that "Republicanism must be the best form of government" does not seem to completely apply to Machiavelli. He has already established that Machiavelli is a republican. However, by doing so, Skinner has already frozen the possibility of a new truth, of a new horizon in politics because he has already assigned a political category to Machiavelli. This is not what Masters of Suspicion ought to do because their philosophy is one of demystification.

**John McCormick and Populism**

Beside Skinner's account of a republican Machiavelli, John McCormick has established a populist turn in Machiavelli's oeuvre. In his *Machiavellian Democracy* (2011), McCormick (2011, p.3) claims that the Florentine Secretary "posed the question of elite accountability" in his *Discourses*. However,

Machiavelli (2003, pp. 146-147) emphasises the fact that Numa Pompilius had "[…] found a very fierce people". Since he wanted "to bring them to civil obedience with the arts of peace, he turned to religion as something absolutely necessary for maintaining a civilized society". McCormick's claim does not seem to be accurate, if one considers that Machiavelli stressed the fact that the elite successfully established a form of religion in Rome. Since the survival and the expansion of a state is what matters to Machiavelli the most, any economic reform or fight against the better off in society is not one of his primary concerns.

McCormick, in his *Reading Machiavelli* (2018), reiterates his claim by laying emphasis on the need of "[…] socioeconomic conditions of substantive equality for the realization of liberty" (McCormick 2018, p. 31). I would claim that McCormick's populist reading of Machiavelli does not seem to account for his ideas. He is not a populist, and two of his main works highlight this element. On the one hand, *The Prince* is a work dedicated to aristocrats and how they can maintain their power. On the other, one can appreciate Machiavelli's engagement with Rome's history in *Discourses* and how the elite created a religious system. I argue that a populist interpretation of Machiavelli is not enough to describe his philosophical enterprise. McCormick's commitment to equality is not a priority in Machiavelli's oeuvre. Rather, it would be better to argue that there is a "wise" Machiavelli, one who teaches leaders how to behave according to the circumstances (cf. Machiavelli, 2005, pp. 60-61).

**The Merits of a Ricœurian Interpretation of Machiavelli**

As Ricœur argues, the task of Masters of Suspicion is to make explicit layers of meaning that would have been otherwise latent. Casting Machiavelli as a Master of Suspicion allows to lay bare the complexity of his thinking, where aristocratic and republican ideas can co-exist. I argue that this quote from *Discourses* (I, 10) encapsulates Machiavelli's idea of politics. In *Discourses* (I, 41), he argues (Machiavelli, 2003, p. 141) that a "[…] prince will also see through the reading of […] history how one can organize a good kingdom". A book informed by a republican approach to history can also provide instructions as to how an aristocratic form of government can be established. This excerpt

enables us to claim that Machiavelli is not interested in either equality or liberty, but in organising a good and solid state. The Ricœurian Machiavelli should never be considered at face value. He casts doubt on the meaning of liberty and civil concord: peace is not the main priority of leaders, but strategies that can help to establish a state and good leaders. The economy is not a priority, either. His focus is on the truth of politics. "Truth", in this case, refers to a more realistic understanding of politics.

### 0.2 Montaigne and Ricœur

In order to make a case for Montaigne as a Master of Suspicion, I will focus on the ways his thinking has usually been received. I will focus on questioning his reception as a sceptic, a conservative author *avant la lettre*, and a moral relativist.

#### Montaigne's Sceptical Worldview and Conservative Politics

Donald Frame (1963, p. 580) claims that Montaigne's writing was informed by stoicism, scepticism, and epicureanism  Famously, Richard Popkin argued that Montaigne is a sceptic On Popkin's account (Popkin, 2003, p. 51), Montaigne had espoused sceptic Pyrrhonism. Pyrrhonism suspends " judgment on all propositions, even that all is doubt. They oppose any assertion whatsoever […]. In this state of complete doubt, the Pyrrhonists live according to nature and custom" (Popkin, 2003, p. 51). Popkin, therefore, stresses the Montaignian need to question everything endlessly. Luiz Eva goes beyond Popkin's assertion by claiming that what characterises Montaigne's philosophical enterprise is the radicality of his scepticism. On Eva's account (2009, p. 100), his philosophy is predicated upon the impossibility of producing "a reliable" and "definitive picture" of the world. If it is possible to cast doubt on everything, then it is impossible to attain any kind of knowledge. Recently, Gianni Paganini has better qualified Popkin's and Eva's argument. According to Paganini (2018, p. 240), "Montaigne is the first modern writer to stick to the ideas that the main activity […] should be doubting". I argue that Paganini's, Eva's, and Popkin's emphasis on doubting is too radical to account for Montaigne's philosophy. Whilst exercising doubt plays a prominent role in *The Essays*, I maintain that it should

not be taken at face value. Eva's, Popkin's, and Paganini's contentions need reassessing because of their commitment to describing Montaigne as a sceptic. This view pre-empts the fact that Montaigne has decided to commit to a specific philosophical school. I argue, instead, that the main feature of Montaigne's philosophical enterprise is freedom. It could be either scepticism or stoicism, but this is not enough to build a whole philosophical system on the tenets of a specific school. Another argument in defence of Montaigne scepticism has been outlined more recently by Spartaco Pupo. He maintains that Montaigne's sceptical frame of mind had forced him to endorse a simple life, overriding any political or social concern. On Pupo's account, Montaigne aims to adhere to the religious and political status quo. He claims (2020, p. 157) that Montaigne

> chooses conformism because of the brutal Wars of Religion. Human failures and humankind's impossibility to attain significant change force human beings to accept customs, the way things have always been done […]. The best form of government is the only one that allows tranquillity and peace […][1].

His argument takes Montaigne's commitment to scepticism or, more loosely, quietism for granted. Pupo seems to argue that Montaigne would certainly be happier living in his castle, his tower, and secluded life than dealing with a war-torn France. However, it is Montaigne himself that contradicts this reading. In *On Repenting* (III, 2), the essayist claims that our life "is a perennial see-saw" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 1558). If our lives were endlessly the same, then change will never happen. But our existence is "a rough, irregular progress with multitude of forms" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 1614). The author himself seems to challenge any quietist or sceptical interpretation of his n work. However, Pupo is not the only one who has defended the idea of a Montaigne's commitment to scepticism. Famously, Michael Oakeshott endorsed a similar view in his *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (published posthumously in 1996). According to Oakeshott (1996, p.76), Montaigne embodies the "sceptical comparison to the forward-looking enthusiasts of the time […]". He

[1] Translation mine.

(Oakeshott, 1996, p. 75) maintains that what characterises Montaigne's scepticism is "a native diffidence in respect of human power". Therefore, he claims that Montaigne does not believe that humankind can enhance its epistemic competence. Albeit influential, I argue that his assessment does not account for the thought of Montaigne. Whilst it is true that Montaigne recommends upholding the customs of his time (especially from a religious point of view) he nonetheless claims that "we are made up of bits and pieces, woven together so diversely and so shapelessly that each one of them pulls its own way at every moment" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 709). We are so diverse and so unique that we all think in different ways. We can be either a sceptic or a stoic, but this should not pre-empt any decision we make concerning our way to live or think. We are enthusiasts because we can experiment. No wonder that, as he argues in *On Experience* (III, 13) our most important need is the one for "knowledge" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 2077). I argue that Oakeshott, by stressing Montaigne's scepticism, interprets him in a way that is not consistent with Montaigne's self-analysis. His praise of knowledge and of his appreciation of the world put pressure on conservatism and quietism. I am of the opinion that Oakeshott and Pupo elide the intellectual pluralism underscoring Montaigne's philosophy.

Pupo highlights what he believes to be another important feature of Montaigne's thinking, the fact that he is he a conservative thinker *avant la lettre*. On Pupo's account, Montaigne argues that upholding the status quo is equates with "wisdom" (Pupo, 2020, p. 161). After all, it is Montaigne himself, in *On Prayer* (I, 56), who claims that he would find it inappropriate to contradict the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church "in which I die and in which I was born" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 676). The essayist trusts long-standing principles more than any new form of worship. However, Montaigne's account of religion evinces something different in the third section of his *Essays*. In *On Some Lines of Virgil* (III, 5), he (Montaigne, 2003, p. 1699) endorses the Huguenot critique of auricular confession by claiming that he will always make his confession "in public". Labelling him as a conservative means not taking with the necessity to question customs into account. Like Machiavelli and his competing ideologies, it is better to classify Montaigne as a free thinker rather

than categorising pre-emptively. He commits himself to reconsidering received knowledge, not to eschewing it. Custom is the world that should be carefully considered and reinterpreted because Montaigne is casting doubt on how one should understand our mores. From a Ricœurian perspective, therefore, it is the very idea of commitment to a philosophy or an ideology that needs reconsidering.

**Montaigne and Moral Relativism**

Claude Lévi-Strauss successfully influenced the reception of Montaigne by claiming he is a moral relativist, an element which any Montaignian scholar has to deal with when focussing on the French philosopher for the first time. Lévi-Strauss (2019, pp. 58-59), when discussing customs, claims that for Montaigne

> all customs, after introducing the most contradictory quotations imaginable, for pages on end, one after the other, he demolishes them sequentially, showing that it is solely on the basis of *where we are born and the education we have received that we believe something.* The result is that all criticisms are absurd. In fact, he adopts a practical attitude that is almost the opposite, for, where customs are concerned, we should maintain considerable, even complete freedom of judgment within but show complete respect without (emphasis mine).

Lévi-Strauss claims that he is moral relativist. On Lévi-Strauss's account of Montaigne, he stresses the fact that he "demolishes" long-standing customs. If one reads *On Cannibals* (I, 31), one would agree with the French anthropologist. Montaigne (2003, p. 478) claims that "every man calls barbarous anything he is not accustomed to […]". We maintain that anything that we do not know or find that does not conform to our own ideas is problematic. However, I maintain that Montaigne is not a moral relativist. He is not describing the customs of newly-discovered people to criticise Europe. He is simply describing them. He is undoubtedly drawing a stark contrast with Western ideas, but he is not interested in making any judgement. He is exercising his freedom in acknowledging the

differences between Europe and the New World, but that does not mean his statements should be read against a relativist background.

**The Merits of a Ricœurian Interpretation of Montaigne**

A Ricœurian discussion of Montaigne's philosophical enterprise would spell out an important change in Montaigne studies. Via scattered reflections, via disorganised thoughts, he strove to make sense of his time. I maintain that it is not possible to establish a final categorisation of Montaigne because he escapes such an endeavour. A Ricœurian interpretation of Montaigne should focus on key terms like doubt, scepticism, and New World. A freewheeling philosophy like Montaigne's could not forgo doubting the reality of things. However, at the same time, such doubting should not prevent us from categorising Montaigne pre-emptively. His thinking is not easy to pinpoint. He can be a stoic or an epicurean at the same time, without there being a contradiction. Montaigne wants us to be philosophically free. Exercising doubt is an activity that should not be discarded by unflinchingly accepting a philosophical outlook.

Another important element to question is the argument for a conservative Montaigne. Pupo defends Montaigne's conservatism, but I argue that this is not the case. Our life always changes; it is unstable. Therefore, trying to steady it, to find unquestionable moral underpinnings will be of no avail. A Ricœurian reading challenges moral relativism. Montaigne is not interested in criticising or praising different customs. He simply acknowledges that they exist, without having us either to accept or reject them. This is not what matters. What matters is that we can extend our own understanding of the world without resorting to any pre-established category and so challenge our customs.

**0.3 Bacon and Ricœur**

In order to label Francis Bacon as a Master of Suspicion, I am going to engage with Horkheimer's and Adorno's critique of his philosophy. Both authors argued that he is a precursor of a capitalist mindset. On the other hand, I will show how (ironically) Aristotle, whose philosophy was sharply criticised by Bacon, influenced his own thought.

**The School of Frankfurt and Bacon**

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno outlined their opinion on Bacon in their famous *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). Both authors criticised Bacon for his overreliance on reason. On Horkheimer and Adorno's account, Bacon had ended up paving the way to capitalism by overemphasising the role of science. They argue that Bacon had fostered the interest of the "bourgeois, the enlightened heirs of the kings" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, p. 33). The omnipotence of knowledge and power did not enrich the masses but helped the bourgeois to increase their wealth. Therefore, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, Bacon had deprived the masses of emancipatory power, and had simply allowed the rich to prosper, with the promise of achieving as much knowledge as possible. Whilst I am sympathetic to the argument outlined by Horkheimer and Adorno, I maintain that Bacon's philosophy should not be judged against an economic and sociological yardstick.. This is the case because Baconian scientific and epistemological merits should be properly assessed, and they should not be criticised from a twentieth-century perspective. I argue that, in this instance, Critical Theory does not do a good job of retrieving important textual clues to fully understand the impact of Bacon when he was spelling out a method to carry out a more effective scientific inquiry.

**Bacon and Aristotle**

Eva del Soldato has claimed the contradictory reception of Aristotle in the early modern age. On del Soldato's account (2020, p. 11), philosophers and scientists aimed to "elevate and undermine" authorities. One such authority was Aristotelianism. Aristotle, in the early modern age, had become the target of strong criticisms. Bacon shared those criticisms. On Bacon's account, the orthodox reception of Aristotelianism, without any critical engagement with Aristotle's writings, had dislodged the possibility of enhancing knowledge. Bacon is not attacking Aristotle for the sake of it but because he wants to undermine his status. No longer is he the revered philosopher of medieval clergymen, but he is the one who has stalled the designing of a new scientific methodology. He outlines his novel approach to science in his manifesto, *Novum Organum* (1620). The title itself is telling: a reform of knowledge can only stem from a revised version of the Aristotelian *Organon*. This is the key

contention for a Ricœurian investigation of Bacon. Francis Bacon, despite his attacks on his thinking, never abandoned Aristotle. Marco Sgarbi (2017, p. 227) is right in claiming that "defining the concept of "Aristotelianism" remains so indistinct that in the end, the crucial question is what Aristotelianism is in any given case—a question that is almost always embarrassing, if not in fact impossible, to answer". So, on Sgarbi's account, it is not possible to put forward a convincing response to what Aristotelianism is. Aristotelianism is the word that should be investigated from a Ricœurian standpoint. Bacon, despite such intellectual strictures, was be able to advance the cause of science. He (Bacon, 2017, p. 89) equates his scientific enterprise with Christopher Columbus. For him it is like

> what Columbus did before his wonderful voyage across the Atlantic, giving reasons for his belief that hitherto unknown lands and continents might be discovered. His reasons were rejected at first, but later they were vindicated by experience, and were the causes and beginnings of great events.

In one word, Bacon wants to be the Columbus of scientific breakthroughs.

**The Merits of a Ricœurian Interpretation of Bacon**

Albeit harshly, I argue that Sheldon Wolin clearly summarises Bacon's philosophical enterprise. On Wolin's account (2004, p. 702), Bacon wanted to discard "past philosophies and scientific methods". This is what Ricœur suggests doing. Masters of Suspicion are committed to a different interpretation. They have to be new exegetes because their aim is to usher in a new type of truth, one that is not easily discernible without a full engagement with the texts. Bacon has to lay bare the lies of consciousness (as Ricœur put it) and shows that a new approach to outlining a scientific method is possible. However, any new approach should not be destructive, quite the opposite. In the tenth aphorism of *The New Organon*, in his reassessment of Aristotelian logic, he (Bacon, 2000, p. 34) argues that the cause of "all deficiencies of the sciences is just this: that while we mistakenly admire and praise the powers of the human mind, we do not seek its true supports". Bacon is concerned with

the fact that we are not interested in enhancing knowledge or, as Ricœur says, in enhancing the truth but in believing in the lies of our consciousness As a consequence, we claim to be satisfied with the knowledge we have and want to retain. This is the reason why, I argue, a Ricœurian Bacon can fulfil this requirement, showing the nature of the shortcomings of our knowledge. I argue that it is only within the purview of a critical reception of Aristotle that Bacon's thought can work.

### 0.4 Ricœur and Milton

#### Milton the Republican

Any discussion concerning Milton always takes for granted that he was a supporter of a republican regime. Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, describes what a republican form of government amount to. On Skinner's account (1998, p. 77), you are not free if "you merely fall into a condition of political subjection or dependence, thereby leaving yourself open to the danger of being forcibly or coercively deprived by your government of your life, liberty or estate". Ultimately, according to Skinner, there cannot be anybody making binding decisions without the consent of the people. It is Milton (1962, p. 409) who stresses a similar point by claiming that Parliament's decisions will no longer count if "at any point they can be rejected by the sole judgement of one man". Milton seems to share Skinner's argument: freedom is undone if just one person has to power to accept or reject decisions.

As I have shown in the previous section, assigning a pre-established category defeats the purpose: Masters of Suspicion challenge such an action. Usually, Milton is portrayed as an unflinching supporter of Cromwell and the Protectorate by attacking Charles I in his tract *Eikonoklastes* (1649), which can be loosely translated as "the destroyer". In this work, he strongly rebutted the lack of checks on unbridled authority. The title of this work hearkens back to the task of Masters of Suspicion, they are iconoclasts but at the same time they open up a new horizon in politics. Therefore, it is anticipated that a new political order will stem from the (metaphorical) destruction of the king. However, there is another element of Milton's thought to take into account. His republican

concern co-exists with a royalist one. This is the case in his *History of Britain* (1670), where he described the deeds of Alfred the Great. The Anglo-Saxon king who had been able to repel the Vikings and pacify his realm. Like Machiavelli, Milton seems to suggest that new political orders can arise from chaos. One can acknowledge that Milton's political allegiances are not clear-cut as they are usually portrayed to be. Like Machiavelli, Milton as well is both a royalist and a republican at the same time, without there being any major political inconsistency. It is not an ideological issue, but the need to establish a new path in politics, to make explicit what is latent.

**Milton and Science**

Like Bacon, Milton objected to strict Aristotelianism and its educational framework. This is the reason why his work *Of Education* (1644), is influenced by the critique of dogmatic Aristotelianism as it had been laid out by Bacon. Albeit critical of Aristotle he still acknowledges the need of rhetoric and logic in his designed curriculum. Milton acknowledges that Aristotelianism cannot be completely discarded, especially if rhetoric is important. No longer does an Aristotelian framework play a vital role, but it is nonetheless an element to take into account.

**Milton and the Self**

Like Montaigne, Milton as well championed a method of self-analysis. Unlike Montaigne, whose philosophical achievement is the invention of the essay as a philosophical genre, Milton described the impressions he experienced from his travels in *Areopagitica* (1644) and *History of Muscovia* (1670). In both works, he underscored the fact that travelling contributes to our understanding of reality rather than unquestionable acceptance of pre-established ideas. *Areopagitica* rejects a static worldview: allowing everybody to voice their opinion enables citizens to examine and reject ideas. This cannot happen if such material is censored by policy-makers In *Historia of Muscovia,* before describing Russia, he claims that travelling is "profitable and delightful" . Either travelling or voicing one's ideas ought not to be frowned upon, but it is instead a necessary component of the philosophical enterprise of Masters of Suspicion.

**The Merits of a Ricœurian Interpretation of Milton**

The works of Milton, like the ones of Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Bacon, are better accounted for by a Ricœurian interpretation of his oeuvre. The analysis of his personality, his need to travel to encounter new things and be exposed to new people, and the necessity of a more thorough scientific investigation, lay bare a totally different Milton. A Ricœurian interpretation can also account for his political allegiance. Milton and Machiavelli show that retaining competing political ideologies is not problematic, because upholding different political ideas in the early modern age could not be clearly pinpointed. Milton is both a republican and a royalist at the same time, without there being any contradiction. Such an interpretation will highlight his commitment to science. Like Bacon, Milton criticises Aristotelian ideas but, at the same time, he has to acknowledge their importance in educational matters. Like Montaigne, Milton considered the importance travelling and thereby enhancing knowledge a key component of one's life.

**0.5. Why These Authors?**

With regards to the choice of these thinkers, one could argue that this choice is arbitrary. After all, many other authors made significant contributions to overhauling politics, the study of the self, and science between the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Having said this, I argue that running a comparison between Machiavelli and Milton is beneficial to their reception because: (1) I will be able to show that they drew inspiration from ancient history to outline viable models of leadership (Machiavelli confronted Graeco-Roman history and Milton considered Anglo-Saxon figures); (2) It will enable me to highlight the fact that a type of Machiavelli's notion of *virtù* is also present in Milton. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is portrayed as having the same *virtù* as the historical figures described by Machiavelli do; (3) It will allow me to draw a comparison between Dumézil's notion of sovereignty and the idea of sovereignty outlined by Machiavelli and Milton

Drawing a comparison between Montaigne and Milton is beneficial to how we interpret their thoughts and ideas because: (1) not enough research has been done on Milton's inner life and self-representation and no comparison has been made to Montaigne's; (2) to show similarities between

Montaigne's *Essays* and Milton's *Prolusions*, something that has never been done before; (3) to draw a comparison between *The Essays* and *Areopagitica* with reference to achieving and negotiating knowledge.

Comparing Bacon and Milton will innovate the ways we approach the two authors because: (1) to show that they had the same attitude towards Aristotle, in that they deemed his work to be important but criticised him at the same time; (2) to draw a comparison between Bacon's correspondence, his *Essays*, and Milton's *Prolusion*; (3) to compare Bacon's *Novum Organum* to Milton's *Of Education.*

**Why the early modern age?**

Why should we focus on the early modern age? Zachary Schiffman provides an answer. According to Schiffman (2016, p. 269), the early modern age accounts for "[…] the reality of this rupture, which engendered an intellectual world of potentially bewildering complexity. […] early moderns navigated this world without the conceptual compass that modernity would subsequently provide […]". On Schiffman's account, the early modern Masters of Suspicion lived at a time of radical change in the domain of politics, in the analysis of the inner world, and science. Given the sweeping changes in the above-mentioned domains, del Soldato maintains (2020, p. 2) that "the subversion of the status quo" was an important enterprise.

**0.6 Outline of Thesis**

In the Introduction, I will explain why labelling Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton as Masters of Suspicion is an innovative way to reinterpret these authors. I will show why this interpretation is better equipped to account for the changes in the domains of politics, self-analysis, and science. I will also outline what the gains are by running a comparison between Milton and Machiavelli, Milton and Montaigne, and Bacon.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss Ricœur's Masters of Suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. I will comment upon the nature of their philosophical enterprise.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the early modern Masters of Suspicion, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton. I will highlight the most important elements of their biographies and their works. They qualify as "Masters of Suspicion" because they interrogated the real meaning of politics, self-analysis, and science.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the life and the context of John Milton. I will highlight the political turmoil of his time (the fight between Charles I and the Puritans) and how his period at university got him to reflect on important issues, like toleration.

In Chapter 4, I will run a comparison between Machiavelli and Milton. I will highlight how they both endorse republican and monarchical ideas. This is the case because the political boundaries of early modern politics were not clear enough.

In Chapter 5, I will draw a comparison between Montaigne and Milton. I will highlight their commitment to travelling and being exposed to new cultures. I will also explore the nature of self-reflection in *The Essays* and *Il Penseroso*.

In the sixth and final chapter, I will discuss the engagement with science of both Bacon and Milton. Furthermore, I will consider the way they dealt with Aristotelianism.

In the Conclusion, I will summarise the findings of this thesis and suggest new avenues of research in Milton Studies.

## Chapter 1

## Ricœur's Masters of Suspicion

### 1.1 The Masters of Suspicion: An Overview

In this initial section, I will set out to explain the phrase 'masters of suspicion' and why, according to Ricoeur, it was necessary for philosophers to undertake an inquiry of 'suspicion'. To account for the epistemic shock caused by the philosophy of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, Ricœur (1970, pp. 32-35) coined the terse phrase "Masters of Suspicion", a label that aptly describes the philosophical approach of the above-mentioned triumvirate.

Ricœur deemed this description to be appropriate because Marx (1818-1883), Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Freud (1856-1939) living at a time of great economic and moral upheaval, questioned received ideas and challenged the established order. Before describing their philosophical approach, I will highlight why Ricœur labelled these three philosophers in such a fashion. On Ricœur's view Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud confronted the problem of the Cartesian doubt; that is the philosopher "trained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not such as they appear." (Ricœur, 1970, p. 33). On Ricœur's understanding of their philosophical endeavour, the three philosophers were casting doubt upon their socio-economic, moral and psychic foundations of their time. This means, according to Ricœur (1970, p. 33), that the three thinkers should be framed as "destroyers".

Echoing Ricœur, Sven-Eric Liedman (2018, pp. 20, 31) discusses how all three thinkers witnessed epochal changes in the European social fabric, which had the potential to challenge the status quo. These transformations were essentially the Industrial Revolution and the ensuing societal changes, new scientific breakthroughs, including a seminal biological analysis that would lead to Darwinism, and a novel interpretation of our inner world that questioned the rational excess of Positivism. Marx's main philosophical interest was in the domain of economics, particularly in contesting established views on economics relationships. Hence, his thoroughgoing analysis of the

economic system in the West, an analysis that has been defined as “historical materialism” (Cohen, 2000, p. 134). Nietzsche was heavily influenced by Darwinism, and his studies in classical philology shaped his key ideas (Prideaux, 2018). Where Marx’s investigation was mostly limited to the domain of economics, Nietzsche’s inquiry was more wide-ranging, even touching upon morality. In sharp contrast to previous views, Nietzsche argued that morality is not something innate, but it is something that it is imposed on us, which we end up accepting uncritically (Kaufmann, 1974). Freud, in turn, effected new developments in psychology by introducing the revolutionary notions of the conscious and the unconscious (Weyten, 2012, p. 6). Freud’s philosophical achievement rests on his inquiry of our inner self; he advanced the radical idea that ‘another self’ inhabits us, and its effect on us is reflected in dreams or slips of the tongue. In brief, Freud is convinced that we are not always aware of we say or think (Freud, 1960).

I would argue that Ricœur, with his Masters of Suspicion, makes a convincing case for how the three thinkers reconsidered the foundations European society at this time of upheaval. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are those thinkers who undertook an innovative investigation that was necessary to rebuild the foundations of the European intellectual landscape.

### 1.2 Why is Marx a Master of Suspicion?

I will now go into more detail into Karl Marx’s analysis of the economy and then why, according to Ricœur, this very analysis shows why Marx believed that the economic system of his age needed reconsidering in order to provide an alternative to capitalism.

Liedman (2018, pp. 20, 31) stresses that Marx lived at a time of great cultural and social disarray. But Marx’s main interest was the economy. Nineteenth-century Europe saw the triumph of capitalism, the economic system whereby a profit is made out of the production and sale of commodities (Jenks, 1998, p.383). The capitalist system, in the nineteenth century, was accountable for the spread of human exploitation in order for those who owned capital to make more and more

money. This is indeed what Marx challenged in his studies on economics, which he held to be the foundational study of society.

Before investigating the role that morality and spirituality played in a capitalist society, he wants to understand the rationale behind the development of capitalism and its offshoots. Such an analysis falls under the name of "historical materialism" and my purpose is to clarify the meaning of this phrase, in particular to show its radical explanation of society.

Marx (1993, p. 265) in his *Grundrisse* provides a terse description of what society is. On a Marxist view "society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand." The very beginning of the quote is key to understanding the fallout of his analysis. Marx contends that society should not be studied as a stand-alone product, but as a whole, by considering the connections between the diverse elements that compose it. It is the analysis of society based upon the study of interactions amongst many stakeholders. Here the notion of materialism comes to the fore; studying society involves studying a material, concrete body and its embodied relationships.

If philosophy is about studying the material circumstances of society that allow for improving its conditions, then, according to Marx, it behoves philosophers to study such circumstances from a historical standpoint. In this instance, "historical" means how different ages manifest different social conditions. Marx's main concern is to study society in order to improve it. He held that to do so we should therefore study how social circumstances evolved under capitalism. He thought that this could be better understood by first looking at feudalism.

Feudalism, according to Marx, is an economic system that involves having two distinct social classes: on the one hand peasants and, on the other, nobility. The essence of such a social relationship is the dialectics between peasants and noblemen. In such a social dynamic one can already anticipate how capitalist society was to develop, *viz.* via the clash between those who are exploited (the proletarian) and those who exploit them (the capitalist/bourgeois) (Wickham, 2008, p. 8). So, for Marx, the only way to understand the workings of social relationships is to study them in a given

context. He does so by showing the evolution from feudalism to capitalism. Both capitalism and feudalism show the same social dynamics, to wit the clash between those who are exploited (peasants/proletarians) and those who wield such power over them (aristocrats/capitalists). Therefore, for Marx, if we want to improve our society, we need to understand its historical evolvement. And, if we want to make sense of history, then we ought to study the relationship throughout history between those who exploit and those who are exploited. In order to understand Marx's conception of philosophy one should never forget his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach where he argues that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it (emphasis in the original) (Collier, 1999, p. 359).

Once that inequalities in society have been identified, then it is for philosophers to find a way to change them. Change, as Marx argues, is the key point: Masters of Suspicion, as Ricœur maintains, are trained in a Cartesian approach to philosophy, that is to say they scrutinise reality very carefully and make plans to change things based on a careful consideration of the circumstances.

Why is Marx a Master of Suspicion? Why does his historical and materialistic assessment of history cause him to be labelled as such? According to Ricœur, Marx offered a radical view of society: for Marx society and the interrelation of its members is organised in such a way that you can only understand it if you put it into its historical context. History is not based on superficial, repetitive mechanisms, but it requires a deeper analysis to be fully understood. In other words, society is predicated on the study of history and its material laws that are better defined by the interaction between those who wield power and those who are subjected to such authority. Therefore, on Ricœur's view, Marx is a master of suspicion because he challenges seemingly "given" social relationships and turns our comprehension of society on its head. This is the only way Marx has to change the world as he argues in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach.

### 1.3 Why is Nietzsche a Master of Suspicion?

Like Marx, Nietzsche lived at a time of great upheaval and was doubtful of standard explanations and narratives. Nietzsche's focus was not on the ever-changing transformations of the economy and the socially negative effects of capitalism, but rather on the received "truths" about religion that were starting to be questioned by Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Therein Darwin postulated his revolutionary theory of biology, the survival of the fittest. E. Mayr (1982, pp. 479-480) and Desmond and Moore (1991, p. 477) summarise Darwin's argument as follows: those species that are more suited to survival are likely to reproduce and leave their heritable traits to future generations. Therefore, survival is contingent upon one's ability of adapting to the environment.

Darwin's work considerably impacted on the European intellectual landscape and also raised many questions regarding the validity of religious dogma, since Darwin's evolutionary theory blatantly contradicted biblical accounts of creation, and it is in this moral earthquake that Nietzsche's philosophical inquiry effectively challenges traditional moral narratives.

In what follows, I will briefly set out Nietzsche's most important philosophical arguments: his critique of metaphysics, the notion of *Übermensch*, and his scathing attack on morality. Then, I will explain why Ricoeur considers Nietzsche a Master of Suspicion.

Nietzsche, like Marx, lived at a time of great moral upheaval: Darwinism and new theories of biological evolutionism caused a profound and seismic change in the European scientific landscape, leading up the biblical narrative encapsulated in Genesis to losing its authority and sway on nineteenth century Europe. It is in this complicated epistemological and moral context that Nietzsche published his first work in 1872, *The Birth of Tragedy*. According to Prideaux (2018), Nietzsche had intended this work to be a watershed in European intellectual history. The young philosopher had penned such a work because he wanted to confront the cultural *crisis* of his days, and his *The Birth of Tragedy* was supposed to be the manifesto for intellectual *regeneration*. A solid philological background undergirds Nietzsche's argument: in ancient Greece, two competing instincts fought to hold sway on humankind, the Apollonian and the Dionysian (Prideaux, 2018, pp. 87-88). The former is the metaphor of the triumph of the rational thinking of Socrates and his question-and-answer inquiry. In

contrast, the metaphor of Dionysus, the deity of drunkenness, violence, and exuberance, reflects the "real" nature of ancient Greece. When the rational spirit of Apollo and Socrates prevailed over the Dionysian, the real Greek culture had ceased existing (Prideaux, 2018, pp. 88, Schaberg, 1995, pp. 19-23).

To sum up, Nietzsche's philosophical plan involved retrieving the "real" nature of Greek life and, by extension, of European life, which had been long crushed by rationality and, more loosely, by the Delphic maxim "know thyself". Therefore, the outcome of Nietzsche's philosophical inquiry is to retrieve the Dionysian and its original character.

The figure that, on Nietzsche's view, heralded this more exuberant and nonconformist life was the *Übermensch*. By *Übermensch*, which could be loosely translated into English as "super-man" or "over-man", Nietzsche meant the harbinger of a new humanity, the one who proclaims a new socio-cultural path. And, for Nietzsche, such a proclaimer is the prophet Zarathustra in his famous *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1884). The first step towards the rediscovery of the Dionysian is to announce the end of the dominance of Western rational thought, instantiated by ancient Greek philosophy; the herald of the new Dionysian is Zarathustra/Nietzsche who, after a ten-year period of reclusion, came into the world to announce the death of God. On Nietzsche's view, God is simply the idol of Western society that has caused it to obliterate its Dionysian nature. Once the idea of God has been effectively obliterated, then everybody will be able to rediscover the Dionysian and its ecstatic energy. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche articulated his programme. Of note is the prologue to the book. Nietzsche/Zarathustra argues (Nietzsche, 1954, p. 5) that

> The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not.

I would argue that Zarathustra's proclamation encapsulates Nietzsche's critique of the existence of God. Those who claim that there is a God are, according to Nietzsche, "Poison-mixers" because they poison people's mind with an idol. Thus, Nietzsche asks people to be "faithful to the earth" as they have to dislodge the Apollonian, that is to say rationality, to accommodate the Dionysian, the real essence of life and call on to embrace it.

The critique of morality is the other element of Nietzsche's philosophy that should be taken into account when defining Nietzsche as a "Master of Suspicion". His critique is articulated in *The Anti-Christ* (1888). According to Nietzsche (2005, p. 13) Christianity has created a fictional world which:

> […] can be entirely distinguished from the world of dreams […] in that dreams reflect *reality* while Christianity falsifies, devalues and negates reality. Once the concept of 'nature' had been invented as a counter to the idea of 'God', 'natural' had to mean reprehensible', - that whole fictious world is rooted in a *hatred* of the natural (- of reality! -) […] (emphasis in the original).

Thus, if one goes by Nietzsche's account, Heaven and Hell are the negation of life. Recently, Bart D. Ehrman has written a very compelling assessment of the nature of Heaven. Ehrman (2020, p. 380) argues that Heaven is the "realm" where the bodies are welcomed once they have passed away. Once in Heaven, the dead will be able to admire the realm of God. Nietzsche takes the opposite view: the earthly life is more important. Living should not involve waiting for the realm of God, but should focus on the *hic et nunc*, here and now. Nietzsche re-emphasises this point by contending that Christianity hates anything that is "natural", anything that belongs to "reality". Philosophy should acknowledge the hiatus between reality and the false reality of Christianity. Lastly, I would argue, one of the most caustic attacks on Christian values is articulated in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) where he argues that Christianity has turned into Platonism for the masses because the transcendent Platonic idea of the Good has prevented people from living their lives to the full. Nietzsche, therefore,

cast doubt on morality, because morality is something superimposed upon us, not something inborn within us.

### 1.4. Why is Freud a Master of Suspicion?

Like Nietzsche, albeit from a medical point of view, Freud too expands on competing drives. In addition to the role that the Unconscious plays in the Freudian philosophical discourse, one should bear in mind that the human psyche is constituted by disorganised and uncoordinated drives that produce what Freud calls the *Id* (Latin for 'it') which are in constant tension with the two rational and regulatory drives of the *Ego* (the 'I'), and the *Super-Ego* (the 'Super-I'). The *Ego* operates according to common sense and our knowledge of the world , but it is the *Super-Ego* that actually tries to mediate between the *Id* and the *Ego*. According to Freud (1961, pp. 95-96) , a child's *Super-Ego* is "constructed on the model […] of its parents' super-ego; the contents which fill it are the same and it becomes the vehicle of tradition and of all the time-resisting judgments of value which have propagated themselves in this manner from generation to generation".

Freud's notion of the Unconscious aligns with Nietzsche's notion of our 'true' selves. In the same way the Apollonian restrains the action of the Dionysian, the *Super-Ego* and the *Ego* restrain the actions of the *Id*. Like Marx and Nietzsche, Freud too claims in *Moses and Monotheism* that religion has played a large part in this repressive process. According to Freud, religion is a mechanism we have created because we needed a sort of religious guidance on which we can rely. To put it in another way, religion is the political tool that has allowed those who govern to hold sway over those who are governed. All three adopt very critical stances on religion for its alienating and deceptive potential.

Why is Freud the last Master of Suspicion of this triumvirate? According to Ricœur, Freud is in an open conversation with his predecessors, Marx and Nietzsche. Like them, he challenges established ideas. Freud is a Master of Suspicion because he revolutionises the notion of the self. He casts doubt on the materialistic notion of the Positivist self. In order to understand our "true"

selves, one should shift to the inner self and this inner self does not fit neatly into a materialistic worldview of prediction and control. On Freud's account, the *Id* is responsible for otherwise unexplainable phenomena. Jokes are a product of the *Id* because it is via jokes that we reveal things people would have never had access to. However, Elizabeth Rottenberg argues that dreams are the most dependable way to access one's unconscious. Dreams, in her estimation, are the safest way to understand what we unconsciously think (Rottenberg, 2021).

According to Ricœur what Freud is aiming to achieve is "not only the renovation of psychiatry, but a reinterpretation of all psychical production pertaining to culture from dreams, through art and morality, to religion" (1970, p. 4). In other words, Freud's ideas pose a significant challenge to established thinking**.** At the same time, however, Marx's and Nietzsche's ideas equally threaten the status quo because of their pronouncements on morality and religion. As Marx famously said, religion is nothing but opium, a drug. Nietzsche saw in religion (especially in Christianity) the sway of the Apollonian, the rational, over the Dionysian, the irrational.

### 1.5 What does it involve being a "Master of Suspicion?'

After examining the main features of Ricœur's "Masters of Suspicion", I will highlight conclusions on what they are and do. In order to help readers to understand my final considerations, I have identified four main features and strategies: they emerge within a time of socio-political and intellectual upheaval; they challenge the general consensus on tradition and established ideas; they undertake empirical analyses to develop new more viable explanations, and they do so in order to effect change.

Masters of Suspicion emerge at difficult times, as it is the case with all the three thinkers. According to Ricœur, it was necessary for these three thinkers to undertake an investigation of suspicion in order to develop more viable approaches to the challenges of the time. Marx wrote socio-political works when capitalism had started to assert its power as the only economic means of production. He challenged the established view and assessed its shortcomings.

Nietzsche's philosophy is the product another major socio-political earthquake, that is to say Darwinism. In the same way that Darwinism highlighted the unreliability of religious accounts and received forms of scientific knowledge, Nietzsche's philosophy aimed to undertake a similar epistemological enterprise: Western civilisation has been plagued by the dominance of rationality and order, and it is time for philosophy to reveal the true, darker sides of ourselves. Freudian philosophy is the attempt to criticise the positivist rationalist agenda by revealing a hidden and apparently repressed aspect of our selves, one that is not easily controlled. By emphasising the need of a more painstaking analysis of the world, science had now to focus on the study of the self and its mechanisms. Freud, therefore, expounded an approach which could help to scrutinise our inner world.

