

Political Theory among Cartesians: Géraud de Cordemoy and Antoine Le Grand

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One of the many areas of his philosophical project that René Descartes (1596–1650) left to be developed by future generations is political theory. While Descartes took relatively little interest in the realm of the political as long as the political stability necessary to tend to quiet philosophical meditation was maintained, later Cartesian philosophers developed their understanding of political theory in more explicit and detailed terms. Among these, two philosophers stand out: Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684) and Antoine Le Grand (1629–1699). However, their political philosophy is little known. I first study the case of Cordemoy who emerges as a fierce defender of absolutism, especially that of Louis XIV. I will then turn to Antoine Le Grand who equally favours monarchical rule over aristocracy and democracy. Overall, this article contributes in important ways to the history of political philosophy, specifically, in seventeenth-century France.

Keywords: Political theory, Cartesian philosophy, absolutism, Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684), Antoine Le Grand (1629–1699).

1. Introduction

One of the many rather underdeveloped areas of his project of a new philosophy that René Descartes (1596–1650) bequeathed to future generations is political theory. While Descartes seems to have taken little interest in the realm of the political as long as the political stability necessary to tend to quiet philosophical meditation was maintained,¹ later Cartesian philosophers developed an understanding of the political in more explicit and detailed terms.

¹ Schall makes this point in “Cartesianism and Political Theory,” 264. The more ambitious claim that he makes is that based on Descartes’s mechanical philosophy, especially the mechanization of the passions and its deterministic implications, the realm of the political can only be that of the intellect (rather than that of bodily passions as these are subject to the mechanical laws of nature) and how it constructs political reality for itself (see in particular, 281–282). Antoine-Mahut, too, points out that that “Descartes wrote nothing that resembles a political treatise” (“Descartes, Politics, and ‘True Human Beings’,” 240) but she shows how Descartes’s scattered remarks on the political are grounded in the realm of the physiological, specifically, Descartes’s theory of the passions. I should note that the scarcity of Descartes’s remarks on politics has not prevented scholars from reading him through a conservatist, liberal, or communist lens (see Antoine-Mahut, “Descartes, Politics, and ‘True Human Beings’,” 240–241). Descartes’s most elaborate comments on politics occur in correspondence with Elisabeth, specifically in the

Among these, two philosophers stand out: Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684) and Antoine Le Grand (1629–1699).² Cordemoy was a philosopher, lawyer, historian, teacher of the Grand Dauphin (1661–1711), a member and later director of the *Académie française*. He saw himself as continuing Descartes’s philosophical project but not without here and there (as he saw it) correcting Descartes’s views.³ The most notable contributions of Cordemoy are perhaps his atomism and occasionalism developed in his main work, the *Le discernement du corps et de l’ame en six discours pour servir à l’éclaircissement de la physique* (*Six Discourses on the Distinction between the Body, and the Soul serving the Elucidation of Physics*, 1666); and a Cartesian theory of speech, that is, his *Discours physique de la parole* (*Physical Discourse on Speech*, 1668).⁴ Le Grand was a Franciscan missionary who left France in 1656 and spent

letters from September and November 1646 where he discusses Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* which Elisabeth asked him to read (CSMK III, 292–295, 296–298). For a careful interpretation and contextualisation of Descartes’ remarks on Machiavelli in his correspondence with, see Del Prete, “Descartes et Élisabeth: Lectures de Machiavelli.”

² I omit here Pierre-Sylvain Régis (1632–1707) because his more political considerations follow from his moral philosophy and (unlike Cordemoy and Le Grand) Régis neither wrote whole works on politics nor did he dedicate entire chapters of his main work, the *Cours entiers de philosophie ou système général selon les principes de Descartes contenant la logique, la métaphysique, la physique et la morale* (1690)—a Cartesian philosophy textbook—to political theory. For a careful study of the case of Régis, see Canziani, “Entre Descartes et Hobbes,” 59–136.

³ For Cordemoy’s life and work, see Clair and Girbal, *Gerauld de Cordemoy (1626–1684)*, 15–84; Battail, *L’avocat philosophe Gerauld de Cordemoy (1626–1684)*, 1–40; Nadler’s introduction to Cordemoy’s *Six Discourses on the Distinction between the Body and the Soul*, 1–53; Ablondi, *Gerauld de Cordemoy: Atomist, Occasionalist, Cartesian*, 9–13; and Prost, *Essai sur l’atomisme et l’occasionalisme*, 36–39.

⁴ For Cordemoy’s account of atomism, see Ablondi, *Gerauld de Cordemoy: Atomist, Occasionalist, Cartesian*, 15–53; Prost, *Essai sur l’atomisme et l’occasionalisme*, 36–62. For his account of occasionalism, see Ablondi, *Gerauld de Cordemoy: Atomist, Occasionalist, Cartesian*, 56–86; Nadler, “Cordemoy and Occasionalism;” Platt, *One True*

the rest of his life in England. He is best known for his *Institutio philosophiae secundum Principia Domini Renate Descartes* (*Institution of Philosophy following the Principles of Mr René Descartes*, 1672), a textbook that systematically presents and develops the philosophy of Descartes. It was republished severally times and—as most of Le Grand’s other philosophical works—translated into English immediately following its publication.⁵

The political theory of both Cordemoy and Le Grand, however, is little known. In the case of Cordemoy, Thuillier (“Une ‘utopie’ au grand siècle”) and Touchard (in *Histoire des idées politiques*) have presented his political theory. Albeit essentially correct, their accounts are hardly accessible. What’s more, Thuillier only focuses on one of Cordemoy’s political works (the *De la reformation d’un état*). Instead, this article studies all of Cordemoy’s political works. In the case of Le Grand, Ryan (“‘Scydromedia’: Anthony LeGrand’s Ideal Commonwealth”) has studied his early political utopia, the *Scydromedia* (1669). Greiff (*Scydromedia*) has recently translated and commented on the same work, but no studies on the political chapters of his highly influential main work, the *Institutio philosophiae* (especially part X, chapters 35–37), exist. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first English article to analyse Cordemoy’s and Le Grand’s (mature) political theory. Cordemoy’s and Le Grand’s political theory is a defence of absolutist monarchy developed in astounding detail. This article fills a lacuna in the history of political thought between Bodin and Rousseau, and in French seventeenth-century philosophy.

Cause, 268–301; Schmaltz, *Early Modern Cartesianisms*, 198–204. For Cordemoy’s account of speech, see Henkel, “Mind-to-Mind Communication and the Case of Inter-mental Occasionalism,” 462–467.

⁵ For the life and work of Le Grand, see Ryan, “Anthony Le Grand (1629–1699): Franciscan and Cartesian,” and Easton, “Antoine Le Grand”. The *Institutio* was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1709, see Ryan, “Anthony Le Grand,” 241.

I first study the case of Cordemoy who emerges as a fierce defender of absolutism, especially that of Louis XIV (section 2). In so doing, I will first look at Cordemoy's theory of the constitution of the state (section 2.1), before analysing his conception of an ideal state (section 2.2), and his defence of absolutism (section 2.3). I will then turn to Antoine Le Grand equally a defender of monarchy (section 3). I will first explore his early theory of an ideal state as laid out in his *Scydromedia* (section 3.1) before studying his political theory of the *Institutio* (section 3.2). I will conclude with some more general remarks on Cartesian political philosophy (section 4).

2. Cordemoy's Political Project

2.1 Foundations of the Political Realm

Géraud de Cordemoy's political theory is developed in a number of small treatises written at the end of the 1660s and in the 1670s, collected and posthumously published in the *Divers traitez de métaphysique, d'histoire, et de politique* (*Diverse Treatises on Metaphysics, History and Politics*) of 1691.⁶ One of these is the posthumously published tract *Des moyens de rendre un état heureux* (*On the Means to Render a State Happy*). Here, Cordemoy deconstructs the state into its constitutive elements: Towns, which in turn are formed by families. The latter are made up by their particular members and run by their chief (*chef*), the family father. In the like manner, towns are run by governors ruling families. The state, or kingdom, is run by the king ruling towns and provinces. Due to their composite structure, states can be analysed down to

⁶ The works contained in the *Divers Traitez* are (abbreviations in brackets): the *Traitez de métaphysique*, the *Observations sur l'Histoire d'Herodote* (l'Histoire d'Herodote), the *Ce qu'on doit observer en écrivant l'histoire*, the *De la nécessité de l'histoire* (Nécessité de l'histoire), the *De la Reformation d'un état* (Reformation d'un état), the *Des moyens de rendre un état heureux* (Des moyens), the *Maximes tirées des Faits de l'histoire de Charles IX* (Maximes) and the *Discours au Roy sur la mort de la Reine*. Citing these, I the give abbreviated title of the work for the sake of clarity, that is, the one here indicated in brackets. Page numbers, however, refer to the *Divers Traitez*.

their most fundamental element, the citizen.⁷ The citizens are the foundational members of a state.

