LECTURE XI.

MODERN PHILOSOPHY. SEVENTEENTH CENTURY. SENSUALISM AND IDEALISM.

Modern philosophy.—Its general character.—Two ages in modern philosophy: the first age is that of the philosophy of the seventeenth century, properly so called.—Schools of the seventeenth century. Sensualistic school: Bacon, Hobbes, Gassendi, Locke.—Idealistic school: Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche.

The philosophy of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries released the human mind from scholasticism, from slavery to a foreign principle—authority; at the same time it prepared it for modern philosophy, for absolute independence; and conducted it from scholasticism to modern philosophy by the intermediation of an epoch wherein authority still reigned, but an authority much more flexible than that of the middle age, the authority of philosophic antiquity. The philosophy of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is, as it were, the education of modern thought by ancient thought. Its character is an ardent and often blind imitation; its necessary result was a universal fermentation, and the want of a definitive revolution. This revolution was consummated in the seventeenth century; it is modern philosophy properly so called.

The most general feature which distinguishes it is an entire independence; it is independent both of the authority which reigned in scholasticism, the ecclesiastical authority, and of the authority which reigned in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the admiration of ancient genius. It breaks with every thing past, thinks only of the future, and feels capable of drawing the future from itself. On one hand it might be said that from fear of being charmed by the genius of Plato and of Aristotle, it turns away from them designedly, and even ignorance and dis-

dain of them seem the ransom of independence. Bacon and Leibnitz excepted, all the great philosophers of the new era, Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Hobbes, Locke, and their disciples, have no knowledge of, and no respect for antiquity; they scarcely read any thing else than what is found in nature and in consciousness. On the other hand, the progressive secularization of philosophy is evident on all sides: inquire, for example, who are the two great men that founded modern philosophy? Do they belong to the ecclesiastical body, that body which, in the middle age, furnished scholasticism with such great interpreters? No, the two fathers of modern philosophy are two laymen; and, with a few exceptions, it may be said that from the seventeenth century up to our own times, the most illustrious philosophers have not come from the ranks of the Church. Philosophical instruction was, in the middle age, confined to cloisters and convents. Universities were soon after established; this was a considerable step, for in the universities, even of the middle age, were found professors taken from among the laity. The seventeenth century witnessed the establishment of a new institution, which is to universities what universities were to convents; I mean academies. They began in Italy towards the close of the sixteenth century, but it was especially in the seventeenth century that they spread throughout Europe. There are three which from their first institution acquired the greatest glory, and were extremely useful to the free culture of thought. These are, 1st, The Royal Society of London, established on the plan of Bacon;* 2d, the Academy of Sciences at Paris, a useful creation of the genius of Colbert, as the French Academy had been the brilliant creation of the genius of Richelieu; 3d, the Academy of Berlin, not only founded† on the plan of Leibnitz, but by Leibnitz himself, who was its first president, and who edited the first volume of its transactions.

* First at Oxford in 1645, then permanently with privilege, at London in 1663. Newton, Locke, &c., were members.

† In 1700.

The second characteristic of modern philosophy is, as I have already told you, the determination of a fixed point of departure, the adoption of a method; and this point of departure, this method, is the study of human nature, the foundation and necessary instrument of all science and of all philosophy, that is, psychology.

In entering into modern philosophy, to study more particularly its systems, after having recognized its general characteristics, the first reflection presented to us is, that modern philosophy is of very recent date. Without speaking of the East and of India, where dates are so uncertain, in Greece the movement of independent philosophy continued twelve centuries, from Thales and Pythagoras to the end of the school of Athens; whilst the corresponding movement of philosophy in which we all participate, and of which we are the agents and products, this philosophical movement reckons scarcely two centuries. Judge of the vast future that is before modern philosophy, and let this consideration embolden and encourage those who find it so ill assured in its proceedings, so undecided in its results. Although still young it is already great, and in two centuries it has produced so many systems, that in this movement, which is, as it were, of yesterday, one may distinguish two ages: the first, which commences with the seventeenth century and extends towards the middle of the eighteenth; the second, which embraces all the last half of the eighteenth century with the commencement of our own.* These two ages have this much in common, that they both participate in the general spirit of modern philosophy; and each of them has this in particular, that it participates more or less in it, and in a different degree: there is harmony between them, but at the same time there is progress from one to the other. I must to-day speak of the first, the philosophy of the seventeenth century.

