THE AGE OF POWER
IN the history of Europe, the period between the years 1610 and 1713 was a time of vast destruction, of brilliant creation—a time of change. Although it would be profoundly unhistorical to assume that the direction of this change, and its inevitability, were apparent to the actors in the drama of seventeenth-century Europe, it is clear that many of them were aware of the historical role of their age; it is no accident that the word “modern” became current in the seventeenth century. For in a very real sense the modern world as we know it is a seventeenth-century creation; modern science, modern philosophy, and the modern state, although they have roots in an earlier past, all emerged during this age. And these three great developments are, in turn, manifestations of an underlying common core. This core is the new sense of power, the power of man to shape his own society, his own destiny. In some of the key thinkers and actors of the age, this sense of power was Promethean in its limitless striving. Nature herself was disciplined by the royal will of Louis XIV (and his landscape architect, André Lenôtre) in the gardens of Versailles. Indeed, the entire universe awaited the same fate at the hands of the new sciences, which, in the words of
Francis Bacon, "extend more widely the limits of the power and greatness of man."

Power has always been one of man's dominant ends, and the search for it one of his great passions. But probably no age allowed this passion to become so all-engulfing, unless it be our own, in many ways so strangely akin to the seventeenth century. Hence Thomas Hobbes (self-styled "child of fear") in his uncompromising adulation of power coined perhaps the most revealing passage of the age: "So that in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restless desire of Power, after Power, that ceaseth only in Death."¹ To him all passions were in the last analysis reducible to that dominant passion for power, "for Riches, Knowledge and Honour are but severall sorts of power."² Although the manifestations of this restless search for power are to be found in every sphere of human activity during the seventeenth century, two in particular are so central to the history of the period that we must speak of them at the very outset: mercantilism and the modern state.

Mercantilism as a System of Power

All the varied economic activities of the century were encompassed within the set of economic and political doctrines which became known as mercantilism. This complex of ideas—as its name, mercantilism, suggests—concerns methods of organizing commerce, but commerce so broadly interpreted as to include all economic activity in general. If one wants to call it a system, it was a system

full of divergencies verging on contradictions. But the central idea was quite distinct: the state, as a secular organization, had the key role in shaping economic well-being. In this context the state was clearly understood, therefore, to have practical and expedient rather than moral objectives. Thus, in a sense, mercantilism was as much a political as an economic doctrine. It may, indeed, be called the most comprehensive theory of the emergent modern state.

The earlier mercantilists strove to increase the wealth of a nation primarily, if not exclusively, for the purpose of providing the sinews of war and conquest. In a famous letter, Jean Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV’s controller general of finance, wrote, “Trade is the source of public finance, and public finance is the vital nerve of war.” And victory in war was seen in turn to be the basis for aggrandizement and power. With this objective of ultimate power clearly in mind, one can say that “national wealth through the regulation and protection of commerce” was the mercantilist credo. This regulation and protection of commerce was superimposed by an authoritarian bureaucracy, an institution which reached its greatest heights in France. So early an act as the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers (1563) clearly shows the trend which was to triumph in the next century in the policies of Richelieu, Wallenstein, Gustavus Adolphus, and Cromwell. For no matter how deeply divided politically, all the top-ranking leaders of this period were practitioners of mercantilist policy, and much of their success flowed from their superior handling and radical application of these policies.

Active governmental concern with every department of economic life was a recurrent theme of the century. The
state—the idealized embodiment of the authoritarian bureaucracy—was made into the ever-alert guardian of the nation’s entire economic life. Prosperity, therefore, was taken to be dependent upon the exertions of a “creative state”—a theme which has been resumed in our time. The further notion that the gain of one state was necessarily the loss of another inevitably contributed to a marked intensification of these efforts. In the words of Francis Bacon, England’s lord chancellor, “The increase of any estate must be upon the foreigner, for whatsoever is somewhere gotten is somewhere lost.” Hence, in the latter half of the century, when mercantilism was at its height, Europe experienced a succession of trade wars, starting with the Anglo-Dutch conflict of 1653–1654.

The early mercantilists became so preoccupied with the gathering of “treasure,” more especially gold and silver, that they laid themselves open to the charge of “cash-box thinking.” This failing, however, is understandable in terms of the decisive effect of gold upon the fate of governments, and particularly upon the successes of the Spanish during the sixteenth century, which they had observed. If they concentrated upon methods of acquiring gold or its equivalents as the prince’s main concern, however, their most significant achievement was to shift their emphasis from the physical capture of gold and other treasures to the development of trade. Mercantilism thus came to foster many remarkable innovations to enlarge the government’s resources—none more so than the modern state itself.

The Modern State

None of these economic doctrines viewed apart from the background of political thought about the state is really
comprehensible. It is surely impossible to understand the disintegration of the system of government with estates without considering the economic revolution resulting from colonial enterprise. But it is equally impossible to understand the economic doctrines of mercantilism without comprehending the political thought of rising absolutism, of state and sovereignty. Advanced thought was both absolutist and mercantilist, revolving around the central idea that through appropriate legislation and policy men have the power to mold their social environment. Finally, it is difficult to understand this political thought unless it is accompanied by a brief sketch of the political evolution which it sought to rationalize and for which it set the frame.

Although it now seems perfectly clear that nothing could have been expected in 1610 but the establishment of the modern state system, many thoughtful men were then far from certain what the future held in store. The activists of the Catholic Counter Reformation were, in fact, determined, through force if necessary, to re-establish the lost unity of Christendom. Yet certainly the modern state had been in the making over a long period of time. Princes of superior ability in England and France, in Sweden and Spain, had been developing effective bureaucracies, the core of modern government. Such a great institution—and is not the modern state the greatest of them all?—"emerges" rather than is born, and by "emergence" is meant the process by which during a given period the outlines become visible to all, like a whale coming to the surface of the sea. During the fifty years between 1610 and 1660, in the period when Thomas Hobbes discoursed upon the great Leviathan and when John Lilburn (1614–1657) cried
out in anguish against the new trend, the modern state may be said to have emerged; the position of the state was firmly established throughout most of Europe by 1710. In 1610 the political focal point of Europe’s order still seemed to be the ancient Holy Roman Empire. Even England, no less than the continent, seemed on the road to princely rule, in fact, somewhat further advanced on it; and under Paul V the papacy was earnestly at work restoring the temporal power of the Holy See, skillfully assisted by the Order of the Society of Jesus.