Masters of Suspicion cast doubt upon the status quo, and through empirical analyses, posit more viable explanations. Marx's critique to capitalism is based on the nature of actual socio-economic relationships by revealing the dominance of the exploiters over the exploited. Nietzsche's philosophical inquiry is predicated upon the redefinition of biology and reveals our "true" nature, one which insists upon earthly pleasures and the rejection of pre-existing ideas. Freud's works lay bare the nature of the Unconscious through dreams and slips of the tongue. Moreover, he shows how the Unconscious can impact upon our own lives via traumas. All of them expound their ideas in seminal works. Marx wrote his *Grundrisse* to explain how the economic system operates and how it ought to be; Nietzsche wrote a genealogical work (an attempt to investigate the origins of our ideas on morality), Freud produced his own interpretation of our psychological structure.

Masters of Suspicion undertake this questioning of standard explanations, and the development of novel methods to bring about change and improvement through a better understanding of society, morality, and our inner world.

In summary, Masters of Suspicion are not naïve or foolish: they emerge within a time of socio-political and intellectual upheaval, and posit new, more viable, explanations through questioning the general consensus on tradition and established thinking which no longer make sense. They undertake an empirical investigation and build a convincing argument that challenges

the consensus-established ideas in order to develop more viable ones, coupled with an agenda of change.

## Chapter 2

## The Early Modern Masters of Suspicion

### 2.1 The Masters of Suspicion: A Recap

In the previous chapter, I described what it involves being a Master of Suspicion. The phrase was coined by Paul Ricœur to describe the intellectual work of Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud throughout the 19th century. In what follows, I will first recap on what Ricœur identifies as the key features of being a master of suspicion and I will then apply these features to Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Michel De Montaigne (1533-1592) , and Francis Bacon (1561-1626). I will adopt Ricœur's phrase by calling them the "early modern Masters of Suspicion". Below are the four main features of being a Master of Suspicion:

*Masters of Suspicion emerge at a time of upheaval and work to make sense of what is happening*

Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud wrote at a time of unrest. Marx confronted the emergence of capitalism as the dominant economic system in the 19th century. Nietzsche re-interpreted issues of morality and religion in the light of the spread of Darwinism, and Freud critiqued Positivism and its rationalising mode by showing that rationality does not account for our behaviour.

*Masters of Suspicion carry out an analysis of their circumstances, based on empirical and historical evidence*

As a consequence of the sweeping socio-political unrest of the 19th century, Marx's, Nietzsche's, and Freud's analyses aim to show that the old order no longer makes sense. Marx, on the basis of his investigation into historic economic relationships, was determined to make changes to the economic order. In the light of Darwinism and the emergence of a different interpretation of our origin, and drawing on ancient Greek studies, Nietzsche could no longer accept Christianity as the main and

unquestioned moral system. Also, Freud, observing patients' behaviour, sought to find new explanations that differed from Positivism and its rationalistic offshoots.

*Masters of Suspicion deal with doubt and reject the status quo*

Due to social upheavals and a thoroughgoing analysis of the observed circumstances based on historical studies, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud rejected the established ideas of their time. Marx shows there is an alternative to capitalism and its consequences. Nietzsche lays bare new alternatives to religion and morality. Moreover, Freud puts forward the idea that the Unconscious can help us to explain our dreams and behaviour.

*Masters of Suspicion design an agenda for change*

After painstaking analyses, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud design an agenda for change. Marx holds that there can be a viable and liberating alternative to capitalism, *viz.* communism, an economic system where nobody is left behind and class struggle is eliminated. Nietzsche suggests that we should embrace our 'true' nature, the Dionysian, and give way to our instincts without any moral or religious constraint. In Freud's view, then, we should acknowledge and understand the presence of irrational drives within our make-up.

**2.2 The Dominance of Aristotelianism**

I will first briefly show why Aristotelianism was so dominant and will then outline Aristotle's main ideas, in particular those that are challenged by Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Bacon.

The most important commentator of Aristotle in the early Middle Ages was Boethius (477-526 CE). Boethius, noting that the best way to make sense of Aristotelianism was to read and interpret Aristotle's works, intended to translate all of the works of Aristotle. However, he only translated *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, the *Prior Analytics*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*.

Nevertheless, these translations constituted a formidable collection of Aristotle's ideas in an accessible form.

What characterises Boethius's approach to translating Aristotle was his double commentaries on his works. He believed (cf. Falcon, 2017) that double commentaries would better work from a pedagogical standpoint, as his plan was to disclose Aristotle's subtlest doctrines

> in a commentary organized in two versions; for what the first version contains prepares, to some extent, an easier path for those who are entering into these more profound and subtle matters. But because the second version develops in connection with the expositor's subtler doctrines, it is presented to be read and studied by those who are advanced in this inquiry and study.

If Boethius was the first who made available Aristotelian works to the scholarly community in the early Middle Ages, it was Albert Magnus, also known as Albert the Great who contributed to spreading the Aristotelian corpus in medieval Europe. His date of birth is unknown, but he certainly died in 1279. Markus Führer (2020) contends that Albert's contribution to the medieval reception of Aristotle "resulted in the formation of what might be called a Christian reception of Aristotle in the Western Europe". Like Boethius, the main enterprise of Albert the Great's intellectual life was to assemble a type of philosophical encyclopaedia of the main scholarly authorities. In summary, Albert the Great advanced Boethius's programme of translating Aristotelianism into Latin and adding significantly to the body of translated Aristotelian works.

Beside the labours of both Boethius and Albert the Great, the key philosopher of , Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), undertook a significant exegetical work on Aristotle. Before I describe the way Aquinas interpreted Aristotle and disseminated his works, I will briefly expand upon Scholasticism.

According to Constant J. Mews (2010, p. 1132), Scholasticism is "a method of inquiry influenced by Aristotle that developed in the Latin West between the 12$^{th}$ and the 15$^{th}$ c., in relation

both to the liberal arts and to theology". Mews (2010, p. 1133) goes on to argue that Scholasticism focussed more on "logic and disputation […]. Scholastics developed a range of perspectives while adopting a common educational method, which emphasized both argument and the critical study of written authority, whether in the liberal arts or in theology". Such a teaching method was so influential that it exerted its influence even beyond the 15th century (cf. Mews, 2010, p. 1133). Scholasticism significantly influenced educational methods in the Middle Ages. And, on Mews's account, it shaped the way teaching was conducted in the early modern age. However, this method did not escape critical scrutiny. Montaigne criticised how dogmatic and unquestionable this teaching method had become. He took aim at it because it had caused the end of any interest in "learning" (cf. Montaigne, 2003, p. 425).

Apart from establishing a teaching method, Scholasticism also reconciled ancient philosophers with Christianity. One of the most important Scholastic thinkers was Thomas Aquinas. McInerny and O'Callaghan (2014) claim that Aquinas had espoused "Aristotle's account of sense perception and intellectual knowledge". Therefore, for Aquinas, Aristotle was the "Philosopher", the most important authority for the development of Scholasticism and its philosophical tradition. As McInerny and O'Callaghan (2018, p. 19) argue, Thomas could be categorised as an Aristotelian because he adopted Aristotelianism as an

> analysis of physical objects, his view of place, time and motion, his proof of the prime mover, his cosmology. He made his own account of Aristotle's sense perception and intellectual knowledge. His moral philosophy is closely based on what he learned from Aristotle and in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* he provides a cogent and coherent account of what is going on in those difficult pages.

Aristotle's notion of an unmoved mover is the basis for Aquinas's argument in favour of the existence of God. If everything is changing, then there must be something that effects change. And, according to Aquinas, what causes change is God (Coplestone, 1992, pp. 341-342).

In my summary of Aristotle, I will focus on the key ideas that are questioned by the Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton. They argued that the way Aristotle and his medieval commentators had investigated logic and the cosmos needed reassessing.

According to Fred Miller (2017), Aristotle's construal of politics is not an empirical or practical analysis, but rather a prescriptive and deontic one. Lawgivers are the most important figures in Aristotelian politics. Their tasks is to design a legal frame which will allow them to rule the city and to make all the changes should necessity arise. In discharging their duties, what lawgivers have to pursue is *eudaimonia*, or "flourishing". Rulers have to allow citizens to live their lives to the fullest The furtherance of *eudaimonia*, according to Aristotle, is essential (and unavoidable) because citizens are "social animals". And they are social animals because, unlike the other animal species, they are endowed with rationality (cf. Reeve, 1992, p. 525).

Aristotle goes on to describe the forms of state that are most desirable for the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. He distinguishes between just constitutions, which are constitutions advantageous and correct, and deviant constitutions, which are most detrimental because they involve exercising despotic rule. Despotic states are to be avoided because they do not benefit a community of free people (Winter, 2012). The notion of correct and deviant constitutions correlates with the number of people involved in the government of the city. Cities can be ruled by a ruler, few rulers, and many rulers. The following chart (Winter, 2012), helps to make sense of Aristotelian political systems:

| | **Correct** | **Deviant** |
|---|---|---|
| **One Ruler** | Kingship | Tyranny |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Few Rulers** | Aristocracy | Oligarchy |
| **Many Rulers** | Polity | Democracy |

According to Aristotle, the most viable political framework is polity, whereby the many have the chance to rule but, more importantly, without degenerating. In a polity only those fit for purpose rule, whereas in a democracy everyone, including those not for purpose, have a say and this leads to degeneration. Avoiding degeneration is central to Aristotelianism because this amounts to pursuing the golden mean. It is in the golden mean (the balance of the parties) that the best form of government can be achieved. Thus, polity helps to achieve this balance because it is the mean between one and few rulers (Curzer, 2012, pp. 2-3).

Another important element of Aristotle's philosophy is the notion of "virtue" (*areté)*. Aristotle (2009, p. 30) argues "a master of any art avoids excess and defect, but chooses the intermediate and chooses this, the intermediate not in object but relatively to us". Therefore, this notion of virtue is the compromise between two extremes. In this regard "bravery" is the mean between "foolhardiness" and "cowardice" (Oosthuizen, 2002, p. 21). It is important to note that the early modern Masters of Suspicion (Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton) took aim at Aristotelianism. Despite their criticisms, they were still operating in an Aristotelian ambit. As I will show, Machiavelli's notion of *virtù* had turned Aristotle's understanding of virtue on its head. It is no longer about finding a compromise (a golden mean) between two extremes, but it now involves resorting to the ruses and strategies that a strong man (*vir* in Latin) would rely on to confront the uncertain nature of politics. Montaigne criticised a dogmatic understanding of Aristotelianism in educational settings. He claimed that nobody could challenge the pronouncements of Aristotle (cf. Montaigne, 2003, p. 349). This is not a total rejection of Aristotle, but he is levelling an accusation at those who studied his work uncritically. Bacon and Milton rejected a too dogmatic version of Aristotelianism, but they still acknowledged his philosophical significance. Bacon's *Novum Organum* outlines a new scientific

model, but its title reveals the influence of Aristotle (the *Organon*). When describing the ideal syllabus in his treatise *Of Education* (1644), Milton stresses the importance of rhetoric and a good understanding of logic, one of the cornerstones of Aristotle's oeuvre.

Beside the reinterpretation of virtue, Machiavelli questioned the idea that states cannot degenerate. He actually believed that the opposite was the case. On Machiavelli's account, states would inevitably cause the degeneration of political orders because this process is part of a cycle, the Polybian doctrine of anacyclosis. In *Discourses* (I, 2), Machiavelli (2003, p. 102) argues that

> […] this is the cycle through which all states that have governed themselves or that now govern themselves pass, but rarely do they return to the same forms of government, because almost no republic can be so full of life that it may pass through these mutations many times and remain standing.

Machiavelli defies the main assumption of Aristotle's political theory, the establishment of a balanced political system. This cannot be achieved because it is possible to discern a circular development of history.

Aristotelian logic revolves around the notion of syllogism. A syllogism is a kind of reasoning which is made up of two parts: two premises and the conclusion connected by a verb (Lagerlund, 2000, p. 4). The main feature of the Aristotelian syllogism is that it is based on deduction. Unlike inductive reasoning, which is based on observation and from there conclusions are drawn, deductive reasoning is based on statements (premises) that allow to arrive at a conclusion (Sternberg, 2009, p. 578). As I have claimed before, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton did not question Aristotelianism as a whole. What they vehemently criticised is dogmatic Aristotelianism, (cf. Sgarbi, 2017, p. 243), whose tenets were passively accepted. This indictment of the Stagirite is more in tune with the early modern age. This is the case because, as I will show later on, new educational systems, which prioritised a

more proactive learning and not the bare memorisation of things, would be established between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century.

Robin Smith (2019) argues that Aristotle's treaties on logic go under the label of *Organon* ("Instrument"). The *Organon* is the instrument that allows us to understand, via logical reasonings, the way the world is constructed The works comprised in the *Organon* are as follows: *Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics, Posterior Analytics, Topics*, and *On Sophistical Refutations*.

*Categories,* in fifteen chapters, describes all the possible things that can be the subject or the predicate of a preposition (Smith, 2019). *On Interpretation* deals with the way language and logic come together (Bobzien, 2006). *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* describe what syllogisms actually are (Striker, 2009, p. 268). *Topics* describes the places (*tópoi* in Greek) where propositions can be found. For Aristotle a topic is "at least primarily a strategy for argument not infrequently justified or explained by a principle" (Stump, 1978, p. 170). *On Sophistical Refutations* expands on the fallacies (the wrong constructions of an argument) that can emerge in deductive reasoning. Aristotle identifies fallacies in the language and outside language (Parry and Hacker, 1991, p. 435).

Aristotle described his cosmological views in his treatise *On the Heaven* (350 BCE). According to Friedel Weinert (2008, pp. 5-6), Aristotelian cosmology is based on a two-sphere universe and a theory of motion. Aristotle's two-sphere universe is divided into the "supralunary sphere, which includes the moon and the region lying beyond it, and the sublunary sphere. This is the region between the Earth and the moon". According to this worldview, the Earth is a tiny stationary sphere suspended at the centre of a much larger sphere which carries the stars. Furthermore, according to Weinert (2008, p. 6) the supralunary sphere is:

> a region of utmost *perfection*, *symmetry*, and *regularity*. The Greeks ordained the *circle* as a perfect geometric shape. It is therefore in accordance with the perfection of the supralunary sphere that the stars and planets should move in perfect circles. By contrast, the sublunary sphere is the region of *change*, *flux*, and *decay*.

The sublunary sphere is filled with four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. If undisturbed, they would settle in concentric shells around the central region of the Earth.

If everything in the sublunary sphere changes, then, by logical deduction, then there must be something that effects that change, something that itself does not change. Weinert (2008, pp. 7-8) notes that Aristotle's theory of motion posits that objects are either at rest or move in a straight line. Weinert (2008, p. 8) also stresses that the motion of objects is granted by an external push or force. Such a motion can only be caused by "an unmoved mover, a Deity". Therefore, what characterises Aristotelian cosmos, is the Earth, lying at the centre of the universe, a universe that is regulated by a prime mover or, to put it in another word, by God.

In conclusion, Aristotle was the most important authority in medieval philosophy. The dominance of Aristotelianism was due to Boethius, who produced double translations of Aristotle for teaching purposes, and made it available to scholars and teachers. Albert the Great worked on an encyclopaedic collection of Aristotle's texts. This extensive set of texts were therefore made accessible, and it was to become the way Christianity engaged with Aristotle in the Western world.

Furthermore, Thomas Aquinas, one of the most prominent medieval philosophers, had written some of the most comprehensive treatises that expound the key precepts of Aristotelianism. The notion of the golden mean as a virtue, in both politics and personal ethics, was deeply entrenched in medieval thinking, as well as the Earth being at the centre of the universe, which moves in perfect circles, set in motion by an Unmoved Mover, that is to say God. This Aristotelian set of ideas and explanations of our being and the world was arrived at through rigorous deductive logic. As I have already argued, Aristotle's thought had become a dogma, an authority which could not be questioned.

This is the reason why the early modern Masters of Suspicion had reservations about the efficacy of Aristotelianism. Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton focus on

destroying dogma to design an agenda of change tailored to their needs in the realms of politics, the self and science. Their philosophical enterprise is aptly captured by Paul Hazard and his assessment of the early modern Europe. On Hazard's account (2013, pp. 32-33), the Renaissance and the Reformation had brought about significant change that "the time had come for a mental stocktaking, for an intellectual "retreat"". Hazard's underscore what Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton are supposed to do, that is to say to reorientate the societal disarray towards a stabler background. Their agenda of change, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, is circumstantial, context-dependent.

### 2.3 Machiavelli and the Foundations of a New Political Blueprint

I will rely on Ricœur's framework to explain the reason why Machiavelli (1469-1527) Montaigne (1533-1592), Bacon (1561-1526), and Milton (1608-1674) should be defined as early modern Masters of Suspicion. My analysis of Machiavelli is informed by recent scholarly contributions on Machiavelli, the works of Michelle T. Clarke (2018), Alison McQueen (2018), David Wootton (2018) and James Hankins (2020).

According to Wootton (2018, p. 38-39), Machiavelli had written a political treatise because he was seeking full-time employment after his exile in the Tuscan countryside. Machiavelli wanted to win the favour of the new aristocratic political regime in Florence by writing a book which was testimony to his expertise and hands-on knowledge of politics. He encapsulates his advice to leaders in his *Prince* (1513), his political manifesto. Pierre Bayle clearly outlines what *The Prince* is about and why it should be carefully ready by anybody in power. Bayle (2000, pp. 168-169) appropriately argues that

> […] his maxims and his practical advice should be judged, and even examined step by step, from the perspective of a minister or the perspective of a prince; that is, by those persons who, before coming to the throne, might well have condemned them and detested them – so true is it that one needs to have become a prince, or at the very least a minister, to under- stand not the utility, I say, but the absolute necessity of these maxims.

Bayle emphasises what the new style politics amount to: leaders have to escape the strictures of conventional morality if they want to stay in power. Such maxims, as he argues, challenge long-standing principle, but Machiavelli's advice is of "absolute necessity".

A Master of Suspicion has an agenda for change. Wootton argues that *The Prince* was written with a view to being employed by the new political regime in Florence. He (2018, p. 14) argues that, for Machiavelli, the main purpose of political leaders is to achieve glory. Thus, what politicians are supposed to is to be ruthless and merciless because such is the realm of politics. Leaders' actions are informed by their virtue, to wit their skills. Out of expediency, leaders can exploit piety if it suits their agenda. Such activities, therefore, may not at odds with one another. Wotton seems to hearken back to Bayle's argument: certain ideas are immoral but it is necessary to abide by them in order to navigate politics and its intricacies.

On Wotton's account (2018, 39-40) Machiavelli argues that politics, whether republican or monarchic, amounts to

> holding your subjects in such a way that they cannot harm you or that they do not wish to. This is done either by making yourself entirely secure against them, taking from them every means from injuring you, or by benefiting them to such an extent that they cannot reasonably wish to change their fortunes.

In other words, the law of politics is to totally disempower your subjects by either crushing all opposition or by buying them off with benefits to the extent that they will uphold the status quo. In *The Prince*, chapter 19, Machiavelli formulates the underlying rule of politics: crush your subjects so that they are unable to rise up against you, or: make them feel fulfilled in such a way they will never want to change their condition.

Michelle Clarke's (2018) argument is that Machiavelli aims to reveal the shortcomings of the Florentine republican regime. On her view, this is best illustrated in Machiavelli's *Florentine*

*Histories* (1525). On Clarke's account, Machiavelli's political philosophy is shaped by the time in which he lived. Florentine republicanism had originated as a response to the rule of the Medici, who had been able to transform Florence into a principality in 1434 (Clarke, 2018, p. 6). Florentine republicanism was heralded as a viable political alternative to the Medici regime during the Middle Ages. However, its many shortcomings and weaknesses caused it to be discarded as a viable and sustainable alternative. In *Discourses* (1515-1519), Machiavelli acknowledges that melancholy is the dominant feeling when it comes to ponder how things could have been if a republican regime had driven the Medici and their supporters out (Clarke, 2018, p. 8).

If Rome and Florence failed to enact their own political plans, it is because they idealised their agendas too much. And, on Machiavelli's view, idealisation or anything that is not rooted in a rigorous contextual analysis is doomed to fail. As Clarke (2018, p. 158) indeed argues "good political theory requires good historiography or it is a wasted enterprise. Why? Because political ideas and actions are intertwined, making it impossible to develop an informed understanding of the one without the other". In summary, Clarke's argument acknowledges the necessity for Machiavelli as a Master of Suspicion to undertake an empirical investigation of history in order to understand its development.

Machiavelli advises political leaders not to make any plans without having full knowledge of history. The purpose of policy-making is better served by being realist, and not by relying on an idealised plan for the future. Since we are not free political agents prescient of any possible circumstance, we have to be humble enough to recognise that the best effort we can make when we exercise power is to regard the historical backdrop as our lodestar.

Alison McQueen's account (2018) emphasises the influence of the political upheavals on Machiavelli's political philosophy, especially his relationship with the fire-and-brimstone Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola. Savonarola (1452-1498) emerged in the Florentine political arena towards the end of the 15$^{th}$ century. Florence, at that stage, was going through a very difficult political situation due to the threat of foreign invasions. To an ardent Savonarola, who had started to discover his potential for prophetic and apocalyptic imagery in his sermons, this was the best moment to establish

a new Jerusalem on Earth (McQueen, 2018, p.71). According to McQueen, one can detect the influence of Savonarola in Machiavelli's *Prince.* This is the case in Chapter 26, the final chapter of the book, where Machiavelli envisages a liberating figure for Italy (McQueen, 2018, p. 80).

Savonarola or a Savonarola-like figure, for Machiavelli, could be the one who could lead Italy out of disunity and to unity. However, he refutes the influence of religion or any kind of piety in the world of politics because this is most undesirable for would-be politician. However, in their political plans, they acknowledge the necessity for a prophetic figure to save a racked Italy. Thus, on McQueen's view, Machiavelli may have been influenced by Savonarola's inciting sermons at the very moment he is envisaging having a liberating secular figure for Italy, to wit his prince (McQueen, 2018, pp. 96-97).

Machiavelli, as I have argued beforehand, reinterpreted the meaning of the Aristotelian notion of virtue. James Hankins argues that Machiavelli secularises such a notion According to Hankins (2020, p. 463), no longer does virtue have a religious meaning, but it has turned into *virtù*, "effectiveness, a kind of manly competence" Machiavelli fits into the Ricœurian notion of "destroyer" because he questions the religious meaning of virtue to retrieve its true meaning, i.e., manly efficacy and strength. Machiavelli who, like Nietzsche, had praised "the natural" against Christianity endeavours to free "the natural", i.e., politics, from the strictures of conventional Christian morality.

In summary, Machiavelli writes at a time of socio-political upheaval brought about by political instability in Italy. However, in order to solve Italy's harrowing political situation, he had to rely on historical precedents. By drawing on historical studies of the Ancients, Machiavelli advances a new interpretation of politics, *viz*. one where ruthlessness and opportunism are its main components but they have to be politically informed. Unlike Innocent Gentillet's misrepresentations (cf. Egío Garcia, 2022, p. 320), Machiavelli does not want leaders to be opportunistic and ruthless just for the sake of it: they have to act in such a way, if the context requires them to do so. This new political conceptualisation carries an agenda of change: liberating politics from morality and pre-established notions.

## 2.4 Montaigne and Self-Reflection as a New Literary Style

In this section, I will interpret Montaigne as a Master of Suspicion. Confronted with the religious disarray of sixteenth-century France, Montaigne realised that a new philosophical tool was necessary to account for his circumstances, that is to say the essay. As a genre that is philosophical and literary at the same time, the essay was a suitable to deal with personal doubts, to explore diverse ideas, and to embrace the tentative grasp of truth. According to Thompson (2018, p.20),

> The word essai, of Montaigne's coinage in this context, means a "try", an "attempt", a "weighing", or a "taste." Montaigne is rolling ideas around on his tongue, as it were, trying out uncertain new perspectives on existing questions and attempting to make provisional sense of complicated matters of human experience.

According to George Hoffmann (2009, p. 24) "[…] open-endedness, the sense that it should trace an itinerary but leave the destination unfixed […]". Like Thompson, Hoffmann as well argues that the essay will always change. It is like a blank slate. However, Felix O'Murchadha cautions the readership against treating *The Essays* as a mere autobiography. On O'Murchadha's account (2022, p. 41), Montaigne's reflections amount to "a fundamental questioning of the possibility of autobiography (emphasis in the original)". O'Murchadha is right in emphasising the fact that his musings cannot be an autobiography. An autobiography would usually involve describing one's life in a coherent way. What Montaigne offers is a series of scattered thoughts.

My discussion of Montaigne's (1533-1592) philosophical achievement will consider the socio-political context in which he operated. Like Machiavelli, Montaigne held significant political offices. Between the 1560s and 1580s, he consolidated his political career and established himself as an acknowledged and influential public figure. According to Phillipe Desan (2018), his uncle Raymond had introduced him into diverse political camps in Bordeaux, and in 1563 he became a royal councillor. Montaigne's political career was further secured by his marriage to Françoise de la

Chassaigne in 1565. His wife's family were powerful supporters of the Roman Catholic Church and, like Machiavelli, Montaigne was fully integrated into the political life of sixteenth-century France.

Like Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, Montaigne too lived at a time of political and philosophical upheaval. Sixteenth-century France was a war-torn country. The Wars of Religion pitted Roman Catholics against Huguenots (the Protestant camp affiliated with Calvinism). Montaigne's France resembled Machiavelli's war-torn Italy. Thus, Montaigne shares a similar historical background as Machiavelli: both men were the witnesses of social unrest and intense fighting, with countless victims (cf. Desan, 2018, p. 8)

Desan discusses the way doubt manifested in Montaigne's educational experience. During his studies at the Sorbonne University (1536), he started to question one of the most important educational systems in Europe, Aristotelianism. Albeit critical of Aristotle, Montaigne did not reject Aristotelianism as a whole. In *On Affectionate Relationships*, Montaigne praises Aristotle because he emphasises, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VIII, i, cf. Screech, 2003, p. 2477) the need for friendship to foster good political orders (cf. Montaigne, 2003, p. 438). In *On the Affection of Fathers for Their Children*, always quoting from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (IX, vii  cf. Screech, 2003, p. 2718), Montaigne claims that kindness can keep a whole society together (cf. Montaigne, 2003, p. 798). This shows that Montaigne does not reject Aristotle, but a very dogmatic reception of his works.

Philippe Desan captures this context of difficulty and questioning of long-standing principles. According to Desan (2018, p. 46), "no system can last very long without undergoing profound upheavals that are intrinsic to it". So, Desan notes, Montaigne understood that Europe was experiencing significant socio-political change and such a situation could no longer be described according to pre-established categories. In line with Desan's contention, Montaigne, in his epistemic manifesto, An *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (II, 12), asks himself "What do I know?" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 591). In his essay *On Schoolmaster's Learning* (I, 25), Montaigne (2003, p. 154) reinforces his contention by arguing that

> This is what Cicero said, This is morality for Plato; These are the *ipsissima verbal* of Aristotle (emphasis in the original). But what have *we* got to say (emphasis in the original)? What judgements do *we* make (emphasis in the original)? What are *we* doing (emphasis in the original)? A parrot could talk as well as we do.

The dogmatic interpretation and study of Aristotle, Plato and Cicero block the pursuit the knowledge. Montaigne scathingly claims that their arguments are simply learnt by heart and repeated without questioning them. He was putting pressure on Graeco-Roman thinking, which had been one of the most important philosophical systems in Europe. Montaigne (2003, p. 642 indeed maintains "that for three thousand years the skies and the stars were all in motion: everyone believed it […]. However, Copernicus's doctrine changed the status quo; Aristotelianism and its unquestioned authority no longer made sense. Émile Brehier (1967, p. 678) argues that

> Intellectuals, towards the end of the sixteenth century, acknowledged how Graeco-Roman and medieval views on the nature of the universe were obsolete. Geocentrism no longer made sense, Aristotelianism was being criticised […] a new continent had been discovered and other facts proved how reason could no longer defined unquestionable and heuristic principles […]: everything was restless.

If the world is matter that is constantly moving in a universe that no longer has its centre, then, according to Desan, it means that ethical ideas can be questioned, rejected, and changed. Montaigne's challenge of pre-existing philosophical systems and the reception of new ideas is context-dependent. It is in his key work, *The Essays*, that Montaigne discusses his time and its changes. Arlette Jouanna has carefully considered the Montaignian self-analysis and what it involves. According to Jouanna (2018, p.12) Montaigne moves "from the outside into the inside"[2]. Jouanna claims that Montaigne is now focussing on his inner world to make sense of his personal circumstances.

[2] Translation mine.

Like Desan, Foglia and Ferrari (2019) argue that the watershed in Montaigne's intellectual career was Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* ("On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres", 1543). They maintain that, from this moment onwards, accepted ideas could be challenged. In one of his most important essays, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* (II, 12), Montaigne claims that Copernicus is the one who mostly advanced science and the challenge of the status quo (cf. Montaigne, 2003, p. 1153). Like Machiavelli, Montaigne realised the need for fresh interpretations. The dogmatic acceptance of the old authorities needed substituting by new ideas. However, the new epistemic conception could not be dogmatic because, as was witnessed by Copernicus's work, the world is constantly and restlessly moving. According to Foglia and Ferrari (2019) the revolutions of the celestial bodies equate with the revolutions of the mind, which mirror the protean nature of the world.

Like the heliocentric (and open) cosmos of the post-Copernican revolution, even literature and philosophy had to acknowledge the fact that new and innovative responses were needed to account for the new epistemic revolution that was underway in Europe. Therefore, a new philosophical and literary genre was needed, one that can help to analyse the self and its inconsistencies. The philosophical essay is like a blank page, a palimpsest that can be used and rewritten at leisure without the urgency of finality.

It is against this always-evolving epistemic backdrop that Montaigne, in his essay *Of the Cannibals* (I, 31) shows that political and moral issues are intertwined. In his essay, Montaigne confronts what the Europeans, after the discovery of the New World, label as "barbarous". They are shocked by the anthropophagous habits of Brazilian cannibals. However, Montaigne calls on prudence, for "there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his practice" (Montaigne, 2003, 185).

This quote, I would argue, should be analysed from two different vantage points, a moral and political one. If one looks at difference in customs from a moral point of view, then one will have to acknowledge that the discovery of a new continent lays out new moral foundations: as argued above,

anthropophagy should be considered one of the many practices that can be appreciated in a newly discovered world. From a political standpoint, I would claim that Montaigne is not making a case for moral relativism: he contends that one should be prudent when passing a Eurocentric judgement upon these issues because our socio-political criteria no longer work and it is advisable to acknowledge new political systems or hierarchies. Therefore, our worldview is only one of the many. What we think to be morally repellent does not apply to everybody and to all the countries. This is why Montaigne invites us to reconsider what we define as "barbarous".

Whilst he acknowledges the fact that Europeans could find repellent the eating of another, the Wars of Religion, where countless human beings lost their lives, were as terrible as eating other people. According to Foglia and Ferrari (2019), Montaigne is also a pragmatist: we are no longer alone and a narrow, set worldview cannot make sense in a world that is open, both from a cosmological, moral, and political point of view. Any generalisation, therefore, does more harm than good to a pragmatic mentality because generalising constrain philosophical scrutiny and block the formulation of new arguments and ideas. As I will set out to show in the section on Montaigne I would argue that his long-standing categorisation as a sceptic and a moral relativist impede from engaging with the epistemic change underway in sixteenth-century France.

I have already outlined the genre of the essay beforehand. However, I argue that Theodor Adorno, in his discussion of the essay as a genre, provides significant insight into its nature. He argues that the essay (1991, pp. 4, 9)

> […] does not let its domain to be prescribed for it. Instead of accomplishing something scientifically or creating something artistically […], the essay reflects what is loved and hated […]. The essay allows for consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical […] in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character.

Adorno captures one of the key features of the essay, that is to say its "fragmentary character". Things are unrecognisable, things have changed to the extent that novel responses and approaches to reality are required. The emphasis on the "partial" fulfils such a requirement.

In the conclusive remarks of his discussion of the essay, Adorno (1991, p. 23) maintains that the key feature of the essay is its "[…] heresy". Through violations of the orthodoxy of thought, something in the object becomes visible which it is orthodoxy's secret and objective aim to keep invisible".

The essay is heretical because it defies to the status quo. It highlights the potential for change: human existence has been deeply affected by external factors that traditional responses do not manage to deal with such epochal changes. Thus, the task of the essay is to reveal, to make "visible the change that is underway. Adhering to orthodoxy, in these circumstances, is detrimental because it cannot bring about change. I would argue that both Adorno and, more recently, Thompson make a valid point about the way essays can be tailored to the circumstances: Montaigne had to confront the ideological imbrications of a world that was rapidly evolving. The discovery of the New World and with scientists defining a new model, a new philosophical genre was necessary, one which would make "visible" the "invisible". The essay, I would argue, fulfils this criterion because it captures societal changes and get its readership to appreciate such evolution.

The essay, according to Screech (1991, xiv), played a significant role in redefining the status of its author. Montaigne was not a trained scholar in a specific subject about which he could claim expertise. This is why he resolved to "write about himself, the only subject he might know better than anyone else". Screech emphasises Montaigne's defiance to orthodoxy because his work is about himself and not about moral or scientific discussions.

Beside Screech, I argue that Farr and Ruggiero convincingly maintain that the essay is an egodocument. According to Farr and Ruggiero (2022, p. 2) an egodocument provides "an account of privileged information that brings insight into the historical meanings of the individual, the self, and identity". An egodocument is therefore the privileged place where authors can take stock of

themselves and their world. By abiding by the definition of the egodocument provided by Farr and Ruggiero, it is possible to conclude that Montaigne's *Essays* constitute such an example.

Like the heliocentric (and open) cosmos of the post-Copernican revolution, even literature and philosophy had to acknowledge the fact that new and innovative responses were needed to take into account the new epistemic revolution that was underway in Europe. Therefore, a new literary genre was needed, one that is predicated on trying out new ideas. The philosophical essay is like a blank page, a palimpsest that can be used and rewritten at leisure without the urgency of finality. I would like to argue that Montaigne is non-committal: his thinking is, as I will set out to explain later, is unruly. The unruliness and the volatility of his philosophy show that there is no accurate description of the world and that ideas are context-dependent.

Charles Taylor (1989, pp.181-182) concludes that Montaigne is the first modern man, because he is the subject of his own book.; humankind is longer at the centre of creation, and it cannot be the measure of all things. Thus, Taylor notes, Montaigne recognises that what human beings need at this time is introspection; they have to study themselves from the inside. J. M. Cohen (1958, p. 9) argues that the *Essays* are an autobiography: Montaigne's aim is to produce sketches of a subject whose ideas cannot be permanent, but only *temporary*.

How does the new Montaignian epistemic investigation differ from the traditional mode of inquiry? Thompson (2018, p. 29) contends that Montaigne philosophises *in utramque partem*, on both sides. This means that he considers both sides of the argument without endorsing any. His is a rigorous philosophical research but, since the nature of the world is protean and everything can always be reconsidered, Montaigne cannot commit to any specific solution. Karshan and Murphy (2020, p. 4) capture this feature of the Montaignian essay when they argue that

> […] the discourses printed on these pages […] should not be taken too seriously as the final, resolved opinions of the author, but instead understood as a tentative and experimental discussion, the voice of an amateur or apprentice

thinking out loud and liable to correction. Montaigne plays on the full range of its possible meanings […] writing as a tentative, risky, and experimental way of rejecting authority and exercising the free thinking of an author […].

Karshan and Murphy's description of the essay re-emphasises the scope of its undertaking: essayists write freewheelingly because they are trying to challenge the status quo and propose new interpretations of a subject. Discussing both sides of the argument allows authors to correct themselves without asserting any final authority.

This intellectual attitude underpins the hermeneutic solution proposed by Ann Hartle. Hartle is of the opinion that Montaigne's philosophy is accidental. On Hartle's view (2003, p. 33-35), accidental philosophers believe that their thoughts are inborn without "a model […] accidental philosophy leaves everything just as it is". As a consequence, Montaigne argues that we should leave things as they are and accept the possibility of there being contradictions; the reasoning *in utramque partem*, looking at things from both sides, bespeaks Montaigne's ideas. That that the world is always susceptible to change calls on us, as human agents, to acknowledge its evolving nature. However, as I will show in the section on Montaigne how Richard Scholar (2010), in line with Hartle's idea of accidental philosophy, argues that Montaigne practises free-thinking. Free-thinking, as I will set out to show, emerges at a time of significant socio-moral transformation.

I would maintain that casting Montaigne as an accidental philosopher could help to explain his vagaries. If we believe that he is an accidental philosopher, then we could argue that Montaigne devotes himself to a freewheeling free inquiry. By claiming that Montaigne's philosophy escapes any traditional category, Hartle maintains that the French thinker cannot be reduced to the status quo: the essay is a novel philosophical genre that purposefully avoids seeking security and certainty (cf. Hartle, 2003, p. 13).

This is why Montaigne's proposed agenda of change is open-ended. Montaigne keeps changing idea without definite conclusions; no wonder Alain Legros (2016, p. 525) concludes that the *Essays* are "an intermittent record of his thoughts" and Zahi Zalloua (2014, p. 19) argues that the

*Essays* are philosophically unruly because of their "resistance to hermeneutic mastery […] and ungovernable character".

Screech contends that Montaigne's intellectual contribution is punctuated by different experiences (he was a royal a royal councillor, a magistrate, the mayor of Bordeaux, and a translator from Latin), leading him to the thematic diversity of *The Essays*. His attempts to grapple with both the classical heritage, the Christian tradition, and the socio-political crises of France in the sixteenth century, brought about by the rejection of the Ptolemaic worldview, find expression in the appropriate medium of the reflective essay. Montaigne is the bridge between the old order, represented by the Church and the Holy Roman Emperor, and the new one, characterised by significant change in political and religious practices. It is a world where everything is always open to discussion. Things are changing but any intellectual debate still has to rely upon classical authorities, like Aristotle. The *Essays* are testimony to this new way of approaching and knowing things (Screech 1991: xiii).

In conclusion, Montaigne's philosophy is a product of his time. The validity of geocentrism was being questioned in the aftermath of Copernicus's outline of heliocentrism, bringing with it new questions about fundamental issues. With science breaking new ground in sixteenth-century Europe, philosophy required a new approach and, in order to acknowledge this new fluid reality, Montaigne inaugurated a new genre, both literary and philosophical at the same time, the essay. The "essay" name bespeaks the genre: since nothing is sure or definite, what philosophers can do is to put forward sketches, attempts at a representation that is perpetually changing.

As Montaigne warns us, his *Essays* are an always-changing picture of their author, who strives to write in good faith by acknowledging that diversity and change is the main feature of his world. As I argue (Di Carlo, 2020, p. 38) Montaigne lacked a "coherent epistemic framework". With doubt at the core of his own self-reflections, Montaigne could be seen as a Master of Suspicion.

### 2.5 Bacon and the New Science

In this section, I will interpret Francis Bacon (1561-1626) as a Master of Suspicion, whose main political and scientific works contributed to establishing a new scientific paradigm, and I will also draw some links with both Montaigne and Machiavelli. Like the former, Bacon also wrote essays and, like the latter, he too was involved in politics.