* This distinction of two epochs in modern philosophy, according to the progress of method itself, is already indicated in the first Series, for example Vol. 2, *Discours d'Ouverture*, p. 6.

Two men open and constitute it, Bacon and Descartes. We must know how to recognize in these two men their unity; for they must have a unity, since they are the founders of a philosophy which is one in its spirit; at the same time we must recognize their difference, since they have placed modern philosophy on two entirely different routes. Both had, what is very rare in men who achieve a revolution, a design to achieve it, and a consciousness of having achieved it. Bacon and Descartes knew that a reform was necessary, that already it had been attempted and that it had been frustrated; and it was voluntarily and knowingly that they renewed this great enterprise and executed it. In all their works breathes the sentiment of the spirit of their times, of which they recognize and conduct themselves as the interpreters. Add to this that they were both what they should have been in order to accomplish the revolution which they undertook. Both were laymen, one a soldier and the other a lawyer. Both were natural philosophers and geometricians, and the nature of their studies removed them from false scholasticism. Both were experienced in the world and in business, and had that sentiment of reality so necessary to be introduced into philosophy. In fine, both were skilled in literature, and were in their respective languages great, or at least excellent writers, and hence they were able to spread and render popular the taste for philosophy. Behold the unity of Bacon and Descartes, it was the unity of modern philosophy itself. But under this unity were manifest differences. Bacon was particularly occupied with physical sciences; Descartes, although a great natural philosopher, was a still greater geometrician. Both started by analysis; but one first rested analysis on the exterior observation of the phenomena of nature, the other on the interior observation of thought; one trusted more to the evidence of the senses, the other to that of consciousness. Hence inevitably two opposite tendencies, and on the same basis two entirely distinct schools, one sensualistic, the other idealistic.

I have often told you, and I shall have frequent occasions to

repeat to you, that every thing always begins well. The chief of a school does not at first perceive all the consequences of his principles; he exhausts his boldness in the invention of principles, and thus overlooks, in a great part, the extravagance of the consequences. Thus Bacon* put the modern sensualistic school in the world; but in vain would you seek in Bacon the sad theories at which this school finally arrived. Bacon created no system, he simply established a method; and this method was far from being as exclusive with the master as with his disciples. It is singularly curious to meet in Bacon a eulogy on the rational method; he even goes so far as to excuse mysticism. In reading Bacon attentively I have found in his works a number of passages which are sufficient to defend his memory from the charge of an exclusive sensualistic tendency.

"I believe" says he,† "that I have, forever and legitimately, united the empiric method and the rational method, the divorce of which is fatal to science and humanity."

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* Francis Bacon, Lord of Verulam, Viscount of Saint-Alban, and Chancellor of England, was born in London in 1561, and died in 1626. A deplorable stain rests upon his memory, one that can be explained only by this passage from the *De augm.*, viii. 3: "Ad litteras potius quam ad quidquam natum, et ad res gerendas nescio quo fato contra genium suum abreptus." Of the great work which he undertook, *instauratio magna*, we have only two fragments; one of them is entitled: *Of the proficience and advancement of learning*, London, 1605, small in-4; and this work, translated into Latin by skilful hands, reviewed by Bacon himself, and very much augmented, has become the *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum;* the second fragment is the *Novum organum*, which, it is said, appeared first in English, though the Latin edition was first known to us; in-fol., Londini, 1620, with the celebrated epigraph: *Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia.* Among his other works we must notice *The Essays or Counsels, civil and moral*, of which he published a newly enlarged edition one year before his death, London, 1625, small in-4. In the Latin translation the *Essays* are called *Sermones fideles sive interiora rerum.* Complete works of Bacon, by Mallet, London, 1740, 4 vol. in-fol.; and 1765, 5 vol. in-4. All new editions are reproductions of the latter.

