

MISOLOGY: THE HATRED OF ARGUMENT  
AND THE LIFE OF THE INTELLECT

*John Francis Nieto*

In the few hours before the city of Athens executed the philosopher Socrates, his conversation dwelt upon his hope to spend the rest of time with the gods. In Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, a young man by the name of Echecrates asks the title character to report this last conversation. Socrates assured his friends of this expectation of a better life and explained that his life as a philosopher, a life cultivating his intellect, was nothing more than a preparation for death. But his friends fear that with death Socrates' existence may altogether end. He encourages them with several arguments concluding to the soul's immortality. Although the arguments at first convince them, they raise objections that appear to undo these arguments.<sup>1</sup> Before he answers the objections, Socrates warns his friends of the danger of becoming "misologists," "as there is," he says, "no greater evil someone could suffer than hating arguments." He discusses this "malady" and then insists,

We shall not admit into our souls that there may be no health in arguments, but rather that we are not yet healthy

---

John Francis Nieto has been a tutor for ten years at Thomas Aquinas College, where he did his undergraduate work, after studying political science and music at various California colleges and universities. At the University of Notre Dame he wrote his dissertation on "Continuity and the Reality of Movement" and received a doctorate in philosophy. His first collection of poems, *The Gloss*, will soon be published by Mellon Poetry Press.

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 89d.

and must be manly and determined to become healthy, for you and the others looking to all your life hereafter, but for me looking to this my death, because I risk at present being not philosophical about it, but strife-loving as those utterly undisciplined.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing the conversation, Socrates solves an objection and presents yet another argument. He then concludes with a lengthy presentation of his beliefs about what awaits men's souls after death, both punishments for sins and rewards for justice.

I should like to discuss the hatred of argument and its relation to the future life of the human soul. First, by examination of Socrates' account, I shall describe the nature and origin of the vice. Then, I shall discuss the elements that make it the greatest of human sufferings. Finally, I shall consider why Plato raised the question of misology in a discussion of the soul's life after death.

### What is Misology?

Before discussing the vice itself, we should pay attention to the name. Two names, "misology" and "misologist" are apparently coined by Plato himself, perhaps in the *Phaedo*. He illustrates their meaning through the etymology or origin of the words.

The Greek adjective *misologos*, in English "misologist," is derived from the participial phrase *misesas logous*, "hating arguments." It means "he who hates argument." The abstract noun *misologia* is therefore the hatred of argument present in the soul. Worth noting is the fact that the Greek word *logos*, although it means argument, can also mean (among other things) the power of reasoning, reasons given, and speech. I certainly believe Plato intends this "confusion" of meanings as beneficial in understanding the full import of this vice.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 90d9-91a3.

Now Socrates approaches the vice of misology in two ways. He describes it as like to misanthropy, with which he assumes we are more familiar. Then, while continuing to use this likeness, he shows how misology arises. I shall examine these passages in order. But first I shall consider how Plato has set the scene by illustrating conditions conducive to passions that dispose us to this vice.

### The Setting

Plato has Socrates raise the question of misology while presenting several arguments to prove that the soul is immortal. Three arguments have been proposed. But objections have been raised, including the claim that the soul is nothing more than a harmony—we might say composition<sup>3</sup>—of our bodily parts. Phaedo, reporting the conversation, says,

Hearing them as they spoke we all took it badly (as we later said to each other), because it seemed that we, so persuaded by the previous argument, were again confounded and cast into doubt, not only about the arguments already stated but also toward anything that might be said in future: either we were unworthy judges of anything or the things themselves were doubtful too.<sup>4</sup>

Now Echeocrates—the young man who requested a report of this conversation—also feels shaken. Socrates' arguments seemed compelling, but he is also moved by the opposing accounts. He complains,

By the gods, Phaedo, I feel with you all. For it affected even me now, hearing you speak such things to me. In what argument then shall we ever believe? Being so thoroughly convincing, the argument Socrates said, it has now been cast into doubt. For that argument, that the soul is our composition—now, and always—quite fascinates me, and, so to

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul* 408a5-9.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 88c1-7.

speaking, it reminded me, once stated, that these things had earlier seemed so to me too. And I am quite in need, starting over again, of another argument that would convince me that the soul of the dead man doesn't die. Say, by God, how did Socrates pursue the argument? Did he, as you say you all did, become visibly depressed at all, or did he not do so, but gently rescue the argument? Did he rescue the argument sufficiently, or was something lacking?<sup>5</sup>

Sadness has overtaken Echeocrates. He thought Socrates' arguments were cogent, but the objection "reminded" him of opinions opposed to these. Since he cannot resolve the contradiction in the two arguments, he now feels anxious whether one can ever judge with certainty about anything.

The dialogue continues with Phaedo's account of the wonder Socrates provoked in him by, among other things, "how sharply he saw what we had suffered from the arguments":<sup>6</sup>

I was on his right seated on a bench low to the ground, and he was on one much higher than me. He patted my head and gathered the curls at my neck—he used, whenever he could, to tease me about my curls—tomorrow, he said, probably, Phaedo, you'll chop off these lovely locks.

I said, it looks like it, Socrates.

Don't, should you be convinced by me.

Then I: but why?