Markku Peltonen (1996, p. 2) notes that, like Machiavelli and Montaigne, Bacon too was born into a politically involved family. He was the son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Elizabeth I's Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and his mother, Ann Cooke, was the sister-in-law of William Cecil, chief adviser to the queen. His family ties helped him to become a rising star in early seventeenth-century British politics. After Elizabeth I's long and prosperous reign (1558-1603) , her Scottish cousin, James VI, became the new king of England and Scotland as James I (1603-1625), bringing in a period of change. Bacon rose to political prominence at a time of socio-political unrest: the Gunpowder Plot (1605) had just been thwarted, and Roman Catholic threats to the Crown were frequent. In spite of domestic difficulties, Bacon benefited from this instability. James I, in 1613, he appointed him Attorney General. Immediately afterwards, he became Lord Chancellor, which "was the highest legal position under the crown" (Peltonen, 1996, p. 10). Bacon's career is similar to Machiavelli's and Montaigne's: like them, he held influential offices, which made him an experienced statesman. But, at the same time, Bacon was also interested in redefining the scientific practices of his time, and the way knowledge could be negotiated.

As Clarke and Wilson (2011, pp.1-2) argue, Bacon's new philosophical and political agenda was a response to the radical changes brought about by the Scientific Revolution. Long-standing scientific theories (like geocentrism) were being challenged. However, albeit critical of Aristotelianism, Bacon was not challenging Aristotelianism per se. The target of his critique was the uncritical reception of his oeuvre and, as Charles B. Schmitt (1983, p. 103) argues, it is always possible to further the cause of science "within the traditional Aristotelian framework".

If the world were to proceed in new avenues of knowledge, then the constraints of Aristotelian logic and medieval authorities had to be loosened. Thus, on Bacon's view, a definite and clear agenda

for change is necessary, and the Baconian programme is spelt out in his *Novum Organum* (1620). Jean- François Gauvin (2011, pp. 321-322) draws attention to the word *organum*: it is the Latinised version of the Greek word *organon*, which means "instrument", and it hearkens back to Aristotle's *Organon*, where he expanded on what his logic is all about. Bacon, in order to explain how science and learning should progress, wrote his own "instrument" , a new method of investigation. It is his *Novum Organum* that signals an important change is underway: he is suggesting unmooring one's intellect from old and discredited ways of thinking. If we want to build new knowledge and appreciate the new world, then we need the appropriate tools "to warn the intellect" (Bacon, 2000, p. 33). It is worth re-emphasising the fact that, despite objecting to Aristotle and his works, Bacon, as argued by Schmitt, is still operating in a scholarly setting informed by Aristotelian ideas.

Gauvin (2011, p. 322) is even clearer: this novel scientific approach cannot be appreciated in libraries, whose passive storehouse of discarded knowledge is of no avail, but rather one should step "into a workshop to discover heuristic practices". By claiming the necessity to conduct a first-hand investigation of nature, Bacon (as I have shown in the introduction) steers clear of Montaigne's need for a personal space in his essay *On Solitude*. Solitude will, on Bacon's account, do more harm than good.

Bacon holds that humankind cannot know and learn in a proper way, if it does not study the way things actually are, and if it simply follows tradition and bias. This is the reason why terms like "superstition" and "idolatry" are recurrent in Bacon's writings. Like the Protestant reformers who had fiercely attacked any form of idolatry, Bacon aims to do the same in science. Science can only progress provided that it is free from prejudices (Jalobeanu, 2012, p.210). And Bacon defines such prejudices as *idola*, the images of traditions which function as "false ideas that prevent us from gaining access to the truth and achieving a more full and accurate understanding of nature" (Dror, 2009, 94). Stephen Gaukroger (2001, p. 205) contends that the main purpose of Bacon's philosophy is to find a way to access minds that are "chocked and overgrown" as a result of the influence of *idola*. Bacon identifies four main category of knowledge errors:

1. *Idola tribus* (Idols of the Tribe): The *tribus,* to which Bacon refers, is humankind. According to Itiel Dror (2009, p. 95), Bacon's "Idols of the Tribe" are so defined because they are inherent in human nature, something that we will never be able to eliminate completely. According to Matthew Sharpe (2019, p. 38), such idols equate with what we usually define as "confirmation bias". We, as human beings, always make the same mistakes, as we see things "distorted by our own mental processes". Challenging the *Idola tribus* thus entails that we engage in critical self-reflection about our very own natures.

2. *Idola specus* (Idols of the Cave): By "Idols of the Cave", Bacon defines all those errors produced by education and customs or, as Dror notes, "are a function of nurture" (2009, p. 99). Thus, the ways we reason, perceive, or decide are, unavoidably, the product of our upbringing, the "Idols of the Cave". Furthermore, the image of the cave is a reminder of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where the dwellers of the cave *cannot* understand that the images on the walls are their own shadows. In the same way the people in the cave are intellectually trapped, so is humankind (cf. Hartmann, 2015). Challenging the *idola specus* means questioning the soundness of our formal and social education.

3. *Idola fori* (Idola of the Market): If an overhaul of learning is necessary, then, Bacon contends, the underlying structure of our natural language has to change as well. Jaap Maat (2011, p. 287) argues that the idols of the market are, by far, the most problematic to challenge, on the grounds that human language is modelled in such a way that errors and misunderstandings frequently arise. David Hawkes (2001, p. 34) concludes that there is a disjunction between what human beings mean and what they actually manage to communicate in their linguistic transactions. Language is the product of human idolatry, to wit the unquestionable acceptance of tradition. Therefore, challenging the *idola fori* means finding better, clearer ways of expressing our knowledge.

4. *Idola theatri* (Idola of the Theatre): According to Gaukroger and Hetherington (2019), these idols are the product of past theories which act, as it were, like theatrical performances, so much entrenched in our mind that we do not even realise it. Sharpe (2019, p. 42) claims that *idola theatri* are "[…] the established, competing, philosophical, and theological systems that have accumulated and been handed down to us since antiquity". These are myths and tales which, once they have asserted their influence on science, make the pursuit of knowledge impossible and unattainable. And, for Bacon, such tales and traditions amount to Platonism and Aristotelianism, the "dogmatists" (Neto, 2011, p. 230). It is important to note that Bacon was critical of Aristotelianism and Platonism. However, this does not mean that he totally rejected the Aristotelianism and Platonism. Bacon's *Novum Organon* is called after Aristotle's *Organon,* the collection of his works on logic. Plato's Allegory of the Cave, the impossibility of grasping reality as long as they remain in the cave (or, more loosely, until people do not realise their bias) could have influenced Bacon's *idola specus* (cf. Locatelli, 2018, p. 163-164).

Like religion, even science is plagued by idolatry and the blind acceptance of long-standing traditions. Science can be better served by eliminating all the traditions that have made human beings' minds unsound and impractical; hence his trailblazing and pioneering method based on his *Novum Organum,* the "new instrument", which is designed in such a way to liberate the intellect from the constraints of dogmatic Aristotelianism. Thus, the *Novum Organum* spells out a novel agenda for scientific progress based on smashing previous dogmas. The metaphor of this new epoch of change is depicted in the very cover of the *Organum*: a ship ready to leave the sheltering harbour on a voyage of discovery. The cover also has a verse from the Old Testament Book of Daniel: "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased", which serves as an aphorism of discovery.

Bacon's novel scientific approach required a structure, a plan, a map to guide us into unknown territories; this is why Bacon drew on aphorisms, which are clear, concise, and detached in nature (Birch and Hooper, 2012, p. 1254). Recently, Guido Giglioni has re-emphasised the need to dislodge the influence of the *idola* According to Giglioni (2020, p. 21) "the mind, abandoned to itself and its own devices, needs a methodological and epistemological help […]. If one wants to lay new

foundation, then one is confronted with a hostile, unsuitable and difficult enterprise". In order to design a thorough scientific blueprint, significant effort will have to be made to achieve the result as there are obstacles and problems, that is to say the *idola*.

Whilst Bacon had committed himself to effecting viable progress in science during a time of significant change, his political and literary works too reflected such epochal changes. Like Montaigne, Bacon wrote his own *Essays*, which went through three editions (1507, 1612, and 1625). It is likely that this self-reflective literary genre appealed to Bacon for the same reasons why Montaigne used it. Montaigne's *Essays* started to circulate in England in 1603, thanks to the translation by John Florio. Martin Dzelzainis (2003, p. 236), however, argues that Bacon had already become acquainted with the essay, because he was "a member of the entourage of Sir Amias Paulet, the English ambassador of the French court". It is worth revisiting the nature of the Montaignian essay to show that its style and approach are reflected in the Baconian essay. Thompson (2018) notes the essay became to be regarded as a blank page that has to be rewritten and reconsidered because life is a work in progress, and it is therefore inappropriate to reflect on life and nature within pre-existing and rigid schemata of knowledge.

This applies to Bacon's blueprint for a scientific revolution, which is based on re-organising one's knowledge the moment all superimposed traditions and prejudices have been overcome. Thus, the essay is the practical tool that suits Bacon's agenda for change. At the same time, the fluid and speculative nature of the essay is suited to political reflections on the ever-evolving nature of politics.

In the 1625 edition, the readers were alerted to a significant change, as the term "counsels", accompanied by the adjectives "civil" and "moral" had become part of the title. Thanks to his French stay, Bacon was familiar with the genre of the counsel, which had been popularised in France by the Italian diplomat and philosopher Francesco Guicciardini. Guicciardini's key work, *Ricordi*, is usually translated into English as *Counsels* or *Reflections*. Unlike Montaigne's *Essays*, which had not been written for a political purpose, the Baconian essay also has an advisory and political nature (cf. Dzelzainis, 2010, p. 332).

Annalisa Ceron draws parallels between Baconian philosophy and Machiavellian realism. Many of Bacon's *Essays* address concerns that had already been extensively expanded on by Machiavelli in both *The Prince* and *Discourses*. In his essay *Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates,* Bacon echoes Machiavelli's emphasis on public involvement. He, like Machiavelli, "did not limit himself to advocating the primacy of an active participatory life but went as far as to say that the public good is of greater value than individual good" (Ceron, 2016, p. 208).

*The Prince* influenced Bacon's *Essays*. Both thinkers emphasised the importance of cunning and deceit, as Machiavelli does in the 18th chapter of *The Prince* and on which Bacon expands in his Essay 22, titled *Of Cunning*. In the same chapter, Machiavelli (2005, p. 61) maintains that leaders should heed qualities like mercifulness, trustworthiness, or reliability, but leaders should often pretend to "observe them is useful". Machiavelli (2005, p. 62) makes a significant point by arguing that very few people "touch upon what you are". Bacon (1985, p. 196) argues that there are "many wise men that have secrets hearts and transparent countenances". Machiavelli and Bacon make the same argument: candid and trustworthy faces do not mean honesty.

Bacon's claim for an epistemic and political radical change hearkens back to the Luhmannan notion of the insult. According to Moeller (2018, p. 28), on Luhmann's view, three thinkers had insulted humankind by negating its vanity, that is to say Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud. Copernicus's heliocentrism negated the main assumption underlying Humanism, *viz.* that human beings are the measure of all things (the cosmological insult); Darwin's evolutionism negated the assumption that humankind is the crown of Creation (the biological insult) and, finally, Freud negated the rationality of human beings, because they are preyed on by irrational drives (the psychological insult). Bacon fits into this category of the insult. This is the case because his approach to science is predicated on the fact that gaining knowledge cannot be merely based on replicating the bias of tradition and prejudice. Like Luhmann's three thinkers, Bacon "insults" human agency by showing it is imprisoned by prejudice. Therefore, the rejection of false knowledge through critical reflection and rigorous textual study of the actual world is an important requirement to act as a Master of Suspicion.

The Baconian revolution is not limited to science, but it also included politics and morality. Bacon, like Montaigne, draws on the same assumptions: life is unstable, and therefore it requires a fluid literary form i.e. the essay, which is an attempt, a work in progress, in critical self-reflection and reflection on the world.

Bacon "insults" humankind, because he rejects an inherited set of ideas that have trapped our thinking, *the idola*. Bacon can be considered a Master of Suspicion because he mistrusts unquestioned epistemic traditions and biases.

Like Ricœur's Masters of Suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), even the early modern Masters of Suspicion (Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton) operated at a time of socio-political and intellectual upheaval. And, like the Ricœurian Masters of Suspicion, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, and Milton questioned the ways one could describe their politics, their inner world, and the scientific background of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

## Chapter 3

## John Milton: Political and Socio-Cultural Context

The aim of this chapter is to sketch the context within which Milton lived and which influenced his thinking. Chapter 4 will focus on how this context influenced his development as a Master of Suspicion, but first I want to outline key events and shifts within Milton's environment. This chapter is divided into four main sections: a brief biographical sketch of Milton's life, the political events and upheavals in Milton's time, the social and cultural shifts taking place, and life at Cambridge University, where Milton studied. The fourth section will draw all the above into a timeline spanning Milton's life.

### 3.1 John Milton: A Brief Biography

This section provides a sketch of Milton's life, his family background, his schooling, his travels, and his jobs. The purpose of this thesis is not to write a biography, but to show how his context, and his ideas help to make him a Master of Suspicion. Chapter 4 will elaborate on this. But first, a brief background

John Milton was born in London in 1608, the son of the composer John Milton Sr. (1562?-1647) and Sarah Jeffrey (1572?- 1637). His father John had studied music at Oxford University and had been trained as a chorister. Whilst in Oxford, John Sr. had converted to Protestantism, and his father, the devout Roman Catholic Richard Milton, disinherited him when he found out his son had begun to read the Bible in English. As a consequence, John Milton Sr. relocated to London in 1583, and became a scrivener. Very little is known about Sarah Jeffrey. She was the daughter of the merchant tailor Paul Jeffrey and, probably, she married John Milton either in 1599 or 1600 (Lewalski, 2000, pp. 1-2; Corns and Campbell, 2008, pp. 7-8).

Young Milton's religious education was characterised by the strong influence of Richard Stock, the minister of the church in which he worshipped, All Hallows. Stock was a devout Puritan, who requested that his parishioners should read the Bible in English and required a strict attendance

at his Sunday sermons. As well as being a very strict clergyman, Stock was very critical of Roman Catholics and Jesuits. Even though Milton was to reject Stock's religious conservative views in his future intellectual life, his critique of Roman Catholicism stayed with him and influenced his writings (Corns and Campbell, 2008, p. 16).

Given the affluence of his father, John Milton was tutored by Thomas Young (1587?- 1655), a Scottish Presbyterian recommended by Stock. As a Presbyterian, Young was able to instil religious radicalism into a very young Milton (he was ten), but also taught him Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. After Young's departure in 1620, Milton learnt French and Italian (Lewalski, 2000, pp. 4-6, Corns and Campbell, 2008, p. 16).

In 1625 Milton went up to Christ's College, Cambridge. It was at Cambridge where he met Roger Williams, one of the keenest supporters of religious toleration in the early modern age. Williams taught Milton Dutch in exchange for lessons in Hebrew. Beside Williams, Stock's hatred towards Roman Catholicism made Milton reconsider his view on the Roman Catholic Church. It is true that Milton, as a committed Protestant, opposed Roman Catholicism and its tenets. However, it is fair to say that his understanding of Roman Catholicism is more nuanced. Whilst he opposed Roman Catholicism, Milton is ready to accept practising Roman Catholics. This can only happen if "the scriptures were read and discussed" (Hadfield, 2007, p. 199). If Roman Catholics were persuaded that reading the Bible is a beneficial thing to their salvation, then Protestants should not oppose them.

One of the most terrible events in Milton's younger life was the outbreak of plague which erupted in 1626. As Ryan J. Hackenbracht (2011, p. 403) notes, the plague "was one of the most severe outbreaks of plagues in the seventeenth century". Even though the apocalyptic import of the plague emerges in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674) and *Elegy III* (1626), the plague is not a key feature of his political philosophy, the focus of this thesis, it nevertheless contributed to a time of great upheaval, which is a characteristic of the background of Masters of Suspicion.

From 1638 to 1639, Milton travelled through France and Italy. Whilst in Paris, he was able to meet the famed Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius who, like Williams, was a supporter of toleration. As well as endorsing toleration, Grotius influenced Milton for his opposition to monarchical rule, a stance that Milton had started to develop in England under the rule of Charles I. In Florence, Milton had the chance to read Machiavelli and to meet one of the most illustrious victims of the Inquisition, the famous astronomer Galileo Galilei who, despite being affected by blindness, had been put under house arrest (Lewalski 2000, pp. 90-94).

Milton, however, had to abruptly interrupt his journey because of the Civil War which had erupted in England in 1639 amongst the Royalists and the Puritans, who supported a republican form of government and who were led by the charismatic Oliver Cromwell. Milton sided with the latter, and began to write his most important political works. In 1642, he authored *The Reason of Church-Government urged Against Prelaty*, a very strong attack against the hierarchical Church of England which, on Milton's view, was reminiscent of Roman Catholicism In 1644, he wrote *Areopagitica*, a tract in defence of free speech (Sauer, 2014, p. 199).

In 1649, Oliver Cromwell appointed Milton Secretary for Foreign Tongues. In this important job Milton had to translate the English foreign correspondence into Latin, and to act as censor and propagandist of Cromwell's republican regime. Cromwell's death in 1658 and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 under Charles II (1660-1685) meant Milton had to go into hiding. However, thanks to a general pardon granted by Charles II, he came back into the public arena and wrote his masterpiece, *Paradise Lost* (1667, followed by a minor revision in 1674).

Milton became completely blind in 1652. It is at this stage that Milton married for the third time. His first wife was Mary Powell, whom he married in 1642 and who died in 1652. The couple had four children: Deborah, Anne, Mary, and John. In 1656, he married Katherine Woodcock, who

died in 1658. Milton, in 1663, married Elizabeth Minshull. Milton died of kidney failure in 1674, aged 65.

### 3.2 Political Context

The aim of this section is to give a general account of the political context in which Milton operated. Given the limited scope of the thesis, I will focus the main shifts taking place in seventeenth-century England, focussing on the transition from the Tudor dynasty to the Stuart dynasty, the Civil War, and the Bishops' War. It will set out to prove why Milton started to question the political and religious imbrications of his time and why such an analysis could show why it could be fruitful to interpret Milton as an Early Modern Master of Suspicion.

In 1603, Elizabeth I died. Her death meant the end of a prosperous and long reign and, above all, of a stable reign. Her successor was her Scottish cousin James VI Stuart (1603-1625), who reunited Scotland and England under his rule, and became James I. Whilst in Scotland, James I had written two key works of political theories, *viz. The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and *Basilikon Doron* (1599). James, as Pauline Crofts (2003, p. 132) notes, outlines in both works the ideological and political framework of the Stuart dynasty by relying upon the political advice provided by the Bible.

In *True Law of Free Monarchy*, James I illustrates the doctrine of the divine right of the kings. Obedience to kings is necessary because they wield power above humankind. They act as representatives of God on Earth. Unlike *The True Law of Free Monarchy,* which is a more practical and pragmatic work, James's *Basilikon Doron* ("The King's Gift") is more personal and private but reiterates the same argument as *The True Law*: kingly authority is from God, and therefore it should not be questioned. In religious matters, the monarch endorsed an Episcopalian policy. By "Episcopalian" it is meant that the ecclesiology of the Anglican Church is a *via media* ("middle way"). According to Dewey D. Wallace (2003, p. 2), the Church of England would be a *via media*

"between Rome and Geneva". Therefore, on Wallace's account, the Church of England has both Protestant practices (like the rejection of transubstantiation, and the possibility for clergymen to get married) and Roman Catholic ones (like the retention of bishops). And it is via the bishops that James I could actually discharge his duties as head of the national church. As we shall see, the Puritans took a very stern view on this mix of Protestant and Roman Catholic practices because the Church of England had to be more in tune with a Calvinist ecclesiology.

However, James I had to face a great deal of polarisation which had simmered during the long reign of Elizabeth I. As Corns and Campbell (2008, p. 3) note, beside the national church, there were many breakaway groups, one of them being the Puritans. The main points of contention between the state church and the Puritans lay in matters of worship and polity. First and foremost, the Puritans opposed an Episcopalian polity, endorsing a Presbyterian one, whereby congregations were self-governed. Furthermore, they opposed any elaborate and ornate priestly attire. This was the beginning of the so-called vestments controversy, because Puritan-orientated clergymen refused to wear a square cap, a surplice, and a white linen gown with drooping sleeves. In their view, such garments were a feature of Roman Catholic priestly attire, and should therefore be rejected (cf. Gunther, 2014, p. 189). Milton opposed such practices and, as we shall see in the section on "The Political Milton" he was a vocal critic of Charles I and his policies.

Despite the religious infighting, James I was very latitudinarian, which accommodated and helped to diffuse tensions. He was not averse to striking a middle ground. He could favour "both the Calvinist James Montagu and the anti-Calvinist Lancelot Andrews, who was a patron of preaching, yet questioned excessive preaching, who castigated Puritanism but tolerated moderate puritans, who could denounce the Pope as Antichrist, yet seek confessional unity" (Campbell and Corns, 2008, p. 14). Crofts (2003, p. 159) notes that "his inclusive policy over appointments produced a broadly based, theologically flexible church, in which it was tacitly accepted that contentious issues which might breach the king's carefully established harmony must be put aside".

The most unsettling event during James's reign was the Gunpowder Plot (1605). English Roman Catholics and Jesuits, led by Robert Catesby, attempted to blow up the House of Lord during the State Opening of Parliament on 5 November 1605. The aim of the plotters was to kill the Protestant James. Elizabeth. Fraser (1996, p. 195) argues that the aim of the plotters was "to cause an uprising in the Midlands to coincide with the explosion in London and at this point secure Elizabeth's accession as a puppet queen. She would then be brought up as a Catholic and later married to a Catholic bridegroom". The plot was discovered and the conspirators tortured to death. The Gunpowder Plot contributed to increasing uncertainty and upheaval, fuelling more religious tensions.

The death of James I 1625 (the same year in which Milton went to study at Cambridge) and the accession to the throne of his son Charles I (1625-1649) transformed the peaceful and tolerant climate into a long period of clash and, ultimately, war. Mark Kishlansky (2014, p. 16) observes that Charles lived at a time of catastrophes, and he brought those catastrophes on himself. He notes that Charles "had a stubborn and authoritarian temperament and was both secretive and impatient". However, as Kishlansky (2014, pp. 83-84) goes on to argue, the most contentious issue at that time was religious ceremonies and how the Church of England, under Charles, had become too similar to the Roman Catholic Church.

The standard form of Anglican worship had become controversial. Celestina Savonius-Wroth (2022, pp. 26-27) argues that "the puritan and presbyterian insistence on a sober, iconoclastic, scripture-centered piety entailed a rejection of […] ceremonies established by the law in the Book of Common Prayer and all of their reverberations in vernacular culture". This is the reason why Puritan congregations disdained such practices as kneeling for communion or bowing at every mention of Jesus's name. The appointment of William Laud as archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 worsened an already tense relationship between Puritans and Charles I. Laud's ceremonialism and sacramentalism attracted a great deal of dispute, and the Puritans started to believe that Charles had Roman Catholic

tendencies, especially since his marriage in 1625 to princess Henrietta Maria, the daughter of the Roman Catholic French king Henry IV.

Peter Donald (2004, pp. 45-46) argues that problems for Charles intensified in 1637, when he and archbishop Laud tried to impose the Book of Common Prayer, the Anglican liturgy, on Scotland. For the most part, the Scottish worshipped in the Presbyterian Church, which had been established in the sixteenth century and whose ecclesiology was Calvinist. Laud's and Charles I's decision escalated the clash with Scotland. The Scottish would brook no compromise with the king, as an Episcopalian government of the Presbyterian Church would not be tolerated. In 1638, the members of the Church of Scotland gathered in a national covenant in opposition to Charles's decree; hence, the name 'Covenanters' for all those who rebelled against the king. The Covenanters made clear they would not tolerate what they thought to be inappropriate "innovations" (Mackie, 1978, pp. 203-204). This signalled the beginning of the first Bishops' War, but it did not last long because both the king and the Scots did not want to engage in a long fight; both parties agreed on the Pacification of Berwick in August 1639.

Charles I had decided on a pacification because Parliament, in England, would not fund any of his conflicts. But the situation aggravated in 1640, when Charles I had to pay war expenses to Scotland. Parliament refused to give him any more money, and impeached Charles's key ally, archbishop Laud (Fissel, 1994, pp. 269, 278). Meanwhile, the political situation in England had become unsustainable because of Charles's stern demeanour and autocratic policies, whereby Parliament was excluded. One of the many adversaries of Charles I turned out to be the fiery Oliver Cromwell, MP for Huntingdon. This is how J.C. Davis (2001, p. 65) aptly describes Cromwell's background:

> Born in provincial obscurity into a junior branch of a family whose social and material standing was slipping from a position of regional dominance, Cromwell was without the advantages of great wealth, and lacked any training or worthwhile experience in the law, politics or arms.

Davis (2001, p. 15-16) claims that what propelled Cromwell's career was his encounter with Puritan ideas in Cambridge between 1616 and 1617 where, in Sidney Sussex College, he was asked to "abhor Popery and all heresies, superstitions and errors". What we know is that Cromwell, according to Davis, cast himself as a new Moses ready to lead the Israelites, i.e. lead the Puritans out of the Roman Catholic realm. Cromwell was undoubtedly a pious man, but he was a political pragmatist. On Davis's reading of Cromwell (2001, p. 140), such pragmatism was necessary.

> Especially in times of political crisis, politicians operate in a complex and rapidly changing world where consistency may be an unaffordable luxury, where one may be called upon not only to reprioritize the desirable but to face the tragedy of choice between evils. In so far as Cromwell operated in such a context from the mid-1640s, we must surely adjust our standard of judgement to, at least, acknowledge its constraints upon him.

Cromwell faced difficult choices. On the one hand, he was the deeply religious MP from the English countryside who loathed the rituals and the ceremonies of the national church. On the other, in political matters he had to make difficult decisions at a time of upheaval. Thus, confronted with the autocratic and rebellious Charles I, who had defied Parliament and the laws of England, Cromwell decided that the king had to die. So Charles was beheaded in 1649, and Cromwell took over from him, becoming the Lord Protector of the republican *Interregnum*.

It is important to note that Cromwell's rule was not different from Charles's autocratic rule. Austin Woolrych (2003, p. 64) emphasises this point by concluding that:

> No man played a larger part than Cromwell in destroying the vestiges of legitimate authority between 1649 and 1653. He would never have become head of state if he had not been the general of a powerful army, and the only body that gave any meaningful assent to his elevation, at least until 1657, was his Council of Officers. Army officers played a conspicuous part in both central and local government throughout the Protectorate, which never ceased to depend on the army for its survival.

Cromwell's Protectorate concluded with his death in 1658. His son Richard's attempt to revive a form of republican government in England was short-lived because, in 1660, Charles I's son, Charles (1660-1658), restored the monarchy and became king as Charles II.

In summary, the political context during Milton's lifetime is characterised by change and contestation: the end of Elizabeth I's long and stable reign; the growing rift between the Roman Catholics and Puritans; the re-emergence of clashes between England and Scotland, and the increasing tension between the king and Parliament. John Milton grew up and experienced the continuous strife between the Church of England and its opposers, either Roman Catholics or Puritans. As we shall see, it was amidst this time of disarray and chaos that Milton wrote tracts against the monarchy. However, as I have noted above, Milton began to question the republican government and this caused him to reconsider his political allegiance.

### 3.3 Cultural Context

This section aims to outline the societal and scientific background in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. Significant changes were brought about by the invention of the printing press, the Reformation, and the most important cultural achievement of the Reformation in England, the King James Bible.

As Febvre and Martin (1976, p. 51) argue, the invention of the printing press consisted in "secret processes". Such secret processes were being undertaken by the German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg who, in 1439, was hailed as the inventor of the printing press. The printing press, as is famously defined by Elizabeth Eisenstein (2005), is the agent of change which was bound to radically change Europe and its socio-cultural transactions.

The printing press became the way whereby the German monk Martin Luther spearheaded the Reformation. Before I describe how the printing press helped to spread Protestant doctrines across Europe, some background information on Luther is required. Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk

who had been racking himself to find out how one can achieve salvation. The moment he read the Pauline Epistle to the Roman he realised that no good work (like alms-giving, sung masses, or praying for the souls in Purgatory) could help the faithful to obtain salvation, but faith alone (*sola fide*) in Jesus Christ's atonement for humankind on the Cross was the only way to salvation. Luther's ideas greatly impacted on the life of lay people and clergy. Lay people could read the Bible in the vernacular without the intermediation of ecclesiastical authorities. It is important to note that members of the clergy had lost the sacramental aura they had had since the Middle Ages and could get married. Luther himself married Katherina von Bora, a runaway nun, and ministered in Wittenberg in the final years of his life (MacCulloch, 2010, p. 1636).

Whilst Luther had understood that good works could not lead to salvation in his monastery, it was only when he wrote his 95 Theses that his soteriological arguments was able to reach a wider audience. Luther wrote and posted his theses to his archbishop, Albert of Mainz, as a protest against the sale of indulgences to build St Peter's basilica in Rome on 31 October 1517. Edward Peters (2008, p. 13) argues that indulgences are "a way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for sins". The sale of indulgences contradicted the teachings of the Gospel, because no good works are required for salvation. So, why did the 95 Theses, a document which had been written and then posted to Luther's archbishop, become a crucial element in the spread of Protestant ideas? This was thanks to the printing press. Peter Marshall (2017, p. 42) argues that "There was a (single) printer in Wittenberg, Johan Rhau-Grunenberg. He operated out of premises in the basement of the Augustinian monastery, and was well known to Luther". Thanks to this German printer, the Lutheran protest against the Roman Catholic Church caused a great deal of sensation in Europe, changing the lives and religious allegiances of many people, and was to change the history of England in a profound way. Thus, as Eisenstein (2005, p. 164) argues, the Reformation was the first mass phenomenon to benefit from the aid of the printing press.

Lutheran precepts had made a lasting influence on Francis Bacon. Albeit writing after Luther's death, Francis Bacon admired what he had done. As we shall see later in this thesis, Bacon praised any way wherewith learning could be advanced. Therefore, it goes without saying that Luther's vernacular Bible meant increasing knowledge of Scriptures and, more loosely, it allowed congregations to be educated. Bacon (2008, p. 138) claims that

> Martin Luther […] was enforced to awake all antiquity, and to call former times to his succors to make a party against the present time; so that the ancient authors, both in divinity and humanity, […] began generally to be read and revolved.

Bacon, as a philosopher and a senior civil servant, acknowledged that Luther's work was to be conducive to a rediscovery of learning and, as a consequence, he believed that the gaining of knowledge should be reformed to catch up with the changes of his time.

It was during the reign of Henry VIII that Lutheran theological arguments were disseminated in England. This marked the beginning of the English Reformation. The reason why the opposition to the Roman Catholic Church started to take hold during the reign of Henry VIII was because he wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon, because he was in love with Ann Boleyn. Clement VIII, the Pope, did not grant Henry his sought-after divorce and, as a consequence, Henry VIII, through the Act of Supremacy in 1534, appointed himself the head of the newly created Church of England.

Henry's breach with Rome was a pivotal moment in the history of the printing press in England. In 1534, the theologian William Tyndale translated the New Testament into English. Tyndale's translation became the site of controversy with the Roman Catholic Church for some of his translations. Moynahan (2003, p. 72) argues that the Church objected to Tyndale translating the word *ekklesia* as "congregation" instead of "church". Tyndale's philological work was regarded by the Roman Catholic hierarchy as a threat to its own authority, because "to change these words was to

strip the Church hierarchy of its pretensions to be Christ's terrestrial representative, and to award this honor to individual worshippers who made up each congregation".

However, the most important achievements of the English Reformation are the Book of Common Prayer (1547-1552) and the King James Bible, also known as the "Authorized Version" (1611). The Book of Common Prayer is the Anglican liturgy designed by Thomas Cranmer, who had become archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII. The import of the Book of Common Prayer is based on the impact it had on English. This is how MacCulloch (2010, p. 1669) summarises its cultural import:

> The words of his Prayer Book have been recited by English-speakers far more frequently than the speeches and soliloquies of Shakespeare. Fragments remain even with the unchurched: 'for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part', or from another resonant moment in human experience, 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'.

Beside the Book of Common Prayer, the Authorized Version of the Bible was to become another important document of early modern England. Corns and Campbell (2008) argues that James I, unlike his predecessor Elizabeth I, liked theological debates, and wanted to give the Puritans the opportunity to voice their own opinions on ecclesiastical policies. This is how Campbell (2010, p. 33) summarises the situation:

> A petition said to have contained more than 1,000 signatures (and so known as the millenary petition) was drawn up and presented to the King; it centred on issues such as "popish" ceremonies and vestments, married clergy, the requirement that clergy be educated, and the grounding of doctrine in Scripture rather than authority of the clergy and the tradition of the Church. James loved theological debate, and decided to convene a conference for which the agenda would be the millenary petition.

A new translation of the Bible was something James supported both for personal and state reasons. The new translation would encourage debate and would also entrench James's position as both the head of the church and of the state. The translation of the Bible instantiates a more practical approach to ruling a state. Government, as I will show in the section "The Political Milton", had become a science, an independent field of knowledge with its own bibliography. Important political treatises, which were predicated on more practical political strategies, started to be published around this time. Campbell (2010, p. 35) is right in underscoring the political meaning of the new biblical translation, because

> A Bible emerging from a conference convened by the King and that would be dedicated to him was in effect an endorsement of the idea of a monarchical national church of which King James was the head. That is why the dedication to the King describes him as the 'principal mover and author' of the translation; indeed, the phrase sets up a parallel with God, the 'first mover' and the 'author of all things', so eliding obedience to God with obedience to the king, and ratifying the claim of James to be king by divine right

I would argue that it is important to emphasise the religious controversies of sixteenth and seventeenth-century England because such events shaped the religious and political ideas of Milton. At the same time, though, such ideas were subject to scrutiny and, as we shall see, Milton would not cling on to any specific political or religious allegiance because the socio-political landscape of his time was ever-changing and committing to any political ideology or religious cause would be of no avail.

### 3.4 Life at Cambridge University

Early modern England was an age of great upheaval from a cultural and religious point of view. This is also reflected in the two most important universities at that time, i.e. Oxford and Cambridge. Paul Rée emphasises the differences between the two universities. On Rée's account, political and religious allegiances account for the difference between the two main universities in England: whilst

Oxford was loyal to the monarchy, Cambridge was “a stronghold for Puritans and parliamentarians” (2019, pp. 45-46).

This dichotomy had significant implications: students coming from Oxford were to embrace the religious and socio-political policies of Charles I and of the archbishop of Canterbury William Laud. On the other hand, students from Cambridge would be very alert to the scientific and religious changes that were underway in continental Europe. Rée also notes that many important cultural, religious, and political figures had studied in Cambridge. Thomas Cranmer, the first Anglican archbishop of Canterbury, read humanistic texts at Jesus College in 1515. Thomas Wyatt, the English translator of Seneca, read humanistic texts at St John’s College, and Sir Nicholas Bacon, the father of the philosopher Francis Bacon and Elizabeth I’s Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, read law at Corpus Christi College in 1527. R.H. Helmholtz (1990, pp. 35, 153) also notes that Cambridge had started to refute the status quo and long-standing ideas since the beginning of the Reformation in England. Henry VIII had ordered that the colleges should stop teaching Scholastic philosophy, and bring in new subjects, like Biblical studies and mathematics.

Lewalski (2000, p. 18) also comments on students’ life in Cambridge during Milton’s lifetime. It was a city of around five thousands inhabitants with sixteen colleges, with Arts being the most popular subject amongst students. Cambridge colleges, especially Christ College, trained students to work either in the Civil Service or to start an ecclesiastical career. Christ College was the college that attracted the most controversy, because during Elizabeth I’s reign, non-conformist and Puritan tendencies had emerged. Under James I and his son Charles I, the conflict between royalists and republicans had escalated. This was, in part, because the eminent Puritan theologian William Perkins was a fellow of Christ College from 1584 to 1594, and he disseminated Puritan theology. Another important Puritan theologian was William Ames, who became fellow of Christ College in 1601

Corn and Campbell (2008, p. 30) describes the curriculum at the college in the 17th century. The curriculum had been changed in 1570 and stipulated that " 'the first year shall teach rhetoric, the second and third logic, the fourth shall add philosophy". Lewalski (2000, p. 20) expands on the disciplines which students were supposed to study. Students had to master Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Also, they had to study subjects like politics, classical history, and rhetoric. Being well trained in rhetoric was a key requisite, because students were supposed to defend their own ideas in disputations on logic and metaphysics. In order to challenge Scholasticism and its offshoots, students needed to master rhetoric and this will be important in Milton's academic life because he used those very rhetorical skills to arraign dogmatic Aristotelianism. MacDowell (2020, p. 51) argues that dismantling a very conservative view on Aristotelianism and religious dogmas will allow knowledge to "flourish" again.

## Chapter 4

## The Political Milton

Since this thesis will mostly focus on John Milton's political ideas and political context, this is going to be the longest chapter. In this section, I will consider Milton's political ideas. However, this chapter will not focus upon a detailed exposition of Milton's political philosophy, but it will only expand upon those ideas of shared by both Milton and Machiavelli. In order to chart the influence of Machiavelli on the development of Milton's political thinking, I will identify key ideas that are explored by both thinkers. I will select pertinent extracts from Milton's writing, summarise, and explain his quotes. Afterwards, I will cite from Machiavelli, paraphrase the quotes and draw out the resonances. At the end of this process, I hope I will be able to show how Machiavelli was likely to have influenced Milton's main political ideas and I hope I will be able to show that both Machiavelli and Milton can be categorised as early modern Masters of Suspicion.

With a view to bolstering my argument, I will organise my discussion of the two thinkers into the following main ideas that they seem to have in common. Here are the main ideas that I will argue Machiavelli's writings could have had a bearing upon Milton's works.

### 1. Hardships present opportunities

History documents a society's development, including its hardships, times of upheaval and times of growth and flourishing. Both Machiavelli and Milton focus on historical writings that examine times of hardship and how in such circumstances, certain political leaders emerge. Through their study of history, Milton takes on Machiavelli's idea that hardships in circumstances are a necessary precondition for leading political change.

### 2. Only those with fortitude, seize hardships as opportunities

Milton echoes Machiavelli's recognition that influential political leaders emerge in times of hardships and that only those who are mentally and physically fit, are able to optimise the given conditions for their 'own' political ends. They argue that history shows that countries need redemptive leaders to steer them out of chaos into peace and unity. A sub-theme of this key idea is that political leaders should take head of omens (foretellers of fate) and seize the appropriate opportunities.

**3. Reason of State**

A central theme in both Machiavelli's and Milton's writings is that sometimes political leaders have to act in ways that are cruel and oppressive, but they sanction such behaviour if it has the intention and brings about unity and peace for the whole community. A leader is justified in acting against conventional morality if it ensures the maintenance of the state. Milton echoes Machiavelli's idea that the end, however, should be a morally sound one – peace and unity – but how this is brought about may have to entail unconventional, often, cruel means. Both writers hold that cruelty to an individual is morally acceptable if it ensures the wellbeing of the entire community.