By the end of the century all this was gone. The House of Hapsburg had made the empire an adjunct of its Austrian dominions, while the other German princes, large and small, were “sovereign.” Indeed, as G. N. Clark has pointed out, “each of the leading members had greater interests and possessions outside [the empire] than inside it.” Thus the elector of Brandenburg was king of the rising Prussian state, the elector of Saxony was king of Poland, the elector of Hanover was heir-presumptive to the throne of England. By the terms of the Peace of Utrecht (1713), the Spanish crown had passed from the Hapsburgs to the House of Bourbon, on condition that it never be united with the French crown. By the time Louis XIV, as the Roi Soleil, took over the reins in 1661, France herself was clearly a modern, national state, absolute in its sway. If Cardinal Mazarin had dreamed of securing the ancient imperial throne for his king, these dreams were the last gasp of a moribund world of ideas; the Sun King’s ambitions were more prosaic. Dead also was the Counter

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8 John Lilburn, *Jonah's Cry out of the Whale's Belly* (1647).
Reformation, and with it all hope of reuniting Christianity; St. Peter's successors had ceased to be a major factor in Europe's great politics, and Innocent XI (1676–1689) actually embarked on an anti-Jesuit policy late in the century. At the same time in England a long revolutionary struggle had crystallized in modern constitutionalism, a permanent legacy upon which the more moderate elements could all unite. The Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 finally settled this issue, when the English "people's" right to settle their own constitution was at last vindicated.

The theoretical origins of the political thought of the age are to be found in the notion of "reason of state." Set forth by the Jesuit Giovanni Botero (1549–1617) in the famous book Della ragione di stato (1588), the idea captured the imagination of the early baroque age. Among politically interested men everywhere, and especially in Italy, "reason of state," "raison d'Etat," or "ragione di stato" was the great subject of discussion and writing. The shift from ethics to politics, or rather the blending of the two through the skillful rationalization of means, illustrated the way in which reason was, in this literature, reinterpreted as meaning the rational means for the accomplishment of ends. Characteristic of this entire literature, and completely in harmony with its origins in the Jesuit Order, was the fact that a distinction was being drawn between a good and a bad reason of state, depending upon the ends to which it was put. The scorn of Machiavelli's frankly pagan and blandly pragmatic mind would have been provoked by this distinction, but to the new baroque minds it was as natural as the curves with which their artists dissolved the stately harmony of Renaissance forms. Hence
they argued, "The reason of state is a necessary violation of the common law for the end of public utility." As can be seen from this definition, the notion of particular necessities occasioned by a state's peculiar interests is linked to this idea of a special means-end rationality directed toward the public utility. In the policies of the great statesmen of the age, arguments about the "necessities" of particular states provided the concrete manifestations of the doctrine of reason of state.

But if one assumed that all thought and action followed a single persistent trend, one's comprehension of the problem would be most inadequate. The illustrious names of Grotius, Richelieu, Hobbes, Cromwell, Spinoza, Gustavus Adolphus, and the great elector of Brandenburg all represent the dominant and victorious trend—victorious, that is, in 1660. But there were other men who struggled to resist, in 1610 and for many years thereafter, and these too had their champions in speech and writing. Most important among these opposing groups was the one which endeavored to uphold the cause of the representative estates, and whose arguments ranged all the way from apologies for feudal reaction to the projection of democratic dreams. These forces were not uniformly unsuccessful, as is illustrated by regions in which they did not succumb to the rising absolutism, notably Poland, Sweden, and England.

To the modern mind the word "state" has become so all-embracing in its connotations, so thoroughly permeated with the ideas of sovereignty and independence, that it is difficult to recapture the thought and feeling of an age in

5 Pietro A. Canonhiero, *Dell'introduzione alla politica, all ragione di stato*. . . (1614).
which the employment of the word to signify unity was a startling, novel concept. It had always been the plural “estates,” prior to the seventeenth century, and the English language obscures the connection, which in French is still patent, between l’Etat and les états. In its typical form the system of états was a joint or mixed government by a prince, himself considered an estate, and all the other estates. The division of competence, because it was not very clearly defined, gave the advantage to prince or estates according to circumstances. There was a tendency from the very beginning to consider estates the representatives of the whole community, despite the fact that they appeared to be little more than a collection of various interests, and despite the fact that this view expressed hope more than reality. The significant contrast of this with later conditions, however, lies in the fact that the early estates were looked upon as apart and separate from the lord or prince. Hence, the dualistic nature of the system was expressed when government was said to be with, not by, estates. Although often overlapping and ill defined, the sphere of competence of both princes and estates was nevertheless thought of as distinct and settled in terms of an agreement. Often called tractatus or treaty, this agreement thus expressed the fact that the two authorities were looked upon as distinct entities.

From the multitude of estates which had characterized the mediaeval constitutional order, gradually there emerged the unitary, all-embracing state. Traditionally there had been the several estates: the king, the nobility, the clergy, and the commons united in parliament—to illustrate by the English example. The fundamental outline is not altered by numerous variations in detail; even the rich complexity
of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire in central Europe followed the general pattern, but with the added factor of geographical divisions. Local estates had been gaining ground in many territories during the second half of the sixteenth century, and, as we shall see, the fatal cataclysm of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) originated in a conflict between the estates of Bohemia and their prince. A disintegration of the mediaeval order is clearly revealed in developments in the seventeenth century, a disintegration characterized by an irreconcilable dualism which, in England, manifested itself in the novel idea that parliament was a thing separate and apart from the king. Although the estates’ assemblies occupied different positions in different places, almost all of them operated under a system of government rather similar to that of England. In Italy, to be sure, there were no estates. In Spain, during the sixteenth century, the Cortes had been crushed in Castile, if not in Aragon, while in France, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the estates were on the point of vanishing, the last assembly being held in 1614. But elsewhere they were holding their own or even challenging the crown in the impending struggle for supremacy.