Today, he said, I shall chop off mine and you yours, if our argument should die and we can't revive it. And I, at any rate, were I you and the argument got away from me, would make an oath like the Argives, not to grow my hair, until, fighting back, I have beat [my opponents'] argument.<sup>7</sup>

As Phaedo had told Echeocrates, Socrates is not saddened or afraid as the others are. He is courageously determined to pursue the truth.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 88c8-e3.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 89a4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 90b9-c6.

Much is at stake. As Socrates says explicitly, if the argument truly dies, he dies also.<sup>8</sup> If the argument cannot in fact be revived, his soul will not remain alive nor enter life more fully, when this evening his body dies. He therefore counsels Phaedo not to put the tradition of cutting his hair off until Socrates' death. Rather, they and all men should mourn now, both for the mortality of the argument and the mortality of the human soul. The fear we feel at the death of argument is tied to the fear we feel at the thought of death. For reason and the soul must live or die together.

### *The Likeness to Misanthropy*

In introducing the digression on misology, Socrates likens it to "misanthropy." As in the words "misology" and "misologist," the words "misanthropy" and "misanthropist" are derived from the notions of "hating" and the object hated. In misanthropy, other men are hated. The "misanthropist" hates other men. "Misanthropy" is the hatred of other men or the vice from which it springs. Socrates introduces them together.

Phaedo has agreed to Socrates' challenge to pursue the argument with his help. But, before they begin, Socrates warns,

First we must take care we do not suffer a certain suffering.

What sort, I asked.

Let's not become—it was he—misologists, just as some become misanthropists, as there is no greater evil someone could suffer than hating arguments.<sup>9</sup>

Here Socrates proposes that the sadness we feel at our own confusion and uncertainty may engender a vice worse even than misanthropy, worse than the distrust and hatred of our fellow men. This is a bold claim, as misanthropy seems to be a vice opposed to our nature. Being men we should love our kind and help those possessing the same nature to thrive. A

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 91b7.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 89c11-d3.

man who despises another of the same nature seems in a way to hate even himself. Yet Socrates implies that misology is a worse disorder.

### *Its Origin*

As he continues, Socrates shows how each vice arises. He does so in light of the comparison with misanthropy, with which he begins:

Misanthropy insinuates itself from vehemently trusting someone without experience and believing a man to be in every way honest, sound, and trustworthy, then a little later finding him worthless and doubtful, and this happening again another time. And when someone suffers this often and from those whom most of all he thought nearest and best, ending up often offended he hates all men and thinks nothing good at all in anyone.<sup>10</sup>

But at the root of misanthropy is an error, as Socrates goes on to point out:

Isn't it vile, he said, and clear that such a man attempts to take part in human matters without experience of what pertains to man? For if he attempted with experience, he would think, just as things are, that the good and the bad are both very few, but most are in the middle. . . . Just as with the very small and very large: would you think anything more rare than to come upon a very large or very small man or dog or anything else? Or one very swift or slow, or very ugly or beautiful, or very pale or dark? Don't you think that of all such the extremes are rare and few, while the middling ones are abundant and many? . . . Don't you think, if a contest of wickedness were held, quite few would show up first even there?<sup>11</sup>

The misanthropist does not see that men are mostly mixed in character. When he finds one after another to be mediocre,

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 89d3-e3.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 89e5-90b4.

after believing them exceptionally good, he is saddened. From this sadness arises an habitual distrust of others.

The likeness of misology to misanthropy leads one to expect that arguments too are mostly mixed, that very few are wholly good or wholly bad, and the misologist has proceeded as if all were exceptionally good. In fact, Socrates seems to have introduced this mediocrity as principle of misanthropy in order to deny *this* likeness between misanthropy and misology. Arguments are not on the whole mediocre, as men are. Although the two vices come about in a similar manner, Socrates denies that the objects hated have a similar intrinsic character. He says,

However in this arguments are not like men . . . , but they are like them in the other way, whenever someone believes an argument to be true without the art concerning arguments, and then a little later it seems to be false to him, sometime being so, other times not, and this happens again and again.<sup>12</sup>

An unwary trust and later disappointment in arguments, quite independent of the actual truth or falsehood of the arguments, can produce in men a distrust of all argument. Further, Socrates thinks this is similar to the development of misanthropy, with one exception. Most men are in the middle, those very good or very bad are rare. Arguments are not like this. Arguments are either true or false, the middle is excluded. Unless Socrates supposes that an argument concluding something false is not a true argument.

Socrates then proposes the ultimate danger of misology, that one should by his own fault miss the truth of things:

So, Phaedo, he said, wouldn't the suffering be pitiful, if, though there is an argument true and secure and able to be learned, through it happening to such arguments that now they seem to be true, then they don't, to the same men, someone were neither to accuse himself nor his inexperience.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 90b4-9.

ence, but end up, on account of his distress, pleased to thrust the blame from himself to the arguments and to go on all the rest of his life hating and railing at arguments, while deprived of the truth and knowledge of things.<sup>13</sup>

Notice that here Socrates has identified the cause of misology. The discussion of misanthropy assumed rightly that men are rarely very good or bad, usually mediocre. The same mediocrity in us is the cause of misology. Few men are wise. Few men have the strength of intellect and experience of arguments to judge rightly of arguments. Most of us are in between. For men live usually in the service of their bodies and bodily desires. They neither cultivate the intellect nor conform their actions to reason. The habits that arise from such a life do not dispose a man to true friendship. Nor do they allow him to judge rightly of arguments. This unhealthy attachment to the body, as Plato proposes in the same dialogue, leads men to live by appetite, perhaps by very spiritual appetites as love of rule and love of honor.<sup>14</sup> Thus the same error produces each vice. The failure to recognize that other men live usually by appetite rather than reason leads to misanthropy, the hatred of human nature. The failure to recognize that we ourselves live usually by appetite rather than reason leads to misology, the hatred of argument. But as we shall see, this is even more the hatred of the divine.

