

CSS PLATFORM
Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat
The Ten “Greatest” Thinkers

WILL DURANT

WHAT IS THOUGHT? It baffles description because it includes everything through which it might be defined. It is the most immediate fact that we know, and the last mystery of our being. All other things come to us as its forms, and all human achievements find in it their source and their goal. Its appearance is the great turning point in the drama of evolution.

When did the miracle begin? Perhaps when the great surges of ice came down relentlessly from the Pole, chilling the air, destroying vegetation almost everywhere, eliminating countless species of helpless and unadaptable animals, and pushing a few survivors into a narrow tropical belt, where for generations they clung to the equator, waiting for the wrath of the North to melt. Probably it was in those critical days, when all the old and wonted ways of life were nullified by the invading ice, and inherited or traditional patterns of behavior found no success in an environment where everything was altered, that animals with comparatively complete but inflexible instinctive equipment were weeded out because they could not change within to meet the change outside; while the animal we call man, dowered with a precarious plasticity, learned and rose to an unquestioned supremacy over all the species of the forest and the field.

It was on some such life-and-death emergency as this, presumably, that human reasoning began. That same incompleteness and adaptability of native reactions which we see today in the infant, which makes it so inferior to a newborn animal but leaves it in recompense the possibility of learning—that same plasticity saved man and the higher mammals; while powerful organisms like the mammoth and the mastodon, that had prowled about hitherto supreme, succumbed to the icy change and became mere sport for paleontological curiosity. They shivered and passed away, while man, puny man, remained. Thought and invention began: the bewilderment of baffled instinct begot the first timid hypotheses, the first tentative putting together of two and two, the first generalizations, the first painful studies of similarities of quality and regularities of sequence, the first adaptation of things learned to situations so novel that reactions instinctive and immediate broke down in utter failure. It was then that certain instincts of action evolved into modes of thought and instruments of intelligence: what had been watchful waiting or stalking a prey became attention; fear and flight became caution and deliberation; pugnacity and assault became curiosity and analysis; manipulation became experiment. The animal stood up erect and became man, slave still to a thousand circumstances, timidly brave before countless perils, but in his precarious way destined henceforth to be lord of the earth.

The Adventure of Human Reason

From that obscure age to our own place and time the history of civilization has been the adventure of human reason. At every step on the stairway of progress it was thought that lifted us, slowly and tentatively, to a larger power and a higher life. If ideas do not determine history, inventions do; and inventions are determined by ideas. Certainly it is desire, the restlessness of our insatiable wants, that agitates us into thinking; but however motivated or inspired, it is thought that finds a way. We need not settle then the ancient dispute between those hero-worshippers, like Carlyle and Nietzsche, who interpret history in terms of great men, and those hero-scorners who, like Spencer and Marx, see only economic causes behind historical events; we may be sure that no pressure of economic circumstance would ever have sufficed to advance mankind if the illuminating spark of thought had not intervened.

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

Perhaps Tarde and James are right, and all history is a succession of inventions made by genius and turned into conventions by the people, a series of initiatives taken by adventurous leaders and spread among the masses of mankind by the waves of imitation. There is no doubt that at the beginning and summit of every age some heroic genius stands, the voice and index of his time, the inheritor and interpreter of the past, the guide and pioneer into the future. If we could find in each epoch of unfolding civilization the representative and dominating figure in its thought, we should have a living panorama of our history. But as we face the task of selecting these persons of the drama, about whom the play revolves, a dozen difficulties daunt us. What shall be our test of greatness? How, in the roster of human genius, shall we know whom to omit and whom to name?

The Criteria

Well, we shall be ruthless and dogmatic here; and though it break our hearts we shall admit no hero to our list whose thought, however subtle or profound, has not had an enduring influence upon mankind. This must be our supreme test. We shall try to take account of the originality and scope, the veracity and depth, of each thinker's thought; but what we must bear in mind above all is the extent and persistence of his influence upon the lives and minds of men. Only so can we control in some measure our personal prejudices, and arrive at some moderate impartiality in our choice.