It is only natural that this system, controversial in its day, should have elicited conflicting interpretations. There are two schools of thought: one has taken the Thirty Years’ War as the historical event which destroyed the estates; the other has insisted that the estates were doomed anyway once they had been reduced to the status of dependent corporations by the idea of sovereignty, of monarchical or royal supremacy. In any case, there can be no doubt that once the Reformation had destroyed the unifying potentialities of mediaeval Christianity, the dualistic constitu-
tionalism of a “government with estates” faced issues that were apt to render the collaboration of the divided powers precarious. The struggle for supremacy became more intense as the religious issues injected themselves. “Your . . . Politicians seem unto me rather to have invented some new ammunition, or Gunpowder, in their King and Parliament . . . than Government,” wrote the English political theorist James Harrington (1611–1677) shortly after the conclusion of the Thirty Years’ War. “For what is become of the Princes (a kind of people) in Germany? blown up. Where are the Estates, or the Power of the People, in France? blown up. Where is that of the people in Aragon, and the rest of the Spanish kingdoms? blown up. On the other side, where is the King of Spain’s power in Holland? blown up. Where is that of the Austrian princes in Switz? blown up.”

That is the setting within which the modern state emerged during the first half of the seventeenth century. During this period estates, except in England, proved to be not only inefficient but actually a hindrance to the effective prosecution of war. So, wherever possible, the princes sought to discard their assemblies altogether. In short, the conflict implied in the dualism between princes and estates was brought to a head in the period of the Thirty Years’ War. The system was the heritage of an age united through a common faith. Mediaeval constitutionalism was built upon a division of power between prince and estates, and as such it had rested upon a unity of faith which was now gone. Everywhere the claimants for a “true Christian religion” were ripping wide open the older constitu-

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tional order as they entrenched themselves in the estates' assemblies. Everywhere the conflict between princes and estates was also a conflict between Catholic and Protestant, between Calvinist, Lutheran, and Nonconformist. It is a curious fact that in some ways the most extraordinary spokesman of the political implications of this conflict was to be King James I of England (1566–1625). He, more than anyone else, personified the divine right of kings theoretically claimed by the emergent state: "The State of Monarchie is the supremest thing upon earth," he declared to his first parliament in 1609. "Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth."  

Although James's assertion of absolute monarchical power was still radical at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the grounds on which he made his claims were obsolete by the time Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* appeared in 1651. European political thought had been largely secularized during the intervening years. The true significance of Hobbes lies in his attempt to construct an authoritarian system without Biblical underpinnings, rather than in his rational justification of despotism. One finds the same secularizing trend in the camp of the constitutionalists: between 1603 and 1690—from Johannes Althusius (1553–1638), the theorist of government with estates, to John Locke (1632–1704), the philosopher of the Glorious Revolution  

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8 Peter Laslett has recently shown, though, that the celebrated essay was not written to "justify" the Revolution. It was actually written about eight years before the Revolution. See his "The English Revolution and Locke's 'Two Treatises on Government,'" *Cambridge Historical Journal*, XII (1956), 40–55.
stitutionalism became secularized. The central political idea of these two writers was sovereignty of the people acting through popularly elected representatives, but whereas Althusius was much concerned with the Biblical evidence offered in support of this tenet, Locke relied almost exclusively upon general philosophical argumentation.

Two other ideas besides the central one of "state" were also fundamental to the newly secularized political thought of the seventeenth century. One was the concept of natural law as a superior norm, necessary precisely because the state and its magistrates were increasingly being accepted as the ultimate arbiters of human, man-made law. The other was the concept of "sovereignty" with its attendant problems of who was "sovereign" and what "sovereignty" included. The prevalent mediaeval view had been that law was fixed and, if not immutable, at least changing slowly and almost imperceptibly. Statutory enactments were usually seen as "interpreting," or making manifest, a law which was believed to be already there. The new scientific impetus to discover the regularities according to which the universe functions contributed directly to the campaign to discover laws of nature. Hence every political theorist in this period, absolutist and constitutionalist alike, undertook to prove that his contentions were logical deductions from the law of nature. What was this law of nature? The age was none too sure about its substance. Opinion vacillated between the older classical concept that the laws of nature were a collection of just norms, and the new notion that the laws of nature described the regular course of nature. The former are exemplified by rules of conduct like the famous triad of the Roman law, "To live rightly, to hurt no one, to give everyone his own," while the scientific laws
of nature seemed most awe-inspiring when regulating the motion of heavenly bodies. If scientific laws of nature were being discovered by observation and experiment, just norms had been learned by study of the Bible and by reason. The political thought of the period was inclined to have recourse to both methods; indeed, for many thinkers the fact that God, the lawgiver of the universe, was the author of both sets of regulations obscured, if it did not obliterate, the difference.