† "Inter empiricam et rationalem facultatem (quarum morosa et inauspicata divortia et repudia omnia in humana familia turbavere), conjugium verum et legitimum in perpetuum nos firmasse existimamus." *Instaur. mag.* præfat., p. 10, ed. 1620.

Here are farther passages from Bacon on mysticism, on divination, and even on magnetism. I do not invent them, I do not justify them; I merely cite them.

"Prophetic inspiration, the divining faculty,* has as a foundation the hidden virtue of the soul, which when it retires within itself, can foresee the future in dreams, in ecstasy, and at the approach of death; this phenomenon is more rare in the wakeful state and in health."

"It is possible for one person to act upon another, by the force of the imagination of one of these two persons; for, as the body receives the action of a body, the mind is apt to receive the action of another mind."†

Bacon was unwilling that magic should be entirely abandoned; he thought that on this road‡ it was not impossible to find facts that might not be found elsewhere; facts obscure, but real, into which it behooves science to bear the lamp of analysis, instead of abandoning them to the extravagant who exaggerate and falsify them.

These are rules truly remarkable for their independence, their moderation, and their extent. But I need not add that they disappear, before the great number of those that are stamped with quite another character, with the exclusive character of sensualism. Here citations are useless. Bear in mind only that the same man who wrote the preceding lines said also that it is solely

* "Divinatio naturalis, ex vi scilicet interna animi ortum habens....hoc nititur suppositionis fundamento, quod anima in se reducta atque collecta nec in corporis organa diffusa, habeat ex vi propria essentiæ suæ aliquam prænotionem rerum futurarum; illa vero optime cernitur in somniis, exstasibus atque in confiniis mortis, rarius inter vigilandum aut cum corpus sanum est et validum." *De augm.*, lib. iv. c. 3.

† "Fascinatio est vis et actus imaginationis intensivus in corpus alterius... ut multo magis a spiritu in spiritum, quum spiritus præ rebus omnibus sit et ad agendum strenuus et ad patiendum tener et mollis." *Ibid.*, iv. 3.

‡ "Nos magiam naturalem illo in sensu intelligimus, ut sit scientia formarum abditarum quæ cognitionem ad opera ad miranda deducat, atque, quod dici solet, activa cum passivis conjungendo, magnalia naturæ manifestat." *Ibid.*, iii. 5.

in the interpretation of external nature that the human mind shows its strength, and that when it returns upon itself and seeks to comprehend itself, it is like the spider, that can merely draw from itself fine and delicate threads, but without solidity and of no use.* It is established and acknowledged that it is the sensualistic tendency that governs in Bacon. According to our habit, let us consult history and the times.

To the school of Bacon immediately attach themselves three men who are his official successors, Hobbes, Gassendi, Locke. It may be said that these three men have transported the spirit of Bacon into all parts of philosophy, and that they divided, as it were, among them, the different points of view of their common school. Hobbes is its moralist and politician, Gassendi its scholar, Locke its metaphysician.

Hobbes† was a friend and an avowed disciple of Bacon. He joined, it is said,‡ with Rawley and several other persons, in translating the beautiful English of Bacon into a Latin which also has its beauty. And what is the philosophy of this disciple, of this translator of Bacon? I will tell you in a few words.§

There is no other certain evidence than that of the senses. The evidence of the senses attests only the existence of bodies; then there is no existence save that of bodies, and philosophy is only the science of bodies.

There are two sorts of bodies: 1st, Natural bodies, which are the theatre of a multitude of regular phenomena, because they

* See Lecture 3.

† Born at Malmsbury in 1588, died in 1679, Opp., 1668. Amstelod., 2 vol. in-4. These are only his Latin works; Hobbes also wrote much in English. A new edition, large in-8, due to the care of Molesworth, London, 1839–1845, devotes five volumes to the Latin works and eleven to the English works.