The starting point of Cordemoy's political project is the state, or kingdom, and the idea that:

A state is for several towns what a town is for several families, and what a family is for each person which composes it: so perfectly that to see only in principle what can make a state perfectly happy, one needs to see what makes a family happy (*Des moyens*, 206).⁸

Cordemoy seems to be thinking in two directions. On the one hand, state, town and family are complex entities. They depend upon their constitutive elements, that is, towns, families, and family members, respectively. This means that to understand the state one needs to descend at least to the smallest constitutive complex entity, i.e., the family and the interplay between its members. On the other hand, the state, the town and the family are principles of unity.

⁷ Cordemoy might have very well been directly inspired by Aristotle's *Politics*, which he might have come across during his study of law, for in the *Politics* we find the same idea that "when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of the daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village. [...] When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence" (Book I, 1252b1, 1987). As we will see, Cordemoy, however, does not expressly subscribe to Aristotle's holism, i.e., the idea that "the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part" (*Politics*, Book I, 1253a1, 1988). Furthermore, Cordemoy clearly deviates from Aristotle in that the only form of government Cordemoy discusses is monarchy, thereby suppressing aristocracy and polity (let alone tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy as corrupted forms of government) introduced in Book III of the *Politics*.

⁸ "Un Etat est à plusieurs villes, ce qu'une ville est à plusieurs familles, & ce qu'une famille est à chacune des personnes qui la composent: si bien que pour voir jusques dans le principe, ce qui peut rendre un Etat parfaitement heureux, il faut voir ce qui rend une famille heureuse."

Let us look first at the deconstruction of the state (through towns) into families, which are to be understood as the smallest complex *social* entities. Cordemoy, interestingly, conceives of the family in terms of what we might call a state *en miniature*. That is to say, the chief of the family—the father or the oldest male member of the family—organizes the areas of responsibility within the family imitating the division of the state’s *ressorts*.⁹ To wit, one or some of the chief’s children will take care of agriculture and the family’s servants working in this domain. Others will be responsible for commerce, for the interior, for ‘foreign affairs’, for education, for mediating conflicts, and for defending the family’s possessions, respectively (*Des moyens*, 210–212). In any case, the chief remains in charge. He delegates tasks to family members, but his power remains undivided (*Des moyens*, 207, 210). In this and in his duty to render the family happy as well as in the fact that everyone is held accountable by him, he mirrors the absolute rule of the king (*Des moyens*, 207).¹⁰ Cordemoy does not make claims about the ontogeny of the state. The link between how states and families are run is logical, but I believe it is plausible to think that historically speaking states owe their *ressort* structure to the way tasks are distributed in families and not vice versa. Cordemoy then describes the inverse process of the formation of a state:

When several similar families as they unite come to compose a town, the leader of the family retaining his power within his family will be subjected to the one who will be in charge of the government of the whole town; and every family thus becoming

⁹ Cordemoy never spells out whom he takes to be the chief (*chef*) of the family. Given the historical context of his works and the fact that the king is the head of his own family (*Des moyens*, 214), this seems to be a safe bet.

¹⁰ For the accountability of the family members, see *Des moyens*, 211–212. For the parallelism between the head of the family and the king, see *Des moyens*, 210–212 and 216–222.

with respect to the town what each individual is with respect to the family, it will be necessary that everyone contributes to maintain the town (*Des moyens*, 212).¹¹

Eventually, when several towns as they unite come to compose a state or kingdom, every governor will be subjected to the one who will be in charge of the whole kingdom: and it will be necessary that every town contributes to maintain *this royal power, which will be absolute* (*Des moyens*, 213–214; my emphasis).¹²

Since the building blocks of towns are families, and families are run by a chief, towns are run by a chief, as well. That is, towns follow the same hierarchical, patriarchal principle of organisation as families do. The chief of the town, then, is called ‘governor’ (*Des moyens*, 213). When towns are joined together to form a state, it, too, is run by a chief. And the only form of government Cordemoy seems inclined to consider is that of a monarchy.¹³ Hence, the towns forming a kingdom are governed by a king. And, of course, a monarchy with a monarch at the top mirrors perfectly the principle of organisation of a family. Finally, as the chief’s power within his family is undivided (*Des moyens*, 207), so is the king’s power (*Des moyens*, 225). He is the absolute ruler of his country. Overall, according to Cordemoy’s political theory political power is exerted in a top-down fashion while political constitution is bottom-up. The citizens make up the state, but they are all subject to the king’s undivided power. Notwithstanding provincial governors and the head of the family have some borrowed power

¹¹ “Si plusieurs familles semblables se joignant, viennent à composer une ville, chaque chef de famille retenant la puissance dans sa famille, sera soûmis à celui qui aura le gouvernement de toute la ville; & chaque famille devenant alors, à l’égard de la ville, ce que chaque particulier est à l’égard de la famille, il faudra que chacune contribuë à maintenir la ville” (*Des moyens*, 212).

¹² “Enfin, si plusieurs villes se joignant, viennent à composer un Etat ou Royaume, chaque Gouverneur sera soûmis à celui qui aura la conduite de tout le Royaume: & il faudra que chaque ville contribuë à maintenir cette puissance royale, qui sera absoluë” (*Des moyens*, 213f).

¹³ Indeed, the term ‘république’ does not even figure in Cordemoy’s historical or political works.

to execute the king's commands. Implicit in Cordemoy's theory seems to be the idea that division of power must be avoided at all costs. He does not specify why this is but we might conjecture that the division of power leads to political unrest or instability. Le Grand, Cordemoy's fellow Cartesian, is much more explicit about this, as will become clear later.

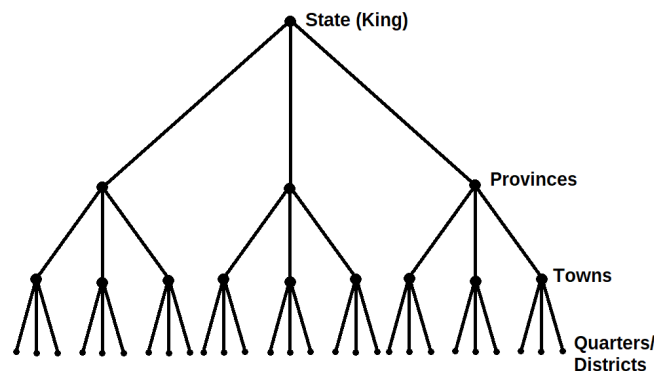
2.2 Dreaming of an Ideal State

Cordemoy presents his conception of an ideal state in the *De la Reformation d'un état* (1668). Jean Touchard (*Histoire des idées politiques*, 362) has called this work "a Platonic and Christian utopia not without traces of Cartesianism" (see also Thuillier, "Une 'utopie' au grand siècle," 262).

In fact, the *De la Reformation d'un état* is a letter to Cordemoy's close friend Claude Fleury (1640–1723) wherein Cordemoy recalls a dream he had after having returned home late from an evening of very liberal conversation with the selfsame Fleury. In his dream, Cordemoy is travelling with Monsieur Conrart—a common friend of Fleury and him. When they stop their cart due to extreme heat inside it and sit outside in the open under a tree in the shade, they meet the twelve Ambassadors of the Reformed State (*Reformation d'un état*, 101–102). One of the ambassadors and Monsieur Conrart commence a conversation, which serves as the occasion for the ambassador to expound the structure of the ideal reformed state. The ambassador emphasizes that it is the installation of this state model that liberated his country from all sorts of corruption and elevated it beyond other countries (*Reformation d'un état*, 107–109).

The ideal state is a hierarchically structured monarchy run by an absolute king. The three foremost domains of this state—setting aside the church and the academy—are the military, jurisprudence, and finance. Accordingly, the king presides over three councils, a council of war, a council of justice, and a council of finance run by so called 'officiers generaux' (*Reformation d'un état*, 115). To each province of the kingdom is sent: a governor representing the military, a president representing jurisprudence, and an intendant representing the department of finance

(*Reformation d'un état*, 115–116). To each town of each province is sent: a captain representing the military, a magistrate representing jurisprudence, and a treasurer representing the department of finance (*Reformation d'un état*, 119, 128, 142, respectively). In general, the state and its institutions penetrate every dimension of the socio-political life of the country. The state's presence on the local town level, for instance, is both institutionally and physically manifest. Besides the presence of its officials, there is a castle in each town to accommodate the captain and his staff (occasionally also the governor), a palace to lodge the magistrate and his staff (occasionally also the president) and a town house (*hôtel*) to make room for the treasurer and his staff (occasionally also for the intendant).¹⁴ The *cursus honorum* in every one of these three domains is both binding and hierarchically ordered, structured according to a quasi-pedantic level of detail, which I will not be getting into. In any case, Cordemoy's ideal state is a *centralized absolute monarchy* very much like France under Louis XIV where every part of the state's activity can eventually be traced back to the almighty king: “*L'état, c'est moi*” (*Louis XIV*) (see figure 1 below).¹⁵



¹⁴ Regarding the realm of justice, there is also an auditorium (*auditoire*) for the magistrate and an auditorium for the judges in each district of a town for the purpose of jurisdiction (*Reformation d'un etat*, 153).

¹⁵ Thuillier (“Une ‘utopie’ au grand siècle,” 258–261) also notes that Cordemoy's ideal state is authoritarian, centralized, hierarchic, dogmatic; its citizens patriotic, obedient, and rational.