The Dutch Calvinist Johannes Althusius, whose *Politica* appeared in 1603, held that the laws of nature were identical with the Ten Commandments, implemented by the Christian doctrine of love. Yet Althusius also undertook to show that commonwealths had been operated in accordance with these natural laws and that, in fact, when they had not they had come to grief. The sanction for the norm therefore was the threat of failure and destruction; the norm was rooted in the facts of nature. Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), on the other hand, attempted to found the law of nature upon human reason and reason alone; reason, he held, could be comprehended without any theological doctrine. Thus war, which during the religious conflicts had gradually deteriorated into the most barbarous slaughter, was once more made subject to certain general rules, obligatory upon Catholic, Protestant, and Mohammedan alike. The absolutist Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) also agreed that the ruler is bound to observe the laws of nature; nor were Hobbesian laws so very different from those of Althusius or Grotius. But two things were attempted by Hobbes which constitute radical departures: on the one hand, he tried to demonstrate the independent existence of these
rules of natural law, and, somewhat contradictorily, he also made them dependent upon the sovereign’s will and enforcement. What he seems to say is this: either these so-called natural laws are true laws of nature, i.e., generalizations based upon observed matters of fact, in which case they will always be enforced, or they are merely normative judgments, in which case they will be enforced only to the extent that the sovereign chooses to put his power behind them. Insofar as natural laws possess the quality of existential laws of nature, Hobbes undertook to derive them from his basic conception of human nature, which was built upon the notion that men’s actions are determined by passions restrained by the fear of violent death. Thus he interpreted the law of nature as a system of rules of prudence, dictated by reason, to be sure, but not the higher reason founded on faith. The Copernican revolution of the view of the law of nature which Hobbes had begun was completed by Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), the Dutch Jew. Whereas Hobbes’s system, though diluted through utilitarian calculations, still recognized a natural law with moral connotations, Spinoza radically asserted the completely naturalistic tenet that might makes right: “The big fish devour the little fish by natural right.” Written about 1660, this debonair sentence states with sweeping skepticism the actual practice of politics as pursued by Richelieu, Mazarin, the Hapsburgs, and the Hohenzollerns. These ideas found striking theoretical expression in the work of Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694). The older, normative conception of natural law, on the other hand, continued to find able supporters throughout the seventeenth century. The most outstanding of these was John Locke (1632–1704), who pre-
sented a modernized version of the traditional Christian view: “The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one; and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind . . . that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.” 9 Whereas Hobbes’s “ought” was simply a prudential rule, Locke’s was clearly a moral norm.

It is fascinating to see how these ideas on natural law, common yet conflicting, were reflected in a similar body of thought on sovereignty and state absolutism. For, like Hobbes and Spinoza, Althusius and Grotius were convinced that in any commonwealth worthy of the name there must be a sovereign authority, a supreme ruler. Here the preoccupation with law intruded itself once more. For the sovereign ruler must give laws to the state as God had given the laws to the cosmos. In other words, order, presupposing laws, cannot prevail where there is no lawgiving organ or body. There seems never to have been any dissent, either absolutist or constitutionalist, from the tenet that the most important function in the state is the legislative function. Yet, the establishment of central administration was undoubtedly the most striking institutional development of the period. The most important function of these administrative staffs, in the opinion of seventeenth-century minds, was to make the law “conducive to a well-ordered polity.” It is highly significant that even John Locke never dreamed of claiming this legislative function for “the legislature” alone. On the contrary, its very importance required the full participation of the king and his administra-

tive staff. Thus, whether exercised by monarch or popular representatives or both, sovereignty was vindicated as the law-making authority and was admitted to be bound by natural law.

How could such awful, godlike power of giving laws to men ever be acquired legitimately? This portentous question, which produced the greatest amount of controversy in the seventeenth century, was characteristically answered by the argument that there must be a law according to which sovereign power is established—a law which the seventeenth century found in contract. The idea of contract, intimately linked with the life and work of the trading middle classes as it was, quite naturally developed into a potent idea in the circles in which political thought was being secularized throughout this age. Indeed, its usefulness is symbolized by the fact that, like the idea of natural law, it became a weapon in the hands of both absolutists and constitutionalists. Thomas Hobbes was the philosopher of power par excellence. More than any other man he penetrated to the very core of the enthusiasm of his age and rationalized it in sweeping, overwhelming generalizations. His was the most secular view of the omnipotent state as a system by which the universe of human life was ordered. Humanist and scholar rather than man of affairs, Hobbes was convinced throughout his life that absolute monarchy was the best form of government, and he showed that the contractual argument could be molded into a tool for the support of this very absolutism. In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes pictures man living in a “state of nature,” characterized by the “war of every man, against every man”:
In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; . . . no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.10

Faced with the horrors of this anarchy, Hobbes argues, individuals contracted among themselves to submit altogether to an absolute sovereign. Similarly, Hugo Grotius urged that the people could transfer, and evidently often had transferred, the sovereign power by contract, explicit, tacit, or implied. The more common use of the contract argument, however, was as a buttress for limited, or constitutional, government. Perhaps the most notable example of this school of thought is John Locke’s Second Treatise of Civil Government (1690):

Whosoever, therefore, out of a state of nature unite into a community must be understood to give up all the power necessary to the ends for which they unite into society to the majority of the community. . . . And this is done by barely agreeing to unite into one political society, which is all the compact that is, or needs be, between individuals that enter into or make up a commonwealth. And thus that which begins and actually constitutes any political society is nothing but the consent of any number of freemen capable of a majority to unite and incorporate into such a society. And this is that, and that only, which did or could give beginning to any lawful government in the world.11

In tone, in content, and even in style, the contrast between these two passages may serve as a measure of the rapid development of political thought during the half century that separates them.

Conclusion

The underlying common core of the seventeenth century—the new sense of power which characterized it—is revealed in our rapid sketch of the variegated patterns of political and economic thought and institutions. Who is to say whether the modern state emerged in this period because some of its most striking representatives were filled with this sense of power, or whether they were filled with this sense of power because the modern state emerged? It is clear in any case that the two developments were closely linked and that they molded the fundamental outlook and feeling of man in the seventeenth century, his “climate of opinion,” to use the phrase invented by the English seant Joseph Glanvill (1636–1680). From this “climate of opinion” came the style that has come to be known as baroque—the style in which Renaissance elements, consisting of revived forms of classical antiquity, were molded into a new and specifically western form. Before we can see the extraordinary stage upon which were enacted the gigantic dramas of the Thirty Years’ War, the building of modern absolutism by Richelieu, and the English revolution, we must explore more fully the essential characteristics of this new style in its varied manifestations in literature, art, and thought. Such a stage western civilization had not seen before, nor has it since.
CHAPTER II

The Baroque

THE new sense of power which characterized every form of human expression and creativity in the seventeenth century is nowhere more apparent than in the artistic style of the age—the baroque. And, indeed, it could hardly be otherwise, for men express through their works of art, their creations of beauty, what they have experienced and have thought to be true. Style is a mysterious quality, true only if spontaneous and spontaneous only if a projection of genuine feeling and true experience. In this sense, there can be no doubt that the baroque was a true style, and surely no other, neither Gothic nor Renaissance, has left so vast and dominant an imprint upon the European scene.