And now how shall we define a "thinker"? Presumably the word will embrace philosophers and scientists—but only these? Shall we include men like Euripides, or Lucretius, or Dante, or Leonardo, or Shakespeare, or Goethe? No; we shall bow humbly to such great names and class them, despite the reach and fathom of their thought, as only secondarily thinkers, as artists first and above all. Shall we include such immensely influential leaders as Jesus, or Buddha, or Augustine, or Luther? No; these founders and renewers of religion would overlap our term; it was not thought or reason, but feeling and noble passion, a mystic vision and an incorrigible faith that made them, from their little foot of earth, move the world. Shall we admit into our council of ten those great men of action whose names ring down the corridor of history—men like Pericles, or Alexander, or Caesar, or Charlemagne, or Cromwell, or Napoleon, or Lincoln? No; if we spread the word "thinker" to catch such heroes in its net we shall deprive it of its distinctive meaning, and shall fail to catch the significance of thought. We must embrace within it philosophers and scientists alone. We shall seek for those men who by their thinking, rather than by their action or their passion, have most influenced mankind. We shall search for them in the quiet places of the world, far from the madding crowd; in those obscure corners where great thoughts came to them "as on dove's feet," and where for a moment they saw, as in a transfiguration, the countenance of truth. Who then shall be first?

1. CONFUCIUS At once our doubts and quarrels begin. By what canon shall we include Confucius and omit Buddha and Christ? By this alone: that he was a moral philosopher rather than a preacher of religious faith; that his call to the noble life was based upon secular motives rather than upon supernatural considerations; that he far more resembles Socrates than Jesus.

Born (552 B.C.) in an age of confusion, in which the old power and glory of China had passed into feudal disintegration and factional strife, Kung-fu-tse undertook to restore health and order to his country. How? Let him speak:

The illustrious ancients, when they wished to make clear and to propagate the highest virtues in

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

the world, put their states in proper order. Before putting their states in proper order, they regulated their families. Before regulating their families, they cultivated their own selves. Before cultivating their own selves, they perfected their souls. Before perfecting their souls, they tried to be sincere in their thoughts. Before trying to be sincere in their thoughts, they extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such investigation of knowledge lay in the investigation of things, and in seeing them as they really were. When things were thus investigated, knowledge became complete. When knowledge was complete, their thoughts became sincere. When their thoughts were sincere, their souls became perfect. When their souls were perfect, their own selves became cultivated. When their selves were cultivated, their families became regulated. When their families were regulated, their states came to be put into proper order. When their states were in proper order, then the whole world became peaceful and happy.

Here is a sound moral and political philosophy within the compass of a paragraph. It was a highly conservative system; it exalted manners and etiquette, and scorned democracy; despite its clear enunciation of the Golden Rule it was nearer to Stoicism than to Christianity. A pupil having asked him should one return good for evil, Confucius replied: "With what then will you recompense kindness? Return good for good, and for evil, justice." He did not believe that all men were equal; it seemed to him that intelligence was not a universal gift. As his pupil Mencius put it: "That whereby man differs from the lower animals is little. Most people throw it away." The greatest fortune of a people would be to keep ignorant persons from public office, and secure their wisest men to rule them.

A great city, Chung-tu, took him at his word and made him magistrate. "A marvelous reformation," we are told, "ensued in the manners of the people.... There was an end of crime.... Dishonesty and dissoluteness hid their heads. Loyalty and good faith became the characteristic of the men, chastity and docility of the women." It is too good to be true, and probably it did not last very long. But even in his lifetime Confucius' followers understood his greatness and foresaw the timeless influence he was to have in molding the courtesy and poise and placid wisdom of the Chinese. "His disciples buried him with great pomp. A multitude of them built huts near his grave and remained there, mourning as for a father, for nearly three years. When all the others were gone, Tse-Kung," who had loved him beyond the rest, "continued by the grave for three years more, alone."

2. PLATO and now we are faced with new problems. Whole civilizations confront us in which we can find no dominating name, no powerful secular personality voicing and forming his people with thought. It is so in India, and among the Jews, and among the nomad races of Asia Minor's "Fertile Crescent": we have a Buddha, an Isaiah, a Jesus, and a Mohammed, but we have no world-scientist, no world-philosopher. And in another case—perhaps the most lasting and marvelous civilization the world has ever known—we have a hundred Pharaohs, and innumerable relics of a varied art, but no name stands out as that of one who brought the past into the perspective of wisdom and stamped his influence upon the intellectual development of his nation. We have to pass respectfully by these peoples and these centuries, and consider the glory of Periclean Greece.

