

1. POPKIN NON-SCEPTICUS

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הניב מוקמ הז יאר אימת ניאמ המכחהו¹

René Descartes, a patriarch of modern philosophy, turned his back on history but could not escape it. Something similar can be said of the field in its current state: while a few of its practitioners have renounced history, philosophy still revels in its past. Indeed, considering philosophy's ambition to be scientific, it is surprising that not many of the university's disciplines concern themselves as much with the past as philosophy does – on the evidence of such things as numbers of journal pages or courses in college catalogs. Nonetheless, given the prominence of history in philosophy, it is not surprising that philosophy also has its historiography, best described in Giovanni Santinello's massive *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia*.² That this fundamental work of reference has appeared in Italian, not in English, bears on my story today.³

Periodization is a key problem for Santinello's topic, historiography. It matters how we break the past into pieces, especially how we cut the big slices, giving them names like "ancient" and "modern." For several centuries, the usual practice has been to put something between those two temporal bookends, something intermediary or "medieval." The script says that modernity starts when the intermezzo stops. Jacob Burckhardt, a Swiss historian of art and culture, gave this new beginning a French name – *Renaissance* – borrowing it from Michelet for the title of a book written in German that deals almost

¹Job 28:12: "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?"

²Giovanni Santinello, *Storia delle storie generali della filosofia* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1981–1995); for a robust view of history in the context of contemporary Anglophone philosophy, see Daniel Garber, "Does History Have a Future? Some Reflections on Bennett and Doing Philosophy Historically," in *Descartes Embodied: Reading Cartesian Philosophy Through Cartesian Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 13–30

³Only the first volume has appeared in English: *Models of the History of Philosophy*, eds. and trans. C. Blackwell and P. Weller (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993).

uniquely with Italians.⁴ Since Burckhardt had little to say about philosophy, perhaps it is fair that philosophers have had little to say about the period that Burckhardt named.

Descartes published his first book – which included his most famous abjuration of history – in 1637; his last major work (not counting some of the letters) appeared posthumously in 1664.⁵ If Descartes is to count as the founder of modern philosophy, the founding seems to have lagged. If we think of literature, government, religion, art and politics, for example, such icons of incipient modernity as Ariosto, Henry VIII, Luther, Leonardo and Machiavelli had been dead for more than a century when Descartes made his fatal move to Sweden. And if, persuaded by Burckhardt, we locate the new age earlier, with Savonarola, Petrarch, the Medici, Masaccio and Brunni, the philosophical lag is even longer.

Notice that these last names are all Italian – just an artifact, you might say, of Burckhardt’s selection, in an un-philosophical book whose setting was Italy. But Italians, and people who taught in Italy, had long been prominent in philosophy. Think of Pythagoras, Empedocles, Cicero, Plotinus, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas – all of them fixtures in the contemporary Anglophone canon. But after Vico, and with the possible exception of Croce, no Italian has entered that canon. Moreover, despite Italy’s time of glory in the Renaissance, there are no *Renaissance* Italians in that canon: not even Valla or Ficino.

That Italian names do not show up when the credits roll on the story of modern philosophy is not a consequence of “presentism,” to use an unfortunate word for an unfortunate thing. By anyone’s standards, Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Abelard, Aquinas and Ockham belong to the deep past, and all of them get lots of attention from philosophers. Ockham, well regarded by contemporary students of logic, language and metaphysics, died nearly three centuries before Descartes published his *Meditations*. But (ignoring Bacon, if I may) no philosopher *after* Ockham and *before* Descartes has earned such respect. In effect, for a period of three centuries – which is also how long it took for philosophy to get from Descartes to Quine – philosophy has very little history.

⁴Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989); Jules Michelet, *Renaissance et réforme: Histoire de France au seizième siècle* (Paris: Laffont, 1992); Lucien Febvre, *Michelet et la renaissance* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992); Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 203–295; John R. Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), pp. 139–198.