In time, the baroque extended roughly from the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth, reaching its height about 1660. Like all styles, it had no uniform set of traits, but can be thought of as the product of tension between a series of extremes operating within a common field of ideas and feelings. This common field of feeling was focused on movement, intensity, tension, and force. In the palace and the opera, two creations which are the result of harmonious blending of many art forms, baroque art found its richest fulfillment. Palace and opera
are manifold units. Baroque architecture produced the richly ornamented façade, the sweep of magnificent staircases, the ornamental garden as a setting of the palace and a foreground of a distant view. Baroque painting revealed in the effects of light and shadow, employed the intermediate shades of many-hued grays, browns, and greens, and, through the portrayal of landscape and of the human face, explored the subtleties of individuality in nature. Theater and drama, especially the form of the heroic tragedy, seemed peculiarly adapted to the baroque spirit in the field of letters; but the extravagant comedy, fairy tale, knightly novel, and ornate lyrics were also characteristic baroque creations. In all forms, baroque developed the art of effective characterization, both of individuals and of types, but particularly the latter.¹ First Spain and then France took the lead. Finally, in baroque music the expressive depicting of emotional states and sentiments reached a high level, first in the solo parts of opera and oratorio, soon afterward in the varying combinations of stringed instruments, and finally in gigantic combinations of human voices and instrumental music, both in the oratorio and in the opera.

Where did this new style come from? A profound revolution of the spirit is clearly manifest in it since it molded all spheres of life and art. It has been argued that the Counter Reformation—the Catholic Reformation of the late sixteenth century—was the embodiment of this revolution. The argument can scarcely be maintained in this simple form of describing baroque art as the direct expres-

¹ Recently, Jean Rouset has argued that disguise is very important to baroque style, and he has interpreted Don Juan in this context. See Diogenes, XIV (1956), 1-16.
sion of the spirit of the Counter Reformation. The extreme religiosity of the early Catholic reformers (notably Pope Pius V, 1565–1572), the fact that the Counter Reformation was nearly dead in the period when the baroque culminated, and the fact that many of the finest flowers of the baroque style were the creation of Protestant people, all clearly demonstrate the inadequacy of this explanation. In part, however, the baroque style is animated by ideas and feelings which the Reformation and Counter Reformation had ushered in. New forms of political thought gave expression to the violent clash of religion and politics, of church and state; the amoral paganism of Renaissance Italy gave way to tortuous rationalizing, to a search for moral "justification" for doing what was necessary. Baroque, as contrasted with the debonair worldliness of the Renaissance, was tormented by doubts and shot through with conflicts and tension. The baroque was an age torn between extremes, an age in which a gross sensuality alternating with pangs of conscience, rather than a happy and unreflective pleasure of the senses, became the dominant note. While the philosophical and scholarly inquiries of Humanism led to skepticism and scientific discovery, the worldliness of the Renaissance turned to coarse materialism and carnal debauch. On the other hand, otherworldly beliefs were intensified by the religious protest against Renaissance and Humanism which Reformation and Counter Reformation share. A fierce moral fanaticism which often culminated in arid dogmatism and intolerant persecution, in superstition and violence, was strengthened by the revival of religion. The Counter Reformation, since it undoubtedly contributed its share to the ideas and feelings which ani-
mated the baroque artist, constituted an essential ingredient of these conflicting attitudes.

Another school has held that the dominant impulse for the baroque style originated in the life of the monarchical courts under absolutism. The basis for this view is the well-known patronage which the princes of seventeenth-century Europe bestowed upon the art of the time. Without doubt some of the most characteristic creations of the baroque style were courtly, such as the sumptuous palace, set within a vast complex of artificially created parks and gardens, or the opera, which made its first appearance as part of lavish court festivals. Yet therefore to make baroque the art of monarchical absolutism, to link the feelings of baroque solely to the particular political structure of absolutist monarchy is going too far. Many of the most beautiful edifices of the baroque period were ecclesiastical—churches, cloisters, abbeys—and this is not all. There were the rich bourgeois, not only in these absolute monarchies but also in England, Holland, Venice, and elsewhere, who bought the canvases of painters, built beautiful town houses, and freely supported the new musical forms of opera, oratorio, and symphony. Such artists as Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), and Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) were indifferent, if not actually hostile, to court life. The plays and oratorios of stage and church, although fostered by the princes, were not the exclusive privilege of the few, but rather were the common possession of all; perhaps they most significantly expressed the spirit of the age.

Baroque sought to give literary and artistic expression to an age which was intoxicated with the power of man; per-
haps in some ways its fascination with the impossible is thus explained. At the height of the baroque, architects, sculptors, painters, poets, and musicians strove to accomplish the impossible in all directions. Hence radical naturalism vied with extreme formalism, materialism vied with spiritualism, the most terrifying realism with the most precious illusionism. Metaphysical poetry sought to probe into ultimate mysteries, while voluptuous and lascivious erotic poetry violated all canons of good taste. Excited beyond measure by the potentialities of man, such an age was able to establish the foundations of modern science through some of its representatives, while through others it persecuted old women as witches; for both activities presume an exaggerated belief in the power of man to think and to act as he confronts with heightened powers a mysterious, exciting world. God orders the universe by his limitless will; Satan by a comparable effort seeks to disturb this order. The fascination which the figure of Satan had for John Milton (1608–1674) was born of admiration for the kind of strength that will challenge rather than be subordinated. The statesmen of this age made a cult of power and of its adornments: the vast spectacle, the impenetrable intrigue, the gruesome murder. Such a sense of power calls for a capacity in the artist to portray, and to dramatize, tension; that is the quintessence of baroque.

The extraordinary artistic productivity of the period 1610–1713, itself an indication of the vitality of the baroque age, makes impossible even a bare enumeration of its outstanding creations. Having discussed the general qualities of the baroque style, we must now be content simply to illustrate its manifestations in the various branches of the arts, showing how the same essential spirit informs the work
of architect and painter, playwright and sculptor, musician and poet.