Why do we love Plato? Because Plato himself was a lover: lover of comrades, lover of the intoxication of dialectical revelry, passionate seeker of the elusive reality behind thoughts and things. We love him for his unstinted energy, for the wild nomadic play of his fancy, for the joy

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

which he found in life in all its unredeemed and adventurous complexity. We love him because he was alive every minute of his life, and never ceased to grow; such a man can be forgiven for whatever errors he has made. We love him because of his high passion for social reconstruction through intelligent control; because he retained throughout his eighty years that zeal for human improvement which is for most of us the passing luxury of youth; because he conceived philosophy as an instrument not merely for the interpretation but for the remolding of the world. We love him because he worshiped beauty as well as truth, and gave to ideas the living movement of drama, and clothed them in all the radiance of art. Here in the Republic and the Dialogues is such a riotous play of the creative imagination as might have made a Shakespeare; here is imagery squandered with lordly abandon; here is humor such as one misses in our ponderous modern philosophers; here is no system but all systems; here is one abounding fountainhead of European thought; here is prose as strong and beautiful as the great temples where Greek joy disported itself in marble; here literary prose is born, and born adult.

Plato, then, must be our second name. But we shall have to defend him against a very reasonable challenge: What of old Socrates, almost the father, and surely the greatest martyr, of philosophy? It will seem ridiculous to omit him from a list which will include heroes not half so great as he. The reader must not be shocked to learn that Socrates is half a myth, and only half a man. A learned Frenchman, M. Dupreel (in *La Legende Socratique*), has reduced the noble gadfly to the misty historical status of Achilles, Oedipus, Romulus, and Siegfried. No doubt when we are dead some careful and conscientious scholar will prove that we never existed. But we may be certain that in good measure Socrates owes his fame as a philosopher to the creative imagination of Plato, who used the magnificent idler as the mouthpiece of his views. How much of Plato's Socrates was Socrates, and how much of it was Plato, we shall probably never know. Let us take Plato as implying both.

His Dialogues are among the precious possessions of mankind. Here for the first time philosophy took form, and by the very exuberance of youth achieved perfection unrivaled in after days. Do you wish to hear noble discourse of love and friendship?—read the *Lysis*, the *Charmides*, and the *Phaedrus*. Would you know what a great and tender soul—the Platonic Socrates—thought of another life?—read the *Phaedo*, whose final pages are one of the peaks in the history of prose. Are you interested in the puzzles of the mind, in the mystery of knowledge?—read the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*. Are you interested in anything?—read the *Republic*: here you shall find metaphysics, theology, ethics, psychology, theory of education, theory of statesmanship, theory of art; here you shall find feminism and birth-control, communism and socialism with all their virtues and their difficulties, eugenics and libertarian education, aristocracy and democracy, vitalism and psychoanalysis—what shall you not find here? No wonder Emerson awarded to the *Republic* the words which the occasionally pious Omar had written of the Koran: "Burn the libraries, for their value is in this book."

As to Plato's influence, how can we doubt? Consider the Academy which he founded, the first and longest-lived of the universities of the world. Consider the perpetual revival of Plato's philosophy from the Neo-Platonists of Alexandria to the Cambridge Platonists of England. Consider the permeation of Christian theology with Platonic thought and symbolism, and the dominance of Plato in the culture of the earlier Middle Ages. Consider the enthusiastic Platonism of the Renaissance, when Lorenzo's table recaptured some of the glory of the Symposium, and Pico della Mirandola burned candles devoutly before the Master's image.

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

Consider that at this moment, in a hundred countries and a thousand cities, a hundred thousand students, young and old, are absorbed in the Republic or the Dialogues, are being slowly and gratefully molded into a sensitive wisdom by the ardor and subtlety of Plato. Here is an immortality of the soul which makes almost insignificant the passing of the flesh.