### The Greatest of All Sufferings

Now I shall examine why Socrates claims misology is the greatest of all human sufferings, worse even than misanthropy. In fact the hatred of argument implies a hatred of the intellect's natural power to grasp fundamental truths and a hatred of these same truths. Yet deeper will be found a hatred of the mind's order to the truth.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 90c7-d8.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 82c7.

Showing these things demands a preliminary consideration of man's intellect and the role played by argument in the life of his intellect. In these remarks I appeal to what may be called perennial philosophy. By this term I refer to the teachings that have been handed down through the centuries as true and certain judgments and conclusions of the human mind. This philosophy is in fact human wisdom as transmitted to mankind by the greatest thinkers.

It has been handed down, sometimes more clearly, sometimes less so, and sometimes with more, sometimes with less, determination. I understand this perennial philosophy to exist in an imperfect yet vital form in Plato's dialogues. Its presence in the school of Plato led to its development in an exact and rather complete form in the treatises of Aristotle. Further, I recognize that through the efforts of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, above all, Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, this human wisdom has been purified in light of the severe wisdom of divine revelation, especially as found in the Sacred Scriptures. In presenting these considerations, I shall therefore propose various positions, all of a very general nature, in a form that focuses on the agreement of these philosophers with one another and with Christian doctrine.

### Preliminary Considerations

Several truths about the nature of man, common to philosophers and theologians, will help us see the full horror of the vice of misology. The first is the distinction between intellect and sense. Later I shall look at what intellect does, how it operates. Several other positions will be established together with these.

*The Distinction of Intellect and Sense.* Among the truths that these philosophers hold we find the claim that mind or intellect is not a kind of sense, but a power of knowing that transcends that of sensation. Usually we see this in the distinction

between men and animals. Though we share with animals various senses, we differ from them by the possession of an intellect. This is the reason we rule over them and use them for our own purposes. No human being—not even a slave—can be ruled and used as animals can be. For animals are generally thought not to possess intellect.

Here Plato may seem to speak otherwise. He speaks as if the souls of men and animals do not differ. Yet, whatever he thinks of the animal soul, Plato clearly distinguishes these powers of sense and intellect and the actions that flow from them.

The distinction of these powers is best considered through the object known. The object known through the senses—sight, hearing, touch and so on—is subject to change and its conditions. The sensible being is distinctly here and now. Even imagination, which can represent what is absent, does so under these conditions of place and time. I can only imagine a particular man, of a certain color, in determinate conditions. If I imagine two men, I must imagine them in different places. The intellect, however, transcends such conditions. For it knows universally. We say not only that we know a man, but we know man. Once something sensed has been grasped by the intellect, man, say, or animal, the mind knows what man or animal is, even when no such thing is present to it. Again, one knows, in a way, every man and every animal, not only those that one has sensed, but those that have been as well as those that will be. This reveals that what is known by intellect, in some way, is not subject to change.

This comes to saying that the intellect knows the nature and the substance of things. The eye sees color, the ear hears sound. These are certain qualities of things. Each sense knows some quality of things, most of the senses know some quantities. Only the intellect pierces to the thing itself and grasps what it is. Even if it does not see what each thing is in great detail, the mind knows it is a being, a living thing or not, an animal or merely plant, and so on. The senses, bound to

qualities and quantities, can never grasp the nature of a substance. Another power, the intellect, must do this. For these differences in the objects demand a corresponding difference in the powers that know them.

This difference, according to perennial philosophy, is nothing other than the difference between the bodily and the spiritual. The senses are powers that reside in the body. Sight is in the eye, hearing in the ear, touch in the whole body. These bodily powers know things in a bodily way, with movement, in place and time. But the intellect knows what is unchangeable in things, even if the things change. For man is still man, even if Socrates is no longer a man. Man is still man, wherever and whenever man exists. The intellect must therefore transcend bodily limitations. It must be spiritual.

Plato presents this difference of intellect and sense throughout his writings.<sup>15</sup> In many of these works, he proposes—I believe only as a hypothesis—that the natures and substances known by the intellect are in fact divine beings, ideas or forms, which exist apart from this corporeal world. To know is to participate or share in these forms, to be united to them. This can only occur if the soul is in some way of the same nature. So the very essence of soul is a distinct share of the divine.

While Aristotle does not think that the intellect, while in the body, has ideal forms for its object, he does agree that certain and unchanging knowledge, even if about changing things, must reside in an unchangeable and therefore immaterial manner. He recognizes that the soul or intellect in which such knowledge is received must therefore be immaterial. Only thus can the human intellect “know all things,”<sup>16</sup> that is know universally, without the bodily limitations of time and place and without being subject to the changes that such limitations impose.