⁵For a detailed biography, see Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

But I should be less hyperbolic – and more precise. It would be more precise to say that philosophy has lacked *not* what Croce called the “history” of those three hundred years but what he called their “historiography”: it is not *events* that are lacking but an *account* of events.⁶ Ockham died in the time of the Black Death – maybe because of it. And if the plague had also killed almost every other philosopher in Europe, then old mortality could explain why the canon registers so few philosophical events for nearly three centuries after Ockham. But dozens of universities had been founded all over Europe after 1200. Most of the undergraduate curriculum had long been philosophical, taught by professional philosophers. Yet those philosophers who kept philosophizing after 1350 have all but vanished from the historiography, in Croce’s sense.

But again, I should be less hyperbolic – and fairer. It would be fairer to say that all this began to change in 1981, when Charles Schmitt launched the project that became the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, with a chapter by Richard Popkin on “Theories of Knowledge,” culminating, naturally, in a section on “Scepticism.”⁷ The *Cambridge History*, soon followed – in this our age of compendia – by Oxford, Routledge and Columbia histories, finally made room for the Renaissance in the Anglophone historiography of philosophy. Popkin was editor-in-chief of the *Columbia History*, and he saw to it that the Renaissance got its due.⁸

Part of the force that drove Popkin’s monumental achievement was human and social – his dazzling gift for talking to people and convening them for hundreds of projects, conferences and publications of great and enduring influence. But what he achieved intellectually is deeper and wider than that. His range was enormous, of course, centering on French, Dutch, English and Jewish thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but reaching forward to twentieth century politics in this country and back to fifteenth century religion and philosophy

⁶ Benedetto Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, ed. G. Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 1989), pp. 88–89, 354–356.

⁷ Richard Popkin, “Theories of Knowledge,” in Charles B. Schmitt et al., *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 279–328.

⁸ Copenhaver, Michael Allen and John Monfasani, “The Renaissance,” in *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, ed. R. Popkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 279–328; Copenhaver and Schmitt, *A History of Western Philosophy*, III: *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Jill Kraye, “The Philosophy of the Italian Renaissance,” in *The Routledge History of Philosophy*, IV: *The Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Rationalism*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 16–69; Stuart Brown, “Renaissance Philosophy Outside Italy,” *ibid.*, pp. 70–103.

– to the Italian Renaissance. In fact, his influence on the historiography of Renaissance philosophy was profound.

Popkin's most important book – one of a multitude – is his *History of Scepticism*.⁹ The revision published in 2003 carries a dedication “to three of my coworkers in the ... history of scepticism,” one of whom is Charles Schmitt. Since Popkin started at Columbia in the early 1940s, he was a generation ahead of Schmitt, who studied with Paul Kristeller at the same university in the 1950s. But Popkin had been one of only two students in the first course that POK taught at Columbia, and it was that course, along with another taught by John Herman Randall, that first attracted him to Sextus Empiricus and the Sceptics. As Popkin hunted for connections between Sextus and Hume, Kristeller encouraged him to find out what happened *before* Hume, which eventually became the *History of Scepticism*. The first edition, Popkin writes, “was submitted to two major academic presses ... [but] turned ... down on the grounds that it was not sufficiently philosophical”; it appeared, nonetheless, in 1960, followed by a second edition in 1979 and a third in 2003.¹⁰ Evidently, it was sufficiently readable.

Popkin's very compelling story, according to the title of the first edition, goes *From Erasmus to Descartes*; but the second goes *From Erasmus to Spinoza*; and the third *From Savonarola to Bayle*.¹¹ Once the apocalyptic Florentine friar appeared in Popkin's title, the Italian renaissance of scepticism had finally made the headlines of Anglophone historiography. That alone was newsworthy, given the previous record of oblivion, both for Renaissance philosophy and for scepticism.

If you still need help forgetting the Renaissance, read almost any history of philosophy written in English before Schmitt's *Cambridge History* became influential. One such work, first published in 1914, was still in print when Popkin was teaching at Iowa and Schmitt was studying at Columbia: this was *A History of Philosophy* by Frank Thilly, a Kantian who taught at Berkeley. In a book of 677 pages, Thilly's Renaissance rates fewer than two dozen, including one whole paragraph on scepticism – mainly on Montaigne.¹²

⁹Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960); *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰Popkin, “Preface,” in *Scepticism* (2003), pp. vii–ix; above, n. 9; Copenhaver, “Science and Philosophy in Early Modern Europe: The Historiographical Significance of the Work of Charles B. Schmitt,” *Annals of Science*, 44 (1987), 507–517.