3. ARISTOTLE All the world would agree that Aristotle must be in our list. The middle Ages called him The Philosopher, as if to say that he embodied the type at the summit of its perfection. It is not that we love him; the texts he has left behind him expound so monotonously a passionless moderation that after feeling the radiance of Plato, we freeze at the touch of the Stagyrte's tempered mind. But it is unfair to rate him by his books; we know now that they were but hasty notes made sometimes by himself, sometimes by his students, for the guidance or remembrance of his lectures; it would be absurd to judge him by comparing these technical fragments with the vivid dialogues through which Plato won for the first time a public audience for philosophy.

But let us once overcome this barrier of scholastic terminology and scornfully concentrated thought, and we shall find ourselves in the presence of an intellect of almost unbelievable depth and range. Here is a circumnavigation of the globe such as no mind has accomplished since; here every problem in science and philosophy has its consideration, its illumination, and a defensible solution; here knowledge is brought together as if through a thousand spies, and coordinated into a united vision of the world. Here the phraseology of philosophy is born, and today it is hardly possible to think without using the mintage of Aristotle's brain. Here is wisdom: calm, temperate, and well nigh complete, as of a limitless intelligence majestically overspreading life. Here are new sciences, founded with almost casual ease, as if these supreme creations of the human intellect were but the recreations of a philosopher; here it is that biology appears, and embryology, and logic. Not that no man had ever thought of these matters before, but that none had controlled his thinking with patient observation, careful experiment, and systematic formulation of results. Barring astronomy and medicine, the history of science begins with the encyclopedic labors of the tireless Stagyrte.

Confucius alone has had as great an influence. Everybody knows how, at Alexandria and in Imperial Rome, the work of Aristotle became the foundation of advancing science; how in the thirteenth century his philosophical writings, brought by the invading Moors to reawakened Europe, played a fertilizing role in the development of scholastic philosophy; how the great Summae of that virile age were only adaptations of the Metaphysics and the Organon; how Dante placed Aristotle first among all thinkers—"master of those who know" how Constantinople brought the last lost treasures of his thought to the eager students of the Renaissance; and how this quiet sovereignty of one man over a millennium of intellectual history came to an end only with the audacious irreverence of Occam and Ramus, the experimental science of Roger Bacon, and the innovating philosophy of Francis Bacon. We shall not find again, in this tour of the world upon which we are engaged, another name that so long inspired and enthralled the minds of men.

4. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS So Greece flits by, and we come to Rome. Who were the great thinkers there? Lucretius first and finest of all. Yet, because his philosophy was not his own, but with modest candor was ascribed to Epicurus, and because his influence upon his own people and upon posterity was esoteric and sporadic, touching only the topmost minds, we shall have to let him stand outside our circle, consoled with his high place in the literature of the



CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

world. And as to Seneca and Epictetus and Aurelius, they too were echoes of the Greeks, adapters of Zeno's apathy to a dying Rome. The old civilization was disappearing as they wrote; the strength had gone from the sinews of its people; freemen were everywhere replaced with slaves, and the proud free cities of the past were humbled with vassalage and tribute. The master-class divided itself into wastrel Epicureans, or Spartan Stoics too militantly stern to indulge in the delights of philosophy. Suddenly the ancient edifice collapsed, and European civilization lay in ruins.

It began again when the Church headed the strife of factions with the mystic authority of the Word, and brought men back from the battlefields to a settled life. The emperors passed, the popes remained; the legions marched no longer, but the monks and missionaries of the rising faith created quietly a new order in which thought could grow once more. How long and dreary was that second adolescence of the conscious European mind! Even today we are so precariously established in enlightenment that we can yet feel, as if in memory, the fearful groping of those many years.

And then trade grew, towns graduated into cities, schools into universities; again it was possible for some portion of mankind to be freed from toil for the leisure and luxury of thought. Abelard stirred half a continent with his eloquence. Bonaventure and Anselm laid down in majestic theology the rationale of medieval faith. When the work of preparation was complete another Aristotle came, Saint Thomas of Aquino, a man who took the universe for his specialty, and flung a frail bridge of reason across the chasms between knowledge and belief. What Dante did to the hopes and fears of the Catholic Renaissance, Aquinas did for its thought: unifying knowledge, interpreting it, and focusing it all upon the great problems of life and death. The world does not follow him now, preferring a doubting Thomas to a dogmatic one, but there was a time when every intellect honored the Angelic Doctor, and every philosophy took his gigantic Summae as its premises. Even today, in a hundred universities, in a thousand colleges, his thought is revered as still sounder than science, and his philosophy is the official system of the most powerful church in Christendom. We may not love him as we have loved the rebels and the martyrs of philosophy, but because of his modest supremacy in a great century, and his vast influence upon millions and millions of mankind, we must make a place for him in our litany of thought.

