

# **The cultural background of modern philosophy: A brief history of the emergence of modern ideas.**

Onyenuru Okechukwu. P. (OP).

Undergraduate Student of Dominican Institute, Samanda, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Jets, atomic bombs, internet, sophisticated gadgets! These are identifying features of industrialized man, of the enlightenment age, of science and technology. When we compare modern man with medieval or ancient man, there seem to be a chasm, a kind of disconnect in thought and deeds. It is however disappointing to know that it is not the case. There still exists a strong connect among these philosophical ages, a seamless flow of thought from the ancient down to the post modern age. Although the sixteenth and seventeenth century was marked with a significant revolution which culminated into the emergence of two great philosophical systems, yet these systems came to birth in a bid to resolve unanswered questions of the past. This essay shall explore the philosophical temperament of the modern age beginning from Descartes to Hume. However, since no idea is alien to other sets of ideas, we will take steps back into the medieval and ancient times to discover what triggered this set of men to think “out of the box”.*

## **FROM ANCIENT TO MEDIEVAL.**

Since the appearance of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the field of knowledge has been driven by the thoughts of these two great men. Each of the Mediterranean religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) has attempted to assimilate the wisdom of these philosophers in order to expound their own doctrines. Before the third century AD, when Constantinople inaugurated Christianity as the central religion in his Empire, Christian thinkers such as Origen, Ignatius of

Antioch and Justin Martyr employed philosophy in order to penetrate the Dogmas of the Christian faith in order to understand it better, and refute oppositions from heretics employing philosophy to challenge the faith. *“One may say that the philosophic ideas of the early Christian writers were Platonic or neo-Platonic in character (with an admixture of Stoicism) and that the Platonic tradition continued for long to dominate Christian thought from the philosophic viewpoint.”*<sup>1</sup> From this time, the West began to experience a different kind of ruling-Christendom. A secular government controlled by the Church, popularly called “Church and State Government.” This government saw to it that the laws made by the state were validated by the Church. The clergy was more powerful than the kings or lords, enforcing imposition of the tenets of Christianity on the people of the West. Christianity imposed social as well as religious cohesion, which for some time was favourable. Nevertheless as time went on, people yearned for freedom, for liberty, for self-determination. This generated some kind of conflict within the system. One was between the church, her philosophies and the people; the other between the Church and state.

### **The Church’s Monopoly of Knowledge.**

Medieval thinkers inherited Platonic and Neo-platonic philosophy from the early Fathers and more especially from Augustine. From the theory of the “world of Forms” to that of immanent creation, according to which all things in the universe are an imitation of reality in the world of forms and that the entire world emanates from the intellectual light of God’s self-contemplation respectively, the theory of universals was set in motion.<sup>2</sup> Plato believed that the existence of universals was required not only ontologically, to explain the nature of the world that as responsive and meditative beings we experience, but also epistemologically, to explain the nature of our experience of it. This theory of universals proposes that only one substance of every genus

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick, Copleston. *A History of Philosophy*, Vol III.(New York:, Doubleday, 1962). p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Frederick, Copleston. *A History of Philosophy*, Vol III.(New York:, Doubleday, 1962). p. 137

of thing exists while all corporeal things within than genus are mere representation of it. Thus the universe consists of two spheres: world of Forms where God lives and a world of corporeal things occupied by man and other created things. Ptolemy in second century AD built on this theory and arrived at a concept of the order of the universe known as called the Ptolemaic cosmology. This cosmology places the earth at the center of the solar system, an immovable mass, around which five planets, the sun and moon revolves, making a total of 7 heavenly bodies, a number that was termed sacred by the church (7 churches of Asia, the Sabbath).<sup>3</sup> The geocentric cosmology fitted perfectly well with the churches theology that promotes the central place of man in God's creation.

On epistemological grounds, Platonism promotes reason over sense perception.<sup>4</sup> Truths of reason are necessary, eternal and a priori. Owing to the fact that man's reason is a participation in the Divine Reason, only recourse to reason (a retrieval of what the soul has always known in its previous life-reminiscence-) can suffice for knowledge. The church clung to this theory to reinforcement her hold on the Bible and Magisterium as the only means of knowledge (both transcendental and terrestrial) since they are revealed truths. Faith now had precedence over reason in verification of claim.