**4. The wellbeing of the community takes precedence over the wellbeing of an individual**

This common feature in Milton and Machiavelli is closely related to the above one. However, whereas the doctrine of Reason of State may entail cruelty, the idea of "the wellbeing of the community takes precedence over the wellbeing of an individual" does not necessarily entail cruelty. This is in line with a general communitarian morality.

**5. To cultivate a great reputation is a political leader's safeguard against potential opposition**

Political leaders want to stay in power. Milton, like Machiavelli, cautions leaders that to do so, they will have to gain the support of their followers through their reputation for fairness and for maintaining peace and unity. They need to rule astutely and wisely. What is acquired through hardships and difficulty by taking virtuous action (seizing the historical circumstances to bring about eventual peace and unity), can then be maintained with little effort (once the loyalty and obedience of the population has been gained). Political leaders should know that their deeds will be recorded for history, so it is in their interests to act with honour.

Both Machiavelli and Milton delve into history for examples of political leadership. But instead of merely extolling their virtues, both writers draw lessons for contemporary and potential political leaders to instantiate. And in Milton's case, I will argue that the lessons drawn are linked to those put forward by Machiavelli. Therefore, virtuous ancient leaders should serve as examples to imitate, rather than merely admire.

### 4.1 Hardships present opportunities

Machiavelli argues that leaders show their *virtù*, their political competence if they want to achieve glory (Wootton, 2018, p. 38-39). Machiavelli retrieved the original meaning of *virtù*: the word has lost its moral underpinning and now, as Hankins (2020, p. 463) argues, virtue means "manly competence", the quality bespeaking a *vir*, "a truly manly man" (Skinner, 2017, p. 142). Therefore, if leaders strive for eternal glory, they should imitate the examples set by historical figures. This is the reason why Machiavelli, for instance, praises Romulus or Moses. Moses showed his *virtù*, his political skills, when he had to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. By recommending a subtle reading of the Bible in *Discourses* II, 30 Machiavelli (2003, p. 711) argues that "anyone who reads the Bible intelligently will see that, in order to advance his laws and institutions, Moses was forced to kill countless men, who were moved to oppose his plans […]. Even religious texts can provide invaluable help to pursue a specific political agenda if it is carefully perused. Montaigne makes a similar point

in his *Essays*. According to the French author (2003, p. 348), a "competent reader can often find in another man's writings perfections other than those which the author knows that he put there, and can endow them with richer senses and meanings". Machiavelli and Montaigne make the same point: literary works can have subtle meanings and it is for equally subtle readers to discern the meaning.

Like Machiavelli, Milton considered history a fecund reservoir of political strategy. Whilst Machiavelli had praised the Bible for providing subtle political advice, Milton suggests looking at mythical stories for solutions to present predicaments. He has determined to bestow "the telling over ev'n of these reputed tales; be it for nothing else but in favour of our English Poets, Rhetoricians, who by thir Art, will now how to use judiciously". Milton's judicious reading of mythical histories is the same as Machiavelli's about perusing the Bible intelligently. Both men remind readers that past figures or mythological tales can define a political agenda. However, it is the contention of this thesis that both mythical stories and actual historical figures can bring about change. Milton looks at the example of Alfred the Great; albeit experiencing a very difficult political situation (England was subjected to Viking raids), Alfred commanded the respect of his subjects by repelling Viking raids and helped his realm to prosper again and pacified it.

Machiavelli does the same with his emphasis on Graeco-Roman and biblical models. However, his long-abiding interest in classical literature especially resurfaced during Machiavelli's exile in the Tuscan countryside after the return of the Medici in Florence. Deanna Shemek (2022, pp. 226-227) shows how his routine in the countryside was mundane and unexcited. Everyday Machiavelli

> checks in daily with the workmen in the woods on his property; strings a few nets for trapping thrushes to eat; finds a spot for some leisurely outdoor reading of Dante, Petrarch, Tibullus, or Ovid; and gathers the latest news while "observing mankind" as he chats with people and makes his way to an inn. He then returns to his house for a simple meal, goes back to the inn to play cards, and finally passes his evenings at home.

Once he is at home, Machiavelli (1996, p. 264) describes how, in the evening, he dedicates himself to reverently studying the past. This is the moment when

> Fitted out appropriately, I step inside the venerable courts of the ancients, were, solicitously received by them, I nourish myself on the food that alone is mine and for which I was born […]; where I am unashamed to converse with them and to question them about the motives for their actions, and they, out of their human kindness, answer me

Machiavelli is beholden to the ancient because they are also a form of solace but, at the same time, they help him to come up with a plan to better scrutinise his circumstances and to design an agenda of change that is based on a contextual knowledge of the past. Sergius Kodera (2022, p. 40) argues that the Machiavelli "derives some gratification from his private and imaginary staging of kingly audiences with long-dead leaders of state". In the same way as Milton did with the legendary tales from the Middle Ages and the deeds of Alfred, Machiavelli drew an almost reverential inspiration from the past in order to innovate decision-making.

Machiavelli and Milton show that difficult circumstances can be a springboard for successful political action. Even though the Israelites had been enslaved in Egypt, Moses was able to free them because he had the necessary skills to navigate such a situation. The same happened to Alfred in England; confronted with Viking raids, Alfred defeated them and therefore showed his *virtù*, his political competence. The leadership of such figures was also a stark reminder of the situation in Italy and England: both countries needed a political figure who could lead them out of chaos and re-establish order.

This discussion adheres to McQueen's argument (2018) of a redemptive figure for Italy, but the same could be said of England. Italy, at that moment, had no unifying political figures. The Vatican and the many states of the Peninsula were fighting against each other in pursuit of power; hence the need for a redemptive figure hailed by Machiavelli in the last chapter of the *Prince*. England, confronted with the chaos of the Civil War, needed a unifying leader who could lead them

out of the predicament. Milton had identified such a figure in Alfred the Great, the king who restored order after years of fighting. Like the Old Testament for Machiavelli, even historical records can help to establish a strong leadership. Not only *The History of Britain* was Milton commenting on medieval English history but I would maintain that he was also sketching the type of leadership England needed to start afresh after the war and the unsuccessful Puritan Commonwealth. Moses (and many others) and Alfred are "armed prophets" because they were able to establish new prosperous orders under difficult circumstances. Under Alfred's rule, Britain prospered and Moses guaranteed a new political regime for the Israelites once they had left Egypt.

**4.2 Only those with fortitude see hardships as opportunities**

As I have highlighted in the previous section, both Machiavelli and Milton lived at a time of disarray. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* and *Discourses* at a time when Italy was disunited and ravaged by endless internecine wars. Milton was one of the witnesses of the Civil War in England. Both Machiavelli and Milton needed a messianic figure to free their respective countries. Machiavelli, in Chapter 26 of *The Prince*, desperately sought help from a political messiah who could redeem a beleaguered Italy. His prince has to do anything that is necessary to lay more solid foundations for a future Italian state.

Milton's plea for help is no different: the English are subjected to the despotic rule of Charles I, which had been causing dissatisfaction and trouble amongst elected representatives and intellectuals. As such, Milton expects a new leader, one who will be able to free England from the strictures of unchecked royal power. Such a leader, therefore, is one who is supposed to implement all the measures that are necessary to lay new foundations for England. I would maintain that the context of abnormality and suspension of law in which Milton's leader operate resembles Schmitt's notion of the state of exception. For Schmitt (2006, p. 5 ), "sovereign is the one who decides on the exception". Milton's England was divided and had been torn by religious and political conflict. This

is the reason why Alfred, in Milton's *History*, is ready to do anything, like hanging criminals, to show that he is the leader England needed. Like the Schmittian sovereign, Alfred took all the necessary measures to establish a political regime against the background of socio-political disruption.

This point reinforces the idea that Masters of Suspicion emerge at a time of disarray; Machiavelli and Milton desperately need a new political figure, one who will bring new ideas into the open and will be able to catch up with a difficult background. Albeit sympathetic to Borgia's deeds, Machiavelli had not been able to find a figure able to unify and pacify the many Italian potentates of his time. Milton's Alfred is the figure who could provide a new model of sovereignty in the midst of a political crisis.

### 4.3 Reason of State

I would maintain that the doctrine of Reason of State accounts for an important development that occurred in politics between the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Before I go on to explain the bearing of Reason of State on Milton's work, I will provide a theoretical framework to understand what this new political doctrine involves. Michel Foucault in his lecture course *Security, Territory, Population* (1978-1979) provided, in broad strokes, what Reason of State is. He (2007, p.238) argues that:

> *Raison d'état* (Reason of State, emphasis in the original) is the type of rationality that will allow the maintenance and the preservation of the state once it has been founded, in its daily functioning, in its everyday management. […] nature and state, the two great references of the knowledge […] and techniques given to the modern Western man are finally constituted, or finally separated.

According to Foucault, therefore, the State is a political technology which started to emerge when the management of a territory had begun to be independent of moral concerns. In Foucault's estimation,

the State started to be an independent unit of analysis in the early modern age because it was at that time that the government of the population began to emerge as a matter of political interest.

Thomas Lemke's account of Reason of State (2019, p.164) goes more in depth:

> Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political theory defines reason of state as a specific art (or technology) corresponding to certain rules that, instead of representing custom or tradition, belong to the realm of rational knowledge […].

Mark Greengrass (2014, p. 700) emphasises this new status of politics as a technique of government. Politics "was emerging as an academic discipline in its own right, and with a literature to match". Government, as Foucault, Lemke, and Greengrass argue, is now independent of any "custom and tradition" with its own "literature" for the "maintenance and preservation" of states. This new political rationale, as is described by Foucault, Lemke, and Greengrass, questions Michael Oakeshott's assessment of rationalist politics in his essay *Rationalism in Politics*. Oakeshott (1962, p. 22), I would maintain, is wrong in arguing that the wide range of works on the diverse techniques of wielding power contain "only what it is possible to put into a book […]. […] their knowledge does not extend beyond the written word which they have read mechanically- it generates ideas in their heads but no tastes in their mouth". Readers should carefully consider Oakeshott's argument. This is the case because, in the context of the early modern age, wielding power is not abstract activity, but one that requires competence and experience. Machiavelli's *Prince* is based upon real-life experiences. Oakeshott's contention disregards the idea that such books were written to teach politicians how to act. Leaders have not learnt mechanically and robotically, but they are personally involved in making decisions.

I believe that three authors bolster the independence of politics. Government is now free from religious constraints and has become a rational and secular technique. Foucault, Lemke and

Greengrass claim that a new decision-making process has emerged, which questions long-standing governmental strategies. Reason of State is the umbrella term to define such novel strategies to exercise power. Such theories account for innovative political tools to catch up with the fast-paced changes in the early modern age. There should be no wonder that Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* to teach rulers who have just come into power how to "maintain" their "principalities" (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 19), a loose term to be understood as "states". The author (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 5-6) draws a comparison between leaders and painters. In the same way painters are very careful in their pictures and study any possible detail, in the same leaders should be "high on top of mountains" to take stock of the situation and act accordingly.

Christopher Celenza deploys a similar argument. As far as leadership is concerned, Machiavelli, given his first-hand experience of politics, is able to give leaders the best advice on how they can rule their states. Celenza (2015, p. 72) argues that Machiavelli felt compelled to write because "different perspective are necessary to observe things correctly […]". On Celenza's view, therefore, an open mind in politics is an important requirement.

Both Foucault, Lemke and Greengrass maintain that these techniques of government require new political sets of rules, which are variable and are always contingent on the circumstances. It is important to note that rules are always required: no longer are traditional ideas of decision-making still reliable.

Milton's political background and his works are informed by a more rational context-dependent idea of politics. Milton, in his ideology, shows both anti-monarchical and, unexpectedly, royalist views. I will first outline Milton's involvement with anti-monarchical groups; I try to show how is anti-monarchical writings could be influenced by monarcomach ideas. I would argue that such arguments re-emerge in *Eikonoklastes* (1649), Milton's most vocal tract against royal government. Afterwards, I will set out to show how royalist ideas resurface in Milton's *History of Britain* (1672).

The political background of between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century was evolving very rapidly. Through the analyses of Foucault and Lemke, we have shown how more secular considerations started to influence politics, and we will see how political thinkers vocally opposed monarchical rule in France during the Wars of Religion. Such thinkers are usually defined as "monarchomach". Monarchomachs are king killers; they believe that kings should be killed if they usurp their authority (Skinner, 1978, p. 301, Skinner, 2002, pp. 297-298 ). Written in 1579, *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* ("Defences of Liberty Against Tyrants") is one of the most powerful tracts in favour of tyrannicide. I will try to argue that *Vindiciae* echoes in Milton's *Eikonoklastes*. *Vindiciae* is divided into four questions centring on resistance and tyrannicide. I would argue that the most important of all is the third question, that is to say "may a prince who oppresses and devastates a commonwealth be resisted; and to what extent, by whom, in what fashion, and by what principle of law?" In the following statements (cf. Franklin, 1969, pp. 190, 196), not only is tyranny indicted but tyrannicide is also recommended:

> […] but if the prince […] pays no heed to repeated remonstrations, and seems only to be aiming at a situation in which he can do anything he pleases with impunity, then the fact of tyranny is proven, and anything that may be done against a tyrant may now be done to him. For tyranny is not only a crime, it is the worst of crimes […].
>
> A king who violates the compact […] persistently is truly a tyrant by conduct. In this case the officers of the kingdom are obliged to pass judgment on him according the law and, should he resist, to expel him from office forcibly where other means do not avail.

The author of *Vindiciae*[3] legitimises tyrannicide if the king violates the law of the state. The Monarchomachs challenge the idea that the king is sacred. If the monarch violates the law of the state,

[3] Despite a very long debate on the authorship of *Vindiciae*, Šalavastru (2020, p. 4) claims that Philippe de Mornay should be considered the author of *Vindiciae*.

then his subjects should resist and kill him. Arguments in favour of resistance were not only offered in France but, as I will show, they were also made in England.

Monarchomach tracts, however, mark a stark contrast because they question the premise of royal authority, the fact that sovereigns are anointed by God. As I have already argued beforehand, they cast doubt on this kind of political system. Per the intimations of *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, any sovereign overriding the rules of the "compact" can be put to death. As I will show in the next section, the republican camp, during the English Civil War, seemed to be familiar with the apprehensions of *Vindiciae*.

Seventeenth-century England's political situation was not different from sixteenth-century France. The country was torn by a civil war which pitted Charles I against Puritans. Charles, like the king in *Vindiciae*, had been violating the law of the state by not summoning Parliament and increasing taxes without Parliament's consent. One of the most powerful monarchomach arguments was deployed by Milton, who outlined such ideas in his book *Eikonoklastes* (1649). His tract is a scathing response to the book *Eikon Basilike* ("The King's Image"). Charles I, who had penned *Eikon*, describes himself as the martyr of the royalist camp. This is also shown by the cover of the book, where the king prays for himself in the run-up to his execution (McDowell, 2011, p. 53). McDowell (2011, p. 271) goes on to emphasise the significance of the image of the king. For the royalist camp, Charles is like the *eikon* which, in the New Testament, is the image of Christ. For Milton, however, Charles was not the *eikon*, but the *eidolon*, the idols of the Old Testament which had to be destroyed. David A. Harper has outlined a convincing account of Milton's attitude towards the cover of *Eikon*. On Harper's account (2021, p. 100), the cover and the book are "dishonest in intent and content". Milton, therefore, feels that he has to destroy the "dishonest" image of Charles. Interestingly, Harper (2021, p. 95) suggests that Charles is more concerned with his image than with his office, with his "image and face". The king is now an actor or, as Milton puts it (Milton, 2013, p. 279), "a politic contriver" who "certainly would have the people come and worship him".

I would argue that this statement by Milton (2013, p. 280) in *Eikonoklastes* echoes the central argument of *Vindiciae*:

> Parlaments at home, and either wilfully or weakly to betray Protestants abroad, to the beginning of these Combustions. All men inveigh'd against him; all men, except Court-vassals, oppos'd him and his Tyrannical proceedings; the cry was universal; and this full Parlament was at first unanimous in thir dislike and Protestation against his evil Government.

Charles's "Tyrannical proceedings" echo *Vindiciae'*s because the king can do whatever he wants without being called to account. He does anything because he believes he has impunity by virtue of him being the king. At the same time, however, institutions were "unanimous" in their dislike for the king; therefore, as the author of *Vindiciae* contends, they can now act in the way the deem most appropriate against the king. *Eikonoklastes* seems to show Milton's engagement with monarchomach texts. As argued in *Vindiciae*, even Milton endorses tyrannicide as the king is disliked because of his despotic government, the worst of all the crimes.

Was Milton aware of *Vindiciae*? Mohamed (2021, p. 31) contends that:

> The first English translation of *Vindiciae* […] appeared in London bookstalls in 1648, printed Robert Ibbitson and Matthew Simmons, the latter being Milton's neighbor […] and frequent collaborator […]. Milton must have been aware of *Vindiciae* as a "greatest hits" of Protestant resistance theory, either in English translation or in the original Latin […].

In his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrate* (1649), which championed regicide, there are echoes from the monarchomach arguments defended in *Vindiciae*. Milton argues that "A Tyrant […] is he who regarding neither law nor the common good, reigns onely for himself and his faction". *Vindiciae* claims that the tyrant "violates the compact", the compact negotiated with the people, and therefore anything can be done against him as tyranny is "the worst of the crimes". Mohamed (2021, p. 34) re-emphasises the point Milton made in his *Tenure*:

> Here we have, then, fundamental principles of early modern anti- tyranny literature that can be used to justify action against a tyrant whose primary harms are against the common home that is, rightly conceived, a *dominium publicum* (emphasis in the original) —a category equivalent neither to private property nor to the commons, but referring to the entire domain as a property owned by the people as corporate entity. Thus, any wielder of sovereign power who, either through active choice or neglect, diminishes the value of the dominion has reneged on the duties of procuratorship. At this point the people are released from their obligation of obedience and may cast off the tyrant's rule.

The moment monarchical authority becomes tyranny, then the populace can rebel against the tyrant and going as far as committing tyrannicide. We could argue that Milton's republican tracts echo monarchomach ideas and commitment to getting rid of any usurpation of power. Whenever sovereigns do not abide by the values of the "dominion", then their subjects can overturn them.

Milton's republican engagement is clearly shown in his Commonplace Book, written between the 1630s and the 1650s. A commonplace book was like scrapbooks, were ideas or thoughts could be recorded. McDowell (2020, p. 596-597) notes that Milton's commonplace book:

> […] is divided into three parts or indices labelled *ethicus, economicus, and politicus*, the three subdivisions of the study of moral philosophy in the Renaissance […]: 'ethics' is concerned with general principles of moral behaviour, […] economics is concerned with particular examples related to 'domestic or private actions', and 'politics' with particular examples relating to the state and public life.

Milton highlights state and public life in his references to Machiavelli's works. Such works emphasise Milton's commitment to the republican cause and tyrannicide. Brown (1995, p. 45) notes that Machiavelli, in his *Art of War*, claims that republics are better than monarchies because men prize virtue (the political skills of leader). I have hitherto shown how Milton committed himself to upholding anti-monarchical stances and went as far as recommending regicide if kings usurp their power ("his Tyrannical proceedings" as Milton argues in *Eikonoklastes*). If the State is a common home, then it is right for the people, the users of such a common space, to rebel against monarchs and their rule because absolute authority has no place in such a political system. This is the reason why

Milton calls on the English to reject Charles's "Tyrannical proceedings" which imperil their common home and the enjoyment of their rights.

However, Milton's political views are more nuanced. Whilst it is true that Milton endorses regicide in *Eikonoklastes*, his views on monarchy might run counter to any pre-established idea of Milton's politics because, unexpectedly, he also defended monarchical ideas, those very ideas he had strenuously spoken against in his anti-monarchical tracts. Why is the case? Corns (1995, p. 33) explains it:

> What he (Milton) persistently attempts […] to establish the notion of the plurality of alternative governmental structures available to contemporary European civilizations. Monarchy or republicanism are two possibilities; their advantages and disadvantages may be evaluated differently in different countries and preferences may change over times […].

Corns (1995, p. 41) re-emphasises Milton's ambiguous positions towards a republican government by claiming that "Republicanism, in Milton's writing, is more than attitude of mind than any other particular governmental configuration". So, it could be argued, that Milton's republican views were just one of the many options offered by the porous and fragmented political landscape of his time..

I would argue that the same uncertainty emerges in the way Montaigne deal with politics occurrences as well. In his essay *On Presumption* (II, 17), the essayist engages with the political background of his own time. As is the case with the Montaignian essay (see next section for more details), he defends his incertitude in deciding on what is right or wrong and therefore avoids committing himself to any specific option. Montaigne argues that he is not capable to make any important decision or lead a group. What stands out, however, is his (Montaigne, 2003, pp. 1173-1174) engagement with Machiavelli:

> The discourses of Machiavelli, for example, were solid enough, given their subject, yet it was extremely easy to attack them; and those who have done so left it just as easy to attack theirs too. On such a subject there would always be

matters for counter-arguments, counter-pleas, replications, triplications, fourth surrejoinders and that endless web of argument […].

Another essay where Montaigne engages with the volatile and unstable background of his time is *On Bad Means to a Good End* (II, 23). The author (2003, p. 1431) claims that France's political background is "[…] so wretched that we are often driven to the necessity of using evil means to a good end […]". Even though we should avoid engaging in questionable acts, there is no other choice in the turbulent condition of early modern France. Again, Machiavelli teaches how to navigate politics at a time of significant disarray.

In France, Machiavelli and his writings had caused a great deal of controversy, especially since the queen, Marie de' Medici, was from Florence and, as a consequence, her policies were supposed to be closely associated with Machiavelli's ideas (cf. Butters, 2010). When it comes to Machiavelli, however, I would argue that Montaigne took two completely different views: the scholarly Montaigne would never endorse Machiavelli's politics; however, Montaigne, the erstwhile mayor of Bordeaux, would have endorsed Machiavelli's contextualism.

As Thompson (2013, p. 210) contends, Montaigne does not shy away from Machiavelli's intimations if "the end is political stability". This reasoning resurfaces in Milton's political beliefs as well. Given the fragmentation of the political background, it is not possible to pick a side and, as Montaigne argues, diverse responses or counter-arguments are likely to emerge. This controversy cannot be easily solved because the dictates of Reason of State had caused "[…] ongoing disintegration of French social and political life in the Wars of Religion" (Thompson, 2013, p. 196). Thompson's contention is in line with Foucault's and Lemke's argument: government has become an art, a technology and no longer can it be reduced to pre-established doctrine.

Like Machiavelli and Milton, Montaigne had to acknowledge that political allegiances are not decided once and for all but they can always change. The French essayist endorses Machiavelli's theories if they help to further the cause of the State. The State is a rational machine endowed with

its own logic and laws which defy the status quo, which is subject to continuous scrutiny to the extent that an "endless web of arguments" always emerges.

A more rational and more secular approach to politics also emerges in Francis Bacon's essay *Of Seditions and Troubles* (XV). Bacon (1985, p. 181) contends that there could be many causes for revolts like "innovations in religion, taxes […], breaking of privileges, general oppressions, advancement of unworthy persons […]". Bacon (1985, p. 182) also recommends solutions like "[…] to remove by all means possible that material cause of sedition […], which is want and poverty in the estate". As a high civil servant, Bacon, like Machiavelli and Montaigne, knew how politics worked and, as a consequence, he provided advice on these matters. These very practical pieces of advice are influenced by the idea that the State is independent of moral concerns and, as such, making controversial decisions cannot be easily ruled out. Machiavelli, Montaigne and Bacon defend policies which are more realistic and contextual, and not influenced by morality.

Corns's and Thompson's argument is consistent with Lemke's, Foucault's, and Greengrass's. Since the management of the State has become a matter of rational knowledge, an art, then it is better for each country to evaluate their circumstances and adjudicates on the better form of government. In other words, political realism is the most suitable political approach. Confronted with a fickle political environment, it is better to be realist and show diverging, even inconsistent, political sensibilities. Raymond Geuss (1998) offers a compelling discussion of what politics *has to be* and not *what it should be* (emphasis mine). In his estimation, politics should be shorn of moralising. Geuss (1998, p. 27) claims that

> […] politics is in the first instance about action and the contexts of action, not about mere beliefs and propositions. In many situations agents' belief can be very important […] but sometimes agents do not immediately act on beliefs they hold. […] the study of politics is primarily the study of actions and only secondarily of beliefs […]

Geuss (1998, p. 30) makes a similar and equally important point later on. He argues that "politics is historically located: it has to do with humans interacting in institutional contexts that change over time, and the study of politics must reflect this fact". His contention that politics should never be about morality but about action. Geuss strengthens Corns's argument because both Machiavelli and Milton could not endorse any specific allegiances. This is the case because politics is matter of context, it is about studying action instead of focussing on beliefs. As such, it could be contended that Geuss's remarks apply to Milton and his (indirect) endorsement of royal authority in his *History of Britain* (1670). So, if Milton had been an ardent defender of Cromwell and his politics, why did he change his mind? Cromwell's quasi-kingly aesthetic is the answer. Kevin Sharpe argues that Cromwell's interest in his representation catalysed Milton's always-changing political allegiances. Sharpe (2010, p. 494) notes that

> the visual representations of the Protector in portraits and engraving, as on seals, medals and coins, were devised to sustain and enhance Cromwell's authority in shifting historical circumstances no less than the earlier images of kings from which they borrowed. They developed and changed with shifting circumstances […].

I would argue that the key words are "shifting circumstances". The republican commonwealth, which was supposed to bring about change in England's political system, ended up resembling Charles's regime. Cromwell had become the *de facto* new absolute king of England. According to Schmitt (2014, p. 232), Cromwell is a sovereign dictator because he "seeks to create conditions in which a constitution – a constitution that it regards as the true one – is made possible. Therefore dictatorship does not appeal to an existing constitution, but to one that is still to come". Cromwell is a dictator in the Schmittian sense: his polity is a new political order in need of a legal underpinning. However, as I have just argued, Cromwell's new political system is more reminiscent of a monarchy rather than a republican system. There is no wonder that doubts started to emerge and questions about his allegiance to his ideas were now legitimate.

As a consequence, Milton's politics started to shift as well. Therefore, not only was Milton politically disappointed but he also needed to look at other political alternatives. One such alternative, oddly enough, was provided by a medieval king, Alfred the Great[4]. In his *History of Britain*, a history of England which stops after the Battle of Hastings, Milton dwelt upon Alfred's deeds. He described how Alfred devoted himself to reconstructing England's institutions after "Rollo, the *Dane or Norman* […], after an unsuccessful fight […] sail'd into *France* and conquered that country, since that time call'd *Normandy* (emphasis in the original). Milton emphasised the peaceful rule of Alfred who, after such "troublesome time", became "a Prince of his Renown". He prized "learning" and had thirsted after "liberal knowledge" and he had translated key philosophical writings (Boethius), historical and political works as well (Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, written in 731). Alfred also wanted educated people "to bear Office either in Court or Common-wealth". Geuss's argument bespeaks Milton's mixed allegiances: both are located historically and they are not a priori. Furthermore, it is telling that Alfred wanted to educate people to wield power in either a republican or a monarchical regime.

Milton, however, especially concentrated on Alfred's policies. He cast Alfred as a king eagerly wanting to dispatch his duties. No man is as patient as Alfred "in hearing causes" and nobody is as good as Alfred "in doing justice". But Alfred did not want to tolerate dishonesty and crimes. He implemented laws which are still "extant". Robbers and thieves were "hung upon a high Post". Milton notes that not only did justice "flourish" but also triumph. For Milton, Alfred was the paragon of justice that England needed at a time of strife. Milton showed that Alfred, despite being a king, could pacify a war-torn England, and help to reconstruct the political system. The past, therefore, helps to illuminate the present.

In order to understand the shifting political allegiances in the context of Machiavelli's and Milton's political ideology, I would argue that Geuss's and Corns's construal of politics are in line

[4] Alfred, the son of Ethelwolf, was king of the West Saxons from 871 to 886. From 886 to 899, he was king of the Anglo-Saxons.

with a realistic and context-dependent approach. Confronted with a volatile political environment, it is better to keep an open mind and decide on the option that better fits the circumstances. The defence of a type of governance depending on circumstances is in line with Celenza's argument: different situations require different perspectives. Furthermore, contextual knowledge of politics, making sensible decisions according to the circumstances, questions Oakeshott's argument. Leaders have learnt how to wield power and when certain decisions are better than others. There is nothing set in stone, the political background always changes, and it is impossible to apply pre-established ideas to account for political changes. It is not something that decision-makers can learn by heart. As a consequence, I would argue, Machiavelli and Milton are right in arguing that diverse governmental practices are contingent upon the circumstances.

Niccolò Machiavelli, like Milton, held both republican and monarchical views. It is important to note that his *Prince* (1513) was written with a view to currying favour with Lorenzo de' Medici. Machiavelli wrote his *Prince* to teach new leaders how to act in the realm of politics. Via *The Prince*, Machiavelli wants to empower the Medici through examples from antiquity and contemporary Italian history. Machiavelli and Milton are on a par: for them, history will teach leaders how to deal with politics. Machiavelli extols the deed of his archetypal prince, Cesare Borgia. In *The Prince,* chapter VII, Machiavelli reported on the acts of Borgia. After he had conquered Romagna, Borgia realised that the local administrators were doing more harm than good with their continuous bickering; therefore, he decided to hand the government over to the cruel Remirro de Orco. Remirro "reduce the territory to a peaceful and united state, and in so doing, the Duke greatly increased his prestige" (Machiavelli, 2008, p. 27). However, since Remirro's rule had become odious to the populace, Cesare decided to win the consensus of the people by killing Remirro. For Borgia it was easy to win people's support because a quartered Remirro on public display proved that Borgia was ready to do anything to overcome any obstacle.

Machiavelli and Milton prove that power can also be a spectacle: the hanged thieves and robbers and the quartered Remirro show that anything goes to make the population fear their leader.

In this instance, Borgia relies on his *virtù*, the political competence that is necessary to deal with forever-changing nature of politics (Hankins, 2020). At the same time, I would argue that Borgia's and Alfred's violent policies are in line with Geuss's reading of politics because informed actions are more important than beliefs.

Interestingly enough, Miltonian Satan provides another such instantiation of *virtù*. Satan's strength, in *Paradise Lost* (written 1667 and 1674), is referred to as "virtue". Satan is virtuous, in that he can wield power and show he is a *vir*, the political leader whose behaviour is context-dependent. He, after "the toyl of Battel" has to "repose" his "wearied vertue" (Book I: 320, cf. Milton, 2007, p. 21) In his fight he has proved to be virtuous, that very virtue Machiavelli calls for. It could be argued that Satan is "virtuous" like Cesare Borgia or Alfred, adopting all possible strategies in his endeavours. In *Areopagitica*, Milton (2007, p. 193) argues that he

> cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race […] not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall […].

Milton's attitude towards virtue his speech is not different from the one he defends in *Paradise Lost*. Virtue is not something that can be hidden like a cleric in a cloister. Virtue needs "triall", that is to say fighting. Again, the aggressive nature of virtue is re-emphasised: it is not striving to be morally good, but to show one's stamina in the face of any political difficulty. Milton's idea of virtue aligns with Machiavelli's because engaging in a trial shows how competent leaders have to be in order to assert their power. No longer is virtue about achieving a balance, as Aristotle had argued, but now it is about showing what resources have to be used in order to attain glory. Both of them have secularised the idea of virtue; no longer is it something moral but it now means the competence leaders needs to have. If virtue is a "triall" then politicians do not necessarily strive to be good. It is worth noting that Alfred behaves like Satan: his virtue (in the Machiavellian sense) is not "cloistered"

but it is a reminder of his subjects that governing a population need new means depending on the context.

Machiavelli's republican views are defended in his *Discourses on Livy* (1531). In order to establish a republic, Machiavelli argues, any means can go. In order to illustrate this assertion, he comments on the killing of Remus by his brother Romulus. In *Discourses* I, IX Machiavelli argues that "Romulus was among those who deserved to be excused for the death of his brother […], and that what he did was for the common good and not for private ambition […]" (Machiavelli, 2003, p. 142). He also dwells upon another important feature of the Roman state, that is to say the Senate. The establishment of the Senate proved that Romulus did not govern autocratically but "he made decisions" on the basis of what the Senate had agreed upon. The centrality of the Roman Senate and the creation of two annually chosen consuls proved that Rome "was more suitable to a free civil state than to one that was absolutist and tyrannical (Machiavelli, 2003, pp. 142-143).

Both Machiavelli and Milton seem to share similar political views. Both endorsed republicanism and royalism. Machiavelli does not rule out killing a relative for the establishment of a long-term republic. Due to the key role of Romulus in the foundation of Rome, he had to kill his brother. If Remus had not died, then the Roman Republic would have never been established. In his *Prince*, Machiavelli is very upfront when defending killing an uncomfortable administrator. Machiavelli's archetypal prince, Cesare Borgia, killed Remirro de Orco, his viceregent, because in the wielding of his power he had become too dangerous. As a consequence, the populace had started to be afraid of him and Cesare killed him.

Milton, who came from a very different political background, argued that the killing of a ruler for the establishment of a republic is morally right. It could be argued that it is possible to tease a link out between the French Monarchomachs and Milton. The Monarchomachs endorsed regicide if the sovereign usurped his authority and initiated a tyrannical regime. Milton did the same when dealing with Charles I. In *Eikonoklastes*, he argued that the king had to die because of his "Tyrannical proceedings". However, at the same time, they endorsed monarchical views as well. Milton,

confronted with the bleak political background of Cromwellian England, decided that the best political model was the one provided by a king, Alfred the Great. Alfred had pacified England and, at the same time, he had encouraged learning and knowledge amongst civil servants and subjects. On top of that, Alfred's policies were informed by a law-and-order approach. Thieves and robbers had to be killed to set a good example and to leave the citizenry stupefied and frightened at the same time. Both Machiavelli and Milton look at the past to outline a political programme. Machiavelli, as he argues in *The Prince* and *Discourses*, had modelled his advice on Graeco-Roman politics. Milton, instead, when prizing Alfred, had looked at the Middle Ages because a medieval king was the only one who could save Britain from its downfall in the seventeenth century.

Historiography is a good resource to provide leaders with reliable political advice. As I have shown in 2.2, Michelle Clark is right in maintaining that good political theories have to be historically informed because "political actions and ideas are intertwined" (Clarke, 2018, p. 158). Politics and actions need to rely on each other to show that leaders know their circumstances and can act accordingly.

Victoria Kahn (1994, p. 34) argues that Machiavelli's and Milton's description of political leaders who do not shy away from violence to defend their State is an example of "cruelty well used". If hanging thieves or quartering can show subjects that leaders are doing anything that is needed to defend their State, then violence should never be ruled out.

The behaviour of Machiavelli's Cesare and Romulus and Milton's Alfred is in line with the doctrine of Reason of State. As Foucault, Lemke, and Greengrass claim, Machiavelli's and Milton's leaders show that exercising power has become an autonomous field and a new political technology. Feisal Mohamed (2020, p. 6) , in his recent discussion of sovereignty, perfectly underscores the fact that defending

a particular form of political authority […] necessitates dismissal […] so that sovereignty comes to exist in the modern political imaginary as a set of Borromean rings[5]: each discreet and uninterrupted by the next, though bound so that no single ring can be removed from the others […]. To advance a core idea on sovereignty is to be conscious of committing oneself to a necessarily embattled position […].

I would argue that Mohamed's view on sovereignty can help to account for the volatility of political ideologies: subscribing to a specific political allegiance involves defending a view that could be challenged. I would claim that Machiavelli and Milton are in a similar position: they cannot decide on whether republicanism is better than royalism and they have to accept that endorsing either view is a matter of timing. Therefore, choosing one of them means committing to "a necessarily embattled position".

David Norbrook (1999, p.15), when he describes early modern politics, argues that "the political horizon was bafflingly open and the meaning of new political formation were constantly uncertain […]". Norbrook well characterises the political situation by contending that political boundaries were porous. It is not easy to classify a politician or an intellectual as either republican or monarchical because the whole political spectrum is constantly changing.

Recently, Rachel Foxley has dwelt upon protean political allegiances in the early modern age. On Foxley's account (2022, p. 80), political allegiances were "heterogenous and indeed hybrid". Both Norbrook and Foxley are reluctant to categorise political thinkers in pre-determined way. As I will show later, their argument will indeed problematise and destabilise the customary categorisation of Machiavelli and Milton.

This idea is reinforced by the argument put forward by Machiavelli's *Discourses* I, 26; therein, he argues that leaders, ignoring how to conduct themselves, "take certain middle courses of action […] because they do not how to be entirely good or entirely bad" (Machiavelli, 2003, p. 215).

[5] In chemistry, a Borromean ring consists of three rings interlocked one to the other. By breaking one of them, then the two others separate without being interlocked again.

Their allegiances could change swiftly and it is better to be ready to change idea and behave cruelly or morally depending upon the circumstances. Politics is protean and flexible; as a consequence, refusing a flexible attitude does not work. Only the circumstances will tell leaders how to act. In what follows, I set out to critique historiographical and political approaches to defining Machiavelli's political views and, indirectly, Milton's.

It cannot be denied that Quentin Skinner's contextualism has been influential and has helped to interpret the thought and the work of Machiavelli. However, I would argue that his Skinner's Neo-Roman theory of liberty does not account for Machiavelli's and Milton's political stances and what the consequences could be. On Skinner's account, Machiavelli's political system rests a Neo-Roman theory of liberty In his view (1998, p. 28) a Neo-Roman theory of liberty is concerned

> […] almost exclusively with the relationship between the freedom of subjects and the powers of the state. For them the central question is always about the nature of the conditions that need to be fulfilled if the contrasting requirements of civil liberty and political obligation are to be met as harmoniously as possible.

Skinner (1998, p. 29) goes on to argue that "[…] Machiavelli, for example, never employs the language of rights; he always limits himself to describing the enjoyment of individual freedom as one of the profits or benefits to be derived from living under a well-ordered government". Skinner assumes that there will always be harmony in the state. But what if the state were not harmonious?

I argue that Skinner's position should be reconsidered, because the category of contextualism can help to better understand Machiavelli's and Milton's ideas. As I have contended before, their holding protean political allegiances is inevitable because the fuzzy political background of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe did not allow them to make a final choice. As I have just mentioned, Foxley has appropriately captured the context. Volatility has to be the case because the political landscape was "hybrid and indeed heterogenous". Whilst it is true that Milton legitimised regicide or the killings of tyrants if they usurp their authority, I have also tried to show how both thinkers lauded

monarchical action. Borgia had to get rid of Remirro because he had become inimical to the populace and Alfred had to hang thieves and robbers because he had to show his subjects that he cared for them and that justice would be better served by taking all the measures that are necessary. Skinner's notion of a "well-ordered government" cannot be easily justified with a very complex political situation.

Pre-established notions of politics and liberty cannot be articulated because context should inform the decision-making process. A philosopher, who has put pressure on Skinner's theory, is John McCormick. However, as I will set out to show, even his account is flawed and does not fully explain why we should reject a Skinnerian account of Machiavelli's and Milton's political allegiances.