Personal Behavior

Before coming to the arts, however, it will perhaps be useful to say a few words about the baroque element in personal behavior during the seventeenth century. Indeed, it may be argued that one of the most revealing aspects of the baroque age was the very fact that at this time personal behavior became, in a very real sense, one of the arts. Throughout Europe, men of high estate thought of themselves as living upon a stage, and their every action was calculated to produce a desired effect. There are peculiarities of personal behavior by which an age or nation is seen, as it were, "naked to the watchful eye," and the wig is probably the most revealing symbol of the baroque. Legend attributes its origin to Louis XIII, who, it is said, wished to hide his baldness, but in fact it vividly expressed that desire to push things to the extreme and to cultivate the theatrical exaggeration of reality. Hair became longer, beards more flowing and dramatic in the first generation of the century, but as the century progressed, beards and mustaches became smaller and eventually vanished, for they hide the face instead of setting it off as does a wig.

Costumes were very stately and elaborate, except where startling simplifications resulted from strong moral convictions; a highly dramatic effect was achieved by the Puritans and the Jansenist fellowship of Port Royal in their monk-like uniformity, as by individuals like Richelieu's colleague Father Joseph, the "Gray Eminence." Ladies' fashions, often bordering on disguise, were similarly elaborate. The

\(^2\) See below, Chapter III.
passion of the age for dressing up in weird attire led even
the exalted, such as the king of Spain, to indulge in occa-
sional masques.

The sense of “face” was as highly developed as in the
Orient, and men went to great lengths to avenge any in-
fringement of their honor. Honor became the most sought-
after sign of power, and the endless quarreling and dueling
took such a toll of the aristocracy in France (and other
countries) that the government felt compelled to take vig-
orous measures to combat it. Corneille’s dramas * were pre-
occupied with the portrayal of clashes of honor, and the
stage of Spain, England, and Germany was dominated by
the same theme.

At the same time, gross sensuality engulfed both high
and low. The excesses in eating and drinking were a uni-
versal habit, although probably most extreme at the Ger-
man courts; in Italy and France they took the subtler forms
of elaborate gourmanderie. These lusts of the palate were
associated with violent sexual debauchery, both male and
female, and there was a contrasting fanatical enthusiasm
for chastity, which may be considered a perverted form of
sexuality. The cloisters of Spain and France, Port Royal and
other similar circles, together with the notorious puritanical
extremists, were as characteristic of the age as the libidinous
and licentious court circles of Britain, France, and Spain,
Italy and Germany. The common folk gloried in the exhi-
bitionism of sexual swagger as much as the aristocracy. Yet,
contrasted with the Renaissance and later periods, there was
a displayful enthusiasm for the passions as such, and an
unprecedented sense of the drama inherent in the struggle

* See below, p. 30.
between these passions and the rational mind, a struggle in which their role was heightened by clerical efforts to control them.

The baroque view of man was closely linked to these aspects of personal behavior. Emphasis was on action, constant combat, personal success, and the resultant heightening of the sense of self. The ceremonial of social contact expressed the pervading and intense sense of personal dignity and gravity. Baroque man believed that the passions were central to man's essence and stressed having, rather than being, something. Descartes, Hobbes, Pascal, Spinoza all philosophized in terms of the passions and their great power over human destiny, seeking to explore and understand them; hence the beginning of psychology in their generation. At the same time man, struggling passionately and willfully to master his fate, was seen as fate's helpless victim. Highly symbolic of the baroque were the meteoric rise and the cataclysmic fall of favorites, conquering heroes and royal concubines. It is almost as if the baroque age had insisted that the most striking exhibition of man's never-ending quest for power was to find a final consummation in violent death or, at the least, banishment, exile, oblivion.

Literature

The figure of Satan in Milton's Paradise Lost (1667) was perhaps as striking a portrayal of baroque man as the age created:

... aspiring

To set himself in Glory above his Peers,
He trusted to have equalled the most High,

* See below, Chapter III.
If he oppos'd; and with ambitious aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God,
Rais'd impious War in Heav'n, and Battel proud,
With vain attempt.⁵

Yet, one must try to imagine Milton together with Pierre Corneille (1606–1684) and Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681), Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) and Molière (1622–1673), John Dryden (1631–1700), Jean Baptiste Racine (1639–1699), and Hans von Grimmelshausen (1620–1676), to appreciate the fullness of his baroque stature. Not only was Paradise Lost the Protestant response to the challenge of the Italian dramma di musica, but it also sounded the counterpoint to the entire dramatic poetry of the Renaissance, especially that of Shakespeare and Spencer. Renaissance elements were present in the work of these baroque writers to some extent, as they were in all baroque forms: these forms were an attempt to combine the formal perfection of the preceding age with the sense of the working of supernatural powers within and beyond man. Deeply metaphysical, the baroque poets and writers strained their powers of formal art to the utmost in order to capture the sense of these dynamic forces—thus reveling in movement, in colorful and violent contrasts, in the aggregation of descriptive adjectives and exclamatory nouns. These dramas, epics, and great chorales reveal a tremendous power of imagination at work. True children of the century of rational intelligence, these writers celebrated self-esteem and gravity, pomp and heroic pathos, as expressive of secular and religious passions. Tension and struggle were everywhere. Poets and writers carried both sober rational-

ism and deeply felt emotionalism to extremes of formal self-expression. Their language is highly ornate, and they maintained rigorous forms at the cost of an artificiality which is often highly irritating to modern ears. Strange flowers are produced by the great passions which pulsate beneath this formal structure, flowers which obscure the view like ice-ferns on the window in deep winter. Milton's description of the procession of evil spirits leagued with Satan abounds in such baroque word-painting.\(^6\) Tortuous similes as well as classical allusions were beloved by all these writers. But their most urgent concern was the portrayal of human passions, which they saw as proliferations of supernatural powers rather than as strictly human characteristics familiar to the Renaissance and to Humanism.