Two teachings of perennial philosophy have been proposed,

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 51e6–52a7.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul* 429a18.

though not fully demonstrated. The intellect is distinct from the several senses, and this intellect must be something spiritual. Before looking at what the intellect does, another teaching of perennial philosophy should be noted. According to both Plato and Aristotle, man *is* or is *most of all* this intellect. They speak differently about this point. Plato identifies man with his soul or intellect. Aristotle holds that both body and soul constitute the man. Yet he agrees that in a sense man *is* his intellect, for the intellect defines man. It constitutes his highest part, in accord with which a man must live. Each philosopher—and every man in some respect—recognizes a man should not live like a witless beast. Thus, this intellect, which is either the most essential part of man's soul or the soul itself, in some sense *is* man.

*The Act of Reasoning.* Now the most obvious of the activities or operations of the intellect is reasoning. Man proceeds from knowing one thing to knowing another. This is precisely the action described above as argument. This activity manifests itself in two ways.

Sometimes we know something and through it see what follows from it. I see that so-and-so is living riotously and conclude he will come to a bad end. Again, I know that the angle of a triangle and the angle exterior to it together equal two right angles. I also know that this angle exterior to the triangle equals its two opposite interior angles. I conclude that the three angles of the triangle equal two right angles. In these cases, I first know a cause of some sort, then through it some effect.

But often we proceed in the other direction. We are aware of the effect and seek knowledge of its cause. We ask for reasons. Why is this or that so. We know it rains or thunders; we would know why. We know that men die; we seek the cause. And note that the intellect is not satisfied by knowing that one man died of poison and another man of drink. A cause is sought why man dies at all, for example, that his

body is subject to changes that destroy its composition. Note further that in finding such a cause, we may well find something more certain than the experiences from which we began. We observe that men die of many different things, and no one knows just how he will die. But the ultimate cause, the body's composite nature, is the cause that man dies.

This search for a cause is of such importance that in the strictest sense we do not really know until we find the cause. Until then we have opinions. We may suspect, we may know vaguely. Sometimes we do know but do not recognize or *know* we know. Nonetheless knowledge seems most secure when we know the cause and know that it is the cause. Plato teaches this in the *Meno*, when Socrates compares true opinion to the statues of Daedalus, so lifelike that they run away. He says,

Opinions, the true ones, so long as they stay a while are a lovely thing and work only good. Yet they don't want to stay very long, but they'll run away from a man's soul, so that they are not worth much, until someone binds them by a reasoning of the cause.<sup>17</sup>

To grasp the cause changes opinion to knowledge. Knowledge in this sense is to understand the aspects of a thing we are familiar with in light of some nature as its cause. This is *why* we seek reasons.

*The Understanding of First Principles.* But the search for reasons cannot go on forever. If knowledge does exist, the mind must stop somewhere, and this cannot be somewhere arbitrary. While the mind may come to know many causes through an argument, the mind must recognize some truths without reasons. The mind must see these truths immediately, without a proof. These must be about things that have no cause at all, such as God, or have no cause within their order, as the point, the circle, and, perhaps, the soul.

---

<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Meno* 97e6-98a4.

The Platonic theory of recollection seems to suppose the first of these. The mind has gazed upon the divine beings that cause these things we sense here in the body. We recall these beings, and by this recollection we know or come close to knowing.

According to Aristotle, the intellect can grasp the natures of sensible things. It abstracts these natures from things, at least at a very general level. In the nature so grasped, the mind can see certain fundamental attributes that belong to that nature. So, knowing animal, it knows that the animal senses and moves himself. Knowing what a whole is, the mind knows that the whole is greater than the part. And no mind could fail to know something, some being, and therefore, that a being is, that a being cannot not be.<sup>18</sup>

Note that this ability is thought to be a natural ability. Neither Plato nor Aristotle think that such an operation demands some desire or appetite. Rather, the intellect sees first truths the way the eye sees color or the stomach digests food, merely from its nature. Plato went beyond his predecessors in this. He saw that intellect differs in nature from the senses, so that it should be able to see first truths. In suit, Aristotle asserts that "the soul is such as to be able to undergo this."<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere

<sup>18</sup> Note that the Platonic notion of ideal forms supposes that we recall abstract ideas which we have seen, but do not now see. The sensible things more striking to us remind us of these ideas. In the thought of Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas these first truths are known in a concrete manner, not yet distinguished from the sense experiences in which we know them. Children know the stove is hot or it is not hot. They argue at length about such questions. But they do not form sentences declaring that being cannot not be, although they know this truth. On either account first truths are known in or through sensible beings. Yet either account, Platonic or Aristotelian, demands some discussion and argument to focus the mind on these first truths, though such truths cannot properly be the conclusions of arguments. Neither account claims that the first statements we can express to others are proportioned precisely to the first truths grasped by the intellect.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 100a13-14.

he discerns the soul's nature from this ability to be conformed to the natures of sensible things. Here, in saying the intellect does this without desire, I am using the word "desire" in its first and strict sense. The word can also be used analogously to signify these natural inclinations. But nowhere in this discussion am I using the word in this extended sense.