¹¹Above, n. 9.

¹²Frank Thilly, *A History of Philosophy*, ed. L. Wood (3rd ed.; New York: Holt, 1957).

Otherwise, scepticism was chiefly a Greek affair for Thilly, and thus stuck in antiquity. In the modern period, Berkeley gets just one paragraph to refute it. Pierre Bayle gets twice as many to expose inconsistencies in religion and work his “potent influence on Hume.” But Thilly’s Hume is the Third Person of the British Empiricist Trinity and thus immaculate against such stains. Hume has his doubts about cause and effect, of course, and about knowledge of the external world and other such items, but we are not told that these worries are “sceptical.” The word enters Thilly’s main account of Hume only in an affecting digest of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, where “in spite of these skeptical reflections, Hume declares that it hardly seems possible that anyone of good understanding should reject the idea of God How seriously these remarks are to be taken, . . . the reader is left to decide for himself.”¹³

That was where scepticism stood in the awareness of Anglophone philosophy when Popkin awoke it from its dogmatic slumber. Leaving his voluminous work on the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries to those who know those periods better, I wish to return to the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries and to consider a reasonable question – which Popkin helped to answer – about that era. Why should philosophers care about the Renaissance? Nothing important happened, right? One might reply with other questions. How would you know? How much Renaissance philosophy have you read? Pico? Ficino? Valla? Even now, Valla’s *Dialectical Disputations*, a stunningly original exposition of the philosophy of language, can be read only in Latin. How many contemporary philosophers of language have heard of Valla?

But that question, which is about access to texts, is for another day.¹⁴ Behind philosophy’s plausible scepticism about the Renaissance lie questions more relevant to this occasion and more serious. If the Renaissance is to be regarded as a period in the canonical historiography of philosophy, what is *distinctive* about it? What makes it *different* from what came before and from what came after? Even more important, how was Renaissance philosophy *effective*? How did it *cause* what came next to be different from what came before? It is this second question, about the philosophical consequences of Renaissance philosophy, that Popkin answered with great originality and effect.

¹³Thilly, *History*, pp. 318–319, 364–366, 367–381, cf. 382, where Reid’s common sense is described as a reaction against “the idealism of Berkeley and the scepticism of Hume,” both of whom in Thilly’s account belong to the movement called “British empiricism.”

¹⁴Copenhaver “How Not To Lose a Renaissance,” *Rinascimento*, 44 (2nd ser., 2004), 443–458, commenting on Christopher Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians and Latin’s Legacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

By the time Popkin met Kristeller in the early 1940s, Kristeller, having come to this country from Germany and Italy, had begun to fill gaps in Burckhardt's suggestive sketch of the Renaissance.¹⁵ Eugenio Garin was doing the same in Italy, while still in exile intellectually under Fascism.¹⁶ Garin, Kristeller and their students showed in detail how classicism – the rediscovery of Greek and Roman antiquity – made the Renaissance distinctive. Part of that classicism, of course, was philosophical. In the medieval university, where Aristotle was The Philosopher, Plato, Epicurus, Epictetus, Plotinus and dozens of other names were little more than that – just names. It was Renaissance scholars who attached texts to the names, recovering the philosophical literature of ancient Greece and turning it into Latin, the intellectual *koine* of Western Europe. Because of this philological achievement, the philosophy that Descartes learned from the Jesuits was not the philosophy taught by Aquinas or Scotus or Ockham. It was a new kind of Aristotelianism, eclectic and classicized.¹⁷

More and more Greek philosophy became available in better and better texts and commentaries and translations. Good news: except that *more* was not unequivocally *better* in the eyes of a Renaissance reader. Although Aristotelian philosophy remained paramount throughout the period of recovery and after it, what was recovered was also Platonic, Stoic, Epicurean and Neoplatonic, even Cynic, Hermetic and Pythagorean – a volatile mix of authorities for a culture that venerated authority, especially ancient authority. When venerable masters disagreed, disciples cried scandal. *Conflict* among authorities was a *crisis* of authority.¹⁸