Figure 1 My own illustration of the centralization of the political realm following Cordemoy.¹⁶

Interestingly, the state also intervenes in the realm of the clergy actively restructuring religious institutions (*Reformation d'un état*, 148–151). Cordemoy conceives religion as a means of supporting the system, not as a means of opposing or fighting it: “religion supports the laws” (*Reformation d'un état*, 147).¹⁷ Finally, the ideal state instantiates the most thoroughgoing and exhaustive humanist education by means of the installation of academies in each town. Education takes place from the age of five onwards until the age of twenty, and is a necessary condition to enter the military, the realm of jurisprudence, finance, or the church (*Reformation d'un état*, 161–162). Not every school subject is treated right from the beginning of age five but by the end of a student’s education, he is a most learned, decent citizen (*un honnête bourgeois*, 195) and servant of the state:

one needs to raise the children for the well-being of the home country, and not for the pleasure of their families [...] the young people are raised under the idea of only serving the public (*Reformation d'un état*, 163).¹⁸

Cordemoy’s educational agenda is certainly surprisingly modern, and proto-enlightened, since the children are taught only by appeal to reason which makes them reason-governed adolescents and adults (*Reformation d'un état*, 176–177). It is not, however, individualistic as Western educational systems are. The role reason plays is further exemplified across all three main

¹⁶ This scheme is only meant to illustrate how Cordemoy’s (ideal) state is structured, not to accurately represent the number of provinces, towns etc. that the state encompasses. Cordemoy never specifies this.

¹⁷ “[L]a Religion soutient les loix [...]” (Cordemoy, *Reformation d'un état*, 147). We will find a similar idea in Le Grand’s utopia, see section 3.1. With respect to religion itself, Cordemoy approves of the idea to return to the Apostolic Age, i.e., the “pureté des premiers siècles” (151).

¹⁸ “il faut élever les enfans pour le bonheur de la patrie, & non pas pour le plaisir de leurs familles: [...] les jeunes gens sont élevez dans la pensée de ne servir que le public” (Cordemoy, *Reformation d'un état*, 163).

domains of society by the fact that soldiers are well-educated, cultivated individuals (*Reformation d'un état*, 123). There is not much legal conflict since every citizen is well aware of the laws and they respect the institutions of the state (*Reformation d'un état*, 130–131). Taxpayers share the conviction that capitation is the best tax system (*Reformation d'un état*, 144–145) as well as that paying taxes is for the best of the state (*Reformation d'un état*, 146–147). This is probably because it creates a reliable source of income and therefore state expenditure. Finally, Cordemoy's ideal king is an enlightened, reasonable leader working for the well-being of the state (*Nécessité de l'histoire*, 97–98; *Des moyens*, 215). However, the ultimate purpose of Cordemoy's ideal political system is to create a new type of man, the “honnête bourgeois” (*Reformation d'un état*, 195): a well-educated, well-mannered, *conformist* servant of the state.¹⁹ Indeed, as Cordemoy puts it: “a man owes more to God, to his prince, and his country, than to himself” (*Reformation d'un état*, 175).²⁰ Furthermore, both in the academic system and in normal life the strictest discipline is in place (*Reformation d'un état*, 172–173). In Cordemoy's ideal state, capital punishment is institutionalized and is executed for (comparably) smaller crimes, such as defalcation and usury (*Reformation d'un état*, 155–156).²¹

¹⁹ See also Thuillier, “Une ‘utopie’ au grand siècle,” 262. Battail, *L'avocat philosophe Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684)*, 244) also notes the anti-individualism running through Cordemoy's system.

²⁰ “un homme doit plus à Dieu, à son Prince, & à son païs, qu'à soy-mesme” (*Reformation d'un état*, 175).

²¹ Touchard (*Histoire des idées politiques*, 362) gives a most acute and concise summary of Cordemoy's utopian vision: “*De la Réformation d'un Etat* is a Platonic and Christian utopia not without traces of Cartesianism: a hero [as] legislator, philosopher-soldiers, virtuous judges, upright tax collectors, artisans separated from [isolés] the bourgeois and living in a community, natural and patriotic education in the style of the ‘*Emile*’, suppression of the venality of offices, establishment of a state, firmly hierarchized and centralized under the responsibility of a sage monarch.” Emphasis in original.

2.3 Supporting the Absolutism of Louis XIV

Cordemoy himself is politically close to the absolutism of Louis XIV (1638–1715) and so is his political theory. Cordemoy was not an *active* political advisor to the king, as were Richelieu (†1642) to Louis XIII; or Mazarin (†1661), Colbert (†1683) or Louvois (†1691) to Louis XIV.²² But taking into consideration Cordemoy’s origin (ancient nobility), his social status (lawyer and philosopher), and his ties to the rule of Louis XIV (educator of the Grand Dauphin), one should not be surprised to find him a supporter of the system.²³

Traces of Cordemoy’s political beliefs can already be found in epistles to the king and the prefaces preceding his philosophical works. In the epistle to the *Six Discourses*, he presents the king as a superhuman being: “Ever since the moment of its birth [that of the “sacred Person” that is the king] we have believed that it came from Heaven” (*Six Discourses*, 54). Cordemoy thus thinks that the rule of the king is legitimized by divine investiture, and accordingly, the king is presented as quasi-divine.

Compare:

The King	God
“Your Majesty sees all the glory of your reign to consist in making us perfectly happy” (<i>Six Discourses</i> , 55). ²⁴	“God created minds in order for them to be happy” (<i>Treatises on Metaphysics</i> , 145).

²² Though interestingly the posthumous collections of his works of 1691, and 1704 indicate him as such (“conseiller du Roy”).

²³ Thuillier (“Une ‘utopie’ au grand siècle,” 257) has it that Cordemoy’s belief in absolutism as a guarantor for political stability might stem from the fact that he lived through twenty years of the Fronde.

²⁴ See also Cordemoy’s political works: “The king [is obligated] to do everything that depends on him to render the kingdom happy” (*Des moyens*, 215). “[Le] Roy [est obligé] à faire tout ce qui dépend de luy, pour rendre le Royaume heureux.”

The king and God are both concerned with the happiness of their citizens and created minds, respectively. To be sure, God's work of creation precedes the king's rule, but since the king is presented as invested by God to rule his country, his foremost duty is to prepare the grounds for the nation and his subjects to thrive. In addition, Cordemoy even goes as far as to say that "[i]t would be a great advantage for all nations if all sovereigns followed Your Majesty's [Louis XIV's] example, or even if Your Majesty reigned over the entire world" (*Six Discourses*, 55). In the same vein, in the *Discours au Roy sur la Mort de la Reine* (*Discourse to the King on the Death of the Queen*), Cordemoy portrays Louis XIV as "the greatest and most worthy king of the earth" (*Divers Traitez*, 288).²⁵

For Cordemoy, there is an intimate connection between the king's rule and political stability: "Your Majesty repaired, as if instantaneously, the disorders of thirty years" (*Six Discourses*, 55).²⁶ It seems a safe bet to assume that Cordemoy is here alluding to the Thirty Years War (1618–1648). Consequently, he ascribes to Louis XIV the role of peace-maker and stabilizer of Continental Europe after the war. Further, Cordemoy thinks that the state's immediate goals are "justice, prosperity, and tranquillity [...], and [to] render the lives of [its] subjects sweeter, more tranquil, and more comfortable" (*Six Discourses*, 55). It seems clear that,

²⁵ "[le] plus grand & [le] plus digne Roy, de la terre" (*Discours au Roy sur la Mort de la Reine*, 288).

²⁶ Cordemoy was born in 1626, a time when the Thirty Years War had been devastating Central Europe, especially the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, for eight years with another 22 years to come. Louis XIV succeeded Louis XIII in 1643, although taking effective rule only in 1661 after the death of his advisor and quasi-custodian Mazarin. Finally, France was one of the major parties negotiating the Treaty of Münster in 1648 (Pennington, *Europe in the Seventeenth Century*, 531–532; Hartmann, *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 31–32).

for Cordemoy, only a strong, perspicacious ruler, such as (or so he thinks) Louis XIV, could bring this about.²⁷

Certainly, we can assume that some of the things Cordemoy says in the dedicatory letters of his philosophical works are mere flattery. Nonetheless, what Cordemoy writes about the glory of Louis XIV's reign, the allusion to the Thirty Years War, the wish that he reigns the whole world, and his comments about the just abatement of the 'revolts' of the provinces of Brabant and Henault in the *Discours physique de la parole* (epistle, 7–8), that is, the reference to the War of Devolution (1667–1668), strike me as unnecessary unless they express Cordemoy's true conviction.²⁸

In the *Des moyens de rendre un état heureux*, Cordemoy's support of absolutism is conspicuous. The king is the absolute ruler of the state, and his power is undivided. He makes laws, imposes ordinary and extraordinary taxes and duties for the maintenance of the state, its institutions and its infrastructure, he declares war and makes peace; he negotiates treaties (*Des Moyens*, 216–222). The royal power (*puissance royale*) is absolute (*absolue*) (*Des Moyens*, 214): "As for the goods [biens] of towns and individuals, he [the king] is the absolute master thereof" (*Des moyens*, 216).²⁹ Each individual citizen owes most of their loyalty to the state, i.e., the kingdom, which means to the king. Loyalty to the town, and family are important, but subordinate to the loyalty one owes to the king (*Des moyens*, 214).