A great turnaround was experienced in the 11th and 12th centuries. This period, also known as the era of the Scholastics, saw the founding of universities where a different kind of philosophy was taught- Aristotelianism- which ran contrary to Platonism. Aristotle taught that universals exist, but they are not subsistent, and so cease to exist when the particulars lose their being.<sup>5</sup> His doctrine goes a step beyond that of Plato. It introduces matter alongside form; universals alongside particulars; reason alongside sense perception. This was really instrumental in

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bertrand Russel. *History of Western Philosophy*. (Wokin: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1947), p. 556.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Wittgenstein*. 2nd Edition. (London: Routledge, 1995). p 13

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk VII, 1038 b, 30-35.

explaining the mystery of transubstantiation.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle's philosophy was championed by the great Angelic Doctor St. Thomas Aquinas, whose writings were accepted by the church. Among his inputs was the probable argument for the existence of God from the nature otherwise called the Five ways.<sup>7</sup> From his argument of cause, purpose, motion, contingency and goodness of corporeal things, he infers the necessary existence of God. He also tries to harmonize the roles of faith and reason. Like Aristotle, Thomas believes in a free being capable of making moral choices, and in the place of sense perception in arriving at knowledge, yet subject to reason.<sup>8</sup>

To what extent did these divergent views solve the pressing enquiries of the western mind such as: man's nature and his position in the cosmos (ontology), his actions in relation to a deity (Free will), and how much of the natural world he can dare to know (epistemology)? Already scholasticism was going beyond the clergy into the general people as universities were established, and there was beginning to surface among the people, doubts about so many things the church preached.

Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century tried to address some of the growing philosophical challenges when he came up with his "Ontological argument" by which God is "an entity than which no greater can be thought."<sup>9</sup> This argument establishes two strong points. One, that God exists by necessity. Two, all other things owe their existence to Him. Blending this with Neoplatonic teaching, we can rightly say that man is a determined being, never free to act.

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<sup>6</sup> Volert C. "Transubstantiation" *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 14, ed. Thomas Carson, 2003 ed., p. 158  
Transubstantiation is the change or conversion of one substance into another. Its usage is confined to the Eucharistic rite, where it signifies the change of the entire substance or basic reality of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, while the outward appearances (species, accidents) of the bread and wine are unaffected. The neologism [coinage] was employed by Roland Bandinelli (the future Alexander III) before 1153; it rapidly gained currency and soon appeared in official documents of the Church.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2 a.3

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Copleston Frederick, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol III. (New York:, Doubleday, 1962). p. 319-321

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161-164

## **Church and State**

From the time of Constantinople, the state has always held allegiance to the Church. Secular power was in the hands of the kings who shared it with the feudal aristocrats. Although the armed forces was on the side of the kings, yet the Church was victor, partly because the church had monopoly of education, partly because the kings were perpetually at war with each other, but mainly because with very few exception, rulers as well as citizens profoundly believed that the church preserved the power of the Key. She had the power to send a king to heaven or hell, to stimulate rebellion and absolve subjects from the dignity of allegiance.<sup>10</sup>

The clergy were as debaucherous as the aristocrats, because all manner of treachery and corruption found in the state were established in the church, yet the latter demanded allegiance from the state on divine grounds. This was irreconcilable and in due course, her stronghold on the state was to collapse as people began to perceive the church merely as a human institution embellished with illusions of the Divine.