Spain in the first half of the seventeenth century experienced the baroque most intensely as the genuine form of its literary genius; indeed, it may be said that in the baroque Spain found her true form and fulfillment. Leaving aside the immortal Cervantes (1547–1616), whose Don Quixote (1605 and 1615) belongs "not to an age, but to all time," one is confronted with the towering figures of Tirso de Molina (1571–1648), the priest who wrote impudent comedies and devout sacred plays of deep wisdom; Góngora y Argote (1561–1627), the subtle lyricist; Lope de Vega (1562–1635), the creator of nearly a thousand dramas, epics, lyrics, and sacred plays; and finally Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681), the great dramatist—they constitute the flowering of the Spanish genius in literature. The dynamic tensions of the baroque, the inherent antagonism between its idealistic, ardent spirituality and its earthy, passionate sensuality, find a deep response in Spain's native

\(^6\) Ibid., bk. I, ll. 331–571.
inclinations. Hand in hand with its exaggerated formalism and the search for subtle and complex ornamentation go poignant naturalism and erotic intensity.

In literature, as in so many other fields, the latter part of the century was dominated by the influence of France; this was truly the age of Louis XIV. Characteristically, it was in the reign of Louis—prototype of absolute monarchy—that the canons of literary taste came to be most rigidly defined and stylistic uniformity most strictly enforced. The French preference for precision and refinement of style, the so-called "preciousness," led finally to L'Art poétique (1674) of Nicolas Boileau, in which acceptable modes of literary expression were codified; so pervasive was this French influence that the English poet John Dryden literally copied many of Boileau's dicta in his critical writings. As in Spain, so in France the baroque found its most fitting literary expression in the drama; but the French genius brought to the baroque world-picture some specifically French sentiments which resulted in greater stress upon gravity and severity of form than in Spain. Corneille particularly was a true baroque dramatist in the ornate quality of his language, the abstract and type-formed character of his figures, and his climactic enhancement of formalized conflict situations. Under the influence of the Cartesian passion for "clear and distinct ideas," and with the active support of the court, this formal element increased in importance throughout the century, as the drama became at the same time more stylized and more analytical. It is perhaps most apparent in the great comedies of Molière: Le Tartuffe (1664), Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (1670), Le Malade imaginaire (1673), and some thirty

† See below, Chapter III
others in which society was skillfully dissected and its follies laid bare with devastating wit. What Molière had done for the less exalted aspects of human nature, Jean Racine, in his great tragedies, and particularly in his *Phèdre* (1677), did for passion. The analytical clarity and the rigid adherence to form which characterizes them both is as baroque as the clipped hedges of Versailles.

Even so brief a survey of the literature of the seventeenth century would be incomplete without some mention of developments outside Spain and France. In Holland the century produced that country's greatest dramatist, Joost van den Vondel; it has been said that “Vondel, in the often clumsy, but always aspiring majesty of his elevated, solemn language is the perfect baroque poet.” Very different in spirit and influence was the *Simplicissimus* (1669) of the German Grimmelshausen, a striking novel of adventure depicting the horrors of life during the Thirty Years' War. Finally, in England, the age produced both the religious allegory of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), an expression of the mystical strain which was so central to the baroque, and the poems of John Dryden, the rationalist par excellence.

The only common denominator which enables us to conceive of these literary creations as varied expressions of a common view of man and the world is the omnipresent sense of power in all its forms, spiritual and secular, scientific and political, psychological and technical. Man's startling achievements produced in him a sense of potential might which alternated with a crushing realization of human limitations in the face of an infinite world created by

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a remote and all-powerful being who transcended all human comprehension. Poets of true grandeur found in the inherent drama of such a view a magnificent setting for their works. It is the glory of the baroque age that everywhere men rose to this unique challenge; they all spoke the language of an age in which man’s dignity was his most prized possession, with which he faced the powers of this earth and those of the beyond.

*Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting*

The term "baroque" was originally coined to describe the architectural style that dominated the European scene from the late sixteenth century to the early eighteenth. As is so often the case with such stylistic periods, the lines that delimit the beginning and the end of baroque architecture are unclear: the late work of Michelangelo (d. 1564) has been considered the beginning of the baroque, while the kinship between baroque style and rococo is so great that the rococo of the early eighteenth century has aptly been called no more than a lighter and more gracious form of the baroque. One may say, however, that the earliest clearly baroque building is the church of Il Gesù, built by the Jesuits in Rome between 1568 and 1584; furthermore, with the exception of Germany and eastern Europe, where the development came somewhat later, the period between 1630 and 1690 was the age of the so-called "high baroque," the supreme fulfillment of the style.

Closely associated with the turn toward the high baroque was the career of Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), the greatest figure of the age in both architecture and sculpture, two arts which at this time enter into so intimate a relationship that the one is inconceivable without the other.
Among Bernini’s most impressive creations are the great colonnaded plaza of St. Peter’s, the tombs of popes Urban VIII and Alexander VII, the superb bust of Louis XIV and the St. Theresa altar piece in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. In his works, the tension, the movement, the dynamic challenge that characterize baroque architecture and sculpture found their supreme embodiment.

From its birthplace in Italy, baroque architecture spread rapidly throughout Europe during the century, first north to France and England, then east to Germany and the Slavic world. Today, no great European city is imaginable without the rich creations of baroque architecture and sculpture: the rhythmic façades, the sweeping staircases, the flowing lines, the broad curves, and the skillful use of light and shadow to unify the whole. Indeed, so rich was this baroque harvest that only a few particularly notable examples can be mentioned here. In France, where baroque architecture, like baroque literature, was restrained by a regard for classic forms, the great palace of Versailles, with its elaborately ordered plan and formalized setting, served as a fitting expression of the disciplined court of the Roi Soleil. The famous eastern façade of the Louvre, despite the fact that the design of Claude Perrault was chosen over that submitted by Bernini, stands as another monument of the baroque, while Jules Hardouin-Mansart’s church of Les Invalides embodies perfectly the French compromise between classical and baroque forms—a compromise which, in a larger sense, may be called typically baroque. In England the baroque was not a popular style. Nevertheless, such an impressive example as St. Paul’s Cathedral, rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723) after the great fire
of 1666, still dominates London, while Blenheim Palace, designed by Sir John Vanbrugh (1664–1726), stands as a monument to the duke of Marlborough. To the east, where the lighter rococo influence was dominant around the turn of the century, one must mention the work of Johann Bernard Fischer von Erlach (1656–1723) in Bavaria and Austria, and the superb Zwinger (palace) of Matthaus Daniel Pöppelmann (1662–1736) in Dresden.