²⁷ Indeed, Jean Touchard (in his *Histoire des idées politiques*, 319–320) counts 'order and peace' after years of religious and political crisis triggering eruptions of violence in the form of the Wars of Religion, and the Fronde as one of the main factors favouring absolutism in France.

²⁸ A similar reference to Louis XIV's 'glorious' campaign, i.e., the War of Devolution, can be found in the *De la Reformation d'un état*, 111–113.

²⁹ "Quant aux biens des villes, & des particuliers, il [the King] en est le maître absolu" (*Des moyens*, 216).

As I hinted before, the only form of government Cordemoy considers is that of an absolutist monarchy. A similarity between the king and God is again striking:

The King	God
<p>“One could not lack being unhappy under a prince, were he omni-benevolent, and omniscient, when he is not omnipotent” (<i>Des moyens</i>, 225).³⁰</p> <p>“We [the people of the ideal state] have a king so sovereign in the state that in order to bear witness to what his power is, we are accustomed to say that he only needs to render an account to God” (<i>Des moyens</i>, 115).³¹</p>	<p>“Since we acknowledge God as omnipotent, it is necessary that we also admit at the same time that he has knowledge of all things, that likewise all things are subjected to his power and command” (Roman Catholic Catechism following the Council of Trent, 1557, 25).³²</p>

³⁰ “On ne sçauroit manquer d’être malheureux sous un Prince, fût-il tout bon & tout sage, quand il n’est pas tout-puissant” (*Des moyens*, 225).

³¹ “Nous [the people of the ideal state] avons un Roy si souverain dans l’Etat, que pour témoigner qu’elle est sa puissance, nous avons coûtume de dire, qu’il ne doit rendre conte qu’à Dieu” (*Reformation d’un etat*, 115).

³² “Nam cum Deum omnipotentem agnoscimus simul etiam fateamur necesse est eum omnium rerum scientiam habere, omnia item eius ditioni, & imperio subjecta esse” (Catechismus ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini ad Parochus. Pii Quinti Pont. Max. iuss editus, Dominicus de Farris: Venice 1567, 25). The Catechism of the Council of Trent, or Roman Catechism written in 1566 by Carlos Borromeo, theologian and archbishop, is the Vatican’s own catechism. It was written for a professional audience, that is to say, clergy itself (Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 29–30). While other catechisms were probably more successful in the realization of the Catholic educational project (such as Auger’s or Bellarmine’s; Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 30–32), I take the Catechism of the Council of Trent to possess the greatest authority. I use it to present the Roman-Catholic conception of God. The cue to look at this catechism is from Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 23–57.

In addition, a king can only be held accountable by God, “to whom alone it is reserved to judge the kings” (*Necessité de l’histoire*, 75).³³ Unsurprisingly, the king *qua* absolute can make new laws, raise ordinary and extraordinary taxes and duties, declare war, and make peace (*Des moyens*, 217–222). Even though his rule is by and large unconstrained, Cordemoy is convinced that the king’s first duty is to render his subject’s happy (*Des moyens*, 215; *Reformation d’un état*, 109). The safest way for sovereigns to attain glory is “to work incessantly to render their subjects happy” (*Necessité de l’histoire*, 74).³⁴ The king therefore has an at least egoistical motive to care for his people. This might be because, according to Cordemoy, the king represents God’s rule on earth and is thus bound to standards of benevolence. Further, political stability is surely easier to maintain when the citizens are well. Given that the king has to work for the happiness of his subjects, for the well-being of his kingdom (*le bien du Royaume*), and always has to give a good example (*Des moyens*, 215–216), despotism and arbitrary rule have no place in the state Cordemoy envisions. Along the same lines, Cordemoy points out that:

Incidentally, one needs to consider that if it is useful for each individual to learn at the right time to make use of its reason, it is of everybody’s utility that those who are

³³ “à qui [Dieu même] seul il est réservé de juger les Rois” (*Necessité de l’histoire*, 75).

³⁴ “de travailler incessamment à rendre leurs sujets heureux” (*Necessité de l’histoire*, 74). It is very astonishing that Louis XIV arrived at almost the same insight in 1679 (in Touchard 1963, 343): “The interest of the state has to go first. When one has the state in view, one works for oneself. The well-being of the one [the former] creates (faire) the glory of the other [the latter].” Another indication of how close Cordemoy’s political works are to the *raison d’état* of Louis XIV.

in charge over others know better than the others how one needs make use of one's reason (*Necessité de l'histoire*, 97f).³⁵

Finally, there are a number of clues that support the conjecture that the ideal state outlined in the *De la Réformation d'un état* is very close to France under the absolutist rule of Louis XIV, i.e., that Louis XIV is the 'young prince' who reformed the state.³⁶ (1) It is striking that the system of the ideal state works similar to the one France has and that it is explained by reference to the French system (*Réformation d'un état*, 115–116). (2) The 'young prince', the protagonist of Cordemoy's envisioned ideal state, was not even thirty years old when he 'so ingeniously' reformed the country (*Réformation d'un état*, 110). Likewise, Louis XIV was not thirty years of age, either, when he took effective rule of the country in 1661. He was still below that age when he launched his successful campaign in the War of Devolution (1667–1668). In addition, the presentation of the 'young prince' as a war hero (a) parallels the eulogy on Louis XIV one finds in the epistle to the *Discours physique de la parole*. (b) What the ambassador in the *De la Réformation d'un état* says about the campaign of the young prince against his neighbouring states, where the latter himself appeared on the battlefield (*Réformation d'un état*, 112; *Discours physique*, epistle, 8) as well as his motivation, perfectly mirror the aforementioned War of Devolution.

(3) The 'young prince's' motivation for the war was to "to put himself in the possession of certain provinces which the right of a legitimate succession has devolved upon the queen,

³⁵ "Au reste, il faut considerer que s'il est utile à chaque particulier d'apprendre de bonne heure à se servir de sa raison, il est de l'utilité de tout le monde, que ceux qui doivent commander aux autres, sçachent mieux que les autres, comment il se faut servir de la raison" (*Necessité de l'histoire*, 97f).

³⁶ Battail (*L'avocat philosophe Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684)*, 234) also identifies the 'young prince' with Louis XIV!

his wife” (*Reformation d’un état*, 111–112).³⁷ Lynn (*The Wars of Louis XIV 1667–1714*, 105) explains that upon marrying Louis XIV, Marie Thérèse, “daughter of Philip IV of Spain by his first marriage [...] renounced her claims to any Spanish inheritance [such as the Franche-Comté; a number of cities in the Spanish Netherlands], she did so contingent upon the payment of a dowry of 500,000 escudos, a figure so high that it was never paid. Thus, from an entirely legalistic point of view [which one should not be surprised to see Cordemoy *qua* trained lawyer adopt], Marie Thérèse retained any claims she had.”

Also, (4) the *jeune prince* is described as “a prince like ours” (*un Prince comme le nôtre*) (*Reformation d’un état*, 199). The birth and life of both the fictional prince and the real prince, Louis XIV, perfectly resemble one another (*Reformation d’un état*, 199–200). We also know that, although Cordemoy’s other smaller tracts are undated and perhaps undatable (Battail, *L’avocat philosophe Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684)*, 233), the *Reformation d’un état* is written in 1668 (Battail, *L’avocat philosophe Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684)*, 233–234; Thuillier, “Une ‘utopie’ au grand siècle,” 257f; Touchard, *Histoire des Idées Politiques*, 362). We know that the Grand Dauphin, Louis XIV’s first born, was at infant age in the 1660s and that all of Louis’s sons except Louis Dauphin died at infant age. Hence, we can safely conclude that the Louis XIV—not his son—is the young prince, and that therefore Cordemoy’s work is unmistakably meant to support absolutism. The whole work might then in part be taken as a eulogy on absolutist France.³⁸

³⁷ “se mettre en possession de certaines Provinces, que le droit d’une succession legitime déferoit à la Reine son épouse” (*Reformation d’un état*, 111–112).

³⁸ Battail (*L’avocat philosophe Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684)*, 249) arrives at the same conclusion: “The monarchy of the divine right is not only not called into question, but even more, it finds itself philosophically justified and reinforced in its authority.”

Cordemoy's political theory is not only a defense of absolute monarchy but more strictly a vindication of Louis XIV's rule of France. Only an absolute ruler could efficiently run the state and guarantee political stability, or so he thinks.

3. Le Grand's Political Project

3.1 Le Grand's Ideal State in the *Scydromedia*

Le Grand first develops his political theory in the *Scydromedia*, a booklet that outlines the political system in the utopic peninsula of 'Sydromedia'. This work is not only interesting because after Cordemoy's *Reformation d'un état* we find another political utopia by a Cartesian author, but also because, as Greiff claims, this might be "up until today the last verified Latin learned utopia" (*Sydromedia*, 7).³⁹ Even if that were not the case, and it is besides the aims of this section to defend this point, the *Scydromedia* did in many ways serve Le Grand as a blueprint for the political theory he would defend in the slightly later, highly influential, *Institutio philosophiae* (see below).