## **Decline of Medieval Philosophy**

Right within the ranks of the schoolmen, there arose one whose theories was to precipitate a great transition. Williams of Ockham, a Franciscan friar, out rightly denied the existence of universals outside the human mind and human language. He was a core conceptualist and argued that nothing existed except individual beings and perceptible things; that only concrete experiences could serve as a basis for knowledge; and that universals existed not as entities external to the mind but as mental concepts.<sup>11</sup> Prior to this pronouncement by Ockham's, Dun Scotus proposed that each particulars had its own individual "thisness", which possessed a positive reality. Also in contrast to St. Thomas' "Five ways", Ockham argued against the possibility of moving from a rational apprehension of the facts of this world to any necessary

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Russel Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy.* (Wokin: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1947), p. 15

<sup>11</sup> Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind.* (New york: Ballantine Books, 1993). p.202

conclusion about God or other religious dogma. Thus for him, there are two realities given to man- the reality of God given by revelation and the reality of the concrete world given by direct sense experience. All knowledge of nature arises solely from what is made available to the senses. Reason was a powerful tool of enquiry, but its powers lay only in relation to experiential encounter with nature.<sup>12</sup> The long assumed metaphysical unity of concept and being began to fall apart. The assumption that the human mind knows things by intellectually grasping the inherent form either via interior illumination of transcendent ideas proposed by Plato, or via the action of the intellect's abstraction of immanent universals from sense-perceived particulars proposed by Aristotle and championed by Thomas was now furiously challenged. This set the groundwork for one of the great systems of modern philosophy-Empiricism.

Another contributing factor to the decline of medieval ideology is the emergence of classical humanism (Renaissance), which served as a transition to the modern age. This era was marked by a return to the classical writings of Plato, Virgil, Cicero, Homer, Horace, Levi and others. The renaissance writers saw in ancient culture not just a source of scientific knowledge and rules of logical discourse, but a guide to the enrichment of the human spirit. Petrarch can be considered the pioneer of this age, as he began the re-education of Europe by presenting newer interpretations of the discourses of the great masters of Latin and Greek literature. There was discovery of non-Christian spiritual traditions possessing religious and ethical profundity seemingly comparable to Christianity. Other options to ascending to the transcendental realm were being explored, rather than having to be "boxed into a corner" with harsh Christian doctrines and spirituality. Man was perceived as a spark of light from the Divine, with the capacity of discovering by himself the image of the infinite deity. One humanist Marsilio Ficini says that man "*by means of the intellect and will.....is a sense all things and even a god.*"<sup>13</sup> Man was been taught to assume his free position; he was given a power of immutability and self-

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind*.(New york: Ballantine Books, 1993). p.204

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 214

transformation; the power to freely define his position in the universe even to the point of ascending, by contemplation and mysticism, to full union with the supreme God.<sup>14</sup>

This new way of thinking was of immense concern to the Church because with man's belief in his exalted position there was a temptation that he would cultivate unrestricted pride even against his creator. It also ran contrary to the more strictly defined orthodox dichotomy between creator and creature, and would eventually break the religious fence that held people within the walls of the cathedral. If man can by himself ascend to God, what then do we need the church for?

On the Church and State front, Luther (1483-1546) led a reformation of immeasurable consequence in the 16th century. Luther, a catholic monk, revolted against papal attempt to finance the architectural and artistic glory of the high renaissance art selling spiritual indulgence.<sup>15</sup> Lumped within his 95 theses are his condemnation of the doctrines of indulgence, purgatory, and papal infallibility. Many who were weary of the burden of the church joined this pull-out, forming a group of churches called the Protestant churches. In some countries where the protestant church flourished, freedom and liberty was promoted, but they lacked a unity of belief right from the beginning of the movements, caused by contrasting theological beliefs. This necessitated proliferation of churches which gave birth to tolerance. Luther was of the opinion that the king or ruler of a region was the head of the church in his territory.<sup>16</sup> The reformation was a new and decisive assertion of the rebellious individuation- of personal conscience; of Christian liberty; of critical private judgment of faith as against the monolithic authority of the church. It also brought to a close the universal dream of the Catholic imperial and opened the doors to empowerment of the various states of Europe. A new world order was on the verge of emerging. Luther's writings heightened the spirit of skepticism with the event "*that individual*

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 217

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 233

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Russel Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy.* (Wokin: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1947), p. 545

*consciences, unconstrained by universal authority, and unwilling to submit faith to rational arbitrament, began to produce a great diversity of beliefs.”<sup>17</sup>*