‡ *Vitæ Hobbianæ Auctarium.* "Illis temporibus, in amicitiam receptus est Francisci Baconi, etc., qui illius consuetudine magnopere delectatus est, et ab ipso in nonnullis scriptis suis latine vertendis adjutus, qui neminem cogitata sua tanta facilitate concipere atque T. Hobbium passim prædicare solitus est."

§ We have related in detail the philosophy of Hobbes, and particularly his moral and political philosophy, 1st Series, Vol. 3, Lectures 7, 8, 9, and 10.

take place by virtue of fixed laws, as the bodies with which physics are occupied, and those which are called spirits, souls with which metaphysics are occupied; 2d, Moral and political bodies, societies which continually change and are subject to variable laws.

Hobbes' system of physics is that system of which Bacon has spoken* with so much eulogium, that of Democritus, the atomistic and corpuscular philosophy of the Ionic school. His metaphysics are its corollary: all the phenomena which pass in the consciousness, have their source in the organization, of which the consciousness is itself simply a result. All the ideas come from the senses. To think, is to calculate; and intelligence is nothing else than an arithmetic. As we do not calculate without signs, we do not think without words; the truth of the thoughts is in the perception of the relation of the words among themselves, and metaphysics are reduced to a well-made language: Hobbes is completely a nominalist. With Hobbes there are no other than contingent ideas; the finite alone can be conceived; the infinite is only a negation of the finite; beyond that, it is a mere word invented to honor a being whom faith alone can reach. The idea of good and of evil has no other foundation than agreeable or disagreeable sensation; to agreeable or disagreeable sensation it is impossible to apply any other law than escape from the one and search after the other; hence the morality of Hobbes, which is the foundation of his politics. Man is capable of enjoying and of suffering; his only law is to suffer as little as possible and to enjoy as much as possible. Since such is his only law, he has all the rights that this law confers upon him; he may do any thing for his preservation and his happiness; he has the right to sacrifice every thing to himself. Behold, then, men upon this earth, where the objects of desire are not superabundant, all possessing equal rights to whatever may be agreeable or useful to them, by virtue of the same capacity for enjoyment and suffering. This is

* De Augm., iii. 4.

a state of nature, which is nothing less than a state of war, the anarchy of the passions, a combat in which every man is arrayed against his neighbor. But this state being opposed to the happiness of the majority of individuals who share it, utility, the offspring of egotism itself, demands its exchange for another, to wit, the social state. The social state is the institution of a public power, stronger than all individuals, capable of making peace succeed war, and imposing on all the accomplishment of whatever it shall have judged to be useful, that is, just. But as the restrained passions are naturally and necessarily in revolt against the new authority, this authority cannot be too strong; and Hobbes places the human species between the alternative of anarchy, or of a despotism which will be so much the more conformed to its end as it shall be the more absolute. Hence absolute monarchy as the ideal of true government.

Such are the politics of Hobbes, politics very consistent with his morality, which is deduced from his general philosophy, whose root is in the sensualistic tendency of Bacon. That which characterizes Hobbes, and gives him a superior rank in the history of philosophy, is consistency. He carried it from theory into practice, he was a man of his doctrines. In 1628, foreseeing the troubles that threatened his country, he made a translation of Thucydides in order to disgust his fellow-citizens with a liberty which leads to anarchy. At a later period he left England with the family of the Stuarts, faithful to this family through fidelity to his own principles. When Cromwell established a power agreeable to his idea of monarchy, Hobbes asked nothing better than to yield his submission, not to the republican Cromwell, but to the dictator Cromwell; consistent, too, in this, whatever may be said of it.* And as then the ecclesiastical power was at vari-

* Lord Clarendon relates in his Memoirs the following anecdote: "In returning from Spain I passed through Paris; Hobbes frequently came to see me. He told me that he was then printing in England his book which he intended to entitle *Leviathan*, that every week he received and corrected a proof-sheet, and that he thought it would be completed in one month at most. He added that he was well aware that I would not approve of his book, when I should read it; and thereupon enumerated some ideas con-