Skinner's Neo-Roman theory, according to McCormick, is not good enough to account for Machiavelli's ideas (and, as I will try to argue, to Milton as well). He argues (2018, p. 296) that Skinner turns "Machiavelli into a Cicero, a traditional republican who emphasized social concord, one for whom public spiritedness and rule by the best men conforms with the common good". On McCormick's account, therefore, Machiavelli's philosophy has been misunderstood: his thinking is not about concord but it is more about flouting the law if it benefits the state. He argues that proponents of a Neo-Roman theory moralise Machiavelli. The same observation can be applied to Milton as well. Milton is usually represented as an author who is committed to a republican ideological system. It is fair to say that, by adhering to the political framework of the Cambridgeans, even Milton has been moralised and turned into a full-fledged republican. However, I would argue that moralising both thinkers, as McCormick does, misunderstands the extent of Machiavelli's and Milton's political enterprise.

McCormick outlines a left-wing Machiavelli in his work *Machiavellian Democracy* (2011). Therein, he vocally criticises Cambridge scholars and their interpretation of republicanism. He (2011, p. 10) argues that "they permit republicanism to be appropriated uncritically as a progressive,

antihierarchical political theory". On McCormick's understanding of Machiavelli, the economy should override other concerns. He maintains,(2011, p. 16) that

> Machiavellian Democracy is characterized by class-specific, popularly empowering, and elite-constraining institutions that accomplish two tasks: they raise the class consciousness of common citizens and formally enable them to patrol more exalted citizens with a vigor that electoral politics in and of itself does not provide.

Machiavelli's political project should be read from a populist perspective because he is striving for "egalitarian conditions" (McCormick, 2018, p. 79). His argument is as problematic as Skinner's. Machiavelli does not seem interested in fighting elitism and inequality. Before articulating an alternative to Skinner and McCormick, I will summarise the main elements of their claims. Skinner emphasises the benefits of living under a "well-ordered" government. McCormick, instead, centres upon Machiavelli's opposition to elitism and argues that a Machiavellian democracy strives to "raise the class consciousness" of the citizens.

Both scholars, in their attempt to describe Machiavelli's politics, does more harm than good. They overlook or ignore the fact that government does not respond to pre-established categories or ideologies. As I have argued beforehand, exercising authority is now independent of Aristotelian moral ideas. Leaders act out of expediency or necessity, not out of morality or political equilibrium.

Against the background of the moralising attempts of Skinner and McCormick, I will show how a better account of Machiavelli and Milton is offered by Raymond Geuss and his critique of a type of political decision-making driven by ethics. In contemporary political parlance, Milton should not be uncritically portrayed as a progressive because, as I have shown, republicanism is one of the many options. As such, I would suggest that any discussion of Milton's republicanism should not be accepted at face value but should be assessed against the political background of his time.

However, providing a left-wing interpretation does not do justice to his work either. In reality, construing Machiavelli as a left-wing civil servant obscures the real import of his political ideology,

that is to say contextualism. Whilst McCormick is right in critiquing Cambridge scholars and their pursuit of the "common good" in Machiavelli's works, one could argue that Machiavelli is not interested in equality. His philosophy emphasises the necessity to deploy any political solution to ensure the thriving of the State. If equality can help to ensure this goal, then it should not be excluded. His interpretation, I would contend, moralises Machiavelli's thinking as well. Machiavelli was concerned with the benefit of the State and not with the redistribution of wealth. I would claim that the same applies to Milton too. Milton was sympathetic to the plight of the people under Charles I, but he never mentions wealth. Like Machiavelli, he is a contextualist not a moralist.

Whenever leaders try to build their states, they cannot rely exclusively on liberty and rights, but they have to do things which could run counter to them. In this regard, I would argue that Geuss's attack on an "ethics-first" approach to politics is mostly suited to question Skinner's and McCormick's arguments. I would claim that Machiavelli's and Milton's writings are at odds with their contentions. Politics is not about morality but is about deciding on what is better depending upon the circumstances. This is the reason why, for example, Romulus's killing of Remus has to be excused or why Alfred cannot be blamed if he hanged thieves to show his authority. Both Machiavelli's and Milton's thinking instantiate Geuss's realist reading of politics, one that is contextual rather than moral (cf. Geuss, 2008, p. 13). I would maintain that treating politics as a moral enterprise is also at odds with Milton's construal of virtue: virtue, political skills, have to be exercised and tested otherwise, as Milton (2013, p.193) states in *Areopagitica,* they are "cloistered", wasted.

I would maintain that Feisal Mohamed (2011, pp. 44-45) is right in criticising the facile categorisations of Milton's thinking: as I have tried to show above Milton cannot be "an uncomplicated champion of liberty summoned to arraign unjust authority, or a demonized anti-monarchist representing the horrors of anarchy among defenders of order […]". Milton is neither "an uncomplicated champion of liberty" nor "a demonized anti-monarchist". His competing political ideologies are caused by the volatility of the early modern age, where a consistent political framework

was being articulated. His thinking is constituted, as Mohamed (2011, p. 17) aptly argues, of "contrary energies". Milton can embody diverse political views (even contradictory ones), but it should not be surprising. He is writing and operating at a time when ideologies were not clear-cut. This is the reason why his philosophy is characterised by "contrary energies". Competing ideas are not problematic but, as I have been arguing, the lack of a consistent ideological underpinning.

James Alexander potentially offers a counter-argument to Geuss's contextualist approach. On Alexander's account, scepticism should also be a way to discuss realism in politics. Alexander (2019, p. 416) argues that a sceptical position is "[…] a form of theory, or, better, theorising in which one considers all possible arguments, and weighs each in turn, without committing oneself *politically* to any of them" (emphasis in the original). Therefore, it is possible to argue that Alexander's contention is more radical than Geuss's. Even though he claims that all the sides of a political opinion should be assessed and weighed, before "committing oneself", he is sceptical of such an enterprise because there could be a clash of arguments and it is better not to take any final decision.

Alexander's non-committal assessment could help to elucidate the nature of Machiavelli's and Milton's political allegiances. I would maintain, however, that even Alexander's scepticism is problematic on more than one level. On the one hand, committing to scepticism thwarts the philosophical enterprise of both Machiavelli and Milton. Claiming that they belong to a specific philosophical school impedes any significant engagement with their works. On the other, their apparent inconsistency is better served by a contextualist approach because it accounts for the uncertainty of the political landscape. Once reality has been studied and all the possible alternatives have been examined, it is possible to make a more informed decision. As Machiavelli and Milton have shown, the volatile nature of politics precludes the possibility of stability.

The destabilisation and problematisation of republicanism and royalism emerging in Machiavelli and Milton allows them to be defined as early modern Masters of Suspicion because their

action is in tune with the debate on the role of the state occurring between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. Both Machiavelli and Milton had similar (and apparently contradictory) political opinions. Machiavelli indeed defended monarchical ideas in his *Prince;* therein, he argues that leaders must have *virtù*, the skills of that are required to deal with politics. This is what Machiavelli did with Cesare Borgia: Borgia had to kill his viceregent Remirro de Orco because he had become odious to the populace. He had Remirro quartered to show that he still wielded power, and would do anything to enforce the rule of law on his territory. Milton also deployed monarchical ideas: confronted with the bleak aftermath of the civil war in England, only a monarchical figure could pacify England, and start new orders. In the case of Milton, this figure is Alfred the Great, the early-medieval Anglo-Saxon king.

I would like to show the way Milton's discussion of kings has shifted from Charles I to Alfred. Charles, as I have shown, instantiates the worst example of royal authority. As I have argued in my discussion of the cover of an almost hagiographic book, *Eikon Basilike*, Charles was more involved in the defence of his deeds, his "Tyrannical proceedings" and endeavoured to appeal to his subjects. Milton criticised this type of royal government, deciding to smash the pathetic idol, the image of the rabble-rousing Charles. Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler (2011, p. 923) is right in arguing that "the frontispiece tells a story, guiding the viewer, sharping the viewer's memory, and encouraging identification with the central character of Charles. The picture is […] a tool of persuasion". I have shown that Alfred's leadership is however solid. The strong and powerful Alfred is indeed the best example of a trustworthy and dependable form of royal government, which steers clear from unnecessary pathos. Alfred, like Borgia, in order to show his competence, his *virtù*, did not shy away from using violence.

Violence is a necessary component of Alfred's government because he had to show transgressors that they could end up being hanged at the crossroads for breaking the law. In his recent *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, Yves Winter addresses the issue of violence and its political

fallout in Machiavelli. I would argue Winter's argument can also applied to Milton as well. Winter (2018, p. 34-35) argues that

> acts of political violence are often designed to be witnessed. Executions, massacres […], are frequently performed in front of audiences or carried out in ways that leave traces for all to see […]. Spectacular violence can also function as a mechanism of political change […].

Maurizio Viroli has recently made a similar argument. Viroli (2021, p. 86) maintains that founders of new political orders "are often compelled, to realise their plans, to resort to cruel deeds"[6]. I would maintain that Winter and Viroli make a very important point. Beside Borgia's or Romulus's violence, Alfred's deeds can also be categorised as "spectacular violence" or feel "compelled" to resort to cruelty. By hanging thieves at crossroads, Alfred is showing his leadership and also is also bringing about change. Not only is he interested in meting out justice but he is also showing his subjects that law and order is equally important. This "spectacular violence" is not violence for violence's sake but, as Winter argues, is a very powerful political "mechanism". Alfred's, Borgia's and Romulus's acts may come across as cruel and unnecessary but, as Guess argues, political action, albeit violent and cruel, cannot be neutralised or reduced to an ethical discourse. Politics is not ethics but action.

I would maintain that Diego von Vacano's insight into political violence aptly summarises the necessity of such a kind of political approach. According to von Vacano (2007, p. 44), this kind of violence is necessary because it lays bare the techniques, the calculations whereby "[…] an exemplary man orders his state". I would argue that both Winter, Viroli, and von Vacano underscore the way Machiavelli and Milton have made politics a technique of ordering and organising the State, ruthless but, at the same time, exemplary action. Their argument also ties into Foucault's, Lemke's, and Greengrass's contention of the autonomy of politics. With government having turned into a specific technique of power with its own theoretical works, then it is possible to argue that leaders

[6] Translation mine.

can put new strategies in place to govern their territories. However, such new policies do not have to account for any moral preoccupation.

As I have shown beforehand, at a time when political allegiances are very porous, all means can be exploited to command the respect and the fear of one's subjects. Executions or quartering bodies fall into this category because they will make a lasting impression on the populace. Death as a spectacle is the most powerful example of politics put to good use. It is not cruel, but useful and necessary, because citizens understand that wielding power is based upon context, not on unquestionable axioms. Action based upon context amounts to those principles that, according to Bayle, are unsavoury but inevitable.

At the same time, however, both Machiavelli and Milton espoused republican ideas. Machiavelli argued, in his *Discourses*, that Romulus should not be blamed because, if it had not been for him and for his killing of Remus, then the Roman Republic would have never been established. Milton espoused monarchomach arguments in order to justify the killing of Charles I, who had become a tyrant usurping his authority. As we have shown, discussing ideas of sovereignty in the early modern age can be problematic because boundaries are porous and, as a consequence, the political spectrum is broad; a republican allegiance could soon turn into a royalist one.

Once a stance is taken, then continuity is required: once violence has been exerted, leaders need to start anew. In order to underscore the need for a fresh start when confronted with such an unstable political landscape, Antonio Calcagno's notion of impasse can be a useful tool. According to Calcagno (2022, pp. xxii-xxiii) a political impasse "creates a new subjectivity […] inspired by novel and creative ways of thinking and being […]". Calcagno (2022, p. 65) more clearly elucidates what is the political importance of impasse:

> Impasse can be a realm in which one may cultivate the sheer potentiality of thinking and the imagination to conceive reality otherwise. Both can and must be kept alive. This is one, but not the exclusive, condition that can help bring about political change […].

Impasse allows philosophers to contemplate more than one option in order to discuss and redefine their ideas. There are more than one ideological model to rely upon and, depending on the circumstances, diverse and even competing models can work. I think that impasse does not represent an obstacle in politics, quite the opposite: a political impasse can help to reconceptualise long-standing taxonomies and made them more relevant to its context.

The creation and consolidation of power is not something unheard of because there is always potential for novel conceptions of wielding power. However, in this dissertation I believe that this process is well articulated by Georges Dumézil and his conception of sovereignty based on ancient examples. Dumézil's definition of sovereignty will be expanded upon in the next section.

### 4.4 The wellbeing of the community takes precedence over the wellbeing of an individual

Machiavelli argues that what is more important in politics is the outcome. This is especially the case with Numa. Whilst Romulus had founded Rome, Numa presided over the establishment of institutions and religion. Numa governed in such a way that both the city and his successors could benefit from his policies. Numa laid the foundations for the administrative apparatuses of Rome. Machiavelli's administrative infrastructure is reminiscent of Georges Dumézil's framework outlined in his seminal work *Mithra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty* (1948). Dumézil (1988, p. 72) argues that "Mitra is the sovereign under his reasoning aspect, luminous, ordered, calm, benevolent, priestly; Varuna is the sovereign under his attacking aspect, dark, inspired, violent, terrible, warlike". Thus, according to Dumézil, Romulus is like Varuna, the violent sovereign who has to be excused for killing his brother because politics takes precedence over morality. Numa is Mitra, who oversees the day-to-day administrative work.

The Mitra-Varuna model can also be retraced in Milton. Alfred, whose deed have been described in the previous section, is the violent and warlike sovereign. His son Edward[7], however, is the reasoning and ordered monarch, he is like Mitra. In his *History*, Milton contends that Edward "the son of Alfred succeeded […] in power and extent of Dominion, surpassing his Father". Edward, from the very beginning, is like Mitra; anything that his father had obtained during his reign, the violence he had to wield to rule over Britain, has not been lost because Edward, as stated by Milton, outdid his father. Edward, in 918, repelled another Viking attack at the battle of Stamford (Lincolnshire), built a castle, and "all the people of these quarters acknolwedg'd him supream". Edward won the Vikings, built a castle, and pacified the area, with the locals acknowledging his military and political success. With the death of his sister Elfled, her territories had been left without any government, and the people "became obedient to King *Edward* (emphasis in the original)". Even in this case, Edward had been able to avoid a stalemate by ruling over his sister's territories. Whilst Alfred's violence was necessary to establish a new political system, Edward cemented his father's gains.

Both Machiavelli and Milton had their own Mitra-Varuna, Romulus and Numa and Alfred-Edward. Romulus killed his brother because it was the only way possible to found Rome and establish the republic. Romulus was much more interested in the wellbeing of Rome than in family relations. Numa was the administrative sovereign of Roma. Numa institutionalised religion and set a government up. Alfred, like Romulus, laid the foundation for the future state of England after fighting with the Vikings. Edward, like Numa, consolidated his father's power and ensure compliance with what it had already been achieved.

Machiavelli and Milton emphasised the wellbeing of communities; once states have been founded, then administrative apparatuses are necessary and they should operate in such a way that laws will always benefit future political decisions. First come the violence: Alfred and Romulus

[7] Edward, Alfred's son, ruled from 899 to 924.

behave like Varuna: they had to act in a brutal and aggressive way to re-establish a new political order. After this more aggressive and violent beginning, there follows the more benevolent and more harmonious side of sovereignty, the Mitra-like sovereign, in this case Numa and Edward, two administrative and more bureaucratic sovereign. The contrast between a violent sovereign and more bureaucratic one is once again described in *Discourses* I, 26, where it is said that new leaders has to "create everything […] anew". They have to create " [new governments] in the cities with new names, new authorities, and new men" (Machiavelli, 2003, p.214). Milton's Alfred and Edward abide by this model: Alfred defeated the Vikings and started to lay the foundation for a new governmental system, which was then consolidated by his son. Machiavelli's "new governments", new names", "new authorities", and "new men" stand out in both thinkers: Romulus and Numa on the one hand, Alfred and Edward on the other. I would like to conclude this section with the words of Bhrigupati Singh about the Mitra-Varuna model. Singh (2015, p. 60) argues that Mitra-Varuna

> […] exist as *potential* (emphasis in the original) tendencies of power. These tendencies are not static and unvarying, influenced by geography or history. Tendencies may morph and assume new shapes […]. As a mythological concept of sovereignty, Mitra-Varuna offers coordinates along which to remain attentive as we enter specific territories.

I would argue that Singh makes a very good point about this framework of power and sovereignty as these models are not "static and unvarying" because they are influenced by historical and geographical reason. Given the porosity of political theories in the early modern age even the Mitra-Varuna conception of sovereignty is appropriate since it can be applied to all contexts and epochs.

**4.5 To cultivate a great reputation is a political leader's safeguard against potential opposition**

Machiavelli gives political leaders a significant piece of advice, that is to say leaders should be generous with giving away goods that are not yours or your subjects'. It will enhance your reputation of beneficence. But avoid squandering anything that is yours or your subjects. Political leaders such as Cyrus, Caesar, and Alexander were able to cultivate a great reputation because they freely spent the goods of others, to wit non-citizens.

Milton, in his tract *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), argued why Charles should be considered a tyrant because "a Tyrant whether by wrong or by right coming to the Crown, is he who regarding neither Law nor the common good, reigns himself and his faction" . Beforehand, I have argued that this phrasing sounds like the word of a monarchomach tract. Milton is calling for the killing of Charles because he is just a tyrant and, as such, he is not interested in ruling in a lawful way. However, Oliver Cromwell and his ruling style were no different from Charles's. This is the reason why, in his *History*, Milton endorsed a monarchical figure to save England (in the Middle Ages and, more importantly, the very moment Cromwell started to wield power). Alfred the Great, the Anglo-Saxon king, behaved in a completely different way because:

> […] no man more patient in hearing causes, more inquisitive in examining; more exact in doing justice, and providing good Laws, which are yet extant; more severe in punishing unjust judges or obstinate offenders. Theeves especially and Robbers, to the terrour of whom in cross waies were hung upon a high Post certain Chains of Gold, as it were dareing any one to take them thence; so that justice seem'd in his daies not to flourish only, but to tryumph

Alfred's actions are reminiscent of the seventeenth chapter of Machiavelli's *Prince*. Asking whether a leader should be loved or hated Machiavelli (2008, p. 57) concludes that "a prince must not worry about the infamy of being considered cruel when it is a matter of keeping his subjects united and loyal". Alfred behaved in the same way: he punished criminals but he would always listen to his subjects and ensure that justice was done. Therefore, justice thrived and people were in awe of Alfred's deeds. Machiavelli and Milton show that even a tyrannical government, if put to good use, one where leaders bring their subjects together can work. I would argue *Discourses* III, 1 provides a good overview of the situation in Italy and, most importantly, England. Machiavelli emphasises the importance of political rebirth and, as a consequence, the establishment of a new system. According to Machiavelli (2003, p. 552) states can "renew themselves […] through their institutions or […]

come through such renewal through some circumstance outside these institutions"[8] In the case of Machiavelli, a new political figure could bring about such changes and, in the case of Milton, a royal figure like Alfred is the one who could produce such a political renewal and establish a new order (the long-lasting laws mentioned above).

However, I would maintain, it is the circumstances that can bring about such a political renewal. As a consequence, it is only through a contextual analysis that a new order, a new system can be established. As I have tried to show in the previous section, the knowledge of the past allows the scope of such a renewal and, more importantly, they define an agenda of change.

### 4.6 Machiavelli and Milton as Masters of Suspicion

At a time of socio-political upheaval, like the one in which Machiavelli and Milton lived, it was necessary to design an agenda for change regarding leadership and the political decision-making process. This is the reason why Machiavelli and Milton outlined a model of governance based on historical figures not merely to admire, but to emulate.

Niccolò Machiavelli lived at a time of great socio-political upheaval. Italy was divided into many cities and States, with no possibility of unifying the country. Given the fact that there was no viable political model or figure at that time, Machiavelli considered classical history as a source of political inspiration. His careful analyses of the past allowed him to identify political figures whose deeds could help to build a safe and solid state. The past instilled hope into 16$^{th}$-century political leaders because they could look at models that were always valid. Thus, what Machiavelli suggests doing is to mould one's leadership on the precedents set by the Ancients. The rulers who emerge in Machiavelli's work are the ones who command the trust, the respect, and the allegiance of their people, because what really counts for them is cultivating the "habits" and the "goodwill" of their

[8] My thanks to Miguel Vatter for this insight. See Vatter (2022, forthcoming).

people and, more importantly, to love and cherish political institutions. What is also required from leaders is not to be "unarmed", they should show their *virtù*, their competence to exercise power. Leaders should always be ready to defend their citizens against outsiders and be supported by their army, otherwise they will fail in their endeavours. Furthermore, they should be generous, but ought not to dissipate the money of the people and steer away from rapacity. It should be noted that he most important lesson that can be drawn from *The Prince* and *Discourses* is the defence of political contextualism. It is the specific context, not a priori models, that should inform political action. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, Machiavelli's rulers have to be virtuous, in that they need to have the skills to make immoral decisions for the greater good. They have to be ready to use force and violence and, for the sake of the State, they should always try to instil fear into their subjects. Allegiance and respect can be achieved by bringing in law and order and cultivating a fierce reputation to secure benefits for the State and its citizens.

Like Machiavelli, Milton lived at a time of disarray. England was a war-torn country, having been subjected to the conflict between king and Parliament. Partisans of Charles I argued that kingly authority could not be questioned because it was divinely mandated. The Puritans, instead, believed that monarchs could not wield absolute power. Not only was war tearing England apart but, at the same time, there were no precedents upon which decision-makers could mould their leadership. Like Machiavelli, Milton as well considered the past in order to discover a viable strategy for wielding power. Brown (1995, p. 45), as I have argued in 4. 3, shows that Milton was familiar with Machiavelli's indictment against the monarchy and his preference for a republic because republics foster more capable leaders. Even though he opposed the monarchy, Milton soon realised that Cromwell's England was not different from Charles's regime. This compounded his disenchantment with the republican government and prompted Milton to select a royal figure as an archetypal ruler. In his *History of England*, he believed that king Alfred, an early-medieval monarch, could be the model leader England needed. He had repelled Viking raids and, at the same time, he was able to

establish a successful and peaceful rule. He strictly administered the law, scaring but – at the same time – winning the trust of his subjects, and granted everybody peace and justice.

Machiavelli believed that a new prince could pacify Italy and unify the country and Milton believed the same: if an Alfred-like figure were to emerge, England would be a more solid and prosperous state. In *The History of Britain*, Milton praised the deeds of two kings, Alfred and Edward. Alfred was "patient" in hearing causes, very scrupulous in "doing justice" and issued laws that were still "extant". Edward, after her sister's death and the potential disarray, made her subjects "obedient" to him, securing stability. Like Machiavelli's rulers, Milton's leaders have to be armed but, like Machiavelli, they should always have the benefit of the State and its people in mind: Miltonian leaders are the ones who are committed to enhancing peace and doing justice in the best way possible. Such leaders should have *virtù* as well; Alfred did not shy away from hanging criminals for the sake of the subjects, proving he was ready to do anything to uphold the new political order.

Albeit a republican, it is fair to say that Milton does not exclude the possibility of a monarch as a ruler. It seems therefore that what is crucial for Milton is not so much the political ideology but the manner of leadership: firm but fair with the focus on secure the wellbeing of the State and therefore of its citizens. Even timing seems to play an important role in Milton's ideas, for him, politics should be context-dependent. During the conflict between Charles and Cromwell, Milton endorsed killing the king because he had usurped his authority; this is in line with the Milton's monarchomach tracts which I have described in 4.3. Therefore, opposition to monarchical ideas well works when a state and its institutions need reconstructing.

However, in the aftermath of such a political change and once the rule of law has been re-established, a monarchical rule can be contemplated again. Milton's ambiguity is not ambiguity for the sake of it, but it lays bare the necessity of being politically receptive to one's context: at a time of disarray, there should be a strong political figure, able to lead the country out of a political stalemate. Alfred acted violently and resolutely, showing that order was being reconstructed and there was no space for dithering; this is the reason why justice, in his days, could "flourish" and "tryumph". His

son Edward went on to pacify the realm and showed his subjects that conflict should no longer be the case; they all acknowledged that he was “supream”.

As far as the political approach to describing Machiavelli’s and Milton’s politics are concerned, I argue that contextualism accounts for their ideology. I have shown how the Neo-Roman theory of liberty, as outlined by Cambridge scholars, does not work. Machiavelli’s political outlook contradicts Skinner’s pursuit of concord within the state. Neither does McCormick’s left-wing interpretation of Machiavelli and its emphasis on equality. Furthermore, I would maintain that Alexander’s sceptical construal of politics does not help either, because contextualism better explains their contradictory political allegiances.

As I have already intimated, such philosophical approaches would only foreground the republican Milton, obscuring his royalist leanings. Milton, like Machiavelli, is not primarily interested in economic equality because it may not be necessary for the sake of the State. What he proposes is a contextualist strategy, which will lay bare his stances because there is no political a priori but any agenda of change has to be modelled on the circumstances. As such, I would maintain that emphasising morality and equality would reiterate the trite view that Milton is a progressive political figure. If such a description is uncritically accepted, then this would not account for his political engagement and ambiguity.

As I have already argued, engaging with the past is crucial to understanding Machiavelli’s and Milton’s politics. In this context, I would endorse Sasso and Gnoli’s recent assessment of why Machiavelli (and Milton) had to focus on reconstituting the state. On Sasso and Gnoli’s account (2013, p. 26), Machiavelli (and Milton) is the philosopher of “crisis”. Political decay, according to Sasso and Gnoli, compelled Machiavelli to design a new political entity capable “to resist a time of crisis”[9]. The same assessment applies to Milton as well; both thinkers were writing at a time of

[9] Translation mine. However, this translation is not literal but it is tailored to the circumstances. The original Italian is “decadenza”, which means either “decay” or “decadence”; given the difficult context in which Machiavelli and Milton operated, I have chosen to translate “decadenza” as “crisis” because it is in tune with the overarching topic of my thesis.

political disarray and  a new political figure, capable of establishing a new order, was necessary. This is the reason why only the past could help them to single out a leader which could lead to a new political system.

Alison McQueen (2018) confronts this paradigm of uncertainty with her notion of apocalyptic thinking. Machiavelli's thought is suffused with the idea that a new figure will lead  Italy out of its institutional disunity. However, I would also claim that Milton fittingly belongs in this category as well. McQueen (2018, p. 96) is right in arguing that turmoil brings about "political rebirth".

It is important to note that this dyad pessimism/optimism diverges from the Aristotelian paradigm. Given the circumstances, political leaders cannot strive for a golden mean because this would negatively affect the way they respond to a political crisis. Machiavellian and Miltonian leaders live at a time when action is required, not dithering.

Machiavelli's and Milton's exemplar leaders are historical, a model of leadership firmly rooted in Roman history and politics and English medieval history; for them, contextualism plays a patriotic role. They single out political models which can help the country to re-emerge from a difficult situation. In this way, their examples are relevant to their contexts because the leaders are well-known figures from their own history with whom citizens can identify. Furthermore, I would contend that their impossibility to commit to a specific political allegiance show that their construal of politics is tailored to their circumstances. I argue that it is more appropriate to label both Machiavelli and Milton as Masters of Suspicion because they question the notion of ideology. The two authors endorse both aristocratic and republican policies. This is the case as the boundaries of early modern politics are unclear and fuzzy. Thus, I maintain that it is better to show that either ideology can be the case depending upon the circumstances. Claiming, like Skinner or McCormick do, that they necessarily adhere to a specific ideology is self-defeating. Their philosophy is more about context rather than a specific political commitment.

In the next section, I will explore the similarities between Montaigne and Milton.

## Chapter 5

## The Personal Milton

Both Montaigne and Milton lived at a time of great incertitude and disarray. France was experiencing the Wars of Religion between Roman Catholics and Huguenots, whilst Milton was bound to be a witness of the Civil War between Charles Stuart and the Puritans. Because of such a long period of socio-cultural unrest, both authors challenged long-standing assumptions. What Montaigne was trying to put forward was a new method of gaining knowledge from "the inside". His philosophy, as I will try to show afterwards, is predicated on "free-thinking", an anti-hierarchical thinking which is based on challenging established ideas. His essays are based on self-analysis; they purport to study himself and his thoughts. The Montaignian essay, as I hope I will be to show in the next section, is markedly different from Bacon's as he is focussed on gaining knowledge about the external world to validate his novel scientific method. In this section, I hope to show that there are similarities between Montaigne and Milton who both withdrew into themselves to challenge the status quo and design an agenda for change based on self-reflection. I will explore the following four main principles that are evident in both their works.

**1. "Recently I retired to my estates": The value of solitary retreat and self-reflection**

Montaigne and Milton prized introspection and solitude to reassess their lives and their circumstances. At a time of sweeping social and religious changes, both authors deem it to be necessary to reflect on their condition and surroundings to better consider how to start afresh.

**2. The individual's faith and conscience is the bedrock of knowledge**

As a consequence of the Protestant challenges to Roman Catholic practices and teachings, individuals started to meditate on their faith and their religious allegiance. Furthermore, conscience became an important component in this process of reshaping of one's knowledge, because individuals themselves could now discuss what it was important to know and what

should be discarded. As writers and intellectuals, Montaigne and Milton were not exempt from such epistemic reshaping.

**3. Self-reflection and the essay as a means of recording that self-reflection**

Given the epistemic evolution, Montaigne and Milton realised that a new philosophical genre was now necessary to chart the ever-changing intellectual landscape. This is the reason why they perfected the genre of the essay and the polemical tract, which became the most appropriate means of discussing their self-reflection without committing to any specific view.

**4. Morality manifests in multiple forms**

The discovery of the New World meant that new moral ideas and codes of behaviour started to be considered in Europe. Montaigne and Milton resolved to discuss such new ideas, showing that the status quo could no longer be the case.

## 5.1 "Recently I retired to my estates" The value of solitary self-retreat and reflection

Montaigne and Milton prized introspection and solitude to reassess their lives and their circumstances. Montaigne's life had dramatically changed after the beginning of the Wars of Religion in France and with the onset of a bout of melancholy. Both incidents caused him to withdraw into his family home to reconsider his life. Milton, however, saw introspection as an opportunity to start to work on himself and a better framing of his own life; as we shall see, melancholy was his "lamp", his source of enlightenment. Therefore, in this first section, I will set out to show how solitude and introspection is a shared thematic preoccupation by both authors. It is important to note that Ricœur himself (1970, p. 43) considered self-analysis and introspection an important feature of philosophising. For him

[…] truth cannot be verified like a fact, nor deduced like a conclusion, it has to posit itself in reflection; its self-positing is reflection […]. A reflective philosophy is the contrary of a philosophy of the immediate. […] truth has to "mediated" by the ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments that objectify it. It is in these objects […] that the Ego must lose and find itself.

Calcagno's notion of impasse accounts for a more rounded investigation of one's interiority Beside Ricœur, Calcagno's emphasis upon self-awareness, as described in the previous section, can explain the volatility of one's mind. When investigating the. self, it is important to acknowledge that a new personality, a new self will emerge after careful consideration of the new "subjectivity", of the new "Ego" based upon context. Ricœur's and Calcagno's arguments are attuned to what Masters of Suspicion think: a reform of thinking is necessary if one aims to scrutinise the world in different ways in order to bring about change.

It is thanks to the diverse interpretations and reconsiderations of the self that Montaigne philosopher will be able to find himself. As I hope I will be able to show truth, for Montaigne, is not immediately available because truth manifests itself in many forms. It is thanks to self-analysis that he will be able to make sense of an ever-changing world.

Confronted with political violence, Montaigne developed a new way of self-analysis as a way to find himself,  the essay. The essay, as a philosophical genre, is fickle and volatile. This is the reason why one's ideas could change. Jan Miernowski (2021, p. 341) is right in arguing that

Montaigne repeatedly contradicts himself in the *Essays,* permanently changing his positions, speaking in different, often divergent, voices undermining his statements by the use of sarcasm or ironically quoting from his readings.

> Montaigne's self-contradicting ventriloquism is so artful that the reader hardly knows when the essayist is ironic and when his words should be accepted at face value […].

The best way to gauge the efficacy of the essay is to conduct a solitary life. In this way change can be appreciated, even though it could also be dramatic or even baleful. This is the reason why Montaigne's ideas are fickle. He lived at a watershed for France and, more loosely for Europe; on the one hand, Montaigne was confronted with religious instability; on the other, he experienced significant epistemic and moral change due to the discovery the New World and the ensuing scrutiny of a new continent and its mores. Solitude and self-retreat are key to understanding the way Montaigne operated. The essay, the philosophical genre he championed, hinged on Montaigne's background. I would argue (Di Carlo, 2020, p. 39) that

> the essay is therefore akin to the intimate practice of taking down personal notes for yourself and discussing them with yourself. Indeed, it could be argued that the genre of the essay was an Early Modern version of the *hupomnêmata*, which roughly means 'notebook'.

It is, therefore, a personal notebook, the most suitable way to gauge one's beliefs and ideas in the midst of a world that was always changing. I would maintain that the essay as a notebook agrees with Ricœur's idea of reflective philosophy: it is not a philosophy of the "immediate" but something that has to be thought through and always reconsidered so that the subject can "find itself". I would contend (Di Carlo, 2020, p. 37) that

> the issue that bedevilled Montaigne the most was knowledge: to identify an overarching socio-political and moral structure had become impossible […]. In the *Essays*, he acknowledged that his knowledge was limited. Ironically, what he knew was that he knew nothing.

The essay, as Adorno had argued, is heretical. Authors, the moment they decide to question traditional forms of knowledge, can find themselves and confess that they do not know anything. The essay

reveals what writers think and believe. In their notebooks, in their *hupomnêmata*, the essayist tries to escape tradition and orthodoxy by devising a new world through such writings. The essay in its claim of ignorance, repetition, vagaries, and contradictions acknowledges that its authors know nothing. Acknowledging one's epistemic limitations is essential when compiling a notebook based on volatility. Whitcomb *et al.* (2017, p. 518) argue that

> […] owning one's intellectual limitations characteristically involves dispositions to: (1) believe that one has them and to believe that their negatives outcomes are due to them; (2) to admit or acknowledge them; (3) to care about them and take them seriously and (4) to feel regret or dismay, but not hostility, about them.

Montaigne is not shy about admitting to his shortcomings. He admits to his vagaries and write them down. Montaigne cares about them because they constitute the main topic of his writings and is not sorry about them because he needs them for his own works. I would argue that being candid about his lack of knowledge is necessary when things are changing and it is not possible to pinpoint certainties.

Montaigne found melancholy to be a productive source for introspection. In his essays *On Sadness* (I. 2) and *On Idleness* ( I. 8), Montaigne analysed his feelings. In *On Sadness*, Montaigne (1993, p. 8) claims that sadness "stuns the whole of our soul, impeding her freedom of action. A few pages later, he argues (Montaigne 2003, p. 10) that "sadness has very little hold on me". In *On Idleness*, Montaigne (2003, p. 31) notes that he had "retired to my estates […]" his family home. Therein he started to contemplate "many chimeras and fantastic monstrosities". These "chimeras and […] monstrosities", according to Fausta Garavini, are key to understanding the philosophical enterprise of the essay. On Garavini's account (2014, p. 13), Montaigne's *Essays* are not "a breviary of moderate wisdom […], but the symbol of the fears and the defences of a man who admits to being uncertain and hesitant". The philosophical monsters, which Montaigne is going to pen, are the only means that can help to redefine a time devoid of meaning and in need to find its own stability.

Montaigne, when discussing sadness and melancholy, shows contradictory ideas. For him, sadness can be bad but, after a few pages, it becomes a force which can be resisted and that toughens him up. Thanks to melancholy, he started to tease his musings out: he began to develop his essays in the solitude of his tower. Terence Cave (2007, p. 3) is right in claiming that essays are "thought-experiments rather than propositions or statement of position […]". There is no commitment to any pre-existing taxonomy.

This is in line with my assessment of the essay. The epistemic uncertainty of his time forced Montaigne to take a non-committal stance because there is very little that he could learn. However, he is endlessly discussing ideas and analysing his circumstances. Furthermore, as Adorno argues, the essay is unorthodox because it is not constrained by long-standing rhetorical and literary rules. This is what he does with melancholy and idleness: they are both forces for good (sadness strengthens him and idleness gets him to write his essays) and for bad (sadness prevents the progress of his ideas and idleness got him to live like a recluse in his tower). Montaigne's volatile thoughts are predicated on their context: his thinking should not be decried but accepted as it is because he is modelling his life upon the circumstances and needs no hurdle.

Like Montaigne, even Milton believed in the value of introspection. Introspection was sacred because it allowed Milton to discover new sides of his personality and help him in his works. For Milton as well, melancholy was a source of inspiration In his poem *Il Penseroso* ("The Serious Man"), he makes a similar argument. He argues that his "vain deluding joys [...] fill the mixed mind with all your toyes dwell in some idle brain, And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess […]". Milton's "toyes" (idle fancies) dwell in his head, and end up in his mind, which in turns produces "strange shapes". Milton's "toyes" sound like Montaigne's chimeras and fantastic monstrosities. In the same way Montaigne has withdrawn into his tower to contemplate his "toyes", Milton does the same in his "high lonely tow'r", where Melancholy "sage and holy" is welcome. Both Montaigne and Milton show that melancholic loneliness can be conducive to poetic inspiration. As I have argued beforehand, Montaigne is at odds with melancholy because he conceptualised it in different ways, wistful and

transformative at the same time. For Milton, however, residing in the tower affords a new conception of life as it involves finding a "lamp", a new orientation to make sense of his life. *Il Penseroso* emphasises the creative potential of melancholia. Maggie Kilgour (2021, p. 47) is indeed right in claiming that *Il Penseroso* praises "a life of restraint, discipline, and the contemplation of higher things", but, at the same time, it is also fair to say that there is potential for literary creation from such thoughts.

Albeit from a less gloomy standpoint, Milton further discusses the importance of introspection in his Sixth Prolusion *Sportive Exercises on Occasion are Not Inconsistent with Philosophical Studies.* Milton (2013, p. 3) argues that, on his returning to university, he is ready to devote himself to "learning" and "to the charms of philosophy" every day and night. As I have tried to show in *Il Penseroso*, Milton acquires more knowledge when he devotes at any hour of the day to "learning" and "philosophy", which equates with his "lamp". In his essay *On Three Kinds of Social Intercourse* (III, 3), Montaigne devotes himself to analysing himself in his library. Such a space is vital for Montaigne (2003, p. 2016) because "[…] it pleases me partly for the sake of the exercise and partly because it keeps the crowd from me". Montaigne can take a better record of his motley thoughts and muse upon his ideas and volatile thoughts as his library keeps "the crowd" away from him. Both Montaigne and Milton can study themselves if they are alone and far away from any external interference. I would argue that they are not withdrawing into loneliness just for the sake of it but because Montaigne needs to reflect upon his personal circumstances, whilst, for Milton, learning is his lodestar.