In the 17th century, the Church launched a counter reformation headed by a group of dedicated intellectuals called Jesuits. Their aim was to repackage the Church’s teaching, and their strategy was the re-education of Europe. They took on the task of educating the young, especially those of the ruling class, in order to forge a new elite class.<sup>18</sup>

### **SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION.**

A new conception of the field of science can be said to be the singular important element that sets the modern age apart. Prior to the 15th century, science was a branch of philosophy and was speculative in approach. But things were to change when the great men of the scientific revolution stepped forward. Bertrand Russell identifies four great men as pre-eminent in the creation of science. They are Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton. He attributes the success of these men to their “*immense patience in observation and great boldness in framing hypothesis. The second of their merits belonged had belonged to the earliest philosophers, the first existed to a considerable degree in the later astronomers of antiquity. But no one among the ancients, except perhaps Aristarchus, possessed both and no one of the medieval possessed either*”<sup>19</sup>

The cosmology of Claudius Ptolemaeus held sway up until 15th century. This geocentric system placed the earth at the center of the universe, with other celestial bodies revolving around it. Copernicus (1473-1543), a mathematician found this model of deferents, major and minor epicycles, equators and eccentrics quite complex and contrary to the perfect nature of celestial

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<sup>17</sup> Anthony, Kenny. *The History of Western Philosophy*, Vol III. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 8

<sup>18</sup> Lampe E. L. and Soergel P. “Counter Reformation” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 4, ed. Thomas Carson, 2003 ed., p. 308

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Russel Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy.* (Wokin: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1947), p.549

bodies. In a bid to account for an unusual movement of celestial bodies, another epicycle is added so as to justify uniform motion. This uniformity in motion is on the assumption that all celestial bodies are made of perfect aethers and will move in perfect circles, while terrestrial bodies are imperfect and move in straight lines.<sup>20</sup> After much study of ancient astronomical works, Copernicus came up with a work *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestrum* in which he showed by mathematical argument that the sun and not the earth was the center of the universe. This had immense implication for man's conception of himself. If the earth was like every other planet, then, either God had no special place for man, as he was just as floating as other creatures or God did not make the universe for He could not have made one that was haphazard, one that lacked purpose.<sup>21</sup> For the church, it crumbled her theories of a localized heaven and hell. How could one now interpret Ps. 104: 5 which says “*the earth is set firmly in place and cannot be moved*” because of this, the Church fought hard to stifle the work of Copernicus.

Years after the death of Copernicus, his work remained enshrouded. Two scientists got interested in it and took his hypothesis a step further. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), a student of Tycho Brahe, in 1609 published his *Laws of Planetary Motions*, where he presented a solution to the problems of the planets giving a physical account of the heavens in terms of a physically plausible motion.<sup>22</sup> Galileo (1564-1642), unaware of the work of Kepler, also made efforts to prove the plausibility of heliocentricity also using mathematical principles.<sup>23</sup> So he came up with his *Theory of Falling Bodies* preceded by the *Role of Acceleration in Dynamics*. According to his principles, all bodies accelerated at the same pace irrespective of mass when equal amount of force was applied to them, except an external force causes them to act otherwise. Thus bodies that move in circles like the planets have at all times a uniform acceleration towards the center.

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<sup>20</sup>Cf. Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind*.(New york: Ballantine Books, 1993). p.248

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Genesis pg Harry Prosch,*The Genesis of Twentieth Century Philosophy*. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966). p.20

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind*.(New york: Ballantine Books, 1993). p.256

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Genesis pg Harry Prosch, *The Genesis of Twentieth Century Philosophy*. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966). p 30

Using the telescope, Galileo made some interesting discoveries. He observed that there were craters and mountains on the surface of the moon that the sun had moving spots, Jupiter had four moons, and the surface of Venus was seen in phases. His findings proved that celestial bodies in fact are not perfect, incorruptible and immutable as proposed by the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology, and that the possession of a moon by the earth just like Jupiter meant that it was not flat but round.<sup>24</sup>