No doubt some hearts will break at this selection, including the author's own. There are so many other names that one might here invoke more lovingly than Thomas's, names far more congenial to the modern world; names like Spinoza or Nietzsche, for which one may have passionate affection rather than mere intellectual respect. But if we prove unfaithful to the standards we have ourselves laid down, we may as well abandon our quest at once; our list would then be an album of favorites rather than a gallery of great minds....

5. COPERNICUS And then came a voice out of Poland, saying that this earth, footstool of God and home of his redeeming pilgrimage, was a minor satellite of a minor sun. It seemed so simple a thing to say; we cannot be moved to fear or wonder by it now; we take it for granted that this soil on which we stand is a passing thing, transiently compact of elements that will disintegrate and leave not a wrack behind. But to the medieval world, whose whole philosophy had rested on the neighborly nearness of earth and God, on the constant moral solicitude of the Deity for man, this new astronomy was an atheistic blasphemy, a ruthless blow that seemed to overthrow the Jacob's ladder which faith had built between angels and men.

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

Copernicus' book *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Orbs* was well named, for no book in history has created a greater revolution. That pious Polish monk, sitting patiently before the baffling stars, had meant no harm; he had no suspicion of the bearings of his thought on the future of belief; he had lost himself in the search for knowledge; he was sure that all truth must be good and beautiful, and would make men free. And so, by the magic of his mathematics, he transformed a geocentric and anthropocentric universe—a world that revolved about the earth and man—into a kaleidoscope of planets and stars in which the earth seemed but a moment's precipitation of a floating nebula. Everything was changed—distances, significances, destinies. And God, who had been closer than hands and feet, who had seemed to inhabit the friendly and flowing clouds, disappeared into the far reaches of an illimitable space. It was as if the walls of a man's house had been torn down by some blind and angry wind, leaving him unsheltered in the darkness of infinity.

We do not know how profound a thinker Copernicus was, except through this immeasurable influence of his work. With him modernity begins. With him secularism begins. With him reason makes its French Revolution against a faith immemorally enthroned, and man commences his long effort to rebuild with thought the shattered palace of his dreams. Heaven becomes mere sky and space and nothingness, or it descends upon the earth and breeds visions of Utopia in the hungry hearts of men who once had hoped for Paradise. It was as in the fable Plato told, of the gods who had cared for man till he had come of age, and then had disappeared, leaving him to the devices of his own intelligence. It was as in the ancient savage days, when the Old Man of the tribe drove the young men forth and bade them seek some other soil and raise upon it their own homes and their own happiness. With the Copernican revolution man was compelled to become of age.

6. SIR FRANCIS BACON He did not falter at this sudden maturity. On the contrary, the century that followed Copernicus was one of youthful audacity and courage in every field. Little vessels began to explore the now round and limited earth; frail minds began to explore the intellectual globe, careless of dogma, unharassed by tradition, and never dreaming that mankind would fail. Oh, the zest of those bright Renaissance days, when the poverty of a thousand years was almost forgotten, and the labor of a thousand years had made men richer and bolder, scornful of barriers and bounds! The flash of those alert eyes, the rich blood in those strong frames, the warm color of their luxurious raiment, the spontaneous poetry of that impassioned speech, the creative insatiable desires, the search and sweep and fearlessness of newly liberated minds—shall we ever know such days again?

Whom can we name as voice and symbol of that fermenting age? Leonardo?— painter, musician, sculptor, etcher, architect, anatomist, physiologist, physicist, inventor, engineer, chemist, astronomer, geologist, zoologist, botanist, geographer, mathematician, and philosopher! Alas, our definitions and criteria exclude him: he was (was he not?) an artist primarily, and only secondarily a philosopher or a scientist; it is by his Last Supper and his Mona Lisa that we remember him, and not by his theory of fossils, or his anticipation of Harvey, or his majestic vision of universal and everlasting Law.—Or shall it be Giordano Bruno, that forever seeking soul, unsatisfied with the finite, hungry for an immeasurable unity, impatient of divisions, sects, dogmas, and creeds, only less controllable than the winter's winds, only less fiery than Etna, and doomed by his own turbulent spirit to a martyr's death?