Though in different ways, introspection is vital to Montaigne and Milton. Introspection and self-retreat were, for Montaigne, literary and philosophical strategies to address his own troubles and France's religious conflict. For Milton introspection was essential because it helped him to reflect and, as a consequence, to produce more literary work based on his personal illumination. According to Lewalski (2003, p. 5), *Il Penseroso* focusses on "contrasting lifestyles […] that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence". Milton, through his *Penseroso*, shows

that authors are chameleon-like; their behaviour has to change because it is predicated upon different circumstances needing a different approach. In his *Sixth Prolusion*, Milton argues the necessity to absorb himself in "the charms of philosophy" at university.

Although discussed in different way, the trope of the chameleon emerges in Montaigne as well. In his *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (II, 12), the essayist draws a difference between the chameleon and the octopus. According to Montaigne (2003, p. 994),

> […] the chameleon takes on the colours of its surroundings, but the octopus assumes whatever colour it likes to suit the occasion, hiding, say, from something fearful or lurking for its prey. The chameleon changes passively, the octopus actively. We change hue as well, from fear, anger, shame and other emotions […]. That happens to us, as to the chameleon, passively […].

Whilst Milton argues that the chameleon is the animal that better describes changes in mind and ideas, for Montaigne, instead, octopi fulfil this task. Octopi show that changing one's mind is always the case, it is not something set in stone, it can always change because there no fixed boundaries. Nora Martin Peterson dwells upon this point. On Martin Peterson's reading of the octopus, she argues (Martin Peterson, 2016, p. 75) that an octopus can " assume many faces to disguise itself in order to get what it wants". Thus, in the same way octopi change their colour so that it can "disguise itself", ideas and opinions are transient. This is not the case with chameleons because, according to Montaigne, their change in colour is contingent upon their circumstances. Either way, both authors rely upon animals to emphasise the transience of opinions and ideas[10]. I believe that this emphasis upon animals is not chance. As I will show in the next section, "The Scientific Milton", animals or, generally speaking, natural phenomena acquired more significance in the early modern age thanks to observation, verification, and the drawing of conclusion.

[10] Emiliano Ferrari argues that Montaigne dealt with the gaining of active and passive knowledge in the *Apology* (Ferrari, 2010, p. 52).

Montaigne and Milton reflect on their lives and they can decide on their discrete ways to achieve self-reflection. Both authors emphasise the necessity of solitude to investigate their lives: Montaigne, in his family home and his library, can record his "chimeras and […] monstrosities" and be away from the "crowd". Milton can investigate in his "high lonely" tower his mood and gauge his education "absorbed" in the study of philosophy.

According to Maria Litsardaky (2021, p. 214), Montaigne's estates (and his library) and Milton's lonely tower are places where both "can isolate and withdraw from the world"[11]. Arnaud Buchs makes a similar point. On a Buchs's reading (2021, p. 8) of loneliness in Montaigne, this loneliness was a necessary component of his essays, as he "[…] describes himself through *his* book instead of *other people's book*"[12]. His book, his essays belong to Montaigne, to his loneliness, and the possibility, as Ricœur argues, to find the self. Buchs, therefore, extols Montaigne's isolation, as it is at this stage that Montaigne can study himself. The same argument applies to Milton as well: in the nocturnal loneliness of his tower, he is able to find his "Lamp", he can find new bearing upon his life. By using Hazard's own words, both authors have found their "retreat".

Montaigne's and Milton's self-analysis is in line with how Masters of Suspicion behave: they reflect upon their circumstances to make sense of their lives at a time of disarray; this is the case with Montaigne's self-exile and the ensuing self- reflection and with Milton's enlightenment within the tower and when he absorbs himself in the study of philosophy. I would argue that the tower and Milton's "toyes" are the reflective philosophy Ricœur had defined: his thoughts within his tower and his studies allow Milton to find himself. Does Milton know his whereabouts? Milton himself will try to answer this question by finding enlightenment with his "toyes" and his study of "philosophy", that is to say his thoughts developed in the loneliness of his tower, for which he cares because he needs them to understand what is going on.

[11] Translation mine.

[12] Translation mine and emphasis in the original.

John Jeffreys Martin (2022, p. 33) reinforces Litsardaky's argument by maintaining that Montaigne's tower "provided him with a sense of stability". Mariafranca Spallanzani (1996, p. 630-631) strengthens Martin's point by arguing that Montaigne's loneliness in his tower happens "after the experience of the world […]. His loneliness is never a final stage of his life […]"[13]. By the same token, Milton's solitude will allow to reflect and gain some sense of stability. Loneliness in both cases a springboard for scrutinising the world. Loneliness in the tower constitutes a way to reflect on one's circumstances and take a record of them. Both Montaigne and Milton, in their towers, produce egodocuments which, according to Farr and Ruggiero (2022, p. 2), allow to ascertain "the individual, the self, and identity".

Montaigne and Milton, in their volatile thoughts, can find stability because they can think about themselves. Ricœur would probably have said that Montaigne's and Milton's ego has lost and found itself thanks, ironically, to their instability, and Calcagno would probably conclude that their impasse had led to a new form of subjectivity.

### 5. 2 The individual's faith and conscience is the bedrock of knowledge

The sweeping socio-cultural changes in France and England got both Montaigne and Milton to consider their context, the prevailing ideas and themselves. Montaigne's France witnessed the polarisation of two different Christian denominations, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Milton's England in the 17th century was torn by the conflict between Charles I and Puritans. Whilst Roman Catholicism emphasised the importance of one's faith to the teachings of the Church, Protestantism emphasised the importance of the self in front of God and His Word conveyed by the Bible. In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, which represented the mediated link between the individual and God, the Protestant link was a direct, personal link between the individual and God.

[13] Translation mine.

The result of these religious upheavals was that new moral and personal preoccupations could be explored to make sense of a time of great disarray. It is against this backdrop of uncertainty and chaos that Masters of Suspicion emerge and start to design an agenda for change.

Montaigne's acknowledgement of his ignorance is articulated in his essay *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*. Therein, Montaigne (2003, p. 1182) argues that knowledge is fickle and temporary. His judgement of humankind and its epistemic competence is scathing because he argues that "[…] Man is the most vain; that a man who dares to presume that he knows anything, does not even know what knowledge is; that Man, who is nothing yet thinks he is something, misleads and deceives himself?"

The essayist makes a similar argument in his essay *On the Lame* (III, 12). Talking about the impossibility for human beings to produce evidence for their arguments, Montaigne (2003, p. 2099) argues that it will never be able to put forward tangible evidence but "[…] they usually spend more time finding reason for them than finding out whether they are true […]". Humankind is not concerned with producing substantive evidence of its views but it simply reiterates the same argument since solid epistemic competence is being questioned. The title of the essay is itself appropriate because it refers to the "lameness", the weakness of human reason to explain things (Panichi, 2022, pp. 293-294, Lestringant, 2021, pp. 204-205). This is something Masters of Suspicion do: they scrutinise their circumstances, cast doubt upon received knowledge, and find novel way to establish new epistemic taxonomies.

Humankind, in its attempt to know, is misled and deceived: its knowledge is temporary and, as Ricœur argues, only self-reflection will help to find itself. Confronted with the epistemic background of his time, Montaigne does not deliberately endorsed ignorance but it lays bare the impossibility to reach an all-encompassing knowledge. No longer could he say what he knew and his own epistemic foundations could only be built by trusting God and His Word. I would argue that Montaigne claimed that demanding sound knowledge is vain since he had been a witness the Wars of Religion.

Belief, in Montaigne's estimation, is of paramount importance. It is indeed the product of faith and grace coming from his dialogue with God; the rest has to be re-established. Re-establishing some semblance of knowledge can only be achieved via an incessant re-exploration of oneself, to wit via the essay. The essay, therefore, allows one to explore God through a rational means. However, as Montaigne states in *On the Uncertainty of our Judgement* (I, 47), our mind is "insatiable" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 315).

Milton argues the same in *Areopagitica*, his polemical tract against censorship. He argues that censoring books "kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God". Insatiable minds are like books: they have potential for learning and censorship impedes us from having a dialogue with God.

A means like the essay or a polemical tract, which are both contingent, can help to investigate our lives, which are forever changing. The essay is not the product of institutional ideas (Scholar, 2016, p. 440). It is indeed a way to prove that knowledge is subject to changing. Milton confirms this assertion: censoring books means killing all the potential for intellectual insatiability. Most importantly, censorship kills "the Image of God", the change of ideas. Milton saw the discussion on censorship as a springboard for investigation: reading books could allow a dialogue with God and consideration with himself. Furthermore, as I will try to show in the section "The Scientific Milton", Bacon makes a similar remark: in his essay *Of Studies*, he notes (1985, p. 375) that only few books have to be "chewed and digestive". Like Montaigne and Milton, I would suggest that Bacon as well believes that our mind must be the receptacle of knowledge: readers must peruse books very carefully and make the most of their reading.

Critical capacity will help humankind to sharpen its wits and adjudicate on what is right or wrong. Critical capacity is essential in such a complicated time because, as I argue (Di Carlo, 2020, p. 38), "[…] against a backdrop of socio-cultural volatility, general social and moral are replaced by doubt". When there is no valid criterion to abide by to gain knowledge, then it always better to doubt than to claim certainty. This is the reason why books must be read and approached carefully because they provide knowledge which has to be considered carefully.

Like Montaigne, Milton makes the same argument: important epistemic processes like belief, faith and knowledge can only be rediscovered via a rational means, the essay or polemical writings. The Montaignian essay and Miltonian polemics are a way to negotiate a new epistemic background. This is the means whereby change can be made because, as a genre, it is predicated on self-reflection. As such, Scholar's argument helps to make of their circumstances: Montaigne's self-reflection and Milton's *Areopagitica* are an alternative to the traditional prayer to God. Self-reflection and polemics help to establish a new relation with God, even in a less institutional way. This fits into the agenda of change that Masters of Suspicion aim to design, that is to say to conceive of the divine in different ways.

### 5.3 Self-reflection and the essay as a means of recording that self-reflection

The new ways to gain knowledge, through solitude and an individual direct link to the divine as a source of all knowledge and truth, need to be put to good use. As I have already claimed in the previous section, this can be achieved via the essay, the genre which Montaigne created to keep a record of his fleeting knowledge and ideas.

It is as if the essay, according to Montaigne, is like a self-portrait. What he is endeavouring to show is to show the changes of his personality; the essay is not a simple sketch of one's life and experiences, but it is a way to verbalise one's life and thoughts. Montaigne's image is incessantly changing and the essay is the means to understand his musings; any subject can be tackled with a bid to investigate himself. No wonder that Montaigne (2003, p. 755), in *On Giving the Lie* (II, 18), argues that "by portraying myself for others I have portrayed my own self within me in clearer colours than I possessed at first. I have not made my book any more than it has made me- a book of one substance with its authors […]". The changes of his ideas and the acquisition of new knowledge are recorded in his *magnum opus* and thus it helps him to confront and examine his ideas and the way he has

changed, which in turn makes him pursue new thoughts and explore new directions. The essay, as I argued in 5.2, is like a notebook where Montaigne discusses his own ideas. Therefore, it links the book with its author because he gets to know himself via his vagaries and thoughts.

In his essay *On the Affection of Fathers for their Children* (II, 8), Montaigne (1993, p. 433) argues that he "offered myself to myself as theme and subject matter". As such, Montaigne's only teacher is himself. The investigation of himself emerges in Milton's work as well. In the *Epilogue* to his elegies (1645-1646), Milton stressed, before going to university, how his thoughts were fleeting:

> These vain trophies of my idleness I once set up in foolish mood and with supine endeavour. Injurious error, truly, led me astray, and untutored youth was a bad teacher; until the shady Academy offered its Socratic streams, and freed me from the yoke to which I had submitted.

Milton, like Montaigne, had been led astray by his many thoughts. However, university was a transformative experience because he could resist his fleeting thoughts by adhering to self-reflection. As it has been pointed out at the beginning of this section, Milton's and Montaigne's investigations of their personalities were spearheaded by the protean nature of personal circumstances. This is the reason why we should acknowledge that transience is the key feature of our nature as human beings. Knowledge can only be achieved through self-reflection. Milton's "Socratic streams" and Montaigne's "book of one substance with the author" point to the same idea: life is unstable and, as such, we need tutoring. Montaigne tutored himself via his essays, whilst Milton's tutoring was tertiary education, which made him aware of himself. Different ways can help to achieve the same end which, in this case, is self-awareness.

### 5.4 Morality manifests in multiple forms

The importance of solitude, individualism and self-reflection is linked to the role of morality. Although all truth, knowledge, and morality reside in conscience and the link to the divine source, the way in which the inspirations of the divine source can be interpreted and lived out may differ

from human context to context. The moral systems of the early modern age were bound to change due to geographical discoveries and, as a result, Montaigne and Milton challenged the notion of European anthropocentrism and acknowledged the morality of cultural plurality as a yardstick against which one could understand the world.

According to Montaigne, the New World is not something we should be afraid of. The most important result of travelling is the discovery of new forms of morality. What we European deem to be morally correct may not be the same for other people. Montaigne articulates his most famous attack on Eurocentrism is his essay *On Cannibals* (I, 31). Montaigne (1993, p. 231) poignantly argues that:

> […] that every man calls barbarous anything that is not accustomed to; it is indeed the case that we have no other criterion of truth or right-reason than the example and form of opinions and customs of our own country. There we always find the perfect religion, the perfect polity, the most developed and perfect way of doing anything!

Whilst it is true that to a European perspective anthropophagy is an outlandish and immoral practice, this is not the case for Brazilian cannibals. As Montaigne contends, we deem barbarous anything that is not in harmony with our criterion of morality. As such, eating other human beings is, for a Eurocentric standpoint, an abominable practice. Our ideas are just an example of myriad ideas that can now be used to question long-held truths. Besides challenging authority, Montaigne claims that travelling constitutes an important component to the upbringing of children. In the essay *On Educating Children* (I, 26), Montaigne (2003, p. 172) states that "[…] mixing with people is wonderfully appropriate. So are visits to foreign lands". Cave (2007, p. 73) argues that children should travel "wherever chance takes […]: the more encounters with the diversity of human cultures […] the better". Montaigne stresses the necessity to leave one's bubble: the world is so diverse that children and young people should have the opportunity to appreciate the customs of other countries. He re-emphasises this point in *On Habit: And On Never Easily Changing a Traditional Law* (I, 23)

For the essayist, our habits, our customs have become so entrenched into our make-up that we do not never realise that what we do has been handed down from generation to generation without even noticing. It indeed at the beginning of the essay that Montaigne (1993, p. 386) argues that habit

> is a violent and treacherous schoolteacher. Gradually and stealthily she slides her authoritative foot into us; then, having by this gentle and humble beginning planted it firmly within us, helped by time she later discloses an angry tyrannous countenance, against which we are no longer allowed even to lift up our eyes.

If we are to appreciate the novel ways of living and thinking coming from newly discovered countries, then we should discontinue our customs and traditions and open up to different kinds of behaviour and codes of morality. I would contend that this reinforces the way the essay work as a philosophical and literary genre: it takes no final stance but calls on epistemic humbleness because, as I have just shown, new ideas always emerge in the socio-cultural arena.

Montaigne's need for first-hand experience of foreign countries is echoed by Milton in prolusions. As Loewenstein (2013, p. 1) argues, prolusions are a "preliminary exercise, trial, or essay". Prolusions lay bare "diverse rhetorical and verbal skills: his eloquence, wit, verbal playfulness […]. They also reveal interests in mythography, history, educational reform […]. I would argue the nature of prolusions show many similarities with the Montaignian essay: both authors tease ideas out in their own reflections. Both genres are anchored in reality because they describe what is going on the world. The shared interest in travelling and exploring the world. This surfaces in Milton's Seventh Prolusion *Learning Brings More Blessings to Men than Ignorance*. Therein (Milton 2013, p. 17), he believes that history and mythography are a delight because they afford

> to the mind to take its flight through the history and geography of every nation and to observe the changes in the conditions of kingdoms, races, cities, and peoples, to the increase of wisdom and righteousness. Young men should also venture into foreign countries to enlarge experience and make wise observation

Milton's argument seems to hearken back to the tyranny of custom: travelling is a very important formative experience because it helps to overcome the strictures of long-seated habits. He argues that only travelling will enhance our knowledge of the world and discover new things. Confronted with new mores, Montaigne and Milton set out to answer the question of Montaigne's *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* (II, 12), i.e. *What do I know?* An attempt to respond this question is necessary because with new countries and new values being appreciated, one's knowledge has to be attuned to the context. Knowledge is now morally located in the emerging of new customs, which vary from country to country, and we have to be realistic and accept diversity. A similar point is made by Bacon in his essay *Of Studies*. If we want to better understand the world, then we should focus on "observation" (Bacon, 1985, p. 374). If one studies and assesses things, then one will be able to understand differences from received knowledge. They all emphasise the necessity to deepen one's knowledge by freeing the mind from tradition and custom.

Charles Taylor (1989, p. 180) argues that it is important "to eschew the presumption of […] spiritual aspirations". He also cautions his readers that living by "some universal model" is chimeric. Thus, what are the philosophical implications of Montaigne and Milton on the dramatic changes brought about by new discoveries or internecine wars? A possible answer to this question could be the one proposed by Patrick Gray and his endorsement of Epicurean ethic and its idea of *lathe bīosas* ("live unnoticed"). According to Gray (2014, p. 213), Montaigne, in withdrawing into his tower, decided to "[…] preserve his equanimity" By doing so, Gray (2014, p. 213) goes on to argue that "[…] Montaigne deliberately avoids responsibility, withdrawing into private *otium* (idleness)". The essayist, on Gray's account, did not incur any responsibility and dedicated himself to his philosophical and literary pursuits. It could be argued that Gray's proposal could work: after all, it is Montaigne himself who claims to have retired to his home and then started to put his vagaries on paper. It could be maintained that Gray's thesis could apply to Milton as well: seeking personal

illumination in his tower could amount to living unnoticed. However, Gray's argument is not good enough to account for Montaigne's and Milton's attitude.

Claiming that they want to live unnoticed and inconspicuous lives in their towers and gaining knowledge via their solitude is not entirely accurate. Their attitude can be better understood by taking their context into account. Both of them were living at a time of disarray and strife. Against the background of internecine wars, I would contend that it was unavoidable that they had to make sense of what it was going on and this is the reason why they resorted to self-reflection. I will show in the next section that self-reflection would ultimately lead to free-thinking. Voicing one's intellectual autonomy and acknowledging one's epistemic shortcomings better account for the philosophical changes of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe.

Along with Hartle's idea of accidental philosophy, whereby philosophical ideas cannot be reduced to pre-existing categories, free-thinking is fragile and flexible because it is used at different times and places, making it context-dependent. It operates differently according to the circumstances. Calhoun (2015, p. 151) pithily notes that "[…] the essayist's philosophical alliances were mixed and ever-changing". Given the ever-changing circumstances, Richard Scholar's notion of free-thinking neatly applies to Montaigne as well. Scholar (2016, pp. 435-436) describes this posture more clearly:

> That kind of free-thinking [Montaigne's] is an inheritance of the classical philosophical tradition: it is, for that reason, an exemplary instance of a moment in the history of European culture that is time and again characterized as one of Renaissance or "rebirth." […] free thinking is, at root, the attempt to reflect upon any particular question […] by asking "What do I think about this question?" […] To question received ideas in this way is to practice free-thinking […].

Free-thinking, as Scholar argues, re-merges when a "rebirth" occurs. This idea of "rebirth", I would claim, questions the notion of liberty posited by Felicity Green and problematises Gray's argument about an unnoticed life. Green (2013, p. 3) claims that liberty is achieved "not through political participation in a free state but through a personal practice of self-regulation allowing us to preserve

our will from subjection and expropriation". Self-regulation, as I will show in the next paragraph, does not affect Montaigne at all. Also, Green's argument, in my opinion, seems to be oblivious of a significant element of Montaigne's life. The essayist had been a very active political figure as mayor of Bordeaux.

Recently, Green has refined her argument. On Green's account (2022, p. 24), Montaigne contends that we can restrain our will if we "husband, economize, manage" it. Green's statement seems to imply that Montaigne is a sort of proto-liberal. I find fault with this statement because a discussion of liberalism in the sixteenth century is anachronistic[14]; Montaigne, I would claim, is not interested in monitoring himself, in restraining his life but he is striving to do is the opposite; he wants to scrutinise and investigate the world in the aftermath of epochal scientific change and the violence of religious strife.

Skinner outlines another problematic account of Montaigne's philosophical enterprise. His is problematic as Green's because of his misreading of Montaigne's attitude. He (1978, p. 276) maintains that Montaigne's politics amounted to a "sceptical and quietist form of stoic moral and political thought". Skinner, a few lines later, argues that Montaigne valued "the life of *otium* more than that of *negotium*". He would undoubtedly agree with Gray's idea of an unnoticed life. His treatment of Montaigne takes for granted that the essayist, once he had retired from politics, had decided to spend an idle life. As. I will show, not only is Skinner inaccurate but he does not seem to take Montaigne's circumstances into account, either.

In order to address Gray's, Green's and Skinner's treatment of Montaigne, I will briefly summarise their arguments. According to Gay, Montaigne lived a life of *otium*, an unnoticed life after holding significant political offices in Bordeaux. Skinner defends and refines Gray's contention; Montaigne is a quietist who decides to live in his family home in order to pursue a life of *otium*.

[14] Foucault, in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, argues that it was in the eighteenth century that new governmental practices arose, which established "a principle of limitation to the art of government […]" (Foucault, 2008, p. 10). For this reason, verbs like "economize" or "manage" would make more sense in the eighteenth century, not two centuries earlier.

Green, instead, refutes Skinner's quietism and provides an economic argument. On Green's account, Montaigne is a proto-liberal. I believe that their claims are one-sided because they take for granted that Montaigne withdrew into his tower to idly write and muse. It is the opposite because his tower became the perfect place to discuss his life and volatile thoughts.

Skinner's and Gray's arguments are not convincing if applied to Milton's ideas. I have already shown in "The Political Milton" that Skinner's analysis of Machiavelli's politics (and indirectly Milton's) is not persuasive. Skinner argues that Machiavelli is concerned with the relationship between the powers of the state and its citizen under the assumption that they are always harmonious. I have shown that it is not possible to attain such harmony because the boundaries of early modern politics are porous. Accepting pre-established taxonomies means that there is no scope for assessing the transient allegiances of Machiavelli and Milton. None of them are actually concerned with what the *state should be*, but they discuss the way political systems work. To put it more simply, they are concerned with what the *state actually is* and how it asserts its authority.

Gray's argument rests on the wrong assumption. He contends that both Montaigne and Milton wanted to live an unnoticed life because they reflect upon their conditions. In order to do so, they live in their towers. His contention overlooks a significant element of their philosophy. Montaigne and Milton did not decide to permanently live in a tower out of quietism or mere acceptance of the status quo, quite the opposite. For Montaigne the tower was a place where he could investigate his own self and record the outcome of such an investigation. The same applies to Milton. The tower is the place where he could successfully seek illumination. However, this was not permanent because both travelled to Italy in order to gain more knowledge and wisdom. However, a counter-argument stems from the one provided by Skinner's and Gray's theorisation, which is Raymond Geuss's account of Montaigne.

Raymond Geuss indeed offers a very compelling response to Green's proto-liberal Montaigne and Gray's and Skinner's quietist argument. Geuss (2017, p.125) maintains that "Montaigne was very keen not just on coming to know himself better but also on certain kinds of personal freedom,

especially his own freedom of movement". He shows that Montaigne does not want to monitor his behaviour, but he aims to know more. I contend that if Montaigne had wanted to regulate himself or if had wanted to tacitly maintain the status quo, he would have never travelled to Italy or criticised custom and tradition in the first place. His "own freedom of movement" and, more loosely, his interest in travelling and knowing makes Green's argument problematic because verbs such as "economize" or "manage" are at odds with Montaigne's and Milton's philosophical enterprise. They had no interest in monitoring themselves because they wanted to travel in order to enhance their knowledge of the world. As well as questioning Green's claim of a proto-liberal Montaigne (and Milton), the extent of Montaigne's and Milton's journey to Italy constitutes a sensible objection to Skinner's quietist argument. Montaigne himself, in his essay *On Three Kinds of Social Intercourse* (III, 3), offers a counter-argument to Skinner's passive acceptance of early modern France. Montaigne (2003, p. 1689) argues that we ought not to "[… ] nail ourselves so strongly to our humours and complexities. Our main talent lies in knowing how to adapt ourselves to a variety of customs".

If we want to know the world and its diversity, then we should refuse our whims and learn how to respond to "a variety of customs". To use Milton's words, we should travel to know cities and countries to increase our "wisdom". Customs, as the essayist argues, are tyrants, they are like a second self. So, if one decides to travel, they can actually learn new things. It goes without saying that quietism is an encumbrance to any learning experience.

John O'Brien and Rüdiger Safranski reinforce Geuss's contention. On O'Brien's account (2016, p. 188), Montaigne's freedom amount to "[…] a feature of an active quest for truth that is opposed to the setting down of hard-and-fast definition of the nature and the content of truth". O'Brien (2016, p. 198) goes on to maintain that Montaigne wants "[…] freedom from dogmatism and the ability to challenge and explore". Like O'Brien and Geuss, Safranski (2021, p. 79) argues that the main feature of the *Essays* is their "mobility". Furthermore, on Safranski's account (2021, p. 16), such freedom is brought about by the fact that "[…] traditional rules, laws, and beliefs have lost their

authority"[15]. The loss of foundational authorities indeed goads Masters of Suspicion into a more thorough scrutiny of reality.

For the essayist, as Geuss, O'Brien, and Safranski argue, this freedom, this need to enhance one's knowledge is inevitable because traditional forms of knowledge have now given way to the new and the unaccustomed and, as Ricœur argues, individuals have to experience the novelty of the world. Quietism, an unnoticed life, and the constraining of the self are the opposite of Montaigne's and Milton's philosophical enterprise. Milton as well condemns the status quo and does not accept the sway of tradition because it would amount to giving up on the pursuit of wisdom.

It is Montaigne himself that articulates his will to knowledge. In his last essay, *On Experience* (III, 13), he (Montaigne, 2003, p. 20175) maintains that the key aspiration of humankind is to enhance its "knowledge". A few pages later (Montaigne, 2003, p. 20177), he claim that our actions are "perpetually changing". In his essay *On Vanity* (III, 9), the essayist (Montaigne, 2003, p. 1955) claims that he is not interested in "the pleasures of building […], nor of hunting nor of laying out gardens, nor the pleasure of life in the country […]". Montaigne himself claims he is not interested in country life; what he actually strives to do is travel and therefore be able to enjoy his freedom. Thus, the author convincingly states that any bid to monitor himself is of no avail because things are endlessly changing, and he has no interest in living in the countryside. In *On a Ready and Hesitant Delivery* (I, 10), Montaigne (2003, p. 175) claims that

> I cannot remain fixed within my disposition and endowments. Chance plays a greater part in all this than I do. The occasion, the company, the very act of using my voice, draw from my mind more than what I can find there when I exercise it and try it out all by myself. And that is why the spoken word is worth more than the written – if a choice can be made between things of no value.

[15] Translations are mine.

The author is clear. He "cannot remain fixed" because the world is endlessly changing and it is not possible to take a final stance. He needs freedom, as he cannot uncritically accept the status quo. Acquiescence is not what Montaigne requires, quite the opposite. The need to investigate the world, or as Ricœur put it, the need to pinpoint the self disqualifies the idea of passivity. As Ricœur himself argues, Montaigne, like all Masters of Suspicion, belongs to a school of doubt. Skinner's quietism does not pass muster because it calls upon a resignation that Montaigne cannot envisage. He adamantly criticises customs or habits because his criticisms are actually the opposite of Skinner's quietism in the first place.

I would like to show how Montaigne's commitment to novelty problematises Michael Oakeshott's famous account of what conservatism is. On Oakeshott's account (1962, p. 169), a conservative mind, a defence of the status quo

> […] is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible […], the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss. Familiar relationships and loyalties will be preferred to the allure of more profitable attachments; to acquire and to enlarge will be less important than to keep, to cultivate and to enjoy; the grief of loss will be more acute than the excitement of novelty or promise.

Montaigne's *Essays* defy the necessary requirement of a conservative disposition. Montaigne does not "prefer the familiar to the unknown" because of his interest in travelling and criticising long-standing traditions. Montaigne prefers the untried to the familiar. Secondly, by using Safranski's own words, he is a thinker of "mobility", one who prefers the unknown to the known and, most importantly, "to keep" would bar from experiencing and enlarging. Furthermore, preferring "the familiar to the unknown" is a hurdle to the philosophical enterprise of Masters of Suspicion. Designing an agenda for change, challenging the status quo mean engaging with the present and refusing what is traditional and long-established.

Whilst I agree that the religious strife in sixteenth-century religious strife in France certainly upset the status quo and the acceptance of long-standing religious practices, I argue that even Montaigne, who remained a devout Roman Catholic throughout his life, criticised some elements of Roman Catholic theology. In *On Some Lines of Virgil* (III, 5), Montaigne is amenable to questioning auricular confession. Since it reinforced the mediatory role of priests, the Sacrament of Penance had become a cornerstone of post-Tridentine theology. Such a practice, however, had been decried by by the Huguenots and, generally speaking, by Protestant theologians. I am going to argue that, despite his adherence to Roman Catholic tenets, the *Essays* problematise this very delicate religious issue

Virginia Krause (2009, p. 146) claims that Montaigne resorts to "a confessional stance in the *Essays*, this context is always there in the background, for he is keenly aware of the two-pronged (judicial and religious) institutional demand for confession. His confessional discourse is thus acutely self-conscious". The personal nature of essay aligns with conventional Protestant theologians. Montaigne indeed claims, in *On Some Lines of Virgil,* that his confession will take place "here, in public" (Montaigne, 2003, p. 1748). A more convenient solution would have been to accept the status quo, to refuse the untried. The essayist, however, confesses to his faults not the priest but in his own work, so that his readers can discover his troubles, shortcomings, and predicaments. This is belabouring the point, but free-thinking is what characterises the author and his attitude towards his time.

I would suggest that Milton holds similar views: from the lonely and melancholic tower in *Il Penseroso,* he is now arguing that freedom of movement is something that will allow young people to "enlarge experience". Therefore, in both instances, neither Montaigne nor Milton recommend curtailing freedom of movement or living unnoticed. It is worth belabouring the point: even Milton, like Montaigne, travelled throughout Italy.

Juliette Morice deploys an argument akin to Geuss's and strengthens Leiter's claim that Masters of Suspicion investigate the materiality of nature. Instead of arguing the necessity for self-restraint, Morice (2017, pp. 178-179) maintains that travelling fulfils the need "to know the world. Montaigne shows that travelling is the opportunity to scrutinise the self and to make the most of his journeys"[16]. Morice's claim applies to Milton's attitude as well, as it will enhance "wisdom". Ultimately, I would argue that Green's, Skinner's, and Gray's arguments are detrimental to the way Masters of Suspicion behave. If they are barred from restraining their will or "economize" their movement, then they will not be able to enhance "knowledge" and investigate their circumstances. Morice's argument strengthen Leiter's claim that Masters of Suspicion are naturalist thinkers because they can avail of different ways to investigate the world. Morice and Calcagno make the same argument: Montaigne's and Milton's urge to travel shows that both thinkers wanted to increase their knowledge of the world, not passively accept the status quo. The status quo constitutes, by using Calcagno's category of impasse, a hurdle to increase wisdom. By doing so, they are contributing to defining a new subjectivity born out of need to explore the world and, as a consequence, to rediscover the self.

In these circumstances, I would argue, free-thinking is a valid alternative to accounting for the epistemic changes brought about by a thorough scrutiny of the world. Scholar's claim is that Montaigne and Milton are not interested in either self-regulation or expropriation: they insist on the value of free-thinking because it is impossible to self-regulate or contain their ideas, as their socio-moral background is too volatile to be able to master it.

Montaigne and Milton do not even think of self-regulation because it is important to find some sort of guidance amongst the many alternatives their epoch offered. This idea evinces in their discussion of melancholy: melancholy is a force for good because Milton experiences its benefits, and Montaigne's philosophical endeavour is born out of melancholy. As Ricœur and Safranski argue,

[16] For a similar claim, see Brahami (2007).

any novel attempt to redefine one's inner life puts pressure on pre-existing epistemological and cultural practices.

Taylor's argument seems to endorse Scholar's: in his estimation, living by universal models is of no avail because the epistemic background is ever-changing and it is better to eschew any universalisation (cf. Taylor, 1989, p. 182). Taylor, unbeknownst to him, calls Skinner's, Green's, and Gray's arguments into question: a proto-liberal philosophy, an unnoticed life, and a quietist life of *otium* simply pre-empt and freeze Montaigne's reception. Montaigne's thinking is not about defending the status quo because it operates in such a way that it destabilises traditional categorisations.

Scholar's idea of free-thinking is the most suitable strategy to question trite and long-standing categorisation of Montaigne as a sceptic. I would maintain that Gérard Defaux, in his article on why Montaigne's philosophy should not be categorised as sceptic reinforces Scholar's argument. Defaux maintains that "there had never been a "sceptical crisis" in Montaigne's thinking […]. If we want to argue that Montaigne is a sceptic, then we should maintain that his "fortuitous" and "unpremeditated" philosophy is […] a product of his maturity" (Defaux, 2002, p. 781)[17]. Defaux disagrees with any account of Montaignian scepticism because his philosophy, as Hartle argues, is accidental, with no consistent philosophical programme. Pierre Force echoes the argument of Defaux (and Scholar's) by claiming that the debate on Montaigne's scepticism is because scholars "find him philosophically inconsistent". This is the case, Force goes on to argue, because Montaigne is critical of "organized knowledge […]" (Force, 2009, pp. 528- 529). Force predates Geuss's contention that Montaigne strives to acquire more knowledge. The essayist wants to explore and know, but not in a systematic way. Force and Defaux help to reconsider the Miltonian contribution. If our aim is to visit cities and states, then our assumptions should not rest upon any form of "organized knowledge" because

[17] Translation mine.

travelling would be inconsequential. Moreover, Force and Defaux bolter Scholar's idea of free-thinking because he maintains (like them) that questioning traditional epistemic practices

All these positions, I would suggest, corroborates Scholar's argument of free-thinking: one should accept that allegiances are volatile because the early modern age and its fuzzy political, epistemological and scientific boundaries require questioning the status quo. In this regard, I would also maintain that the description of Montaigne as a disciple of Pyrrho should be reconsidered against the background of doubt towards "organized knowledge". Unlike Pyrrho, Montaigne does not want to achieve *ataraxia*, he is not interested in calmness. Ironically, he has already achieved tranquillity by practising free-thinking. Jack I. Abecassis (1995, p. 1709) reinforces this point by contending that his

> […] is the power to play with vocabularies (the vocabularies of Plato, Seneca, Sextus, Ovid, Horace, Plutarch, Sebond […]), to toy with quotations, to cut and paste, to paraphrase, to pastiche, to play languages and dialects against each other, to somehow, through this creative *bricolage* (emphasis in the original), through these multiple mirrors, fashion a self if only for a brief moment.

Jan Machielsen (2011, p. 431) reinforces this point by arguing that

> […] Montaigne's exploration of Pyrrhonian scepticism was neither literally nor philosophical the end of Montaigne's journey. The essayist's famous motto – 'Que sçais-je'? - must be placed alongside his self-discovery […]. It has been only to easy to equate the free flow of Montaigne's thought, and the lack of commitment and certainty that entailed, with scepticism.

The need to explore, brought on by the many voyages of discovery, could inevitably lead to the need of questioning customs, received knowledge, and tradition. Montaigne's philosophy is, therefore, a hotchpotch of many epochs, writers, ideas, and languages because it is what his time looked like. Warren Boutcher (2017, p. 5) pithily defines the author's philosophical enterprise by arguing that he

is like “a freestyle registrar and comptroller of literary and verbal artefacts from classical citations to anecdotal *experiénces*”. Boutcher, like Scholar, gestures to Montaigne’s resistance to the status quo by re-emphasising his open-mindedness and his rejection of pre-established epistemic principles. I believe that the behaviour of a “freestyle registrar” perfectly captures the way Masters of Suspicion scrutinise reality.

Mixing things up constitute the only viable philosophical enterprise because free-thinking allows him to think more clearly, without appealing to any authority. Thanks to free-thinking, he has achieved calmness and has acknowledged things cannot be conceived of in any other way. His commitment to free-thinking is deftly summarised at the beginning of his last essay, *On Experience* (III, 13). Montaigne (2003, p. 2175) claims that most natural desire is “the desire for knowledge. We assay all the means that can lead us to it”. I would claim that committing to scepticism limits the scope of Montaigne’s thirst for knowledge. Labelling him as a sceptic does actually more harm than good, as his interest is not in questioning knowledge itself, but how we can gain that knowledge and all the strategies that can help us in the process. Trite categorisation does not help because it undermines the broad scope of Montaigne’s philosophical enterprise, that is to say designing an agenda of change at a time of great epistemic change. By re-emphasising the fact that Montaigne’s thinking cannot be compartmentalised, I will try to elucidate how Montaigne’s description as a moral relativist does not pass muster either. I will try to show how free-thinking could help to reconsider the role of moral relativism in Montaigne’s philosophy.

I would maintain that neither Montaigne nor Milton endorse any form of relativism because they abide by a new different way of describing things. I would argue that Geuss’s realist interpretation of politics could also be applied to epistemology and morality: Montaigne and Milton seem to believe that morality has to be contextually located. When designing a new moral and epistemological model, one should always scrutinise their circumstances and thereon make their claims. Travelling will allow us to draw parallels between different sets of morality but that does not mean we should superficially praise them. They should teach us how to behave in a world that is

constantly changing. Scholar (2010, p. 88) maintains that "the argument is not relativistic […], but contrarian in its reversal of perspective: the chapter offers ethnographic information in the place of ethnocentric prejudices […] aiming a parting ironic jibe at the insularity […]". I would argue that Montaigne is not passing judgement upon what is right or wrong, acceptable or inacceptable, but he is arguing that we should accept other modes of living without comparing them against the yardstick of a Eurocentric mind.

It is also important to note that, indirectly, both Montaigne and Milton are criticising Aristotelianism. As I have shown in "The Political Milton", Foucault, Lemke and Greengrass put pressure on governmental practices by questioning the pre-existing Aristotelian framework. Greengrass, in this instance, scrutinises the existing moral framework. He maintains ((2014, p. 252) that everybody "was convinced (because Aristotle and classical Antiquity in general had taught so) that human nature was uniform". I would claim that his remark is the watershed between the status quo and a new worldview. Aristotelianism now rests on shaky ground because the encounter with diverse populations and mores proves that nature is not uniform and customary taxonomies are therefore pointless. As we shall see in the next section, "The Scientific Milton", Bacon finds fault with Aristotelianism as well. This does not mean that Aristotle is no longer influent. Even though scientists had started to challenge the influence of Aristotle, his importance cannot be denied. Any scientist or scholar still worked in an Aristotelian ambit.

If we are travelling, we are not only enhancing our knowledge but we are scrutinising the differences between a European mentality and the ideas coming from the New World. This is the reason why young people should travel: this is the only way they have to see what differences are between Europe and a newly discovered world. They should not model their judgment upon what they see but they should take diversities into account. In this context, I would suggest, moral relativism does not help because is a superficial praise of mores without critically engage with them. I would maintain that Desan (2018, p. 156) reinforces this position by claiming that "[…] the New World remains an *outside world* (emphasis in the original), the expression of cultures that are worthy

of esteem, but so distant from Western practices that it would be absurd to take them as a model". Scrutinising our world, as Montaigne (2003, p. 1911) maintains, is inevitable because the world itself is "a school of inquiry".