The *Scydromedia* is in two books. Its overall form is in principle that of a dialogue (book one). Soon, however, the presentation of the ideal state in the form of a monologue takes over (book two). The protagonists are the Duke of Falmouth, an English aristocrat, sympathetic to a parliamentary monarchy, and Alphonsus de la Vida, who lived for five years in Scydromedia, and is more in favour of an absolutist monarchy not unlike that of Scydromedia.⁴⁰ The

³⁹ I will be using Greiff's critical edition of the *Scydromedia*. The *Scydromedia* was first published in 1669 and republished in 1680. Greiff uses the 1680 edition for the simple fact that it corrects the typos in the original edition. Her edition has the additional merit that it corrects new typos in the 1680 by means of the 1669 edition. Translations from the Latin are my own, but Greiff's German translation helped clarify some of the trickier passages.

⁴⁰ Alphonsus de la Vida's report is in French (*Gallica voce*) (*Scydromedia*, 66). Given the name, he might be a Spaniard.

conversation is presented as being reported from memory by Le Grand himself, probably to lend it more authority but that changes little with regard to the idea that De la Vida is his spokesperson.

Let us first turn to the political constitution of Le Grand's ideal state (3.1.1), before studying the rights and duties of ruler and citizens, and those of people in office (3.1.2). This ordering has the advantage that—though slightly rearranging Le Grand's own exposition which is somewhat unsystematic—it mirrors that of the later *Institutio*.

3.1.1 Absolutism as the Ideal State Form

Scydromedia, Le Grand's ideal state, is described as the most beautiful (*amoenissima*) country. It shares a border with Spain in the North and the fictitious country of the Nymphs (*Nymphii*) in the West. Scydromedia itself is rich in diverse landscapes: coastlines, rivers, hills, desert-like areas (*Scydromedia*, 68). The initial state was the state of nature, of being wild. Soon, however, questions about political constitution came about:

The people were barbarians as long as they were their own masters. [...] But because power was no one's over others but everyone's, immediately there was quarrel about political power. Some liked the rule of the people. They mostly had liberty in mind. [...] Others rejected the power of the people (*Scydromedia*, 70).⁴¹

Eventually, they established the rule of one leader following the principle that “the heaven does not tolerate many gods, the world does not tolerate an alliance of kings” (*Scydromedia*, 70).⁴² Le Grand's ideal state is a monarchy and this is at least partially grounded in the conviction that

⁴¹ “Barbari incolae, quamdiu sui fuere. [...] At quoniam nullius in alios, sed penes unumquemque potentia erat, statim de imperio agitatum. Quibusdam popularis status placebat. Hunc maxime libertatem spectare. [...] Caeteri popularem potentiam aspernantur” (*Scydromedia*, 70).

⁴² “non plures deos coelum, non sociatos reges mundum pati” (*Scydromedia*, 70).

there is some kind of isomorphism between the heavenly and the earthly realm. Just as there is only one God, there can only be one ruler. An additional reason for monarchical rule (given slightly earlier) is that Le Grand is convinced that “*The division of the citizens is the poison of the republic*” (*Scydromedia*, 42, emphasis in original), and only the concentration of power in the hands of one ruler could prevent this division.⁴³ Finally, a monarch as a single ruler is more secretive than the rule of many for “*one person has to protect those things when others knowing them would harm the republic*” (*Scydromedia*, 44, emphasis in original).⁴⁴ Like Cordemoy before, Le Grand hence thinks that only the concentration of political power in the hands of a single ruler can guarantee political stability and a flourishing state.

The first to govern Scydromedia was Scydromedus, the country’s name giver (*Scydromedia*, 70–72). He was elected, or so tells us Alphonsus de la Vida, for his competence in the art of war and ruling (*Armis & regendi artibus*) (*Scydromedia*, 70). Although the first king was chosen, the system in place thereafter is that of a hereditary monarchy (*Scydromedia*, 72). Le Grand does not explain why this follows, but it can be surmised that he believes that an outstanding individual selected to rule over others because of his eminent qualities will produce eminent progeny. Le Grand’s political thought is, however, sexist in that he believes that women are *per se* unfit to rule. Instead of reason they possess only caprice, instead of political prudence only audacity (*nisi pro ratione voluntas, pro consilio audacia*) (*Scydromedia*, 72). For Le Grand, “the gods can threaten [us] with nothing more horrible than that a woman commands men” (*Scydromedia*, 74).⁴⁵

⁴³ “*Virus reipublicae, civium, divisio est*” (*Scydromedia*, 42, emphasis in original).

⁴⁴ “*Tegere unus debet, quae scire alios reipublicae nocet*” (*Scydromedia*, 44, emphasis in original).

⁴⁵ “*Tetrius nihil comminari dii possunt, quam ut viris foemina imperet*” (*Scydromedia*, 74). I should add that Le Grand is not only sexist but also latently xenophobic in that strangers have only a limited right to stay in Scydromedia and should mind their own business (*Scydromedia*, 100–102).

Alphonsus de la Vida had made clear earlier that he does not mean to defend tyrannic rule (*Scydromedia*, 52). Nonetheless, the king—for we have seen that women, according to Le Grand, must not rule—has near absolute power: “the Scydromedians are ruled by on person, in charge of the laws, weapons, and the treasury” (*Scydromedia*, 56).⁴⁶ Following Le Grand, the king rules by good example, he should be of noble birth, and good education (*Scydromedia*, 74–76). While being of noble descent and having a good educational background might act against tyrannical and arbitrary rule, Le Grand still envisions that the king’s rule is largely unconstrained. The laws, for one, reflect the mindset of the ruler (*Juris anima & sensus principis mens est*) (*Scydromedia*, 94). He declares war on other countries—though mostly for defensive purposes (*Scydromedia*, 110)—and he decides on the state’s budget. Le Grand’s absolutism also shows signs of totalitarianism and, in any case, very little political and social liberty. A few examples will help bring home the argument. (1) “Every year, everyone is asked to account for the way of life, how they provide food, and how they provide for their family” (*Scydromedia*, 104).⁴⁷ La Grand does not go into detail how this is supposed to be put into practice but the very idea seems horrifying enough. He seems to have in mind that the people need to be kept in check how they lead their life and what economic and professional decisions they make, perhaps in order to guarantee some form of moral integrity. An indecent or professionally and economically unsuccessful or lazy lifestyle could potentially result in punishment. (2) Women’s freedom is restricted in that they must basically dress like nuns. Nothing must be visible except their hands and face or else this is considered an act of profanity (*profanum*) (*Scydromedia*, 100). (3) Le Grand envisions severe punishments negatively motivating opportune behaviour: capital punishment for adulterers and renegades; cutting off the hands of political agitators (*Scydromedia*, 76–78, 112, respectively). One may wonder why

⁴⁶ “Sydromedios ab uno regi, & penes unum leges, arma, aerarium esse” (*Scydromedia*, 56).

⁴⁷ “Quotannis a quovis vitae ratio exigitur, & quae eum alant, quibusque familiam sustentet” (*Scydromedia*, 104).

an ideal state still requires a punitive system, after all, the ideal citizen would be enlightened, loyal, and opportune. One answer that Le Grand could give is that even an ideal state like *Scydromedia* is surrounded by neighbouring countries. These might not have ideal political systems of governance. Their citizens might not be equally ‘enlightened’. Citizens from foreign countries entering *Scydromedia* might then try to undermine the political system of *Scydromedia*, or they might engage in more mundane criminal activities like theft, for which they need to be punished. Otherwise, the laws themselves could function like a moral code telling people what is right and wrong; or they are a relic of older days and kept for the sake of tradition.

There are hints of more liberal ideas in Le Grand’s work, but these stand back against his more conservative and traditionalist ideas: marriage in the ideal state is among socially equal people of mature age (approximately 25) and consensual (*Inter pares matrimonia fiunt, consensus mutuo, aetate matura. Ante vigesimum & quintum annum, rara connubia*) (*Scydromedia*, 110). High schools are to be found everywhere furthering the education of the people (*litterarum gymnasia passim instituta*) (*Scydromedia*, 102). However, like in the case of Cordemoy’s political theory these institutes could be a means of political and moral indoctrination to support the state.

Before turning to the political duties of the people, a word about the role of religion in Le Grand’s ideal state is in order. This is because, clearly for Le Grand religion is essential. Early on, he explains that religion is politically important, it is “the connection of the minds [of the people]” (*Scydromedia*, 56).⁴⁸ It counteracts political division. Le Grand believes that “not so much through power and riches as through the bond of minds are kingdoms made firm” (*Scydromedia*, 44).⁴⁹ Religion is precisely what makes people like-minded and holds a society

⁴⁸ “nexus esse animorum religionem” (*Scydromedia*, 56).