While Galileo was being cross-examined by the inquisitors for his position, the resourceful Descartes was grappling with Galileo's works. Descartes (1596-1650) devoted immense time to the discovery of the laws guiding nature. The laws of motion that he inherited posited that components of object move in an orderly manner towards their source, which account for linear and circular motions of terrestrial and celestial objects respectively. For Descartes, nature is an intrinsic impersonal matrix strictly ordered by material laws. He proposed that the physical world was composed of an infinite number of particles or "corpuscles" which mechanically collided and aggregate without order, obeying certain rules imposed by God. Thus he enunciated the first unequivocal statement of the law of inertia by concluding that these corpuscles will continue to move unless stopped by the another force or will continue to rest unless prompted to move by a force. He also proposed the sustainability of nature after the first cause using the law of conservation of energy.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to the Aristotelian view that forces come into existence only by bodily contact, Descartes had proved that this was false and that forces had metaphysical foundation. Also, if nature is governed by some strict mathematical principles, then explaining it teleological would be superfluous. Nature acts by causality rather than by Teleos (cause vs.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Harry Prosch, *The Genesis of Twentieth Century Philosophy*. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966).p 24-

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Harald Hoffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, Vol. 1. (USA: Dover Publication, Inc., 1955). p 229

purpose).<sup>26</sup> Yet the entire puzzle had not yet fitted: how is it that the earth and other planets venture towards the sun?

All these was to reach a peak in the work of the creative genius Isaac Newton (1642-1727), whom some refer to as the greatest mind that ever lived. Four of his discoveries sealed the discussion on heliocentricity. They are the laws of cognate bodies, definition of force, law of inertia and theory of universal gravitation.<sup>27</sup> These findings explained the working of the universe. The planets maintained an orbit because they are attracted to the center by the sun, and their velocities are proportional to their distance from the sun. Their velocities increased as they appear closer to the sun and decreases as they venture father away from it, accounting for seasons on the planets.<sup>28</sup>

These great men succeeded in pulling down the stronghold of Aristotelianism. All of Aristotle's speculative science came crashing down in the face of a new way of arriving at knowledge of the natural world. Hence the modern man fully emerges.

### **THE TWO GREAT SYSTEMS.**

Now that the church has lost her monopoly of knowledge, and science now perceived to consist in analysis of quantity rather than quality, a new system of discipline was instituted. They are the two opposing schools of thought-Rationalism and Empiricism.

#### **Rationalism:**

Championed by the one who is referred to as the father of modern philosophy, Descartes and all who fall into this school of philosophy taught that knowledge can be acquired by reason and not by sense perception. We can see the old Platonic doctrine being revived here, but in a different

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p 231

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Harry Prosch, *The Genesis of Twentieth Century Philosophy*. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966). p 58

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 59-66

manner. In an age plagued with skepticism propagated in the Renaissance by Montaigne, questions were raised on the certitude of knowledge. In his search for some fundamental indubitable truths, Descartes employed the “methodic doubt” by which he doubted everything he had ever known, ever been thought, including the natural world. He arrived at certain indubitable truths: that he thinks and so he existed-*cogito ego sum*; that God exists; and that mathematical principles are not contingent.<sup>29</sup> He also asserts that certain attributes of the corporeal worlds are true such as extension, shape, size, place and line only because they are objects of the field of mathematics. But attributes such as taste, smell, colour, are mere illusions. Descartes had enthroned human reason as the sole authority on matters of knowledge. The once infallible church had finally lost her grip.<sup>30</sup>

From this point, he goes ahead to expound his metaphysics. He doesn't with his *cogito ego sum* prove his existence as a whole human being, rather the existence of a mind. After observing the change of state of a lump of wax, he concludes that not only are the senses intrinsically unreliable in discerning the reality of physical objects, but that the real nature of physical objects must consist in something more than sensible qualities.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, there are three substances in reality: God, Mind and Matter that do not interfere with one another.<sup>32</sup> Descartes' philosophy of nature poses a mind-body problem which is still debated today. If the mind is in the body without influencing it, why then is it trapped there?