I would argue that Milton (2013, p. 17) is right in stating that we should "observe the changes in the conditions of kingdoms, races, cities, and peoples, to the increase of wisdom and righteousness". It is through scrutiny and appreciation of new people and their customs that we can understand their epistemic processes without making any superficial or acritical celebration of such differences. Like Montaigne, Milton intimates that such broad generalisations are of no avail unless they are rest upon solid contextual evidence. Both thinkers abide by the stipulations of the investigation of Masters of Suspicion: they observe the world and design an agenda of change tailored to their circumstances. James Kloppenberg (2016, p. 23) lauds their attitude because of their "sober commitment" to enhancing their learning. Kloppenberg's intimation confirms the validity of the contextual investigation of knowledge. They want to know more because the world has dramatically changed and they have to reorientate the scope of their philosophical endeavours. Milton's thirst for "wisdom", his "sober commitment" to enhancing knowledge questions both Gray's and Green's arguments. Milton does not want to live unnoticed (in spite of what he says in his *Penseroso*) and, most importantly, he does not want to manage his movements, as I will show in the next section. As I have claimed beforehand, Milton's reflection on melancholy in his *Penseroso* is *not* a literary exercise, but it is actually predicated upon showing the "Lamp"; the light that will lead us to discover the different facets of the world and the divers patterns of behaviour amongst newly discovered peoples. It will help us to redirect our attention to an unstable world.

Scholar's notion of a rebirth via scrutinising the world, in the case of Montaigne and Milton, coincided with a new way to take stock of the self via a new means, the essay or polemical tracts. Both capture fleeting and uncertain ideas which appear when things have dramatically changed. A rebirth also means a renewed interest the ways of knowing. Montaigne emphasises the importance of knowing and not disowning new forms of morality. At the same time, he also emphasises the

importance of travelling. It is through travelling that one's knowledge will be increased. Milton's argument echoes Montaigne's: to observe in order  to study countries and their people will help to enhance our awareness of diversity.

I  maintain that Montaigne and Milton, like Machiavelli, put forward the idea that knowledge should context-dependent. We should make our judgement against our own background and it should not be clouded by pre-existing interpretation. Free-thinking, as articulated by Scholar, coincides with the actions of Masters of Suspicion: no longer are they satisfied with customs and the entrenchment of opinions, which have become like tyranny. I argue (Di Carlo, 2020) that free-thinking grants authors "ample leeway to explore new ideas". Not only does free-thinking as a system of thinking allow "ample leeway" but, I would maintain, is also unorthodox as authors can ponder on things without being confined to a pre-existing intellectual framework. This echoes Karshan and Murphy's discussion of the essay, a genre that allows authors to put forward tentative ideas without committing to any authority. Thanks to this new leeway to gauge things, this iconoclastic response to reality and acceptance of the tentative and risky representation of such reality, free-thinking allows philosophers to find themselves in order to design an anti-authoritarian agenda of change by acknowledging the always-changing socio-political order.

I argue that, when discussing upholding a new socio-political order and the consequences of epistemological instability, Frank Lestringant makes a very good point. Lestringant (2022, p. 57) argues that Montaigne designs a reform of his more that "always changes, that is always tried and tested"[18]. Montaigne and Milton assess themselves, and they acknowledge that they cannot endorse long-standing patters of knowledge because the world is continually changing and such change will help them, as Milton says, "to enlarge their experience". I would argue that this continuous change is what Masters of Suspicion do: they observe their whereabouts and design an agenda of agenda that applies to their lives.

[18] Translation mine.

Like Machiavelli and Milton, who could be described as patriotic contextualists, I would maintain that Montaigne and Milton could be described as moral contextualists. This is the case because they do not commit to any value judgement. Their praise of diversity is not superficial but it ties into their study of context and of how customs can be influenced by context. Milton, with his commitment to enhancing wisdom denies there being alternatives to having a first-hand experience of the world. On Milton's view, if people cannot travel and encounter new populations or cities, then this precludes the opportunity of knowledge. Ultimately, as far as Milton is concerned, I would like to re-emphasise the fact that the inner light, the discovery of the self should not be limited to Milton's considerations in *Il Penseroso*, but it should also be extended to a wide range of experiences with the world.

**5.5 Montaigne and Milton as Masters of Suspicion**

Both Montaigne and Milton lived at a time of disarray and chaos. Montaigne was amongst the witnesses of the French Wars of Religion, a conflict which pitted Roman Catholics against Protestants. The notion of piety was now debated: whilst Roman Catholics claimed their allegiance to the teachings and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church, Protestants believed that the reading of the Bible and the direct link with God was the only way to obtain salvation. However, religion was not the only ever-changing domain: voyages of exploration in the New World meant that old, long-standing ideas in morality could now be challenged. No longer was it easy to understand what is right or wrong. Montaigne did not fail to confront this situation. After a successful political career, he resolved to leave politics to withdraw into his family home and, living a recluse, he started to develop chagrin which became, in turn, melancholy. So, facing a difficult social situation and his difficult personal background, he designed a genre that was philosophical and therapeutic at the same time, the essay. The essay, from the French "attempt", could be summarised by the sentence *Que sçais-je*? ("What do I know?").

As I have shown, sadness and melancholy are a creative force in the Montaignian essay. Both can have bad and good consequences since Montaigne offer contradictory views on them. Different ideas can be teased out but none is ultimately endorsed. For Montaigne, travelling has potential for self-reflection and epistemic transformation: travels help to redefine one's knowledge after encountering different codes of behaviour. The essay is Montaigne's agenda for change because he had to re-establish what was lost, above all his relationship with God, and to acknowledge the presence of new ethical codes. Thus, one could conclude that the essay is Montaigne's agenda for change for his epoch.

Milton, like Montaigne, lived at a very difficult time for England: the country was torn by the conflict between Puritans and Royalists. Like Montaigne, Milton realised that self-retreat was not an excruciating experience. I have shown that Milton's *Il Penseroso* ("The Serious Man") posits the idea that melancholy could be a divine and enriching experience, which could inspire authors to create new works. Even in a dark tower, the holy and wise light of melancholy can manifest itself, and it helps to illuminate new ideas and get rid of frivolity.

Like Montaigne, Milton confronted the new ways of thinking and knowing caused by the discovery of the New World. In his *Seventh Prolusion*, Milton emphasised the need to travel and get young people to come together to know more about each other. New knowledge and new information can be absorbed depending on the circumstances. Exclusivism can no longer be the case because knowledge can manifest in different forms but, at the same time, I have maintained that relativism is not good enough because it could be considered a broad generalisation of mores without engaging with them. As a consequence, I would argue, Montaigne and Milton could be practising free-thinking. I would suggest that, in this context, free-thinking is a sound heuristic approach. Both authors operated at a time that is too volatile and uncertain. Furthermore, the discovery of new populations and, therefore, of a new epistemic attitude does not call on certitude but on modesty. Put it more simply, the more ideas the better because we can sift them and make sense of the world.

Free-thinking appears when there is a rebirth, when new ideas are ushered in, and intellectuals start to ask themselves "What do I know? (which echoes the Montaignian *Que sçais-je?*). In this way, the re-exploration of long-standing ideas is contextual: novelty goes hand in hand with new places and with new epistemic modes at any time. As argued before, knowledge cannot be constrained because novel ways of thinking always emerge; self-reflection helps to take stock of the always-changing circumstances. Through constantly reflecting on new ideas and questioning old modes of knowledge, Montaigne and Milton are Masters of Suspicion because they explore new avenues of knowledge and their thinking is defined by their circumstances. They do not hold bold epistemic views but they practise epistemic modesty. Their assessment does not rely on the status quo or on a priori categories but it an *essay*, an attempt, to start afresh in order to design an agenda of change. It is important to note that self-reflection grants authors leeway to explore new ideas and enables them to design a worldview that is not based on sweeping generalisations but on the temporary and the uncertain.

I would maintain that two quotes from Milton's *Areopagitica* and Montaigne's essay *On Repenting* (III, 2) help to pinpoint their attitudes towards this endless scrutiny of their selves. Milton (2013, p. 210), when tasked with describing the essence of truth, claims that "[…] it is not impossible that she may have more shapes than one". Self-reflection and careful scrutiny of his circumstances allow Milton to conclude that the world is diverse and needs to be ceaselessly studied. Like Milton, Montaigne makes a similar point in *On Repenting* (III, 2). Montaigne (2003, p. 2066) contends that the world is an endless "see-saw". What Montaigne and Milton questioned was traditional philosophical approaches.

In the next section, "The Scientific Milton", we will see how the Baconian reform of knowledge will impact on Milton and how Bacon changed the format and the tone of the essay. Furthermore, we will see how Bacon perfected a long-standing literary genre for his work, that is to say the aphorism.

## Chapter 6

## The Scientific Milton

Bacon and Milton were contemporaries, both living at a time of upheaval. What characterises their philosophical enterprise is the influence of the New Science on their work. Francis Bacon's undertaking was to carry out an overhaul of the process whereby scientific knowledge was discovered. No longer did science have to be based upon on a dogmatic interpretation of Aristotelianism. Bacon does not want to deny the influence of the Stagirite, but he aims to reduce his influence on philosophy and science. Bacon's approach to science was based on "a safer and surer method" (Bacon, 2017, p. 22), one where real and observable data could be studied and then conclusions could be drawn. Clemens (2012, p. 172) contends that, in this new system,

> […] knowledge must be refounded on unprecedented new principles; this refoundation must be pragmatic, technical and testable; it requires new forms of collective work and institutions to support it; it is cumulative, acquisitive and in principle endless […].

Bacon had freed science from the shackles of a method which could no longer provide adequate explanations at a time of big changes and new discoveries. Unlike Montaigne's *Essays*, born out of the need to study himself at a time of disarray, Baconian science did not need inner validation because its validation was provided by the outer world.

Ian Box argues that Baconian writings should "provoke the reader to inquire further". On Box's account (1982, p. 34), Bacon's works are pragmatic and devoid of "[…] length or pithiness […]". Milton, as I will show in section 6.1, was concerned with science and its complexities, arguing that dogmatic Aristotelianism had been hampering scientific progress and a new methodology was necessary. Bacon strove to set out a new scientific plan where empiricism and sounder knowledge of the world would hold sway "over the abstract (Funari, 2011, p. 17). […]".

Milton voiced similar concerns in his *Prolusions,* outline his proposals to amend the strictures of an uncritical reception of Aristotle. The framework of the New Science could overcome such problems.

As I have shown in 2.4, Bacon's *Essays* are *Counsels*, that is to say advice on dealing with the realm of morality and public life. The essay *On Innovations* (24) underpins the practical nature of the Baconian matter-of-facts writings. Bacon (2008, p. 24) maintains that if things never changed, then long-standing traditions would constitute the yardstick against which we can explain society. However, time

> […] contrariwise moveth so round, that a froward retention of custom is as turbulent thing as an innovation; and they that reverence too much old times, are but a scorn to the new. It were good therefore in their innovations would follow the example of time itself; which indeed innovateth greatly, but quietly, and by degrees scarce to be perceived.

Things are endlessly changing. This is the reason why Gray's idea of unnoticed life and Skinner accusing Montaigne of quietism do not succeed in accounting for this background. In the same way that Gray and Skinner fail to account for Montaigne's emphasis on travelling and discovering, one can make a similar argument for Bacon's philosophical and scientific enterprise. I would like to emphasise that this notion of endless investigation ties into my discussion of the role of the octopus and the chameleon in Montaigne and Milton in the previous section. If we are like chameleons, then we never change and accept the status quo. However, if we behave like octopi, our lives will change because we engage with the real world and its many facets.

Milton (2013, p. 19), as we shall see, argues that observing the world should always be the case because "[…] looking back over a period of years how great a distance we have covered and across how a wide sea of learning we had sailed, without a check on our voyage". As I have argued in the previous chapter, Scholar's notion of free-thinking applies to Bacon and Milton as well, because scrutinising the world and gathering evidence bring about a re-assessment of scientific

knowledge. This ceaseless process of observation and validation of reality is a feature of the investigation of reality carried out by Masters of Suspicion.

I hope to show there are similarities between Bacon and Milton, who both questioned the strictures of a dogmatic Aristotelian approach, committed themselves to a new scientific paradigm, one which is based on empirical observation and testing. I will explore the following four principles that are evident in both their works:

**1. Scientific knowledge is no longer based on religion, but on observation and testing**

Whilst Montaigne was concerned with carrying out an investigation of his inner self, Bacon shifted his focus on the external world. No longer was the gathering of scientific and personal knowledge based on the dogmas of Scholasticism, but it was now driven by scrutiny of the outer and inner world. The new epistemic foundations should now rely on secular and observable sources, so that science could be based on more compelling, clearer and verifiable evidence. Although Milton, like Montaigne, acknowledged the importance of self-reflection as a way of exploring one's inner life, Milton, like Bacon, accredited the new scientific method as a means of discovering and validating scientific knowledge about the external world. As scholars, both Bacon and Milton could now capitalise on such a new epistemic model.

**2. The necessity of an empirical method to validate one's hypotheses**

A consequence of the secularisation of knowledge was the centrality of an empirical method. Experience was the criterion which could now explain the conclusions derived from observing the world and its workings. As intellectuals, Bacon and Milton promoted the new system of scientific knowledge.

**3. The extension of scientific knowledge requires a collective and collaborative effort**

Co-operation was now a necessary component of the new empirical method. If scientific knowledge is to be gained, then what is necessary is a common effort to show that the New Science is not a solitary undertaking, but a joint one, where observations, conclusions and evidence have to be discussed and confirmed in order to be validated. I will show that cooperation is a common feature in Bacon and Milton.

**4. Knowledge bestows more benefits to the common good than political gestures and money do**

The secularisation of knowledge and the dissemination of observable and tested scientific ideas could help to mitigate the religious conflict of the 16th century. A scientific model, which is no longer shackled by dogmas, could now be used to address political and religious controversies. Seeking peace and reducing fighting through informed and validated judgements is a preoccupation shared by both Bacon and Milton.

I will now consider these four key ideas by identifying sources that support my argument.

### 6.1 Scientific knowledge is no longer based on religion, but on observation and testing

In this first section, I will try to show how secularising knowledge is a preoccupation shared by both authors. As contemporaries, Bacon and Milton appreciated how the new epistemic model was predicated upon secular and observable sources instead of religious ones. Bacon, as a scientist, argued that secularising knowledge would lead to more dependable results. Bacon was not concerned with introspection and self-reflection because his commitment to the propagation of scientific knowledge was an enterprise aimed at a diverse readership so that the public could be cognisant of his effort to universalise objective ideas and validated studies. The new scientific approach was also important to Milton and the insights of the New Science were reflected in his works as well. Milton, in his *Prolusions*, shows that knowledge has to be freed from the principle of authority; there should be no

*ipse dixit* ("he himself (Aristotle) said that"). Dario Camuffo has reconstructed the origin of this dictum. According to Camuffo (2021, p. 13)

> in the Middle Ages, in the eyes of the Church and also of Islam, Aristotle was the reference for undisputed merits, starting from his fame that was summarized in the famous […] *ipse dixit* […] he said it himself. This dogmatic expression meant that no demonstration was needed when one thing is said by an authoritative person: a mix of avoiding explanations, faith and absolutism that represented the pillar of the autocratic societies of the Middle Ages and was very good for those who could not understand, as well as for those who could not explain.

This apodictic and unquestionable dictum had thwarted the work of scientists. However, whilst Aristotle's importance could not be denied, he had also become the target of unwarranted attacks. Del Soldato (2020, p. 3) reinforces Camuffo's argument by claiming that "Aristotle was invoked in writings and treatises […], sometimes through manipulations". As I have shown in the opening remarks of this chapter, Bacon claims that the task of science is to innovate "quietly". The background against which such quiet reforms happen cannot be discarded, but slowly improved. Aristotle, therefore, could not be rejected.

Bacon defends the New Science in a letter written to Sir Henry Savile, one of the most important classicists of the seventeenth century. In his letter, the saying "Faber quisque fortunae suae" ("Everybody is the maker of their destiny") is of paramount importance. This maxim is supposed to goads people into work. However, what Bacon is trying to do, at a time of great change, is not to negate the importance of the saying. He is actually recommending that humankind should be more proactive and take more responsibility for sharpening its mind in order to bring about change. This is the reason why Bacon argues that the saying "Faber quisque suae fortunae" should be rephrased into "Faber quisque ingenii sui" ("Everybody is the maker of their own wits") so that human beings will work on improving themselves. "Ingenii" is the key word in this instance: in order to understand that the world was becoming more secularised and that everything was changing, the emphasis should

shift from one's destiny to one's "wits". Refining knowledge is now more important than one's destiny.

The most pressing change is required in the mind because, if humankind is to progress, then it needs a new frame of mind that can be more receptive to a paradigm shift centred upon the analysis of the world and the drawing of conclusions. Thus, in order to enhance the apprehension of new things, then mankind should not depend on divine knowledge, but it has to rely on human perception, reasoning and external validation to discern new learning and knowledge. Albeit in their own ways, Bacon and Montaigne confront the issue of religion. Montaigne, by questioning received knowledge, does not completely deny the importance of religion. Free-thinking allows him to elucidate his ideas of religion. In his essay *On Prayer* (I, 56), Montaigne (2003, p. 355) claims he was and will die a member "of the Church Catholic, Apostolic and Roman" and will heed its teachings. A few pages later, however, Montaigne (2003, pp. 361-362) argues that he is offering his own fallible thoughts which are not "things established by God's ordinance […]: they are matters of opinion not matters of faith". By doing so, he acknowledges that challenging religious precepts is now possible because the essay allows him to talk freely about his religious views. Whilst his allegiance is to the Roman Catholic Church and its dogmas, he is also putting forward a more eirenic approach to religion by acknowledging that his beliefs are not universal but his own.

Unlike Montaigne, who defends a more peaceful approach to religion, Bacon, instead, argues that religion is a stumbling block in scientific progress. In his preface to his *Novum Organum* (1620), Bacon (2017, p. 7) excoriates religious leaders because in order to

> lay down the law of nature as something that has already been discovered or understood […] have done great harm to philosophy and the science. As well as succeeding in producing belief in people, they have been effective in squashing and stopping inquiry.

Bacon, however, in the second book of his *Advancement of Learning* (1605), where he articulates his epistemic manifesto, resorts to an agricultural simile to explain how scientific inquiries and the use of the mind should work. According to Bacon (2008, p. 245) any scientific inquiry amount to "[…] Georgics of the mind concerning the husbandry and tillage thereof […]". "Georgics" (after Virgil's bucolic poems) is indicative of what scientists should do: like farmers, they must get rid of any weed (symbolic of any hurdle to observation of the world) to further scientific scrutiny.

I argue (Di Carlo, 2020, p. 43) that Bacon's philosophical investigation is the one of gardeners, who "must sow the seeds of truth and learning". The tending of a garden is the metaphor of the mind: in order to disseminate the seeds of knowledge, one has should be aware of mental processes so as to get rid of long-standing tenets. The mind should be more flexible because learning and scientific investigations can yield significant results via the sharpening of one's wits, one's intellect. Sharpe (2014, p. 91) re-emphasises this point by arguing that "A complete magisterial philosophy must come 'the diseases and infirmities of the mind' […] as well as painting stately theoretical pictures of human natures, the virtues, and the good. Then only can philosophy help to 'cure' these ailments [19]. "Disease and infirmities" can only be cured by sowing "the seeds of truth and learning". The gardener of the mind will be able to decide on what should be discarded and what should be sown.

Bacon's philosophical works, as I will show later in this section, is suffused with references to classical works. Graeco-Roman literature, as I will argue, allows Bacon to design an agenda for change in the domain of science. Like Machiavelli and Montaigne, who had relied upon ancient authorities in the realm of politics, knowledge and morality, Bacon will do the same by relying upon the classical world to question received knowledge and innovate it by scrutinising scientific

[19] Even though this is beyond the scope of this thesis, Sharpe (2021) argues that Bacon's philosophy also has a therapeutic and self-reflective component. To philosophy as a cure to ailments, see Corneanu (2011, p. 84). Virgil's references are from *Aeneid,* VI 893-897.

discoveries. Looking with reverence at the past is what Masters of Suspicion do: past examples illuminate present approaches to design an agenda of change.

I would like to argue that Milton makes a similar remark in his *Seventh Prolusion*: in Milton's estimation (Milton, 2013, p. 19) our pursuit and the study of the Arts is " […] outdone by labourers and husbandmen in working after dark and before dawn; they show greater energy in a mean occupation, to gain a miserable livelihood, than we do in the noblest of occupations, to win a life of true happiness". In order to advance a reform of learning, we should behave like farmers who spend their whole day working hard for very little; scholars, however, do not do enough for the pursuit of science because dogmas impede the scientific community from gaining more knowledge and they prevent scientists and scholar from being more proactive. This is the reason why they should imitate farmers: their work (or, for scientists, their inquiry) will be long but its result will be fruitful.

It is in his essay *Of Superstition* (17) Bacon defends the necessity of continuous scrutiny. He blames superstition (the blind obedience to dogma) for what it has done to the marshalling of knowledge. He argues (Bacon, 2008, p. 373) that the theologians of the Council of Trent are responsible for the spreading of superstition because "[…] the doctrine of the schoolmen bare great sway […] the schoolmen had framed a number of subtle and intricate axioms […], to save the practice of the church". Religious dogmas, unless they are questioned, become entrenched in the human mind and prevent people from changing their opinions. This what Bacon defined as "idols of the theatre" because one can no longer say the difference between what is truth of falsehood; hence, as I was arguing beforehand, Bacon has to be the gardener of the mind so that he can scatter the seeds of truth and knowledge.

This the reason why humankind should always scrutinise its own knowledge and get rid of anything that disallows progress. As a high civil servant in James I's kingdom, Bacon applies the same principle to politics: in his essay *Of Empire* (19), he calls on monarchs' prudence. According to

Bacon (2008, p. 377), this is the case because monarchs "[…] have to deal with their neighbours, their wives, their children, their prelates […], their nobles, their […] merchants, their commons, and their men of war; and from all these arise dangers, if care and circumspection be not used". Even in matter of politics it is more opportune to observe things and then adjudicate upon the best course of action otherwise leaders may suffer setbacks if they are not careful enough. Bacon aligns with Machiavelli (and Milton) in this case: it is better to act according to circumstances. Like Milton's Alfred, Bacon's advice to monarchs, is based on context: there is no a priori knowledge but a contextualised one. Bacon (1985, p. 217) argues in his essay *Of Counsel* (20) that

> counsellors should not be too speculative into their sovereign's person. The true composition of a counsellor is rather to be skilful in their master's business than in his nature, for then he is like to advise him, and not to feed his humour.

Advisers, as Bacon notes, have to be "skilful". The job of advisers is not about pleasing leaders, far from it. Even though they have to recommend a certain course of action to politicians who may not like it, counsellors advise leaders on what they see, on the evidence provided by the circumstance. They do not " feed their humours". Their job should be context-dependent and should not be predicated upon pleasing politicians but they have to recommend the best course of action depending upon their circumstances. This means that making difficult decisions is always a matter of concern and of contextual knowledge. In *Of Counsel* Bacon stresses a very important element in the relationship between advisers and monarchs, that is to say trust. Monarchs can rule their country thanks to "the trust of giving counsel" (Bacon, 1985, p. 186). Giving advice is a matter of trust. If there is no trust between monarchs and advisers, then the whole process is flawed.

Bacon's discussion of religion is an outright refusal of dogmas because they have impeded the understanding of science. He does not attempt to look at religion from two different vantage points because religion is detrimental. Unlike Montaigne, Bacon does not endorse epistemic modesty. According to Mario Aquilina (2021, p. 4), Bacon's essays are "anti-Montaignian" in that the

Montaignian essay is predicated a continuous reconsidering, rewriting and rethinking of things. I disagree with Aquilina's argument because Montaigne engages with education. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Montaigne discusses reforming education in *On Educating Children* (I, 26). The essayist was one of the many intellectuals who wanted to instigate changes in educational methods. As Manzo (2006, p. 249) argues, Bacon and other seventeenth-century philosophers (like Descartes) address scientific progress because it would grant humankind more leeway so that "men have the power to judge their theories and methods, and to refute their errors". Therefore, if one's wits have not been sharpened, dithering could prevent them from investigating the world and describing scientific change. His essays necessarily have to be, as Aquilina notes, "anti-Montaignian" because Bacon has already made sense of his world thanks to his determinacy to advance scientific progress.

Bacon contended that Aristotelian dogmatic scholars taught ideas sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church; thus, learning and knowledge were mostly consigned to clergymen. Their teaching was based on the principle of authority: what Aristotle said is unquestionable because his works had provided scholars with all the necessary tools to describe the outer world. Inevitably, this rigid educational system had impeded philosophical and scientific progress due to pre-established ideas and dogmas stemming from Aristotle's *Organon*, i.e., the "instrument" which taught the sanctioned version of thinking. Aristotelian scholars had done more harm than good. However, Bacon's aim was not to completely destroy Aristotelianism. According to Christopher Crosbie (2014, p. 233), Bacon

> […] creates an Aristotle […], that is, fashioned to advance a particular agenda. Throughout his works, Bacon seeks […] to remove from the philosopher his iconic status […] to transform him into a different icon altogether, a paradigmatic instance of how a faulty methodology can […] consign subsequent generations to intellectual torpor.

Crosbie's quote outlines *one* of the ways Bacon perceived Aristotle. The other one was to refuse the way he had been unquestionably received in universities. Indeed, it is important to emphasise that his manifesto is called *Organon*, Aristotle's exposition of logic. He wants to criticise

Aristotle but, at the same time, his work is too important to be totally dismissed. What Bacon and many of his contemporaries aimed to do was to criticise those intellectuals and scholars who defended "his authority as the only source of truth" (Sgarbi 2017, p. 243). In aphorism 68 of his *Novum Organum*, Bacon (2017, p. 59) excoriates the old learning by arguing that

> The corruption of philosophy by superstition and input from theology is far more widespread, and does the greatest harm, whether to entire systems or to parts of them. Systems thus afflicted are just nonsense judged by ordinary vulgar standards, but that doesn't protect men from accepting them, because· the human intellect is open to influence from the imagination […].

One of the most important features of Bacon's *Novum Organon* is the fact that it is made out of aphorisms. Andrew Hui, in his recent survey of the aphorism as a genre, dwells upon Bacon's conception of his own aphorisms. On Hui's account (2019, pp. 111-112),

> […] aphorisms destabilize the reigning epistemologies so that the scientist can directly interrogate the particulars […] of Nature itself without the interference of superannuated authorities […]. In the *Novum organum*, each aphoristic paragraph […] contributes to the overarching plan […] of Bacon's […] thinking […]. Instead of giving the appearance of an encyclopedic *summa* (emphasis in the original), the "fragmentary" aphorism provides only a provisional blueprint, an invitation for the reader to participate in the construction of an entirely new "system" of science […].

Bacon's conception of the aphorism serves his purpose. He does not want to build a new scientific model on the incontrovertible axioms of dogmatic Aristotelianism. Rather, he wants to create a new "system", one where observation and the drawing of conclusion will help to foster "a provisional blueprint". Aphorisms facilitate learning and the appreciation of new things in the world in that they constitute a novel means of broadcasting our discoveries. Aphorisms are pithy and terse and can always be rephrased depending on the circumstances. As I will set out to show later, Milton did not write aphorisms, but he achieved the same result via his *Prolusions*, which are not as terse and pithy as aphorisms but meet the same requirements by announcing that scientific change is under way.

If the quality of learning and of scientific inquiries is to be enhanced, then a new method is required. Such a new method will retain the starting point of "sense-perception", but adds a method predicated on systematic observation and testing; the emphasis is, therefore, on the construction of a scientific system which does not rest on unquestionable ideas, but this is a new system, one where observations are based on testing and validation. Bacon (2017, p. 22) argues that his *Organon* has to know how "to penetrate into nature's inner and further recesses […]". Laura Snyder emphasises the importance of observation and testing of this time. In her estimation (2016, pp. 28-29) this epoch was characterised by

> a new idea of what it meant to *see* emerged (emphasis in the original) […]. This new idea of what it meant to see went hand in hand with a new idea of science, one in which enhanced sense perception—not ancient texts, not logical deduction, not even raw visual experience—was the foundation of knowledge of the natural world […]. For the first time the question of how we see assumed a central place in science, and what it meant, precisely, to see, was radically reconceived.

In order to investigate "nature's inners and further recesses" science could no longer rely upon the teachings of dogmatic theologians. Nature needed investigating and the only way to do so was, as Snyder argues, to start to scrutinise the world and its phenomena. Indeed, on Snyder's account, science had prized observation. No longer are ancient books or ancient dictums the unquestionable repositories of learning but now the world was the only place to look at in order to effect change. Furthermore, I would argue, there is another important component of Bacon's scientific idiom, that is to say its iconoclastic, destructive potential. It was May Midgley who had emphasised the iconoclastic potential in Bacon's language and, more loosely, of his contemporaries. According to Midgley (1992, p. 79), they key feature of this language was its

> […] destructive gusto that, from the start, went with it. Wanting to emphasize experiment, the pioneers of modern science had an image of themselves which differed from earlier images of learning in being more workmanlike […]. This physicality, together with the fact that they really did want to make big changes, led them to revel in drastic language.

I would contend, however, that there the purpose of Bacon's philosophy is twofold. Whilst, like many others, he was questioning academic teaching and the ensuing dissemination of knowledge between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, he is also trying to rebuild. He is destroying but, as I have argued beforehand, Bacon is the gardener of the mind because he is sowing the seeds of knowledge. Destroying past knowledge and fostering the new one is his main task.

The author fulfils this task in his *Novum Organum.* As such, his *Novum Organum* dislodges mere acceptance of dominant ideas and, as a Master of Suspicion, he has an agenda for change, that is to say one that relies on the rejection of epistemic frameworks that have prevented science from developing properly. Milton, like Bacon, believed that strictures of the most dogmatic forms of Aristotelianism had to be reformed.

As part of his educational process, Milton was supposed to fulfil his academic requirement through prolusions, which focussed on the state of learning. According to Loewenstein (2013, p. 1), prolusions are "academic exercises or orations […]. The Latin word *prolusion* refers to a preliminary exercise, trial or essay. These exercises are based on his intensive rhetorical training […]". Milton's *Seventh Prolusion* marks a stark contrast with Montaignian rhetoric; whilst Montaigne prized humbleness and an endless investigation of himself, Milton does the opposite: he wants to assert. This is something Milton and Bacon share: it is possible appreciate scientific change and the intellectual debate has to acknowledge it. Even language is not exempt from this change.

Milton argues that the old philosophical and logical system based upon the most dogmatic forms of Aristotelianism impedes progress; it had become like weeds. If learning, based on the principle of authority still holds sway, then philosophising is nothing but rote learning. Milton (2013, pp. 15-16) argues that the moment the most dogmatic interpretations of Aristotelianism influenced the gaining of knowledge "blind illiteracy had penetrated and entrenched itself everywhere, nothing was heard in the schools but the absurd doctrines of drivelling monks […]". Bacon (2017, p. 29)

strengthens this point by arguing that *not much can be known about nature by the method that is now in use* (emphasis in the original). Like Bacon, Milton as well believes that learning cannot be the endless repetition of Aristotle's doctrine but it should be based on observation and testing. It should be like wrestling. It is like fighting because people practising it will have to pit their findings against the critical scrutiny of others and so make scientific knowledge more dependable. At the end of his speech, Milton seems to adopt the same idiom as Bacon's: if humankind relies on rigorous observation and validation, then its "ingenii sui" ("its knowledge, wits") will be more beneficial to humankind, because, as a consequence, it will ameliorate the whole system. The liberating quality of knowledge is also expressed by Milton in his *Sixth Prolusion*. Milton (2013, p. 6) argues that philosophy entangled in "the brambles of logic", that is to say the Aristotelian dogmas, then there will not be any intellectual amelioration and, most importantly, no critical scrutiny of its arguments. A few lines later Milton defends a pugilistic acquisition of scientific awareness by arguing that

> […] those who exercise themselves in wrestling and other sports grow much stronger much stronger than others and more ready for all emergencies, even so we usually find this mental gymnastics strengthen the sinews of the mind and tone up its whole system, and polish and sharpen the intellect, making it versatile and adaptable.

I have argued beforehand that Bacon is the gardener of the mind, committed to improving science. I would contend that Midgley's remarks upon the destructive potential of language in scientific works of this time resurfaces in Milton as well. Milton's emphasis on "training" and strength fulfils the same purpose: his keenness upon training, strengthening one's mind and also gymnastics is reminiscent of the "drastic languages" used by science. Anybody who wants to acquire new knowledge has to behave in the same way successful wrestlers do whenever they want to win trophies.

Like Bacon, even Milton destroys and then sows the seed of reconstruction As I have already shown in the section "The Political Milton", I would argue that the making one's intellect "versatile" and "adaptable" is beneficial to the field of politics as well. Political advisers have to know the context

before making any recommendation to leaders. Milton's "mental gymnastics", his praise of testing and validation, equates with the ubiquitous scientific gaze which studied and classified everything without heeding any religious authority. It is important to note the metaphorical shift between destroying and reconstruct is also a feature of Masters of Suspicion: they study their circumstances and then design an agenda of change. In this dialectic between destroying and laying new foundations, Bacon's aphorisms fulfil the same requirement. Its terseness means that science can always change and it is always important to be "versatile" and "adaptable" instead of taking a dogmatic posture.

Sharpening one's wits helps to better understand the benefit of the New Science: if science and learning are based upon tangible data scrutinised by others, instead of the mere acceptance of the scientific status quo, then the mind will progress and overcome intellectual restraints. Thus, Bacon and Milton share the same idea: if the mind stops depending upon an uncritical engagement with long-standing scientific dogmas, it will discover a new scientific approach where educational dogmas no longer hold sway and a whole new learning process, namely based on the results of rigorous observations and confirmed conclusions, can open itself up.

I would argue that classical literature and classical mythology may have helped both Bacon and Milton to articulate their views. As we have seen, Bacon appeals to Virgil for the metaphorical cultivation of the mind and the questioning of prejudices and Milton, in his *Sixth Prolusion* resorts to mythological figures to enhance the pursuit of science. He (Milton, 2013, p. 12) argues that he must beseech "Neptune, Apollo, Vulcan, and all the artificers-god to strengthen my ribs with wooden supports or to bind them round with iron plates". Classical gods can help Milton to accomplish his investigation of the world and nature. The careful scrutiny of the past, as I have shown in the section "The Political Milton", helps to illuminate the present in order to design an agenda for change; Bacon does so through his "Georgics of the mind", the thorough examination of the mind and its workings which hearkens back to Virgil's bucolic poems. Milton does the same via his appeal to Greek mythological gods. He argues that, by appealing to Greek deities, he will be able to gather more

knowledge because they will provide him with strong material and solid support: through (the metaphorical use) of wood and iron, Milton will therefore accomplish a more systematic analysis. The more knowledge one gets through continuous scrutiny of the world without relying on dogma, the more reliable one's judgement will be. Provided that they study the past carefully, Masters of Suspicion can then design an agenda of change.

The scrutiny of the past and the formulation of ideas based on "sense-perception" will ultimately strengthen our discernment of things. I would argue that their reasoning is also attuned to Montaigne's rejection of custom. As I have shown in the previous section, customs are like tyrants who are not easily dislodged; this can only be achieved through acceptance of diversity and observation of reality. I would maintain that Montaigne, Bacon and Milton design an empirical agenda for change predicated on the study of the past and the ensuing drawing of conclusion. The workings of the present can be ultimately understood if one has a grasp on the past.

Bacon's *Essays* centred on the importance to sharpen one's wits to enhance knowledge. In his essay *Of Studies* (50), Bacon (2008, p.439) emphasises the importance of reading and learning. He believes that one should not "read to contradict and confute […] but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested […]". Reading is not a light activity, but rather one demanding attention, because books, no matter their topic, always impact on their readers. Bacon (2008, p. 168), in his *Advancement of Learning* (1605), reinforces this point:

> […] the images of men's wits and knowledge remains in books, exempted from the wrong of time and capable of perpetual renovation. Neither are they fitly to be called images, because they generate still, and cast their seeds in the minds of others, provoking and causing infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages.

Bacon's emphasis on the importance of books and reading is laid bare by Milton's polemical speech *Areopagitica* (1644). MacDowell (2020, p. 51) argues that knowledge "can only flourish" once all

obstacles have been removed. One such obstacle is censorship. According to Milton, censorship amounts to killing a life. Milton (2013, p. 185) contends that anyone who

> […] destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the Earth; but a good Booke is the pretious life- blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life.

As I have shown above, Milton (2013, p. 185), a few lines later, re-emphasises the idea of hard labour, this time with reference to the publishing of books and licensing. He argues that

> We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men, how we spill that season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in Books; since we see a kinde of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdome, and if it extend to the whole impression, a kinde of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elementall life, but strikes at that ethereall […] essence […].

Milton is worried about censorship. It is like committing a murder as it is not "the slaying of an elementall life" but the one of an "ethereall […] essence […]". Censoring books or any kind of educational medium is like a murder because it will (metaphorically) kill what books can teach and tell us. The hard labour of writers and intellectuals will be lost forever because licensers are not amenable to authorising works which do not abide by the status quo. Blasi (2021, p. 21) indeed argues that the most important thesis of *Areopagitica* is that

> passive understanding in deference to custom and authority is a dereliction of duty. In this regard, heresy as conventionally understood to mean deviation from community, orthodoxy, embracing ideas commonly held to be false, is not a legitimate basis for regulation. Punishing heresy so conceived […] saps inquisitive energy, encourages shallow understanding, and presupposes a 'static' rather than active, adaptive 'living' of truths.

Milton contends that "heretical" content should not be censored but should always be available in the public domain. If anything that is deemed inappropriate for consumption is banned, then people will learn nothing and their knowledge will be, as Blasi argues, "static". Instead, Milton intimates, we

should always learn from such "ethereal" existence. I would argue that censorship will stall the work of Masters of Suspicion because they will no longer be able to scrutinise and reconsider the meaning of texts and select those items that can be questioned.

Bacon's argument about books and their impact on their readers is reiterated by Milton too. Books are holy: censoring them means depriving them of their teaching. If books teach how to "weigh and consider", then censorship impede such an intellectual operation. In *The Advancement of Learning, Of Studies* and *Areopagitica*, books are like sentient creatures which bestow knowledge upon those who read them; they are like "seeds" that shape opinions and arguments even for future generations Most importantly, censoring them means impeding scientific progress. If the New Science, which is based on rigorous observation, testing and the drawing of conclusion, cannot disseminate its results, then its results will not be available to the public. Consequently, long-standing scientific principles will never be contested and the status quo will prevail. By designing this argument, both Bacon and Milton liberate knowledge and make it available to everybody. Peter Pesic has recently discussed violence in Bacon's texts. On Pesic's account (2014, p. 90), violence equates with liberty. Such liberty and violence can " […] transform nature itself". Pesic's emphasis on the potential of violence to effect change, I would maintain, can also be appreciated in Milton. As I have shown beforehand, Milton recurs to pugilistic images to describe the progress of science. Such violence has significant liberating potential because it is not violence for violence's sake but it is motivated violence. Like Machiavelli in politics, Bacon and Milton seem to harbour the same feelings about violence in science. If it is well used, then violence can help to further the cause of scientific investigations. However, liberty, violence and study of the past hold significant sway on the work of Bacon and Milton as Masters of Suspicion.