⁴⁹ “non tam viribus opibusque regna, quam animorum vinculo firmari” (*Scydromedia*, 44).

together. Ex negativo, Le Grand tells us that where religion or the connection of minds are in a state of confusion, the kingdom is weak (*intuta regna, ubi miscetur [religio]*) (*Scydromedia*, 56). Le Grand later adds that “*Nothing is healthy in a kingdom where the people are out of their minds about religion*” (*Scydromedia*, 106, emphasis in original).⁵⁰ What religion did the Scydromedians adopt? Le Grand is not as outspoken as is desirable, but a couple of clues allow for a good guess. The Scydromedians venerate one God (*Unum [numen] venerantur*), they are monotheists. They are Christian (*Christianorum*) (*Scydromedia*, 104). Furthermore, “they have a high priest, whom they call pontifex, and whom they follow” (*Scydromedia*, 106).⁵¹ Besides the high priest, there are bishops (*episcopi*) and other priests (*sacerdotes*) (*Scydromedia*, 106). All of these are committed to celibacy (*Scydromedia*, 108).

Now, obviously Islam and Judaism, the two other main mono-theistic religions, are out of the picture because the Scydromedians are Christians. Protestant priests are neither committed to celibacy nor does the Protestant Church have a high priest. What’s more, Le Grand’s talk of a pontifex (maximus) and bishops strongly resonates with the offices and structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, the idea that the Scydromedians are Roman Catholics gains additional support from the fact that Le Grand himself was a Catholic (Franciscan) missionary.

3.1.2 *The Citizens’ Political Duties*

The people of Le Grand’s ideal state all possess moral integrity and a strong sense of duty: “The counsellors have moral integrity, the merchants have trustworthiness, the kings are just against the citizens, the citizens possess love and veneration vis-à-vis the kings” (*Scydromedia*, 36).⁵²

⁵⁰ “*Nihil in regno sanum ubi de religione insanit populus*” (*Scydromedia*, 106, emphasis in original)

⁵¹ “*Summum sacerdotem, quem pontificem appellant, habent & sequuntur*” (*Scydromedia*, 106).

⁵² “*Conciliariis probitas inest, fides mercatoribus, regibus erga cives justitia, & civibus erga reges suos amor & veneratio*” (*Scydromedia*, 36).

The citizens themselves are law-abiding (*Scydromedia*, 100). They love and obey their ruler (*Scydromedia*, 104). That is also why only few judges are needed (*Scydromedia*, 94). Citizens act righteously by themselves. Perhaps, this is because of the good example that the ruler lives by, or because of the education they received. Although Le Grand does not specify this further, we can assume that civil and political unrest hardly if ever occurs.

Le Grand not only presents the citizens of *Scydromedia* qua citizens but also qua civil servants. The offices he discusses are those of counsellors and ambassadors; teachers; priests; and soldiers. In contrast to seventeenth-century France, offices are not for sale in *Scydromedia* (*Scydromedia*, 78); and only the nobility can hold work for the state (*Scydromedia*, 90–92). Counsellors are there to prevent evil (*avertendo malo*) by providing guidance to the ruler, and they are given the power to speak freely (*libere cuique* [that is, the ruler] *dicendi potestas data*) (*Scydromedia*, 78). Counsellors and secretaries should be trustworthy (*fidi sint*), experienced (*variae fortunae experimento*) and possess prudence (*prudencia*). They should be pious (*pietas*) and free from passions (*affectibus vacuos*) (*Scydromedia*, 84–88). Ambassadors possess the ornament of nobility (*nobilitatis decor*), virtue (*virtus*), modesty (*modestia*), and flexibility (*fluxus*) (*Scydromedia*, 88). “Teachers take care of the youth (*juvenum cura*) and they possess sound doctrines, moral integrity, and they are not unaware of the passions [of their students]” (*doctrinae integris moribus, & cupiditatem scrutatores non ignavi*) (*Scydromedia*, 102). Priests and religious servants are not allowed to engage in religious disputations as this would disunite the people, or so thinks Le Grand. According to Le Grand’s ideal, priests are, of course, moral and they obey celibacy (*Scydromedia*, 106–108).⁵³ Soldiers, finally, must be born free and skilled in using weapons (*liberos esse, & manibus promptos*) (*Scydromedia*, 112).

⁵³ “In order to prevent disagreement, all disputation about religion is prohibited” (*Scydromedia*, 106). The Latin reads: “Praeveniendo dissidio, omnis de religione dissertatio prohibetur.”

What holds Le Grand's ideal state together is a capable, well-respected leader, obedient, moral citizens, one religion, and strict laws. Le Grand's ideal is driven by the overarching thought that without these things, political unrest like the one Britain experienced during the Civil War shortly before Le Grand's arrival in the mid-1650s, might soon tear apart society and lead to a failing state.

3.2 Le Grand's Political Thought in the *Institutio*

3.2.1 Political Constitution and Defence of an Absolutist Monarchy

In the *Institutio philosophiae secundum Principia D Renati Descartes*, his incredibly popular Cartesian textbook, a "must read" at Cambridge University at the time (Easton, "Antoine Le Grand," 2), Le Grand first turns to the constitution of states and the emergence of political power.⁵⁴ In older times, or so Le Grand has it, people were living like beasts (*ferarum more*), farming and strolling through caves and forests (*Institutio*, 847). As human beings are inherently social creatures, according to Le Grand, and growing tired of this unsteady life style, they formed a council in which the individual submitted themselves to the opinion of all.⁵⁵ This is because, as Le Grand explains later, society depends on peace (and stability), the latter of which

⁵⁴ I will be using the third edition of the *Institutio* from 1695. All translations from the *Institutio* are my own.

⁵⁵ Le Grand gets to the social nature of human beings slightly later in part X, chapter 37, §1. Here, he explicitly states that: "Humans love society and take pleasure in the companionship of the like of them" (*Institutio*, 853). "Homo adeò Societatis Amans est, similibusque contubernio gaudet." From a systematic standpoint this remark could have equally been included in the opening of part X, chapter 35. Unless Le Grand explicitly refers to men, I will employ a gender-neutral language ('they', 'them', etc. for 'he', 'him'). I am aware that the Latin original uses the singular. In citing the Latin, I follow Le Grand's orthography and punctuation unless stated otherwise. This includes his frequent capitalization of nouns. I usually omit this in the English translation because the frequency of his capitalization is distracting.

can only be had when some form of political authority is established. His reasoning here is as follows:

Since society cannot be conserved for long without peace, and peace depends on unity, but unity presupposes order, order distinction, distinction dependence, and dependence authority: it is a fact that humans convened at first; soon having elected the more eminent to rule, the others submitted themselves (*Institutio*, 853).⁵⁶

Peace, he thinks, requires some kind of political unity, some kind of ruling principle. Political unity needs some kind of structure (such as feudalism) and laws. Political structure and laws, however, require that distinctions are made between different classes of people, for example, landowners and vassals, generals and soldiers, professors and students. We will encounter some of these professions and their duties later on. These kinds of distinctions are clearly ones of political (and economical) dependence, and they depend on power relations. Ultimately, they require some kind of governance. Another interesting point that Le Grand's argument reveals is that he (in opposition to someone like Hobbes) strongly believes that human beings are not the same: some are better than others; some are naturally superior and born to rule, others inferior and born to serve.

While in the beginning perhaps nearly all people were somehow included in the decision-making process, in the course of time, it became inconvenient that everyone should come together when deliberations and decisions had to be made. Still, it was (initially) difficult (*grave & difficile*) to exclude the opinion and vote of some (*singulorum*). The majority,

⁵⁶ Verum cum Societas citra Pacem, diu non conservetur; & Pax ab unione pendeat, Unio autem ordinem praeponat, Ordo distinctionem, Distinctio dependentiam, & Dependencia Authoritatem: factum est, ut Homines primo convenerint, mox praestantioribus ad regendum assumptis, se caeteris submiserint" (*Institutio*, 853).

however, was somehow pleased to transfer power to one or few (*Institutio*, 847). Indeed, the very concept ‘citizen’, for Le Grand, signifies someone who has given up their natural freedom and who acknowledges the authority of other people:

by the name ‘Citizen’ nothing else is understood than he who abandoned his natural *freedom*, and subjects his will to the will of one person or a council, which he acknowledges as superior and in which resides the power over life and death (*Institutio*, 853; emphasis in original).⁵⁷

According to Le Grand, three political systems (*triplex regiminis politici forma*) can be distinguished: (1) where the people (*populus*), (2) the noble (*primores*), or (3) individuals (*singuli*) rule. These are democracy (*Democratia*), aristocracy (*Aristocratia*), and monarchy (*Monarchia*), respectively.⁵⁸ Le Grand commences explaining these in inverse order to present first the advantages of what he considers the best system, that is, monarchy (*Institutio*, 847). Le Grand defines these systems as follows:

“When the highest authority is found in *one*, this is called *monarchy*, because [the one] commands all people but receives commands from no one. When the command consists in one council of a few or selected citizens, this is called