In the painting of the baroque period, the same general tendencies which molded architecture and sculpture were, of course, at work. But here the baroque also developed certain other formal elements. Among the outstanding traits of the new and vital style were the extensive use of tonal gradation rather than clear colors, combined with the gradual elimination of distinct outlines and the merging of objects into the surrounding background; chiaroscuro (the contrast of light and shade); and finally the employment of large quantities of pigment and the consequent visibility of brush strokes.

All the great nations of Europe, with the exception of England and Germany, produced magnificent painters in the period of the high baroque. In the early seventeenth century we find the Italians in the lead with Guido Reni (1575–1642) and with the more important Pietro da Cortona (1596–1669). Farther north, the brilliant work of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) with its rich sensuality and color unquestionably dominated the first phase of the high baroque. Rubens, whose influence throughout Europe was tremendous, found perhaps his greatest follower in the more subtle and delicate portraitist Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641), the court painter of Charles I of England. But if
Van Dyck was a pupil of Rubens, his true kinship was with the even greater Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599–1660), the court painter of Philip IV of Spain, in whose works a Renaissance clarity is still apparent, as it is in those of his countryman Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682). In painting, as in the other arts, one finds the characteristically classical French form of baroque: the artificial, orderly heroic landscapes of Poussin form a perfect counterpart to the dramas of Corneille, while the quietly lyric paintings of Lorrain give superb expression to the baroque sense of unity. The basic polarity of the age is nowhere better illustrated than in the contrast between the work of a great court painter such as Le Brun, the decorator of Versailles, and the work of the greatest Dutch baroque, rooted in the life and feeling of the common folk, the burgher and peasant of the Dutch lowlands, especially as exemplified in Frans Hals (1580–1666) and Rembrandt van Rijn. Among the incredible welter of brilliant talent that illuminated western painting, these two were perhaps the most striking baroque figures, although such men as Jacob Van Ruisdael (1628–1682) and Jan Vermeer (1632–1675) certainly have great claims upon our recognition. Perhaps Frans Hals was the most extreme representative of that lust for life and nature which the age offered. In the work of Rembrandt, however, baroque painting rose to universal significance and appeal. Rembrandt’s originality, in its final and perhaps ultimate combination, was revealed in “The Return of the Prodigal Son” (1668–1669); his intense religiosity was here given final form, the inner light of Protestant faith animating not only the painter, but the abject figure of the son, the face of the father, forgiving
and sorrowful, and the reverent attitude of the onlookers wrapped in darkness. Here the ultimate in the spirit of baroque feeling was achieved.

Music

In considering the development of music during the seventeenth century, one must take particular care to avoid treating the creations of this period as little more than preparations for the masterpieces of the two supreme baroque composers, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) and George Frederick Handel (1685–1759). As one becomes familiar with the compositions of men such as Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) and Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643), Henry Purcell (1659–1695) and Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672), it is apparent that, quite apart from their historical role, these men deserve a place among the great creative artists of the age; they represent the unfolding of a new style of musical composition in which emotionalism and rationalism, naturalism and formalism, found a dynamic outlet comparable to the creations of baroque architecture and painting; and, indeed, surpassing them.

In music, as in architecture, the development of the baroque style began in Italy, with the creation of an entirely new art form, the *dramma di musica*, or opera. Intimately associated with the so-called “monodic revolution” of the early seventeenth century, which substituted for counterpoint a simpler form of music sung by a single voice with instrumental accompaniment, the baroque opera reached its greatest heights with Monteverdi. Unlike the rather stiff productions of his predecessors, the operas of Monteverdi, notably his *Orfeo* (1607) and *The Coronation of Poppea* (1642), were all conceived in the spirit of unity
and power, of deep emotion and stately ritual, in which the baroque gloried. In France, where the opera soon became a fixture of the royal court, Jean Baptiste Lully (1632–1687) wrote a major tragic opera each year from 1673 until his death, establishing a formality in music similar to that of the poetic tragedy. As might be expected, it was at the court of Louis XIV, under Lully, that the first disciplined orchestra was created and orchestral conducting made an exact art. In England, too, under the restored Stuarts, opera dominated the musical scene; Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) ranks among the most moving and dramatic works of the century. These new operas may be considered the crowning fulfillment of the life of baroque man, at once stately and playful, enchanted by illusion and yet full of life, reaching out for the infinite in an ecstatic sense of man’s power and at the same time full of a sense of cosmic unity and of the passing of time, of the death that seals all life’s ambitions and glories. In Germany, in the wake of the disastrous Thirty Years’ War, the more somber and spiritual side of the baroque was revealed in the great church music of masters such as Schütz, Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676), and Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707). Finally, instrumental music flourished throughout the century, particularly in Italy; the works of Frescobaldi, Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713), Alessandro Scarlatti (1659–1725) and his son Domenico (1685–1757), and Antonio Vivaldi (1675–1743) were a source of inspiration to Bach and Handel.

*Conclusion*

The high baroque, with its vast array of wonderful creations in literature, the arts, and music, tempts one to proclaim it the highwater mark of European creative effort.
The sense of limitless power, checked by an overwhelming sense of cosmic relationships, produced a style which startles by its contrasts, yet at the same time exhibits a singular and unique unity. The creators of this style thought that they were continuing and developing the art of the Renaissance, the letters of Humanism, and yet recapturing something of the spirituality of Gothic Christianity. Many of these artists and writers would have been greatly surprised to be called "baroque," since they strove for classic design and perfect beauty. The baroque, like its great predecessor, the Gothic, received its name from critics who did not sympathize with its profound intensity, its sweeping vitality, and its heaven-scaling grandeur.