Knowledge can be gained via intuition, a function of the intellect, when it is abstracting the essentials of corporeal object, and these abstractions are made possible by applying the principles of mathematics. Again, how then can we know the essence of a thing? The essential parts of a corporeal substance or body being extensible, flexible and changeable with its various modes

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind*.(New york: Ballantine Books, 1993). p.279

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 279

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Wittgenstein*.2nd Edition.(London: Routledge, 1995). p 35

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Russel Bertrand,*History of Western Philosophy*.( Wokin: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1947), p.594

facilitate the revelation of the essence of the body upon the application of powers of intuition and rationality.

Another rationalist is Baruch de Spinoza (1633-1677), a genius of Jewish descent who was excommunicated for his heretical beliefs, held that only one substance existed and that substance is God. He defined a substance as that whose conception doesn't depend upon the conception of anything from which it must be found.<sup>33</sup> A substance cannot enter into relations with particulars and can be neither the cause nor effect of anything outside itself. All other "substances", thoughts and extensions (mind and body), are attributes of God. God's attribute transcend what we can ever be aware of since we are mere finite beings. Our end is not in personal immortality, but in perfect union with this God. This metaphysical position is called monism as different from dualism of Descartes.

In his *Ethics*, Spinoza describes knowledge in terms of ideas in our minds, identifying three kinds of knowledge which includes imagination, reason and intuition. Knowledge by intuition is knowledge of things by their essence and it is the only means of arriving at adequate, error-free certitude of knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Not every idea is a true representation of the thing sought, but every adequate idea is. An adequate idea is self-evident to the one who grasps it, because if we know something, "*we know that we know it, and know that we know that we know it.*"<sup>35</sup> Spinoza seems to have eliminated the concept of particularity, reducing every property to God. The implication is that man is determined, and so lacks free will in contrast to Descartes view which supports free will in its support of individuality.

Whereas the basic elements of the Spinozistic worldview are given in the *Ethics*, Leibniz's philosophy must be pieced together from numerous brief expositions, which seem to be mere

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Wittgenstein*. 2nd Edition. (London: Routledge, 1995). p 49-52

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Anthony Kenny, *The History of Western Philosophy*, Vol III. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). p 154

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Wittgenstein*. 2nd Edition. (London: Routledge, 1995). p 55

philosophical interludes in an otherwise busy life.<sup>36</sup> He neither tows the line of Spinoza nor that of Descartes. For Leibniz, there is infiniteness of substance. Every substance is an individual and each individual a monad which is a simple entity that cannot be extended in space and is distinguished from one another by its properties.<sup>37</sup> Examples of monad are souls or minds and they are windowless, such that one mind cannot interact or act as the cause of an event in another monad. He uses the theory of Pre-established Harmony to try to solve the mind-body problem created by Descartes, but arrives as pluralism. According to this theory, the mind and body work independently of each other since each is a windowless monad, but they seem to synchronize because God has made them like two clocks working independently yet reading correctly. How then can we account for causality in nature? His theory still seems to be deficient in answering this crucial question.<sup>38</sup> Although it emphasizes individuation, the unresolved issue of mind-body restricts its attending to the question of free-will.

On epistemological grounds Leibniz postulates knowledge by retrieval of innate ideas. For him, we have in us innate tendencies and disposition which unfold as soon as experiences offer them occasion and which underlie all theoretical and practical activity.<sup>39</sup> Thus experiences only afford us opportunity to unwrap what we already have in our intellect for there is much more in us than we know. This clearly is Plato reborn.

### **Empiricism**

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is honored as the founder of modern science. He it was who first introduced the method of inductive enquiry into the search of knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Bacon posits that as the new world was been discovered by explorers, there was also a need to invent a new way of

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<sup>36</sup> Duignan Brian. *Modern Philosophy from 1500 CE to the Present*, (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2011), p. 100

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 102

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Wittgenstein*. 2nd Edition. (London: Routledge, 1995). p 65-66

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Harald Hoffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, Vol. 1. (USA: Dover Publication, Inc., 1955). p 357-358

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Russel Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy*. (Wokin: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1947), p.563

thinking, purge off old traditional prejudices, subjective distortions, verbal confusions, and general intellectual blindness.<sup>41</sup> This new method was an organized way of finding a common ground in natural occurrences, a general law guiding nature.