Note also that I am speaking about first truths as naturally known to our intellect. There may be first truths in reality which we can only know, in this life, as the conclusion of an argument. For example, if we conclude that God exists or that the highest being is one, as the result of an argument, this would be a fundamental truth. It need not be among the truths that the human intellect has the power to see from its own nature.

Yet that the mind is capable of seeing some first truths, truths that are the foundation of all other knowledge, is the clear teaching of the perennial philosophy. This manifests yet another truth, the order of the intellect to the truth. For the mind first comes alive in the experience of the truth. Even if it does not immediately notice itself, but is attentive only to this truth, it does in fact experience the truth as its good. For this truth conforms the intellect to reality and so satisfies the inclination of its nature. When the mind discovers itself, by analyzing such knowledge, it sees in itself nothing other than a natural disposition to receive such truths. It sees itself as naturally brought to completion and satisfaction by such truth.

But we must also recognize that this order to first truths is, explicitly or implicitly, an order to the divine. Both Plato and Aristotle recognize truth dwelling in the mind to be something immaterial, and to that extent divine. But they also see here an order to beings wholly spiritual. Thus for Plato these first truths are divine beings, the ideal forms, which the intellect beheld before its entrance into the body. Aristotle's thought demands that such an orientation to truth, even if it begins in truths about sensible beings, concludes in truths

about God. He explicitly considers happiness to consist principally in knowledge of God. And this is implicit in his claim that scientific knowledge is knowledge of the cause. Certainly the intellect can know without equivocation when it understands the first causes within a particular order, say geometry. Yet, since God alone is the first cause of all things, the desire of the mind to know the causes of sensible being is incomplete unless it in some way knows God as first cause of all things.

The perennial philosophy therefore teaches, in accord with Christian doctrine, that the human mind is ordered to truth and so is capable by nature of knowing certain first truths, as well as reasoning. If sometimes we reason *from* such truths to others, more often we reason from opinions, conjectures, and things confusedly known *to* the principles or first truths implicit in them and more certain than they are. This too is the inheritance of the perennial philosophy: we must always keep in mind whether we proceed *from* first principles, as usual in mathematics, or *to* them, as is usual in the other sciences.<sup>20</sup> This tradition further teaches us that we can in some way obtain knowledge of God, our first cause, and that the only or most complete satisfaction of the mind consists in such knowledge.

Several other principles were proposed. These include the distinction between intellect and sense, the immaterial nature of intellect, and the close identification of man with his intellect.

### *How Misology Opposes Man's Nature*

Now the misologist must recognize some force in argument or he must cease to argue. No doubt many who live according to appetite rarely care to reason about their actions, as the character Anatole Kuragin in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Such men, living like beasts, are not misologists in the most com-

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a30-b1.

plete form. For they turn from argument, rather than actively oppose it.

Another sort of misologist can be heard in the following passage from Henry James' *The Portrait of A Lady*:

"Don't you see what I mean?" [the Countess] went on, appealing to Isabel. Isabel was not sure she saw, and she answered that she was very bad at following arguments. The Countess then declared that she herself detested arguments, but that this was her brother's taste—he would always discuss. "For me," she said, "one should like a thing or one shouldn't; one can't like everything of course. But one shouldn't attempt to reason it out—you never know where it may lead you. There are some very good feelings that may have bad reasons, don't you know? And then there are very bad feelings, sometimes, that have good reasons. Don't you see what I mean? I don't care anything about reasons, but I know what I like."<sup>21</sup>

Note that this misologist does defend certain propositions. Certain "truths" will be insisted upon. But these are not obtained by the intellect's natural power. These truths depend upon the appetite. So the Countess takes as certain that some good feelings have bad reasons. But the determination of bad and good depends upon her desires. So she testifies to her first truth: "I know what I like."

Yet most striking is perhaps the fact that despite her contempt for argument, the Countess uses argument. Nor is she anxious about the contradictions in her soul. This is something recognized by Socrates, who calls such men "strife-lovers." Men who enjoy only the strife of argument are, as he says, the most likely to become misologists:

And most of all those who pass their time with contradictory arguments end up thinking they've become wisest and only they observe rightly that neither in things is anything sound or secure, nor in arguments, but all things are unruly, as the

<sup>21</sup> Henry James, *The Portrait of A Lady*, ch. 24.

water goes up and down in the straits and doesn't remain for any time.<sup>22</sup>

This phrase, "pass their time with contradictory arguments," describes the forming of arguments to either side of a contradiction, without attention to the truth of the matter. This is represented in many of Plato's dialogues. Pursued for its own sake, it leads to the belief that nothing is stable, in the mind or in reality. As Heraklitos says, "all is in flux," and "You can't step twice into the same river."<sup>23</sup>

Keep in mind that the method of sifting through arguments and considering either side of a contradiction, especially regarding those things that are (or we imagine to be) most fundamental, is in fact a tool essential to the pursuit of truth. But, once divorced from its order to truth and reality, such a method will inevitably turn upon the very first truths. The trial and death of Socrates is perhaps the most striking illustration of this among the Gentiles.