I would also argue that the scrutiny of the past examples is essential to Masters of Suspicion: it helps them to effect change. They countenance using violence if wisely wielded. We have seen how Machiavelli and Milton approved of violence depending upon the circumstances (Cesare Borgia and

Alfred, as I have shown in the section “The Political Milton”, are of this opinion). In the case of Bacon and Milton the use of violence is necessary to transform science. It is not callous or aggressive but necessary to allow science to progress.

### 6.2 The necessity of an empirical method to validate one’s hypotheses

The New Science had abandoned a dogmatic and unquestionable reverence towards the Aristotelian corpus. The New Science designed by Bacon is one freed from bias and pre-existing assumptions and, instead, is predicated on an empirical methodology, i.e. one where observable data can question accepted ideas. In this section, which is closely aligned to the previous principle of the secularisation of knowledge discovery, I will try to show the importance of an empirical method for both Bacon and Milton. Bacon, like Montaigne, relied on the genre of the essay to defend his new mental framework.

Whilst for Montaigne the essay is reflective and self-interrogating (his thoughts and ideas had made himself because they stemmed from his own act of self-reflection and record-keeping), Bacon believes that the essay can also be conceptualised in a novel way: no longer should it be confined to self-reflection, but in Bacon’s hands it has now become a work aimed at a more general readership to show the progress made by a scientific system predicated on observation and testing. So, in line with a methodology based on empirical data, the more humankind keeps questioning, the more it will apprehend and increase its knowledge. Any question asked to those with expertise will be beneficial, because people will attain more and more knowledge through sharpening their wits thanks to others. Given the importance of empirical evidence, Bacon exhorts his readers that they should be proactive, i.e. insist on asking because, as a result, it will increase shared knowledge and society will benefit from it. Masters of Suspicion insist that new ideas can help to question traditionally accepted notions by renewing the debate with novel skills to gather new knowledge.

As a consequence, science has been refounded: rigorous observation and the drawing of conclusion now hold sway. Even in matters of everyday life observation is essential: the more you study your body, the more you will understand what you should be doing and what you should not.

Rigorous and systematic observation is complemented by hypotheses. Bacon's main concern is the way science engages with real-life experiences and enriches them. This is especially the case in Bacon's essay *Of Regiment of Health*. Bacon (2003, p. 404) argues that the most important thing is to "examine" one's customs in eating and sleeping. If one examines one's life, then they will be able to shape their life on an empirical basis instead of pre-existing ideas. Like Bacon, Milton will emphasise the importance of testing and drawing conclusion.

Milton argues that a new scientific paradigm was required because of the blind and unquestionable acceptance of what Aristotle had written. Now, however, humankind is more amenable to scrutinising the word, the expansion of knowledge is gaining ground, and the prejudices of the past are eroding. It is important to note that this echoes Bacon's exhortation that "Faber quisque ingenii sui" ['everybody is the maker of their own wits']. Also, Bacon's comment on examining life seems to be echoing in Milton's *Sixth* and *Seventh Prolusion* (see 6.1). The key word in this case is "to observe" how societal change affects the life of countries (Milton, 2013, p. 17). I would like to argue that, albeit indirectly, Bacon's theory of the *idola* resurfaces in Milton's writings as well. Milton never mentions the theory of the *idola* but its influence can be intimated, as thanks to continuous scrutiny of the world and old epistemic patterns can be effectively dislodge; the drivelling monks, as Milton argues, will soon be a thing of the past because scientific progress cannot be arrested. This approach based on questioning the efficacy of old methods of knowledge is endemic to Masters of Suspicion, in that it shows how to design an agenda of change to reconsider our circumstances and the ways we make sense of the world and its novelties.

Milton's *Areopagitica* addresses issues of censorship both in literature and science. It was during his tour of Italy and 1638 that Milton visited an aged and weak Galileo, who had been imprisoned in his Florentine home by the Inquisition. Galileo, in his works, had proved that Aristotelianism had impeded scientific progress at a time when science had become empirical and rigorous. As a consequence, Galileo had been detained by the Inquisition because, according to

Milton (2013, p. 201), he thought "in Astronomy otherwise then the Franciscan and Dominican licencers thought". Milton is concerned with both Roman Catholic and Anglican censorship because they were inimical to the progress of science by not licensing books (in England) or by putting scientists (like Galileo) under house arrest. Gimelli Martin (2001, p. 258) argues that censorship obstructs a "Baconian expansion of learning", which is all about observing, testing, and drawing conclusions. Both Bacon and Milton emphasised the importance of observing and investigating the outside world. With such sweeping changes in science happening very quickly, it is important to foster learning and new ways to gain knowledge.

Beside Galileo, Milton mentions in *Areopagitica* a religious figure who had decried Roman Catholic censorship, Paolo Sarpi. Sarpi, a Venetian clergyman, had authored a very scathing account of the Council of Trent (*History of the Council of Trent)*. Published in 1619 in Italy, it came out in the same year in England Milton (2013, p. 188) was in awe of "Padre Paolo", who had criticised the Tridentine Council and the Index[20]. McDowell (2020, p. 591) claims that Sarpi's work "[…] became increasingly important to Milton's thinking in the early 1640s about the pernicious effects of religious censorship on the intellectual health of a nation". Mario Infelise's assessment of Milton and Sarpi ties into McDowell's argument. According to Infelise (2014, pp. 188-189), Milton had had the chance to "appreciate the work of Sarpi […]. It was Sarpi's work that allowed Milton to put forward a full-fledged argument against censorship"[21]. As he argues in his prolusions, studying and reading are a benefit. If human beings cannot avail of such opportunities, then their lives will be shallow.

Outside of Milton and Bacon, Montaigne as well addressed the similar issues in the French-speaking world. As I have already shown in the previous section, Montaigne's *Essays* provided a vital means of self-analysis. However, the author also touches upon censorship and the stifling of learning. In his essay *Something Lacking in Our Civil Administration* (I, 35), Montaigne lamented the fact that the French intellectual and theologian Sebastian Castalio (1515- 1563) (Sébastien

[20] Cherchi (1997, p. 315) provides a brief overview of Sarpi's work.

[21] Translation mine.

Châtellion) had died in penury in Basel after having been forced to leave Geneva by John Calvin. Châtellion had vocally denounced Calvin's involvement in the death of the Spanish anti-Trinitarian theologian and medical doctor Michel Servetus in 1553.

In 1554, he wrote a work in defence of freedom of conscience and the free exercise of religion, *De haereticis, an sint persequendi* (*Should Heretics be Persecuted?*). His oblique defence of Châtellion's ideas is in line with this change of paradigm: our ideas are not fixed, and they can be changed in accordance with our endless investigation of the world. Montaigne's free-thinking underscores the fact that the more we engage with the world, the more we will know. I would maintain this is the reason why the essayist discussed Châtellion and his book, as we should always leave the door open to change our mind and we should avoid taking a definite stance. No wonder Scholar (2016, p. 1089) argues that this age is a time where "the tongue has to speak", and Marco Sgattoni (2022, p. 302) contends that people like Montaigne and Châtellion had freed Europe from "intellectual hypertrophy"[22].

The Châtellion and the Galileo controversies evince that the intellectual and the scientific communities should be emboldened to speak and defend their own ideas thanks to their investigation of the world. The more we discuss and observe, the better it will be for our existence. Garavini re-emphasises the idea of free-thinking to discuss the religious transformation in the early modern age. On Garavini's account (2021, p. 25), Montaigne's most important "[…] aspiration was […] a radical reform of Christianity"[23]. In the same way the *Essays* are the account of the transient reflections of Montaigne, free-thinking can now help Montaigne to confront the equally fragmented early modern religious landscape.

As shown by Bacon, Montaigne, and Milton, travelling and studying (even with the aim of settling religious discord) are key to enlivening the public debate in the aftermath of epochal societal transformations. Due to this sweeping change of paradigm in science, even the essay had to catch up

[22] Translation mine.

[23] Translation mine

with this new environment: Bacon wrote essays which addressed matter-of-fact concerns, like science. Milton did not express his thoughts in essays but he voiced similar ideas in his academic exercises (his prolusions) and polemical speeches (*Areopagitica*). Both Bacon and Milton chose different means to achieve the same goal, to show that change could only be achieved via observation and drawing of conclusions. Montaigne as well confronts these issues. He avers that free-thinking and the gaining of new knowledge at a time of significant change can help to revitalise public discussion based upon our circumstances.

Both Roman Catholic and Anglican censors believed that certain material should not be available to the public. Montaigne argues that with the unquestionable defence of dogmatic positions issues as diverse as the free exercise of religion will be equally censored. However, by doing so, then the seeds of knowledge, as I have averred, cannot be scattered and, as Blasi maintains, knowledge will be forever "static" because the status quo will never be challenged. This is the reason why Masters of Suspicion should question practices like censorship or, more loosely, any ban on learning and the gathering of information, because the public will never learn and, as a consequence, they will never bring about change.

### 6.3 The extension knowledge requires a collective and collaborative effort

If we are to usher a new science into the world, then cooperation amongst stakeholders is required. Spiller (2004, p.2) notes that science and philosophy at this time cooperate because they are "instances of early modern knowledge production". Both Bacon and Milton knew that spreading the new knowledge required cooperation. The change was, therefore, epoch-making: no longer was knowledge to be found in a religious establishment and interpreted by the clergy, but now it had become a secularised project, which can be understood by everybody if their investigation is based on a process of observation and the drawing of conclusions.

Bacon defends the scientific programme of the New Science in his *Advancement of Learning* (1605). Bacon (2003, p.146) declares that in his book he will counter the ways "men have withdrawn too much from the contemplation of nature and the observation of experience, and have tumbled up and down in their reason and conceits". Later, Bacon (2003, p. 147) makes a similar observation: hindrance to knowledge is accounted for by " […] the manner of the tradition and delivery of knowledge, which is for the most part magistral and peremptory […], in a sort that may be soonest believed and not easiliest examined". A similar remark, as we shall see, is defended by Milton in his tract *Of Education*, where he arraigned the lack of critical engagement and the ubiquity of dogma.

Unflinching dogmas have impeded scientific and it has also prevented humankind from scrutinising the world and its workings. The theory of the *idola*, as exposed in *New Organon* (aphorism 38), helps in this context. According to Bacon, *idola* amount to the false images, the prejudice that have stifled learning. In order to disseminate his ideas and show how an overhaul of science is necessary, Bacon sought cooperation from James I. His royal patronage was necessary to advance his thesis and circulate the work he was doing.

The *Advancement* is divided into two parts: in the first part, he will dwell on the benefit of learning and education and the best way wherewith such education and learning can be broadcast. In the second, Bacon will address the tools which have been put in place to acquire new knowledge. The fallout of the Reformation and the scientific progress made between the 16$^{th}$ and the 17$^{th}$ century meant that science and politics needed to go hand in hand. Even more so in England, where religious institutions were overseen by the sovereign.

An invitation to cooperation is articulated in the preface to *Novum Organum*. Bacon (2017, p. 14) argues that if scientists are not satisfied with the present state of scholarship and

> […] if you want to stick with the knowledge we already have, and want to penetrate further, to conquer nature by works, not conquer an adversary by argument, to look not for nice probable options but for sure proven knowledge, I invite you to join with me, if you see it fit to do so.

Bacon is also inviting those who may want to pursue scientific studies to follow him in this endeavour. Science, therefore, can only help humankind to progress if the work is shared; with there being any help but only dogma, then people will never challenge the status quo. Via cooperation, Bacon designs an agenda of change with his readers: if they follow his arguments, then they will improve their "wits".

Bacon claims that carrying out a scientific investigation is a holy undertaking. He likens kingly authority to the wisdom of biblical sovereigns, like Solomon (Sargent, 1996, p.150). Furthermore, a biblical quote appear in the cover of the above-mentioned *Novum Organum*: "Many will travel and knowledge will be increased" (Daniel 12: 4). I would argue that this praise of travelling resurfaces in Milton's *Seventh Prolusion.* He argues (Milton, 2013, p. 16) that

> […] what delight it affords to the mind to take its flight through the history and geography […] and to observe the changes in the conditions of kingdoms, races, cities, and people to the increase to wisdom and righteousness

The emphasis on travelling and the knowledge of diverse epistemic backgrounds is recurrent feature of Masters of Suspicion because they design an agenda which catches up with societal change. In his tract *Of Education* (1644), Milton proposes a new curriculum to the Anglo-Polish pedagogist Samuel Hartlib. Hartlib's concern with education is something that was shared in Europe at that time. The Czech pedagogist Jan Amos Komensky (also known as Comenius) had been writing about a more efficient universal education. Lee and Hong (2021, p.9 ) argue that Comenius "wanted all people to be educated, and there was no exception when it came to science education" Lee and Hong (2021, p. 20) maintain that the content of a science curriculum "should (i) provide comprehensive of natural

and artificial things, (ii) be carefully selected because a personal cannot learn all the scientific knowledge but should instead learn the important things, and (iii) be relevant in raising students […]". Hartlib was disseminating his ideas in England, with a view to setting up his own school (Loewenstein 2013, p. 170). Dedicating this essay to Hartlib, Milton argues that education should not be influenced by Scholasticism. Milton (2013, p. 173) seems to be echoing Bacon's emphasis on direct observation when he argues that "universities […] not yell well recover'd Scholastick grosnesse of barbarous age […] they present unmatriculated novices at first commenting with the most intellective abstractions of Logick & metaphysicks […]". As argued above by Bacon, educational plans should be radically changed. Instead of studying the outer world and drawing conclusions, students have to learn dogmatic and abstract topics : they lose contact with reality and cannot focus on scientific progress. Consequently, I would argue that the educational plans devised by Comenius (and Milton) hearkens back to the Baconian theory of the idols, especially the idol of the theatre. As explained above, the idols of the theatre are superimposed philosophical and epistemological systems which prevent scholars from articulating viable scientific theories. Milton (Milton, 2013, p. 173) maintains that if students are to engage with the outer world and its workings, then it will be fruitful to discontinue

> […] babblements, while they expected worthy and delightfull knowledge, till poverty or youthfull yeers call them importunately their severall wayes, and hasten them with the sway of friends either to an ambitious and mercenary, or ignorantly zealous Divinity […] and *Sophistry* (emphasis in the original).

The "babblements" and sophisms taught at university hinder education and knowledge because they are superimposed and do not contribute to teaching. I would contend that Milton's reforms of schooling will target an education steeped in dogma, they will (metaphorically) destroy it. As argued by Ricœur, Masters of Suspicion have to destroy and then lay the foundations for change; this is what Bacon and Milton do because they destroy dogma and the unquestionable principle of authority which impede critical thinking and the understanding of the New Science.

A similar approach is endorsed by Montaigne as well. In his essay *On Educating Children* (I: 26). Talking about children's education, Montaigne recommends having a tutor. Such a tutor, according to Montaigne (2003, p. 169), should not be "the only one to choose topics or to do all the talking: when the boy's turn comes let the tutor listen to his pupil talking […]. Spewing up food exactly as you have swallowed it is evidence of a failure to digest and assimilate it […]". Montaigne's educational approach is not different from Bacon's and Milton's: no longer is the role of the teacher an essential one, but now it is for pupils to make the necessary progress in their learning. Learning is ultimately devolved to pupils: it is for them to pick up on the most important elements of their education. Montaigne, Bacon and Milton emphasise the autonomy of learners: nothing should be imposed on them. Montaigne uses the metaphor of digestion: you should not regurgitate what you have learnt but you should assess it critically. Bacon makes a similar argument since, for him, learning is like reading: some books demand that they be read in a desultory way but others need reading very carefully. People have to be masters of their own wit; knowledge is more important than simply repeating things by heart. Milton's approach is based on Montaigne's and Bacon's: learning has to be freed from pre-imposed ideas, but it is for learners to make up their mind. Montaigne, Bacon and Milton challenge the status quo when it comes to education: the authority principle is faltering, and new ways to learning have to be explored. From an educational point of view, Montaigne, Bacon and Milton design an agenda of change predicated on autonomy rather than on authority.

Both Bacon and Milton emphasise the need of examining and observing: as argued in 6.1, mankind has to become the maker of its own wits and be more proactive, giving up on pre-established ideas. Bacon's essay *Of Studies* argues that if humankind cannot make subtler arguments, then it is because of "schoolmen" (Bacon, 2013, p. 460). Bacon's schoolmen and Milton's logic and metaphysics are the kind of education that should be got rid of. In order to do so, cooperation is of paramount importance. Bacon dedicates his *Advancement of Learning* to James I. Milton promised to help Hartlib, who had decided to set up his own school and required help as to how his syllabi could be designed, focussing on a more experimental method. What is at stake is how they deal with authority.

No longer does authority mean blind acceptance, but it means critically acknowledging the past. Aristotle is still an authority, but not an infallible one.

### 6.4 Knowledge bestows more benefits to the common good than political gestures and money do

The use of a new kind of scientific knowledge resting on rigorous observation and validation of one's hypotheses can be fruitful in more than one epistemic domain. Scientific knowledge, therefore, has become independent and in doing so, is of immense benefit to the progress of society. Having a fit mind and a rigorous process of making new discoveries can deliver more benefits to society than political policies or the use of money to solve long-standing social problems or scholarly disputes; this aspect should be emphasised because the new scientific method based on observing the world will help to advance the agendas of change promoted by the Masters of Suspicion.

Bacon casts himself as a messenger of change. His message, as it has been shown in 6.3, is that the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of learning is a pursuit which should enable people to defend their reasoned ideas without being punished. His mission is to enhance the domain of knowledge and learning. To do so, however, is a collective undertaking, one where ignorance has to be countered. Like Machiavelli, Bacon relies on historical figures to support his own reform of science. In *Novum Organon* (aphorism 92), Bacon (2017, p. 117) claims that "hope is the only way to bring men to *particulars* (emphasis in the original). Christopher Columbus hailed a new era thanks to his voyages, Bacon will do the same in the domain of science; he is the herald of scientific progress, the one who recommends focussing on the particulars, the most minute details of knowledge. This is in line with the emphasis on the importance of understanding history and the past, as both can help to design changes in the present.

The same concern with the importance of learning is highlighted by Milton in his *Areopagitica* (1644). Books, according to Milton, are full of advice and ideas. Thus, since books have their own life and broadcast knowledge, it is possible to conclude that they are more powerful,

efficacious and useful to human beings than politics and money. Furthermore, given their inherent lives, books, written at any time, can provide Masters of Suspicion with the knowledge, often rich historical knowledge, they need design a specific agenda of change for their epoch. It is important to note that in *Areopagitica* Milton (2013, p. 185) argues that books enable anybody to have "the liberty to know".

Montaigne, Bacon and Milton encourage travelling. Montaigne, in his essay *On Vanity* (III, 9), touches upon travelling. According to Montaigne (2003, p. 1101) travelling is

> an enriching experience. It keeps our souls constantly exercised by confronting them with things new and unknown; and […] I know of no better school for forming our life ceaselessly to set before it the variety found in so many lives, concepts and customs, and to give it a taste of the perpetual diversity of human nature.

Travelling is open-ending: new things can always be learnt. As Cave (2007, p.73) contends "travel is education". Travelling is as freewheeling as an essay; knowledge has become context-dependent because the more you know the more you are exposed to different codes of morality.

Bacon, in his essay *Of Travel*, puts forward a very similar argument. According to Bacon (2003, p. 374) travelling is for young people "a part education". Seeing new places and appreciating new customs amounts to examining and observing; in this way can young people (and their older cohort) understand that their opinions are not the only ones. The appreciation of diversity is the result of examining and observing.

Milton relies on a similar approach. In *A Brief History of Moscovia*, published posthumously in 1682. Milton argues that "the study of Geography is both profitable and delightful". However, Milton caveats his readers: his writing about geography and travelling will not be fustian but to the point. In his *Brief History,* he will report on "onely worth observation". Talking about new countries is vital but, at the same time, it is more important to know about new places without being involved in too many unnecessary and verbose musings; this is the reason why Milton will provide his readers

with all the necessary information. Knowledge gained from travelling is worth considering only if disseminate relevant knowledge. Milton (2013, p. 16) reinforces this point by arguing that "[…] human happiness is derived from the society of one's fellows and the formation of friendship […]". Like Montaigne and Bacon, Milton as well believes that meeting new people and travelling can be part of an educational process. Travelling, experimenting, and observing contribute to the work of Masters of Suspicion, because they will help them to interrogate reality and its workings.

### 6. 5 Bacon and Milton as Masters of Suspicion

Both Bacon and Milton lived at a time of important scientific change. The blind acceptance of Aristotelian dogma was detrimental to the development of a methodology based on an empirical analysis of reality. At the same time, however, it is important to note that Aristotelianism was not a totally discredited system. This is the reason why Bacon's manifesto is titled *Novum Organum*. The *Organum* was Aristotle's 'instrument' to describe his logic, but for Bacon it was the 'new instrument' to set out what the New Science is about: it is a system based on "sense-perception", an empirical programme which will be most profitable to humankind, because it will sharpen those "wits" whose "inquiry". Bacon wants humankind to be the maker of its own wit. In order to achieve this, however, Bacon emphasises the idea of cooperation: "the advancement of learning" will only be possible if human beings collaborate and if such cooperation is validated by other scientists (and by the sanction of the king). Bacon illustrated how he wanted science to progress to the king and eagerly sought his help. Bacon, however, did not believe that the advancement of science should be violent: his idea of science is one of peace. Violence destruction and peaceful reconstruction, based on observation and the drawing of conclusions, underscores Bacon's method. Violence, even in science, should be well used.

Thus, Baconian science is one based on observation, testing, and cooperation so as to make humankind as knowledgeable as possible. Faith is important but, according to Bacon, science is more

important because it has to provide new epistemic methodologies. This is the reason why Bacon's *Essays* are different from Montaigne's; whilst for Montaigne the essay is self-reflective, for Bacon it is a broader genre, with the aim of universalising an empiricist agenda. Bacon never digresses or provide anecdotal knowledge because he wants succinct and to the point; Bacon's effort is about changing humankind via rational means, not to change himself by talking about himself. By the same token, Milton emphasises the importance of science.

Like Bacon, he too attacks Aristotelian dogmas in his *Seventh Prolusion* (see 6.1). Even in the case of Milton, adhering to dogmatic Aristotelianism had involved excoriating a system which was no longer dependable. It could be argued that Milton's *Organum* are *Areopagitica* and *Of Education*: in his polemical speech and his proposed educational reform, Milton advanced the primacy of learning. In *Areopagitica*, he contends that censorship is detrimental to the progress of science: licensers decide what books should circulate. In this way, science cannot progress because new ideas cannot be discussed. If the ban on books is detrimental, religious censorship can be even worse. Milton, whilst travelling through Italy, relays meeting Galileo, whose discoveries ran counter to Roman Catholic teachings and, as a consequence, was put under house arrest in Florence.

In *Of Education*, Milton helped the pedagogist Samuel Hartlib to set a curriculum. Milton as well highlights the importance of cooperation. It is only through collaboration that science can progress. Bacon and Milton believe that travelling is essential. In the frontispiece of his *Organon*, Bacon's quote from the Book of Daniel emphasises the relevance of travelling. It is vital to our own understanding of the world because it enriches us. Milton makes a similar argument in his *Brief History of Moscovia*, where visiting Russia will help to innovate and change one's ideas of the world. Like Montaigne and Bacon, Milton too argues that friendship and encountering new people can help to extend one's knowledge and one's ideas. Both Bacon and Milton share a commitment to exposing the detriments of dogmatic Aristotelianism, which could no longer yield any result in scientific investigations. Both authors had excoriated tradition. However, what they show is not tradition itself the problem, but the blind and unquestionable adherence to Aristotelianism. If Aristotle's oeuvre is

not accepted blindly, then the Aristotelian corpus will not be as important as it used to be. Bacon and Milton set out to combine Aristotelianism with a new scientific framework, which was predicated upon the rejection of dogmas. They take aim at the idea of blindly accepting tradition.

In the next section, I will explain why it is fruitful to define Milton as a Master of Suspicion.

**Conclusion**: **A Revisited Milton**

In the previous chapters, I argue why Milton should be considered an Early Modern Master of Suspicion. In the first section, "The Political Milton", I have examined what I believe to be the similarities in political thinking between Machiavelli and Milton. First and foremost, I have highlighted the fact that both Machiavelli and Milton considered the past to set important examples for political action. Looking at the past in pursuit of new political model is necessary for Machiavelli, and he did so by analysing the figures of Romulus and Numa. In *Discourses* I, 9 Machiavelli claims that Romulus's murder of his brother Remus should be excused because he was to found Rome. If Italy is to be unified, then past figures can provide a viable examples.

Like Machiavelli, even Milton lived in a very difficult time: England was a war-torn country, with the Puritans and the Royalists fighting against each other. After the Commonwealth had been established, it was clear to Milton that the new republican order was no different from Charles I's autocratic rule. In his bid to re-establish peace and order, Milton looked at the past as well. In his *History of Britain*, Milton saw in Alfred and Edward viable examples of sovereignty. Alfred countered Viking raids and pacified England. In the same way that Machiavelli excused Romulus for his deed, Milton seems to be doing the same in his treatment of Alfred; he was cruel (he had no qualms about showing thieves and criminals hanged) but his cruelty was necessary, it is well used. As such, he was able to command the respect of the people and Milton concluded that justice "flourished" under his rule. Edward, like Numa, consolidated Alfred's political reforms.

In their works Machiavelli and Milton confronted *raison d'état*, Reason of State. No longer was the State a moral political unit, but an autonomous one. Moral concerns no longer held sway on political leaders. Politics, for both Machiavelli and Milton, has become a matter of context: decision-making is now circumstantial. This is the reason why Machiavelli hails the killing of Remus by Romulus: Remus had to be killed because Rome had to be founded. Despite the cruelty of the action, in Machiavelli's estimation, Romulus should be excused. Machiavelli. By the same token,

Machiavelli praises Borgia's violent killing of his ally Remirro de Orco: the spectacular fashion of Remirro's death should remind the people of Romagna that Borgia is ready to take any measure for the safeguard of the State.

Milton's contextualism is evidenced by his ambiguous relationship to a monarchical system. We have posited that Milton may have been aware of monarchomach writings, which suggest killing unrighteous kings. This ideas resurfaced in tracts like *Eikonoklastes*, where regicide is defended if need be. However, since Cromwell was behaving in the same way as Charles, Milton is not averse to having a king: this is the reason why singled out Alfred the Great. Like Borgia, Alfred acted on the same principle: the citizenry had to understand that upholding law, order and peace was more important than morality; if need be, then violence cannot be ruled out. Machiavelli and Milton studied their circumstances and thanks to their engagement with the past designed an agenda of change: past political figures can provide sensible answers to complicated contemporary situations. Geuss's argument for a more contextual and less moral politics underpins my argument; politics does not engage in an "ethics-first" approach but it is more localised and is subject to change according to the circumstances.

In the second section, "The Personal Milton" , I have shown the possible links between Montaigne and Milton. Montaigne, one of the witness of the French Wars of Religion, withdrew into his family home and created a new philosophical genre, the essay. The essay is informed by self-reflection. Confronted with the stark reality of French politics, Montaigne claimed that having an insatiable mind means studying everything.  In his essays Montaigne teased out diverse ideas and showed how long-held moral principles could no longer hold sway. This incertitude is clearly shown in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (II, 12) where Montaigne spells out incertitude as to how he can gain knowledge. Previous patterns of knowledge no longer work because the world has changed in his moral and geographical set-up. The essay calls on modesty: things have radically changed and so should our ideas; this new genre does not provide answers but it is a location where discrete ideas can be discussed. A very fecund means of exploration is provided by melancholy: Montaigne claims

that, thanks to his melancholic bouts, his rambling ideas and his musings could be put to paper. The author of the *Essays*, as argued by Zalloua, is unruly because he never ceases to contradict himself.

Milton, like Montaigne, drew inspiration from melancholy. For Milton, melancholy is wise and sacred, and gets him to illuminate his most remote ideas; it is like a lamp. He as well articulated his ideas in tracts or polemics. He argues in *Areopagitica* that political and scholarly debate cannot be stifled by censorship. In *Of Education*, he articulated new ideas for school syllabi, focussing on observation and examination. However, his proposals are not final: he is simply advising what it should be better to do.

Montaigne and Milton praised the discovery of new worlds. Accounts from newly discovered countries appealed to both Montaigne and Milton. The former argued that Eurocentrism should be dislodged to allow diverse ideas of morality to prevail; the latter argued that travelling is an important endeavour: new places can be visited and, consequently, new ideas can be discussed. Montaigne and Milton show that contextualism works in the realm of morality and education as well. Novel conceptions about morality or education cannot be discarded a priori, but they have to gauged on a case-by-case basis. This is in line with the analysis of the circumstances promoted by Masters of Suspicion: since the circumstances have to be studied, therefore an agenda of change has to take the context into account.

In the third and last section, "The Scientific Milton", I have shown how Bacon and Milton discussed the scientific breakthroughs of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, specially the influence of Aristotle. Even though philosophers and scientists had challenged Aristotelianism, the Greek author was still an important authority.

Bacon's scientific programme is clearly outlined in a work that is reminiscent of Aristotle's *Organon*, *Novum Organum*. The *Organon* is one of the key books on logic by Aristotle; however, in his "new" *Organon* Bacon set out to proffer a solution to the shortcomings of Aristotelian epistemology. This is the reason why Bacon wants humankind to be the master of its own knowledge without relying on unquestionable authority. Milton shared Bacon's ideas; in his *Prolusions* Milton

arraigned the legacy of the dogmatic instances of Aristotelianism. The progress of science has been impeded for far too long by "drivelling monks", the hindrances of past scientific ideas. Thus, like Bacon, even Milton confronted the scientific landscape of early modern Europe and concluded that an overhaul of knowledge was necessary.

I contend that this could be beneficial in the way John Milton has been studied in philosophical circles and by arguing that Milton could be reinterpreted as a Master of Suspicion, it will certainly help to recast his philosophical heritage. This could make a very strong argument to rebut the usual hermeneutic categories which are assigned to him and his oeuvre. Such a reassessment should be carried out against the background of his own time and, as I have tried to show throughout this thesis, politics, self-analysis and science should be prioritised. Overall, I also believe that the thought of Paul Ricœur and his notion Masters of Suspicion should also be extended to other thinkers in the early modern age: Descartes, for example, could be categorised as a Master of Suspicion because his philosophy is iconoclastic and Descartes himself is the destroyer of a whole philosophical tradition in his *Discourse on Method* (1637). However, I do not argue that Milton's reassessment should not be limited to the above groupings but scholars may want to consider more avenues.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, Milton and Machiavelli seem to abide by Geuss's rejection of an "ethics-first" approach to politics because their political allegiances were protean or context-dependent. I believe that there is potential for more extensive research in this domain. This could help to look at Milton from a more exhaustive political vantage point: did he have more extensive knowledge of monarchomach tracts in his opposition to Charles I? Another possible avenue to explore is the connection between Milton and the English seventeenth-century reassessment of the Middle Ages: I have tried to argue that he may have looked sympathetically at Alfred to rebuild England in his *History of Britain*, but it would be worth considering how extensive Milton's knowledge of the Middle Ages was; this could mean looking at co-operative research between political philosophy and history and, as a consequence, to effect a change of paradigm. I would argue that, in order to do so, Milton's political thinking should be scrutinised against the background of

Brexit and nationalist propaganda. His political thinking is not one suffused by nationalism but one that should acknowledges his open-mindedness and his amenability to changing ideas depending upon the circumstances. By analysing the medieval tropes of Brexit and, more loosely, British nationalism, I would maintain that this could be a good starting point to scrutinise how Milton may have approached the weaponisation of the Middle Ages to establish a new model of sovereignty.

I have also considered the Dumézialian diarchic model of sovereignty in *Mitra-Varuna*; beside Dumézil, I think that there is potential for further research in Milton's ideas of sovereignty and other Indo-European models of governance. I would have tried to argue that there could be a possible linkage between Milton and Schmitt. First and foremost, we should ask ourselves if, unbeknownst to him, Milton was Schmittian *avant la lettre*. Schmitt emphasised the need for a polarisation in politics and he also expanded upon dictatorship and the role of the dictator. Milton underscores political enmity in his tracts: I have tried to argue that Charles I fosters the fight between friend and enemy. However, could the same be said about Alfred or Edward? Did they identify their own enemies and fight against them after the establishment of their power? With regard to dictatorship, could it be argued that Alfred tried to design a political order that would later be perfected by his son Edward? I think that if one set out to frame Milton as a Schmittian thinker, this would provide a new and thought-provoking interpretation of his writings showing how porous and ambiguous political allegiances were in the Early Modern age.

Michel Foucault provides interesting tools to reassess Milton and his works. Could the cover of *Eikon Basilike* be an example of governmentality? Alfred's victorious fight against the Vikings could be well regarded as an example of the model of war as politics, as outlined by Foucault in his course lectures *Society Must Be Defended.*

Another avenue of research is the notion of virtue. This is not to be intended in the Aristotelian sense, but in the way in which Machiavelli had configured it; I have tried to argue that, albeit indirectly, Alfred the Great and Satan were "virtuous" in that they did not shy away from morality to assert their power. Could other Miltonian figures be considered "virtuous", bold enough to question

the status quo? “Virtuous” should, in this instance, underscore the impetuosity and the skilful nature of such characters. The follow-on question for further research should be how Machiavellian was Milton? Since he had good knowledge of Italian, was Milton ever exposed to Machiavelli in the original or did he just read it in English?

Both Machiavelli and Milton describe political figures who did not resort to violence for violence’s sake but because violence was the only way to command the respect for their subjects. In this case, I would argue, Machiavelli’s Borgia or Romulus and Milton’s Alfred and Edward fit into this new conception of the State. Reason of State, a contextual idea of politics, is advanced by Milton in his reappraisal of the Middle Ages. In this instance, Alfred and Edward’s actions were influenced by context: the unstable political situation of medieval England could only be addressed by a king ready to be both violence and reassuring depending on the circumstances. This is the reason why Milton emphasised Alfred’s attitude towards his subjects: he was ready to listen to their problems and find solutions. However, at the same time, he resorted to violence for the sake of the State: he had petty thieves and criminals hanged to show that he was amenable to do anything that was necessary to save the State and uphold its security. Edward, after Alfred’s death, cemented what his grandfather had done previously, by repelling Viking invasions, building infrastructures and wielding power over the territories previously ruled by his sister.

By doing so, Milton’s description of medieval England had already laid bare an embryonic theory of Reason of State, showing that Milton was Machiavellian *ante litteram*. Albeit anachronistically, it would be worth investigating whether other Miltonian figures are Machiavellian. At the same time, I believe that investigating Milton from a Schmittian standpoint could yield new readings: how Schmittian and Machiavellian is Milton? Schmitt himself wrote about Cromwell in his *Dictatorship*. According to Schmitt’s key work *Dictatorship* (1921), there can be two types of dictatorship, a commissary and a sovereign one. Schmitt tackled Cromwell’s style of government as a sovereign dictator. Can other figures from early modern England be described in those terms? I

would argue that it is worth reassessing the political status of England during and after the Civil War and determine whether other case studies in terms of state of exception or dictatorship can be found.

Self-analysis plays an important role in Milton's oeuvre as well. Montaigne investigated his ideas and his life in the fallout of the French Wars of Religion. In order to do so, he pioneered a new genre, the essay. Milton wrote polemics or tracts to broadcast a wide range of ideas, like education or censorship. Like Montaigne, Milton lived at a time of disarray: England was a war-torn country and discrete political ideas came to the forefront, like the defence of the king or the liceity of regicide. Investigating the mental frame of Milton and how it influenced his demeanour could benefit the reassessment of the author himself. I contend that defending an existentialist approach to his work and his life could be helpful: could we cast Satan as an existentialist figure, reflecting on his condition after being expelled from Paradise? This thesis has highlighted the prominence of travelling in the work of both Montaigne and Milton: it is worth exploring what Milton learnt and what attitudes developed in his writings after visiting France and Italy. With reference to travelling, research on Milton could benefit from pinpointing his views on newly-discovered countries. Even though he appreciated travelling and seeing new places, what did Milton think of cannibals and new groups? I think by exploring this avenue there is potential for a new appraisal of Milton and how he felt about colonialism. I would argue that further research should be conducted as far as melancholy and *Il Penseroso* are concerned; does Milton engage with melancholy in any other work? Was Milton familiar with Montaigne's musings on melancholy and its poetic force? I would argue that expanding the research on Milton and melancholy could help scholars to consider Milton from a less literary viewpoint and offer more philosophical insight into his work. Perhaps a feminist or gender critical perspective could help us to find new ways of reassessing Milton; with Witterich (1987) having been the only one to write about Milton and feminism, new work done on these topics could innovate his critical reception.

Finally, the nexus between Bacon and Milton show that the New Science, the empirical approach defended by Bacon, means that there is potential to reassess Milton's contributions to

science. Work on ecocriticism and Milton would be welcome; so far, Hiltner (2017) has written on Milton and the environment (with special focus on *Paradise Lost*) but I would argue that it would be useful to look at other Miltonian work where the environment plays a role. Scrutinising Milton's *Prolusions* could a good way to reinforce the idea of a Baconian Milton: did Milton himself recommend having "Georgics of the mind" as Bacon suggested? Did other classical figures inform Milton's scientific thinking? I would also argue that it could be important to assess whether Bacon and Milton knew each other and what Bacon could have learnt from Milton and if this is case, how extensive was Bacon's impact on Milton. I would argue that it would be fruitful to engage with Milton and the development of the New Science in Europe as well. Milton mentions meeting Galileo in *Areopagitica*; research could be done on Milton's familiarity with other scientific representatives of his time, like Descartes. Thomas Browne, the English scientist and scholar, could represent another important case study: Browne was influenced by Bacon and his scientific theories (especially in his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, where he excoriated the lack of progress of science caused by *pseudodoxia*, "false beliefs" like Bacon's idols). Furthermore, his extensive travels to Europe allowed him to scientific discoveries in France and Italy; I would argue that there is enough material to assess whether Browne was aware of Milton's travel to Italy, as recounted in *Areopagitica*, and to what extent the Baconian method had influenced Milton. In this regard, it could be interesting to know how familiar was Browne with Milton's *Prolusions* and how Milton was familiar with Browne's *Pseudodoxia*. Such a philosophical, literary and scientific investigation could yield new and interesting results in our bid to study Milton, Bacon and Browne and, possibly, to try to frame them as early modern Masters of Suspicion given the similarity in their scientific pursuits and their decrying of Scholasticism and its strictures. Finally, from a more contemporary perspective, it could be fruitful to investigate whether Milton's works could impact on our understanding of pollution and the environment. In other words, could one consider Milton as forerunner of those writers and intellectual engaging with the notion of the Anthropocene?

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