⁵⁷ “nihil aliud nomine Civis intelligitur, quàm is, qui naturalis *libertatis* jacturam fecit, & Voluntatem suam unius Hominis, aut consili Voluntati subjecit, quem ut Superiorem agnoscit, & in quo vitae, & necis potestas residet” (*Institutio*, 853, emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ In his *An Entire Body of Philosophy according to the Principles of the Famous Renate Des Cartes* (1694), an English translation of his *Institutio* but with some “alterations and additions by Le Grand himself” (Easton, “Antoine Le Grand,” 3), Le Grand gives the following examples: For monarchy, France and Spain; for aristocracy or a council system, Venice; and for democracy, the Low Countries (book 1, part X, ch. 35, 399).

aristocracy. When it is understood that the highest command is that of nearly all people, it is labelled *democracy*” (*Institutio*, 847, emphasis in original).⁵⁹

Now, each of these systems praises itself with a particular advantage: democracy with freedom, aristocracy with the protection of the best against the people and the tyrant (a middle way between democracy and monarchy conceived as two extremes), and monarchy with the idea that the monarch works for the sake of the people (*pro populi salute*) (*Institutio*, 847–848). However, Le Grand ultimately believes that monarchy surpasses (*præcellit*) the other two political systems. Its conveniences (*commoda*) outweigh those of the other two systems. More specifically, the power or political rule (*imperium*) of the monarch is freer (*liberius*) and unconstrained by time or place to deliberate and make decisions (*sed quocunque tempore, & in quavis parte haberi consultatio possit*, *Institutio*, 848). The monarch does not necessarily need to consult with others in council or other political meetings. Furthermore, following Le Grand, it is obvious that the monarch can decide more secretly and quickly:

who does not know that in the case of the chief a council is more secret, the execution takes place quicker, partisanship and political discord are mostly excluded, and security and freedom that the other forms of government strive for so very much are more commonplace and constant (*Institutio*, 848).⁶⁰

Monarchy, for Le Grand, is a more straightforward political system than democracy and aristocracy because there is less conflict of interest and a much more streamlined political

⁵⁹ “Quando summum imperium in *uno* reperitur, *Monarchia* dicitur, quia toti Populo imperat, à nemine verò imperatur. Quando imperium in uno Concilio ex paucis, sive ex selectis Civibus constat *Aristocratia* vocatur. Quando summum imperium penes totum Populum esse intelligitur, *Democratia* nuncupatur” (*Institutio*, 847, emphasis in original).

⁶⁰ “quis nescit, Consilium in Principatu secretiùs esse, Exequutionem promptiorem, locum Factionibus, Seditiõibusque magis præcludi, & Securitatem, ac Libertatem, quam aliæ formæ regiminis tantoperè affectant, uberiorem, ac constantiorem esse” (*Institutio*, 848).

decision-making process. After all, fewer people have to be included in the decision-making process and no diverging interests obtain. The idea that political representation of particular interests is a good is therefore absent in Le Grand. Further, he claims that peace, union, and the highest good of the people can simply be realized more quickly through the rule of one compared to the rule of the many trying to act as one (*Institutio*, 848). Like Cordemoy, Le Grand also believes that the rule of the monarch mirrors God’s rule: “It is necessary that that form of the republic [that is, monarchy] is happier which imitates the eternal and undivided rule of the omnipotent *God* (*Institutio*, 848, emphasis in original).⁶¹ Insofar as God’s rule is by and large unconstrained—setting aside his divine attributes, such wisdom, love, justice and so on—the kind of monarchical system that Le Grand evokes with this comparison seems to be absolutism. This gains additional support when Le Grand later explains that “the monarchical [authority] is that which hangs on nothing else in its execution” (*Institutio*, 851).⁶²

The rule of the good monarch is opposed to that of a tyrant (*Tali Principi opponitur Tyrannus*, *Institutio*, 848; emphasis in original). The latter either gets their authority from outside the law and the customs of the country they rule—that is, we are dealing with an usurper—or even if they ascended to the throne legally, they only see their private gain (*non nisi Privatum spectat commodum*) and spread fear, poverty and unrest (*& omnia Metu, Egestate, Calamitate complet*) (*Institutio*, 848).

Having laid out the advantages of an (absolutist) monarchy, Le Grand also briefly turn to the flaws (*vitia*) of the other two state forms. Aristocracy is a bad system when those who are improper for the job rule and are blinded by ambition (*Improbi regnandi cupidine*

⁶¹ “Necessum est, illam Reipublicæ formam feliciorē esse, quæ *Dei* omnipotentis Imperium imitatur, æternum, & indivisum” (*Institutio*, 848, emphasis in original). We have encountered a similar line of thought in Le Grand’s earlier *Scydromedia*, see section 3.1.1.

⁶² “[imperium] Monarchicum [...], hoc est, an in ejus exercitio à nullo pendeat” (*Institutio*, 851).

perciti) (*Institutio*, 849). Furthermore, Le Grand criticizes that they will only deliberate among themselves without an eye for the utility of the subalternate of whom they are in charge (*Institutio*, 849). Following Le Grand, aristocracy, therefore, easily falls prey to partial interests and clientelism instead of working for the good of all people. In the case of democracy, Le Grand fears that it might lead to a kind of dictatorship of the majority over a minority (*Institutio*, 849). What's more, democracy might come at the cost of political stability, and bad people might be in charge here, too (*Institutio*, 849).

Overall then monarchy best reflects Le Grand's core political values: stability, peace, and efficient, streamlined decision-making processes. Further, qua Franciscan priest, Le Grand also stresses that monarchy is the political system that most closely resembles the God's rule.

3.2.2 Political Duties

Le Grand is not only concerned with political constitution but also with the duties of the ruler and the people. It will not be amiss to present and discuss these briefly.

Le Grand claims that not only virtues (*virtutibus*) but also knowledge of the subject matter (*rerum Scientia*), that is, knowledge of the nature (*Indolem*) of those governed, is necessary for political rule (*Institutio*, 849). What he has in mind here is that the ruler should know the nature of the realm they govern:

The task of the prince is that they perfectly understand the nature of the realm and the citizenries. Indeed, the mode of ruling is not everywhere the same and in accordance with the diversities of realms different laws must be observed and established (*Institutio*, 851).⁶³

Alas, Le Grand does not provide a more concrete example that would allow us to better grasp this comparatively abstract rule. It is clear from the discussion above that depending on the

⁶³ "Principis munus est ut apprimè Regni, aut Civitatum indolem calleat. Quippè non æqualis ubique est regendi modus, & pro diversitate Regnorum, diversæ sunt Leges observandæ aut condendæ" (*Institutio*, 851).

political constitution political processes are different. Le Grand might also be thinking here that the national character of French or British citizens were different from that of citizens of the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁴ What's more, according to Le Grand, the ruler also has to know "what is the size of the realm, the location, commerce, strength, which neighbours occupy the borders, what utilities and inconveniences come from their allies and enemies (*Institutio*, 851).⁶⁵

Now, the main goal of the ruler is the good life of the people (*beata Civium Vita*) or their welfare (*salus*) (*Institutio*, 850). The ruler should surpass the governed in dignity, virtue and wisdom (*Dignitate, sic & Virtute, ac Sapientia*), and rule by good example. Notably, Le Grand remarks that political power has to do with the powers (*vires*) of the mind not of the body (*Institutio*, 850).⁶⁶ For him, political intelligence and prudence are more important than physical strength. Further, the ruler needs to possess piety (*Pietas*), justice (*Justitia*), bravery (*Fortitudo*), and clemency (*Clementia*) as well as liberality (*Liberalitas*).⁶⁷ To these character traits, he adds virtue (*Virtus*), prudence (*Prudentia*), constancy (*Constantia*), and modesty (*modestia*) (*Institutio*, 850–851). According to Le Grand, the ruler should have advisers who stand out through moral integrity (*Probitate*), experience (*longo rerum Usu*), trustfulness (*Fide*), and prudence (*Prudentia*). The ruler should be able to receive council against his initial state of mind. The ruler also needs to watch: their ministers so that the latter do not commit an injustice; their prefects that they do not enrich themselves; their army leaders that they do not violate the

⁶⁴ In the *Entire Body* (book 1, part X, ch. 36, 400), Le Grand more explicitly talks about the "temper and inclinations" of the governed.

⁶⁵ "quæ sit Regni Amplitudo, Situs, Commercia, Munimenta, qui Vicini Limites obsideant, & quæ ex illorum affinitate, aut dissidio, Utilitates, & Incommoda Regno accedant &c" (*Institutio*, 851).

⁶⁶ "Not because of the forces of the body but of the mind does their [the ruler's] nature partake in authority" (*Institutio*, 850) "Non enim propter Corporis, sed Animi vires contigit in natura Imperium."