As opposed to the deduction of Aristotle, Bacon preached a new science founded on a special kind of induction called simple enumeration, where observations are made, and hypothesis proposed. This hypothesis is then tested by making numerous observations in a variety of circumstances. The hypothesis is made into a law when what is proposed is consistent to natural occurrence (verifiability).<sup>42</sup>

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) in his *Leviathan* was clear on the supreme position of the material world. He can rightly be called the first philosopher who took empiricism too far to what is termed materialism. In a work aimed at expounding the history of civilization, Hobbes claims that man was only beleaguered by the ideas of non-extended and non-bodily substances such as spirits, angels and the divine. What keeps Hobbes in the school of empiricists is his unwavering claim that no conception is in man's mind which hath not first, in part or whole, been begotten from the organs of the sense. Every imagination, reasoning, memory sensation are merely decaying data derived from the senses.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to this, John Locke (1632-1704) calls the human mind a white paper devoid of all ideas on which is impressed data derived from sense experience. He strongly opposes the doctrine of innate ideas and vehemently emphasizes the place of the senses in guaranteeing knowledge. All ideas have their foundation in the sense.<sup>44</sup>

Locke was followed by Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753) whose position on the metaphysical existence of corporeal things is quite controversial. He points out that all human knowledge is in the mind or is experienced as ideas in the mind, and there is no certainty of correlation between

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993). p.272

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Russel Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy*. (Wokin: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1947), p.565

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Anthony Kenny, *The History of Western Philosophy*, Vol III. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). p 128

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Stephen Priest. *The British Empiricists*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 76-80

what we have in our minds and what the natural world presents. Thus only two things exist: the mind and the ideas perceived by the mind. So that whatever we experience in the corporeal world find their source in the mind. “*Nothing exists outside the mind.*”<sup>45</sup> He appears to have written in response to the growing ideology of materialism in Europe, which was inevitably leading to irrelevance of God. Thus, he opines that even though we perceive things differently, there is still objectivity in knowing the things of nature because the world and its order depend on a mind that is universal, transcending our individual minds. So that whatever exists- nature, our minds, and ideas- do so because they all exist in the mind of God.<sup>46</sup>

The scientific tool of induction was put to great test by the man David Hume (1711-1776). His famous slogan “no ideas without impression” establishes him within this school of thought. However the senses may promise us knowledge, Hume rejects its ability to provide us with certain knowledge of things because it lacks the ability to grasp the essence of things, which is the most important part of a thing. He also rejects reason completely, insisting that “reason is powerless and useless, while impression can do little.”<sup>47</sup>

Man presumes knowledge of things by observing things over a long time and arrives at a causal connection between his idea and the natural phenomenon. This is clearly induction. Hume sees this as wrong, because our conclusion was never arrived at by direct human experience, yet our conclusion is a prediction of human experience. Hume does not wish to dismiss induction as a means of arriving at knowledge for it is inevitable for living, but he warns against making inductive generalizations, predictions and causal generalization from an experience we never had. We must have experienced all possible cases-past, present and future- before we formulate

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Harald Hoffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, Vol. 1. (USA: Dover Publication, Inc., 1955). p 418-420

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993). p.336

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 338

any law.<sup>48</sup> He succeeds in rubbishing all attempts to validate the field of science as a discipline that can provide truth about the state of affairs in nature, and enthroning skepticism.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have taken a tour of the history of western philosophy from Plato to the ancestors of Wittgenstein. The ideas brought forth by philosophers within the modern epoch is, as the essay presents, not alien to the Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance schools of thought, but a radical offshoot similar, yet paradoxically different. The men of this age in a bid to be relevant found it necessary to invent a novel way of enquiry founded on observation and reason, furnished by the tools of mathematics and logic. With curiosity “impregnated” with skepticism, modern man redefined metaphysics and epistemology, broke of the shackles of the imperial church and opened up limitless possibilities for her successors. Although not perfect in their formulations, modern man owes his progress to the tireless effort of these great thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Whether there will ever be a radical paradigm shift from twentieth century post-modernism to something of a sharp difference is something that is not evident from the direction the key players of philosophy are headed.

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Stephen Priest. *The British Empiricists*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 157-160

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