In what follows I shall argue that the misologist, as he develops, must come to hate the mind's natural ability to grasp first truths, to hate those first truths themselves, and to hate his intellect's natural order to the truth. All this is implicit in his willful hatred of argument. For whatever truth the misologist acknowledges springs not merely from the natural operation of his intellect, but from his will and appetite. I shall support each position with examples from modern philosophy, which I understand to be, in many ways, nothing other than a tradition of misology, opposed to the tradition of perennial philosophy.

*Hatred of the Intellect's Grasp of First Principles.* Now if truth is nothing but the mind's conformity to reality, only the natural grasp of primary truths guarantees the truth arrived at by argument. The force of argument is such that the truth or false-

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 90b9-c6.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Cratylus* 402a8-10.

hood of the conclusions depends upon that of the premises. So truth can be obtained by argument only if the mind is conformed to reality in the first operations that spring from its nature.

But once the misologist recognizes such an ability, he must recognize other truths that follow from the truths so apprehended. Thus, if he willfully clings to his hatred of argument, he will deny the intellect's natural efficacy in grasping truth. He may well grant that by an act of will, he can lead the mind to some first truth. Again, aiding the intellect in its first grasp of truth, he may use instruments to supply for deficiencies following upon its dependence on the senses. But he will certainly find fault with the mind's original attempts to receive the truth of things.

So Sir Francis Bacon proposed a new "logic." This logic was to replace the method of proceeding from the principles grasped immediately by the mind with an inductive method founded only on detailed observation of particulars. In the following statements, Bacon traces his difficulty with argument (here named in its most exact form, the syllogism) back to a fault in the human mind:

XIII. The syllogism is not applied to the first principles of sciences, and is applied in vain to intermediate axioms, being no match for the subtlety of nature. It commands assent therefore to the proposition, but does not take hold of the thing.

XIV. The syllogism consists of propositions, propositions consist of words, words are symbols of notions. Therefore if the notions themselves (which is the root of the matter) are confused and overhastily abstracted from the facts, there can be no firmness in the superstructure.

XV. There is no soundness in our notions, whether logical or physical. Substance, Quality, Action, Passion, Essence itself, are not sound notions. . . .<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 41-42.

Bacon clearly recognizes the force of argument. But he limits this force. The syllogism commands assent only to the proposition. It determines our words and thoughts. He will not grant that argument obtains the truth of things.

He supports this with the claim that our original notions are not sound. No one would deny that notions abstracted too hastily cannot serve as firm foundations. Socrates assumed the same in criticizing the misanthropist's over hasty belief that certain men are "honest, sound, and trusty." But Bacon is claiming that the very first concepts of our intellect, those that naturally arise in it through its most fundamental contact with the world, are of this sort.

Now if these notions are not sound, no truth seen in them or proposition that flows immediately from them can be known with certainty. For example, that "one substance cannot be in two places at one time," that "qualities must exist in a subject," that "an agent always produces something like itself." I do not claim these are clearly known to all. Clear knowledge of them requires argument and discussion. Yet, if they are not sound, no amount of argument can clarify them, for the very notions, in which the propositions are seen, are the sources of error. If the human mind does not see the natures of things, it can never see what is universally attributed to it or said of it. On this account, the natural operation of the intellect by which it sees first truths is defective.

*Hatred of First Truths.* The misologist must also turn against first truths themselves, at least insofar as they proceed from the intellect's natural power. For such truths, insofar as they conform to reality, substantiate a sound understanding of the human intellect and its operations. These truths establish the truth of argument independent of human will.

Although this conformance of the mind to reality and the truth of things occurs throughout the life of the intellect, it is nowhere more evident than in the very first truth known

to the mind. This is the truth better known as the principle of contradiction, that "being is and cannot not be." This is the aspect of being that makes it possible for one man to contradict what another man says. Few men ever notice that they know this truth, yet any child that speaks reveals his awareness of it, especially the child that "speaks back." For the child will contend that the stove is hot. He will contradict at length whoever asserts that it is not hot. And even if he changes his position, it is only to insist as doggedly that it is not hot. For he is more certain that it cannot be hot and not hot, than whether it is in fact hot or not hot. His certainty of the principle of contradiction is greater than his certainty about the particular state of the stove at this time. Further, as the example makes clear, he grasps this truth in or through sensible things.

As I have said, the primacy of this truth, that being is and cannot not be, manifests more than any other truth that in the mind's natural operation it grasps the truth of things, of beings. For this truth is nothing more than a grasp of being and a recognition that it is. "Not to be" is opposed to the notion of being and must be denied of it. Further, we see the nature of truth in the same truth. For truth is precisely to say of being that it is, while falsehood is to say of being that it is not. For the mind to possess truth is for it to conform to the being it attends to.

Clearly the "strife-lover" and misologist also uses this principle. Nonetheless, he has changed its name to manifest his insistence that it depends upon his will. He calls it the "law of non-contradiction." "You may not say that being is and cannot not be." But he is not satisfied with this. The most radical of "strife-lovers," as I read him, will attempt to "contradict" the principle of contradiction and say that being *can* in fact both be and not be, but not for any time, because then again it *cannot* both be and not be and *so* it must change. Others object to the primacy of this truth by asserting that

“non-being” is prior to and cause of being. This comes to saying that “non-being is” and that the principle “non-being is” is prior to the principle “being is.”