No; It cannot be Bruno, for there was one greater than he: "the man who rang the bell that called

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

the wits together” who sent out a challenge to all the lovers and servants of truth everywhere to bind themselves together in the new order and ministry of science; who proclaimed the mission of thought as no vain scholastic dispute, no empty academic speculation, but the inductive inquiry into nature’s laws, the resolute extension of the mastery of man over the conditions of his life; the man who mapped out as with royal authority the unconquered fields of research, pointed a hundred sciences to their tasks, and foretold their unbelievable victories; who inspired the Royal Society of Great Britain and the great Encyclopedia of France, who turned men from knowledge as meditation to knowledge as remolding power; who despised worship and longed for control; who overthrew the Aristotelian logic of unobservant reason and turned the gaze of science to the self-revealing face of nature; who carried in his brave soul, beyond any other man of that spacious age, the full spirit and purpose of the modern mind. Of course it was Francis Bacon.

7. SIR ISAAC NEWTON From that day to ours the history of the European intellect has been predominantly the progress of the Baconian as against the medieval conception of the world.

Predominantly but not continuously; there are many great figures that stood aside from this main road. In Descartes the new struggles in the arms of the old, and never quite liberates itself; in the great unifying soul of Leibnitz the medieval tradition is still powerful enough to turn a mathematician into a precarious theologian; and in Immanuel Kant the voice of ancestral faith speaks amid the skepticism of the Enlightenment. Strangely bridging these two streams of thought—the scientific and the religious—stands the figure of Spinoza: polisher of lenses and God-intoxicated man; silent devotee of lonely speculation, and formulator of the metaphysics of modern science; lover of mechanics and geometry, and martyr equally with Bruno to philosophy, dying only a slower and obscurer death. Every profound mind after him has felt his power, every historian has attested the quiet depth of his wisdom. But we have bound ourselves to judge these heroes of the mind in objective terms of influence rather than by personal estimates of wisdom, and even a lover of Spinoza must confess that the healing touch of the “gentle philosopher” has fallen upon the rarer and loftier souls rather than upon the masses or even the classes of mankind. He belongs to the islanded aristocracy of thought, and the world has not mounted to him yet.

But of Sir Isaac Newton there can be no similar dispute. “Every schoolboy knows” the story of his absent-minded genius; how the great scientist, left for a moment to his own culinary wits, and told to boil an egg three minutes for his lunch, dropped his watch into the water and watched the egg while the time- piece boiled; or how the absorbed mathematician, going up to his room to change his clothes for dinner, undressed and went contentedly to bed (it would be sad if these delightful stories were not true). Not so many schoolboys know that Newton’s Principia marked the quiet assumption, by science, of its now unchallenged mastery over modern thought; that the laws of motion and mechanics as established by Newton became the basis of all later practical advance, of that reordered surface of the earth and that extended and intenser life which are the miracles of science in our day; the discovery of gravitation illuminated the whole world of astronomy and brought the bright confusion of the stars into an almost organic unity. “Not long ago,” said Voltaire, “a distinguished company were discussing the trite and frivolous question” (alas, this is an untimely quotation!), “who was the greatest man—Caesar, Alexander, Tamerlane, or Cromwell? Someone answered that without doubt it was

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

Isaac Newton. And rightly: for it is to him who masters our minds by the force of truth, and not to those who enslave them by violence, that we owe our reverence.” Even in his lifetime the world understood that Newton belonged to its heroes.