⁶⁷ For the sake of parallel construction, I cite the Latin terms in nominative case.

law of war (*Belli jura*); and their judges that they are just (*Institutio*, 851).⁶⁸ Since the ruler is also the preserver of religion, they must be watchful that no novelties (new beliefs or ceremonies) are introduced. They also take care that the arts flourish, especially agriculture and seafaring (*nautices*) as these are the most important (*Institutio*, 851–852). In foreign affairs, the ruler must be watchful that negotiated peace with foreign nations is kept. This is also because a ruler should keep their word and thereby set a good example for the people to do likewise. The troops should be on standby, however, (*exercitum in promptu semper habeat*) so that they can be called upon when needed. In internal affairs, the ruler must be watchful of any uprisings or rebellions and bring these down at an early stage (*Institutio*, 852). Finally, Le Grand cautions that war must not be waged lightly but only when necessary and warfare must abide the rules of religion and reason (*Religio & Ratio*) (*Institutio*, 852–853).⁶⁹ That is to say, warfare must not be excessive. After victory, the ruler should spare the innocent and those who were neither cruel nor inhuman.⁷⁰

Not only those in power but also those that are governed have certain political duties. As Le Grand explains, these can be divided into (1) general and (2) special duties. The former concern a citizen's relation to the magistrate (that is, the ruler(s) of the city), the whole citizenry, and fellow citizens (*Institutio*, 853–854). They cease when the citizenry is disbanded, when the citizen moves to a different city, or is sent to prison (or taken prisoner) (*Institutio*, 856). The

⁶⁸ For further elaboration, Le Grand refers the reader to his booklet (*libello meo*) *De optimo regimine* (*Institutio*, 851). According to Ryan (“Anthony Le Grand (1629–1699): Franciscan and Cartesian,” 238), this is but the second part of Le Grand's *Scydromedia* that we analyzed before.

⁶⁹ Ryan (“‘Scydromedia’: Anthony LeGrand's Ideal Commonwealth,” 52) notes that the idea that war is a “last resort” goes back to the “medieval tradition”.

⁷⁰ “Having obtained victory, [the ruler] spares the innocent, and [the ruler] lets those live who were not cruel, not brutal in war (*Institutio*, 853).” “Parta Victoria, innoxis parcat, eosque conservet, qui in Bello non crudeles, non immanes fuerunt.”

latter pertain to those citizens holding a public office (advisers, servants of the church, professors, ambassadors, financial officers) but also soldiers, and they cease when the office is no longer held (*Institutio*, 854–856).

(1) “A citizen is obliged not only to obey the *magistrate* or rulers but also to trust them and show reverence,” says Le Grand (*Institutio*, 854, emphasis in original).⁷¹ Insofar as the duties vis-à-vis the citizenry are concerned, Le Grand makes clear that a citizen should wish for nothing but happiness of the community, and should be ready to give everything for it including their life. Finally, a citizen should be friendly to his fellow citizen (*omnibus Benevolum se præbet*) and preserve peace (*Pacem inter illos servat, ac tuetur*) rather than causing civil unrest (*Institutio*, 854).

(2) The duty of advisers is to be diligent and to work for the wellbeing of the citizenry. They must be immune to corruption. That of God’s ministers is to lead an innocent life and refrain from introducing new dogmas (*Nova Dogmata*). Rather, they should teach the received doctrines of old Christians (*Veteres Christianos*), i.e., that of the Church Fathers. Professors and other teachers must not teach anything false, and their opinion must not go against the tranquillity of society or stir dissensus.⁷² Likewise, they should avoid internal quarrels (*discordias*). Soldiers must abstain from theft or abusing the peasants. They bear their burden, do not act head over heels, and fight honourably to their death. Ambassadors must be circumspect and not credulous. They keep secrets, listen carefully to the suggestions of foreign

⁷¹ “Civis *Magistratui*, seu Rectoribus Civitatis, non modò obsequi, sed & fidem præstare, reverentiamque exhibere tenetur” (*Institutio*, 854, emphasis in original).

⁷² “None of their [the professors’] *opinion* should conflict with the society’s tranquillity or give rise to any discord among the citizens” (*Institutio*, 855, emphasis in original). “Nulla eorum *Opinio* Societatis tranquillitati adversetur, aut aliquod dissidium inter Cives procreet.”

rulers, and are immune to corruption. The financial officers (*quaestores*), finally, must not be a burden to the people they collect money from (*Institutio*, 855–856).

Like Cordemoy, Le Grand endorses absolute monarchy as the best of all political models by arguing that it is more efficient, secretive and more apt to ensure political stability.

4. Conclusion and Open Questions

Both Cordemoy and Le Grand develop an original political theory that strongly supports monarchical rule and absolutism. The monarch should be rational, circumspect, and rule for the good of the people. These, in turn, are loyal and dutiful supporters of the system.

In her *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on ‘Antoine Le Grand’ (13), Easton notes that “Le Grand’s early ethical and political writings are not Cartesian.” It seems to me that the same could be said about Le Grand’s political theory in his chief oeuvre, the *Institutio philosophiae*, and about Cordemoy’s political theory, too. The sources that Le Grand and Cordemoy draw on are classical authors only: Cicero, Justinian, Seneca, and Tacitus in the case of Le Grand. Cicero and Plato in the case of Cordemoy. Now, doubtlessly Cordemoy and Le Grand self-identify as Cartesians.⁷³ They explicitly commit themselves to the continuation of Descartes’s philosophical project. To illustrate: they accept Descartes’s substance dualism, his substance-mode ontology, and his mechanical natural philosophy.⁷⁴ They also push Descartes’s

⁷³ Le Grand even goes so far as to claim that “this whole Work [that is, his *An entire body of philosophy*, the English translation of his *Institutio*] contains nothing else, but his [Descartes’s] Opinions, or what may clearly and distinctly be deduced from them (Preface, [unpaginated]). Nadler (*The Good Cartesian*, 41, emphasis in original) similarly stresses that “To be a Cartesian—truly a Cartesian—then, meant taking one’s start from Descartes’s fundamental principles and [...] pushing that system in directions that Descartes never intended and probably would not have endorsed. Being a Cartesian meant above all, *seeing oneself* as a Cartesian.”

⁷⁴ Nadler (*The Good Cartesian*, 34-36) adds the will and the intellect as the mind’s faculties as being another perhaps minimally sufficient criterion of Cartesianism.

project further: Cordemoy presents a Cartesian account of language in his *Discours physique de la parole* and seeks to reconcile Descartes's natural philosophy with the book of Genesis in his *Lettre écrite a un scavant religieux de la compagnie de Jesus*. Le Grand discusses metals, plants, insects but also fallen angels or demons in his *Institutio philosophiae*.

The question then is: given that Descartes left us with only a handful of remarks on politics, how would a Cartesian political theory qua Cartesian look like? Perhaps Cordemoy and Le Grand could have done things differently, but what difference would we need to find to label their political theory 'Cartesian'? Schall ("Cartesianism and Political Theory," 281–282) has hinted that Cartesianism leads to absolutism in political theory because while the body is subject to deterministic laws of nature (mechanics), the mind is free and absolute in its dealings with reality. However the mind constructs political reality, that's how it is. If type substance dualism were a sufficient ground for absolutism, then Cordemoy's and Le Grand's political theory should qualify as Cartesian. However, I have doubts that matters are as simple as this. From the detailed discussion above, we can see that neither Cordemoy nor Le Grand evoke substance dualism in justifying absolutism. Anchoring the particular political theory that Cordemoy and Le Grand develop in Descartes's substance dualism, his substance-mode ontology, or his mechanical philosophy would have admittedly been a strange move because all of these claims—even if constituting the least common denominator of Cartesianism—are somewhat orthogonal to political theory. Cordemoy and Le Grand endorse absolutism because they are convinced that it is the best guarantor of political stability and that it conforms to their religious views about God. The rule of an absolute king mirrors the rule of God. Clearly, Descartes accentuated political stability, too. But it would seem strange to make this the distinguishing mark of Cartesian political theory.

Perhaps, Cordemoy and Le Grand should have simply referred explicitly to Descartes when presenting their political theory. However, what is there substantially to refer to?

Furthermore, are Descartes's political remarks Cartesian? Do they follow from or depend on his other views that we identify as characteristically Cartesian? It should be clear that this is a complicated and elusive issue. Finally, it can hardly be that easy that one would simply need to reference Descartes's scattered remarks on politics for one's own theory to count as Cartesian. What's more, Cordemoy does not mention Descartes in his main work, the *Le discernement du corps et de l'ame en six discours*, either, and yet his views (bracketing his atomism and his occasionalism) can be shown to be inspired by Descartes. That is to say, naming or not naming one's source of inspiration cannot be the decisive criterion for deciding the origin and philosophical allegiance of one's own thought.

Perhaps the bottom-line then is that Cordemoy and Le Grand are Cartesians but that they also develop an independent political theory. There might simply be no one-to-one connection between a certain set of metaphysical doctrines (that of Descartes or someone else's) and a certain political or moral theory. We might be expecting too much. And while philosophers are usually taken to be systematic, they are also human. They might endorse one political theory, on the one hand, and some kind of metaphysics or natural philosophy, on the other hand. But the one does not necessitate the other. Cordemoy, for one, might have felt that living through the Fronde between 1648–1652, only rigorous political leadership can guarantee political stability and societal peace. Or perhaps, both his family heritage of being ancient nobility from the Auvergne and his close ties to the court of Louis XIV in his later life made him grow fond of absolutism. Le Grand, in turn, might have come to believe that absolutism squares well with his religious beliefs as a Franciscan missionary in England, or he came to believe that only a strong monarchy could hold together post-Civil War England, his new home from 1656 onwards.

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