Yet another way of opposing the principle of contradiction is at once more subtle and more common. It is one we are most of us familiar with, whether we have studied it or not. This is to question whether we know anything through the senses. René Descartes argues that he does not know whether anything exists in the following passages:

But I have found that these [senses] sometimes deceive, and prudence teaches never to trust fully in those who even once have deceived. But perhaps, although the senses sometimes deceive us about very small and distant things, there are yet many others about which one cannot doubt, although they are drawn from the same [senses], as that I am now here, sitting by the fire, dressed in my winter robe, holding this letter in my hand, and the like. . . . Unless perhaps I compared myself to, I don't know, the insane. . . . But these men are mindless, nor would I seem less demented, were I to draw for myself an example from them. Quite reasonable! as if I were not a man who usually sleep at night and experience in dreams all the same things, or even things less likely, than do they waking.<sup>25</sup>

Descartes insists that he does not know anything. He has resisted the truth that “being is.” Whether this truth is known about or through sensible beings is here irrelevant. For the first thing we know is merely “being is,” not what those beings are. We know their existence, not their natures. Descartes does in fact ultimately recognize the principle of contradiction and the existence of sensible beings, but he will not do so in virtue of the mind's natural operation in dependence on the senses.

Descartes then opposes this truth by a determinate act of will. He denies the existence of all external things and so not

<sup>25</sup> René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* I, p. 3-5.

only resists but opposes the grasp of being by the intellect's natural power. He says:

I shall then suppose not the optimal God, the font of truth, but some malign genius, and the same most powerful and cunning, has put all his industry into deceiving me: I shall think the sky, air, earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things nothing other than the mockings of dreams, by which he has set traps for my credulity. I shall consider myself as not having hands, nor eyes, nor flesh, nor blood, nor any sense, but as falsely opining that I have all these. I shall remain obstinately fixed in this meditation, and so, even if it is not in my power to know anything true, yet certainly by all that is in me, with a firm mind I shall beware lest I assent to false things or that deceiver, however powerful, however cunning, be able to impose anything upon me.<sup>26</sup>

Descartes will finally *argue* that these things in fact exist. But he claims that he is not certain of this without this act of will, opposed to the natural grasp that they are or at least something is. He claims that his intellect is naturally incapable of grasping or recalling being through sensible things. Further, to arrive at truth he must attack the first natural conceptions of the intellect and its first experience of the exterior world by an argument to which he clings, against his nature, by his will. He admits *nearly* as much when he says,

they occupy my credulity . . . nearly against my will. . . . Nor shall I ever break the habit of assenting and trusting in them, as long as I suppose them to be as they in fact are, namely, in a certain way doubtful, but nevertheless quite probable, and such as it would be more suitable to reason to believe than to deny.<sup>27</sup>

The force of this movement of his mind is so great, Descartes must use the ruse that God is a wicked demon, “supremely powerful” to form an act of will opposed to it. He says in

<sup>26</sup> René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* I, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* I, p. 11.

unequivocal terms, "wherefore, as I believe, I would do not badly, if, my will turned completely to the contrary, I were to deceive myself. . . ." <sup>28</sup>

I have therefore argued that the misologist conceives the intellect as naturally incapable of grasping truths immediately and consequently attacks such truths, and I have provided examples of this. Already we can see this is an attack on man's natural order to the truth.

*Opposition to Man's Nature.* Perennial philosophy, in recognizing that man is or is most of all an intellect, sees that he is by his nature ordered to knowledge and truth. As can be shown quite broadly, the misologist orders man and all his powers to action. Having divorced the mind from reality at the beginning of its life, he rejects Socrates' interest in attaining to the truth of things. The mind is ordered not to knowledge, but to action. And, as our exterior actions are sought to satisfy the appetite, man is above all not intellect but appetite.

Few have said this as plainly as Friedrich Nietzsche, speaking of man's order to truth as a "will to truth,"

The will to truth which will still tempts us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect—what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! . . . *What* in us really wants "truth"?

Indeed we came to a long halt at the question about the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete stop before a still more basic question. We asked about the *value* of this will. Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance? <sup>29</sup>

Nietzsche thinks it necessary, in the "interest of truth," not merely to ask *why* the intellect seeks truth, but to ask *why*

<sup>28</sup> René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* I, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 9.

not untruth. He recognizes the mind's hesitation before such a question. He knows that the very question he asks is in opposition to one of man's fundamental judgments about his own nature.

Elsewhere Nietzsche continues this thought,

The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment. . . . The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating. And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments . . . are the most indispensable for us. . . . <sup>30</sup>

As stated earlier, he sees the order of the intellect to truth or falsehood as itself ordered to life, by which he means the activities of life.

But we seek activity to satisfy appetite. This explains Nietzsche's phrase "will to truth." He will resolve truth and all natural operations of the living to appetite in later passages,

A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power. . . . <sup>31</sup> Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of one basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power, as my proposition has it; suppose all organic functions could be traced back to this will to power and one could also find in it the solution of the problem of procreation and nourishment—it is one problem—then one would have gained the right to determine all efficient force univocally as—will to power. The world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its "intelligible character"—it would be "will to power" and nothing else.—<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 48.