8. VOLTAIRE It was Voltaire who introduced to France the mechanics of Newton and the psychology of Locke, and thereby began the great age of the Enlightenment. It will shock scholastic minds to see Voltaire included among the supreme thinkers of mankind; they will protest that his thought was borrowed rather than original, and that his influence was immoral and destructive. But which of us is original except in form? What idea can we conceive today that has not enjoyed, in one garb or another, a hoary antiquity of time? It is easier to be original in error than in truth, for every truth displaces a thousand falsehoods. An honest philosopher will admit, like Santayana, that truth, in its outlines, is as old as Aristotle, and that all we need do today is to inform and vary the design with our transient needs. Did not Spinoza, profoundest of modern thinkers, take the essentials of his thought from Bruno, Maimonides, and Descartes? Did not Ramus defend, as his thesis for the doctorate, the modest proposition that everything in Aristotle is false except that which he pilfered from Plato? And did not Plato, like Shakespeare, borrow lavishly from every store, making these stolen goods his own by transforming them with beauty? Granted that Voltaire, like Bacon, “lighted his candle at every man’s torch” it remains that he made the torch burn so brightly that it enlightened all mankind. Things came to him dull and he made them radiant; things came to him obscure, and he cleansed and scoured them with clarity; things came to him in useless scholastic dress, and he clothed them in such language that the whole world could understand and profit from them. Never did one man teach so many, or with such irresistible artistry.

Was his influence destructive? Who shall say? Shall we abandon here the objectivity of judgment we proudly assumed, and reject the laughing philosopher of Ferney because his thought was different from our own? But here we have sacrificed Spinoza, though some of us swear by his philosophy; sacrificed him because his influence has been, though deep, too narrowly confined. Evidently we must ask of Voltaire, not do we accept his conclusions, but did the world accept them, did his thinking mold the educated humanity of his age and his posterity? It did; there can be little doubt of it. Louis XVI, seeing in his Temple prison the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, said, “Those two men have destroyed France,”—meaning despotism. Perhaps the poor king did philosophy too much honor; doubtless economic causes underlay the intellectual uprising that centered in Voltaire. But just as physiological decay leads to no action unless it sends its message of pain to consciousness, so the economic and political corruption of Bourbon France might have proceeded to utter national disintegration had not a hundred virile pens brought home the state of affairs to the conscience and consciousness of their country. And in that great task Voltaire was commander-in-chief; all the rest willingly acknowledged his lead, and did his bidding proudly. Even the mighty Frederick greeted him as “the finest genius that the ages have borne.”

Beneath the recrudescence of ancient beliefs amid which we live, the influence of Voltaire quietly persists. As all Europe in his century bowed to the scepter of his pen, so the great leaders of the mind in later centuries have honored him as the fountainhead of intellectual enlightenment in our time. Nietzsche dedicated one of his books to him, and drank deeply at the Voltairian spring; Anatole France formed his thought, his wit, and his style on the ninety-nine volumes which the great sage left behind him; and Brandes, aged survivor of many a battle in

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

the war of liberation, gives some of his dying years to a forgivably idolatrous biography of the Great Emancipator of Ferney. When we forget to honor Voltaire we shall be unworthy of freedom.

9. IMMANUEL KANT Nevertheless, there was another side to this irrepressible conflict between simple faith and honest doubt. Something remained to be said for the creeds which the Enlightenment had apparently destroyed. Voltaire himself had retained a sincere belief in a personal Deity, and had raised "To God" a pretty chapel at Ferney. But his followers had gone beyond him, and when he died materialism had pursued every rival philosophy from the field.

Now there are two modes of approach to an analysis of the world; we may begin with matter, and then we shall be forced to deduce from it all the mystery of mind; or we may begin with mind, and then we shall be forced to look upon matter as merely a bundle of sensations. For how can we know matter except through our senses?—and what is it then for us but our idea of it? Matter, as known to us, is but a form of mind.

When Berkeley for the first time clearly announced this novel conclusion to the world, it made a stir among the pundits, and seemed to offer a splendid exit from the infidelity of the Enlightenment. Here was a chance to reassert the primacy of mind, to reduce its threatening enemy to a mere province in its realm, and so to restore the philosophical bases of religious belief and immortal hope.

The supreme figure in this idealistic development was Immanuel Kant, perfect archetype of the abstract philosopher; Kant, who traveled much in Konigsberg, and from its promenaded streets saw the starry heavens melt into a half-unreal phenomenon, transfigured by perception into a subjective thing. It was Kant who labored best to rescue mind from matter; who argued so irrefutably (because so unintelligibly) against the uses of "pure reason" and who, by the prestidigitation of his thought, brought back to life, magician-wise, the dear beliefs of the ancient faith.