The crisis boiled over after 1512, when the Church convened the Fifth Lateran Council. In its eighth session of 1513, the Council issued a decree which needs to be read in a substantial passage to feel its force. It condemned “every proposition contrary to the truth of the enlightened Christian faith,” including

a number of extremely pernicious errors ... particularly on the nature of the rational soul, specifically that it is mortal, or that it is one for all people ...
 .And since there are some who philosophize so recklessly that they have

¹⁵For recent discussions of Kristeller's work as a philosopher and a historian, see *Kristeller Reconsidered: Essays on His Life and Scholarship*, ed. J. Monfasani (New York: Italica, 2006).

¹⁶Copenhaver, “Eugenio Garin,” in *Renaissance News and Notes* (<http://www.rsa.org/rnn.htm>), February, 2005.

¹⁷Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁸Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 1–36, 51–59, 196–328; Copenhaver, “The Slums of Cosmopolis: A Renaissance in the History of Philosophy?” in *Everything Connects: A Festschrift for Richard Popkin*, eds. J. Force and D. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 63–86.

maintained this to be true, at least philosophically, ... we condemn and rebuke all those who maintain that the intellectual soul is mortal ... and impute doubts in this matter, since the soul not only really exists, of itself and essentially, as the form of the human body ... but is also immortalThis is manifestly established by the Gospel....And since truth never contradicts truth, we define every contrary claim ... to be totally false, and we strictly prohibit it and declare it impossible to make any different statement of the dogma. Moreover, we command each and every philosopher who gives public lectures in university faculties or elsewhere ... to devote his every effort to teaching ... the manifest truth of the Christian religion, teaching it as persuasively as is possible, and giving all his effort to excluding and eliminating the arguments of philosophers of that sort....But since it is not enough to snip the roots of the brambles now and thenand since extended study, especially of human philosophy,... sometimes leads more to error than to clarifying the truth, it is our decision and ordinance ... that no one in sacred orders ... may concentrate on the study of philosophy or poetry for more than five years ... without some study of theology or pontifical law.¹⁹

Too many verses and too many syllogisms too! The target of this anathema was an eminent professional philosopher, Pietro Pomponazzi, an Aristotelian who had access to the new Plato and to the Greek commentators on Aristotle, some of whom were Neoplatonists. Behind Pomponazzi's subtle and disquieting treatment of the soul was a new array of philosophical authority. Horrified by novelty, the Council made Pomponazzi's book on the soul infamous and dissuaded him from publishing more, but it failed in its main goal, which was to clean up corruption in the Church.²⁰ As a result, when Luther made his complaints public in 1517, the last year of the Council, there was still much to complain about.

The dogmatic Luther, in conflict with the diffident Erasmus, has a leading role in the part of Popkin's *History* that deals with the Renaissance – the introduction and the first three chapters – and this has been so from the first edition through the third. But in the third edition, the even more doctrinaire Savonarola has a part as big as Luther's in the story of scepticism.²¹

¹⁹Sessio VIII, 19 Dec. 1513, Concilii Laterensis V, in *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, eds. J. Alberigo et al. (3rd ed.; Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 1973), pp. 605–606.

²⁰The best treatment in English of Pomponazzi is Martin Pine, *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance* (Padua: Antenore, 1986); Copenhagen and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 103–112.

²¹Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 3–7, 19–27.

Popkin opens the story with a sketch of ancient scepticism: Academics as negative dogmatists; Pyrrhonists as suspenders of judgment; and Sextus Empiricus as the sceptical physician who prescribes “a purge that eliminates everything including itself,” a methodical formulation of sceptical doubts about absolutely anything that you might be tempted to assert.²² Then, after more than a millennium of intermission, action resumes in the middle of the fifteenth century with the first signs of interest in scepticism that suggest continuity with its later career. Savonarola enters in the 1490s. As Prior of San Marco in Florence, he roars at that opulent city in sermons that turned it briefly into a pinched theocracy. He believes in his own prophetic authority and no other, not even the Church as an institution, which had tainted its authority by consorting with Aristotle. In this circumstance, Savonarola – who is a preacher, not a scholar – orders some of his friars to translate Sextus into Latin. He takes up scepticism as a sword to destroy philosophy and thus to chastise the worldly-wise clerisy that quakes at his prophetic thunder.