We have already seen that Descartes demands a movement of the will before the grasp of any first truth. The position of Nietzsche is only the clarification of this demand. All thought has as its purpose life and action, but this is the fulfillment or discharge of some desire or will. Knowledge is sought only for the sake of satisfying some appetite.

This is the state of the misologist. He cares nothing for the truth of things. What he knows and what he seeks in everything is "what he likes." Knowledge is among the means he may use to obtain it. But so are falsehood, uncertainty, and ignorance. I believe I think with Socrates when I say that such a man hates human nature, just as the misanthropist must. But he goes beyond the misanthropist in hating precisely the spiritual and divine character of human nature. And in hating this image and likeness of God, he also hates God himself.

#### Misology and the Immortality of the Human Soul

We have come much closer to the question: What has this business of misology to do with the soul's future life? One additional teaching of perennial philosophy will manifest this link, namely, that the intellect's inclination to know cannot be completely satisfied in this life. Though Plato and Aristotle did not agree in the precise understanding of this truth, each philosopher taught it unequivocally.

*Such Satisfaction Cannot Be Had Completely in This Life.* Now these philosophers certainly teach that knowledge of God can be had in this life and that earthly happiness consists principally in such knowledge. Nonetheless, they recognize that such knowledge can never be complete in this life. For Plato the body must always be an obstacle to perfect sight of the divine. Although Aristotle advises us "to become immortal as much as possible and do all for the life in accord with what is best in us,"<sup>33</sup> he recognizes that on earth such a life is possible

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b33-34.

to us only sometimes, not always, and only imperfectly. They both testify, though in very different ways, that complete satisfaction of the intellect cannot be had in this life.

Yet here these two philosophers must be distinguished. While Aristotle is almost silent about the sort of life led by the human soul after death, Plato not only proposes that intellect is immortal, but that in its life apart from the body, it can attain the satisfaction that eludes it here.

Now, so long as we consider this position, not as opposed, but as conformable to the Christian doctrines of the beatific vision and the resurrection of the dead, this too is part of the perennial philosophy.<sup>34</sup> The body as now possessed limits us to knowledge of the divine insofar as it is the cause of corporeal beings. But when freed from the body, some manner of knowing immaterial beings is proper to the human soul. Further, the natural light of the intellect teaches that God by grace *can* raise the separated intellect to such glory that his own essence is its proper object. The Christian faith teaches that God has in fact established an order by which man can attain to such a satisfaction of the most profound inclination of his nature. When the glorified body is restored in the resurrection, it will belong to a soul raised to the glory of seeing God face to face and can therefore pose no obstacle.

Finally, though I hesitate to say that in this matter Plato saw more clearly than Aristotle, I dare say he saw farther. He understood—and this is the whole burden of the *Phaedo*—that the perfect satisfaction of the intellect must occur outside *this* bodily life. That condition of the mind, when it sees and is conformed to the highest and most divine realities, as it cannot be had here, must be possible in the soul's future life.

*Misology and This Future Life.* In light of these principles misology is clearly not a mere digression in this dialogue. For one and the same aspect of our nature, immateriality, is the source

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 114d7.

of the human soul's inclination to truth and of its ability to exist apart from the body. The intellect's grasp of universal truths is a manifestation of its power to surpass bodily limitations. Our soul inclines by nature to truth and immortality. Neither truth nor immortality can be avoided. Neither is subject to choice. The intellect from its immaterial nature cannot help knowing certain first immediate truths, nor can it avoid the life to come.

But a man can willfully turn against these natural inclinations. By will he can oppose his intellect even to the first truth, which he also holds by nature. This man embraces contradiction, welcomes strife into his soul, and wages war there. The misologist faces death with his intellect turned against its complete and eternal satisfaction possible after death.

Now Aristotle says rightly of this part of the soul, "Separated it only is just what it is, and only this is immortal and eternal." So at death the misologist's body will perish, but not his soul in which contradiction has seated itself. Plato has Socrates state further:

But it is much rather like this. If [the soul] is set free pure, not at all drawn after the body, so that it is in no way defiled by it in this life, but fleeing this and remaining recollected, so that it always practices this—but this is nothing else than to philosophize rightly and in fact to practice dying easily—wouldn't this be the practice of death? . . . So if it is like this, it goes to its like, the unseen, the divine and the immortal, and the wise. Happiness comes to it there, set free from error, lack of understanding, fears, and savage loves, and other human ills, . . . so that it passes the rest of time with the gods.

But, I think, if it is released stained by the body and impure, seeing that it always consorted with the body, cared for it and loved it, bewitched by it and its desires and pleasures, so that nothing else seems to be true, but the bodily, which someone may touch and see and eat and drink and use for sex, but it is accustomed to hate what is hidden from the eyes and invisible, intelligible and grasped by philosophy,

and to tremble at it, and to flee it—do you think such a soul will be released pure, by itself?<sup>35</sup>

And later, about to die as witness to the truth that can be obtained by argument, Socrates urges,

We shall not admit into our souls that there may be no health in arguments, but rather that we are not yet healthy and must be manly and determined to become healthy, for you and the others looking to all your life hereafter, but for me looking to this my death, because I risk at present being not philosophical about it, but strife-loving as those utterly undisciplined.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 80e2-81c2.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 90d9-91a3.