The world heard him gladly, for it felt that it could live by faith alone, and did not love a science that merely darkened its aspirations and destroyed its hopes. Throughout the nineteenth century the influence of Kant grew; time and again, when rationalism and skepticism threatened the old citadels, men fled for strength and refuge "back to Kant." Even so matter-of-fact a man as Schopenhauer, and rabid a heretic as Nietzsche, accepted him, and looked upon his reduction of the world to mere appearance as the indispensable preliminary of every possible philosophy. So vital was Kant's work that in its outlines and its bases it remains to our own day unshaken and intact; has not science itself, through Pearson, Mach, and Poincare, admitted that all reality, all "matter," all "nature" with its "laws," are but constructs of the mind, possibly but never certainly known in their own elusive truth? Apparently Kant had won the battle against materialism and atheism, and the world could hope again.

10. CHARLES DARWIN And then Darwin came, and the war waged anew. We cannot know now what Darwin's work may finally mean in the history of mankind. But it may well be that for posterity his name will stand as a turning point in the intellectual development of our Western civilization. If Darwin was wrong, the world may forget him as it has almost forgotten Democritus and Anaxagoras; if he was right, men will have to date from 1859 the beginning of modern thought.

For what did Darwin do but offer, quietly, and with a disarming humility, a world-picture totally different from that which had contented the mind of man before? We had supposed that it was

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

a world of order, moving under divine guidance and omnipotent intelligence to a just and perfect fulfillment in which every virtue would find at last its fit reward. But Darwin, without attacking any creed, described what he had seen. Suddenly the world turned red, and nature, which had been so fair in the autumn's colors under the setting sun, seemed to be only a scene of slaughter and strife, in which birth was an accident, and only death a certainty. "Nature" became "natural selection," that is, a struggle for existence; and not for existence merely, but for mates and power, a ruthless elimination of the "unfit" of the tenderer flowers, the gentler animals, and the kindlier men. The surface of the earth seethed with warring species and competing individuals, every organism was the prey of some larger beast; every life was lived at the expense of some other life; great "natural" catastrophes came, ice ages, earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts, pestilences, famines, wars; millions and millions of living things were "weeded out," were quickly or slowly killed. Some species and some individuals survived for a little while— this was evolution. This was nature, this was reality.

Copernicus had reduced the earth to a speck among melting clouds; Darwin reduced man to an animal fighting for his transient mastery of the globe. Man was no longer the son of God; he was the son of strife, and his wars made the fiercest brutes ashamed of their amateur cruelty. The human race was no longer the favored creation of a benevolent deity; it was a species of ape, which the fortunes of variation and selection had raised to a precarious dignity, and which in its turn was destined to be surpassed and to disappear. Man was not immortal; he was condemned to death from the hour of his birth.

Imagine the strain upon minds brought up in the tender philosophy of our youth, and forced to adapt themselves to the harsh and bloody picture of a Darwinian world. Is it any wonder that the old faith fought fiercely for its life, that for a generation "the conflict between religion and science" was bitterer than at any time since Galileo retracted and Bruno burned at the stake? And do not the victors, exhausted by the contest, sit sadly today amid the ruins, secretly mourning their triumph, secretly yearning for the old world which their victory has destroyed?

Apologies

Well, there are our ten. Shall we see them in one glance?

1. Confucius
2. Plato
3. Aristotle
4. Saint Thomas Aquinas
5. Copernicus
6. Sir Francis Bacon
7. Sir Isaac Newton
8. Voltaire
9. Immanuel Kant
10. Charles Darwin

Those whom we have omitted would make as fair a list: Democritus, Epicurus, Marcus Aurelius, Abelard, Galileo, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Schopenhauer, Spencer, Nietzsche. And consider the vast movements of thought which we have ignored –feminism, for example, with its great leaders from Mary Wollstonecraft to Susan Anthony; and socialism, with its roster of hopeful theorists from Diogenes and Zeno to Lassalle and Marx. It must be so; no list could exhaust the treasure of man's heritage or equal its infinite variety. And it is well; let us have many lists and many



CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat
heroes; we cannot honor them too much, or commemorate them excessively.

CSS PLATFORM