Savonarola, the scourge of Renaissance Florence, is the emblem of a rupture in historiography: the view of modern scepticism that Popkin found current in the 1950s identified it simply with *disbelief* in religion; fifty years later, Popkin had traced its roots to a priest whose dogmatic *belief* was not just sincere, but fanatical. Accordingly, Popkin sees scepticism not as disbelief in religion but as opposition of a certain kind to dogmatism of a certain kind – philosophical opposition to philosophical dogmatism. The ensuing suspension of judgment about truth-claims assists faith when the claims that threaten faith are philosophical and hence vulnerable to sceptical attack. Fideism emerges as a philosophically attenuated species of scepticism: scepticism about claims *not* based on faith, whether that faith is completely blind or simply prior to reason. Only faith, in any case, can trump the sceptic’s doubts for the religious fideist.²³

But religion needs a *rule* of faith, a license for its own claims to truth, and after 1517 some Christians promulgated rules that clashed, violently and shamefully, with rules decreed by other Christians. Catholics appealed to a criterion of tradition and institutional authority, while for their criterion Protestants looked to scripture, as revealed by grace to the illuminated individual. But Catholic tradition contradicts itself, ending in confusion, complain the Protestants, while Catholics rejoin that individual conscience is unreliable, leading to Protestant anarchy. From a Catholic perspective, the Protestant “criterion of religious knowledge is inner persuasion, the guarantee of... inner persuasion is... God, and this we are assured of by our inner persuasion.” From a

²² Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. xvi–xix.

²³ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. xix–xxiii; above, n. 21.

Protestant perspective, “the Church cannot be the authority of its own infallibility, since the question at issue is whether the Church is the true authority on religious matters. Any evidence for the special status of the Church requires a rule or criterion.” Either way, the search for a rule of faith spins in a circle.²⁴ No wonder that scepticism and suspension of judgment looked appealing in the sixteenth century, as Christians fought bloody wars over points of dogma.

Popkin tells the story of scepticism during the Reformation and the wars of religion through books that he loved and collected, books produced by the younger Pico, Erasmus, Agrippa, Talon, Hervet, Sanches and others, including Henri Estienne, who published the first complete printed version of a work by Sextus in 1562, after which interest in scepticism accelerated and deepened philosophically.²⁵ Popkin’s hero in this part of his story is Montaigne.²⁶

Because the “Apology for Raimond Sebond” is unforgettable, we all remember it: the relativism, both anthropological and moral; the critique of sense knowledge; the choice of Pyrrhonism over Academic dogmatism; the use of the sceptical tropes; the infinite regress of the criterion; the advice to follow law and custom in matters of practice; and the complementary advice to suspend judgment in matters of theory. Reading Montaigne reading Sextus through the Paul of I Corinthians, the Paul who writes “to destroy the wisdom of the wise,” Popkin recapitulates the immortal essay with grace and clarity.²⁷ But he misses something about the relationship between Montaigne’s scepticism and Descartes’ first public reaction to it, in the *Discourse on the Method*.

Although Popkin discusses the *Discourse*, he follows the main line of Cartesian criticism by focusing on the *Meditations* and its aftermath. But the *Discourse* came first, after years of avoiding publicity.²⁸ Since Descartes was at least obsessive, if not worse, about self-presentation, and since theological problems were exceedingly sensitive, we may assume that he thought very carefully about the theology in the fourth section of the *Discourse*. Having doubted everything but his bare thinking – everything including his own body and other bodies – he needs God to get them back. To show that God exists, he uses a version of the ontological proof, first formulated by Anselm in the eleventh century.²⁹

²⁴ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 3–16.

²⁵ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 23–43.

²⁶ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 43–63.

²⁷ I Cor. 1:19–21; Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 47–54.

²⁸ Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), pp. 143–173; Gaukroger, *Descartes*, pp. 181–190, 225–228, 290–332.

²⁹ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), I, 126–131.

What Descartes does *not* use in the *Discourse* is the natural theology of later scholastic philosophy. Scholastic natural theology argued from creatures, as God's effects, to their cause, God the Creator, in order to prove God's existence and perfections. As Paul had written, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead."³⁰ Taking his cue from Paul, Peter Lombard gestured at proofs of God's existence and introduced them with the claim that we have "recognition of the Creator through creatures."³¹ Before Thomas Aquinas laid out five arguments – much more explicit but on the same general grounds – for God's existence, he cleared the ground by rejecting Anselm's ontological proof.³² Although Descartes's Jesuit teachers had enshrined Thomas as the supreme theological authority, Descartes bypassed Thomas's five ways for Anselm's ontological proof. Why?

If we follow Popkin's story, the scepticism that Descartes sets out to defeat is mainly Montaigne's, recorded in the "Apology" and filtered through Charron and others.³³ But what the "Apology" politely demolishes is scholastic natural theology, as summarized in the work by Raimond Sebond that Montaigne translated for his father. Hence, Descartes could depend on scholastic natural theology to prove God's existence only if he could salvage enough from Montaigne's demolition of it, which evidently he could not do.

Whether Descartes' *Discourse* was actually shaped in this particular way by Montaigne's "Apology" is surely debatable. In any event, a larger point will hold: in Popkin's story, there is a momentous role for the Renaissance in the historiography of philosophy that is not just *distinctive* but also *effective*. The ancient wisdom revived in the fifteenth century included the sceptical wisdom of Sextus Empiricus. Religious strife in the sixteenth century encouraged study and dissemination of the sceptical texts, preparing the way for Montaigne's corrosive essay. In the seventeenth century, Montaigne's case for scepticism survived the best efforts of Descartes to refute it, letting this discovery of the Renaissance linger as the incubus of modern philosophy.

The discovery was made in Savonarola's convent in the 1490s, but it became publicly effective only after 1562, when Henri Estienne produced the first printed text of Sextus. Examining the motives behind this publication, Popkin concludes that Estienne "did not present himself as a sceptic or a purveyor of scepticism.... [He] saw himself as adding to human wisdom and knowledge."³⁴ Because Popkin

³⁰Romans 1:20.

³¹Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 3.9.1–6.

³²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2.1–3.

³³Above, nn. 25–26, 28.

³⁴Popkin, *Scepticism* (2003), p. 36.

himself added so much to human wisdom and knowledge, the same words apply to him as *non-scepticus*.

At the same time, there surely was a Popkin *scepticus*, for whom subversives like Erasmus and Montaigne were congenial characters. In not exactly the same spirit, E.M. Forster once said that he would rather take his laws from Erasmus or Montaigne than from Moses or St. Paul, understanding those amiable renaissance Christians in a gentler way than their religious rigorism would have allowed. Unlike Forster, they could not really “hate the idea of causes.” By the standards of their time, both were prophets of tolerance, but their time was different from ours.

Or maybe not so different. As in our time, so also in the age of Erasmus and Montaigne, and of Savonarola and Luther, faith was a cause good enough to die for – and for others of other faiths to die for. That some heroes of that embattled age promoted a scepticism whose main motive was religious is one – but only one – of the revolutionary insights which have made all citizens of the Republic of Letters Richard Popkin’s debtors. Another famous statement of Forster’s – writing as a novelist, not a social critic – speaks to the generous, persistent and passionate spirit of inquiry that led Popkin down so many paths to so many treasures. In *Howard’s End*, Forster wrote:

Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest.

Popkin’s sermon, of course, isn’t a sermon at all. It’s a magnificent body of history and philosophy. It tells us, as philosophers, historians, thinkers and scholars: “Only connect!” And were we to connect as he did, the work surely would be exalted.³⁵

³⁵These last lines of my essay, including the quotations from Forster, repeat what I said at the end “The Slums of Cosmopolis,” pp. 85–86.