

## *Philosophical tale*

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Bullard, P. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7193-0844>  
(2023) Philosophical tale. In: Cook, D. and Seager, N. (eds.)  
The Cambridge Companion to Gulliver's Travels. Cambridge  
companions to literature. Cambridge University Press,  
Cambridge, pp. 96-108. ISBN 9781108830195 doi:  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108909488.010> Available at  
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/99619/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781108909488.010>

Publisher: Cambridge University Press

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

[www.reading.ac.uk/centaur](http://www.reading.ac.uk/centaur)

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online



## ***Gulliver's Travels* as Philosophical Tale**

**Paddy Bullard**

5133 words

Why should we read *Gulliver's Travels* as a philosophical tale? Jonathan Swift wrote the book as a satire, and expected his readers to laugh at some very silly jokes. But there is plenty of internal evidence that he wanted them to read like philosophers too, at least from time to time. 'The main concern of philosophy', writes the American philosopher Thomas Nagel, 'is to question and understand very common ideas that all of us use every day without thinking about them [...] The aim is to push our understanding of the world and ourselves a bit deeper'.<sup>1</sup> These are Swift's aims in *Gulliver's Travels* as well. The reversals of physical scale that Gulliver experiences in Lilliput and Brobdingnag raise some classic philosophical questions about how we perceive the world. They also trouble our everyday assumptions about what is hugely significant or minutely trivial within it. In Part III the ridiculous mathematicians of Laputa bring Gulliver to doubt that abstract science can ever be the basis for a sound understanding of the universe, as many philosophers of his day argued it should. And in Part IV Gulliver has some deeply held ideas about his species-identity as a rational being put to the test by a race of philosopher-horses. In each fantastic episode the world that Gulliver experiences remains solid and recognizable, and the style in which he describes it plain and matter-of-fact. Gulliver speaks to us, that is, 'rather in a Philosophical than a Rhetorical strain', as the scientist Robert Boyle characterized his own method of writing, 'rather clear and significant, than curiously adorn'd'.<sup>2</sup> Swift gives us journeys in which our common, everyday ideas are fully operational, but in which many of them cannot be taken for granted.

Swift's contemporaries would have been less surprised than we are to find such philosophical provocations in a book of travel stories. The association of philosophy with travelling was well established in the early modern period. Michel de Montaigne praised travel as the great improver of the human soul, 'and I do not know, as I have often said, a better School wherein to model Life, than by incessantly exposing to it the diversity of so

many other lives, fancies, and usances'.<sup>3</sup> René Descartes provided a famous example of such plural modelling in his *Discourse on Method*, tracing the freedom of his thinking back to his experiences as a young traveller:

For having learnt from the very School, That one can imagin nothing so strange or incredible, which had not been said by some one of the Philosophers; And having since observ'd in my travails [ie. travels], That all those whose opinions are contrary to ours, are not therefore barbarous or savage, but that many use as much or more reason then we, [...] I found my self even constrain'd to undertake the conduct of my self.<sup>4</sup>

Gulliver echoes Descartes's observation about the extravagance of philosophers (275), and he discovers the use of reason in some far-flung places.<sup>5</sup> But it is in the overall shape of his *Travels*, in their structure as four interrelated thought experiments, that the philosophical character of the writing is most apparent. Swift's friend and colleague George Berkeley described returning to 'the simple Dictates of Nature' after losing himself in philosophical problems. It was 'like coming home from a long Voyage: a Man reflects with Pleasure on the many Difficulties and Perplexities he has passed thorow'.<sup>6</sup> Gulliver makes a journey into the realm of ideas as well, and it is a sign of the restlessness of Swift's thinking that the satirist grants his hero no such peace of mind when finally he does return home.

Montaigne, Descartes, and Berkeley help us to identify a philosophical component in *Gulliver's Travels*, but they offer no straightforward encouragement to philosophical reading. Our first attempts to find contemporary contexts for this component have led us to passages that reject earlier philosophical writing. They remind us that hostility to philosophers is not incompatible with philosophical engagement. *Gulliver's Travels* is full of anti-philosophical reflections. In Part II Gulliver tries to give lessons in scholastic philosophy to the sensible giants of Brobdingnag, but 'as to Ideas, Entities, Abstractions and Transcendentals, I could never drive the least Conception into their Heads' (195). Swift had his fill of these topics while studying at Trinity College, Dublin: 'to enter upon causes of Philosophy', he complained at the time, 'is what I protest I will rather dy in a ditch than go about'.<sup>7</sup> When Gulliver explains contemporary Natural Philosophy to the Houyhnhnms, his master, a horse not given to humour, cannot help but laugh 'that a Creature pretending to

*Reason*, should value itself upon the Knowledge of other Peoples Conjectures' (402). When Gulliver visits Glubbudrib, an island of sorcerers, the governor conjures the ghosts of Descartes and Pierre Gassendi to explain their ideas to the ghost of Aristotle, who reports that their systems are already 'exploded' (295-6). Metaphysics were a particular bugbear. When Swift's friend Lord Bolingbroke wrote in 1734 with news of his own metaphysical projects, he expected trouble: 'I know how little regard you pay to Writings of this kind', Bolingbroke apologised, 'but I imagine that if you can like any such, it must be those that strip Metaphysics of all their bombast [...] and never bewilder themselves whilst they pretend to guide the reason of others'.<sup>8</sup> Swift replied with stiff compliments. One of his earliest biographers reported that he 'held logic and metaphysics in the utmost contempt'.<sup>9</sup> Any reading of *Gulliver's Travels* as a philosophical tale must adjust to this negative frame of reference.

One way of accommodating a philosophical reading of *Gulliver's Travels* to its author's anti-philosophical attitudes is to focus readings on the themes of writers with whom we know Swift aligned himself intellectually. Swift recognized George Berkeley as 'a very ingenious man, & great Philosoph'.<sup>10</sup> They were both Tory in their political outlook, both senior officeholders in the Church of Ireland, and both took critical positions on mainstream philosophical opinion within that church.<sup>11</sup> Berkeley's books were in Swift's library, although there is no evidence of how Swift read them, if he read them at all.<sup>12</sup> But their presence there shows some of the affordances that contemporary philosophical debate allowed Swift, in terms of the problems that were most pressing in 1726. Berkeley's writings on the relationship between sight and touch indicate the issues at stake when Swift swapped Gulliver between two radically distorted and imaginary subject positions, those of very large and very diminutive persons.

These indications also highlight the perspectivism of *Gulliver's Travels*. Perspectivism, the idea that objectivity is impossible because knowledge is circumscribed by subject position, is implicit in the structure of Swift's satire.<sup>13</sup> The differences between the four Parts of *Gulliver's Travels* suggest that there is no stable relationship between truth 'in itself' and what individuals believe about the world, but only comparisons in quality or scope between

different perspectives. The first [next?] section of this chapter will look further into these questions. A second writer of philosophy with whom Swift had a close (though often antagonistic) friendship was the poet Alexander Pope. Pope's correspondence with Swift during the 1720s and the later systematic statement of Pope's optimistic and harmonizing philosophy in *An Essay on Man* (1733-4) set up contrasts with *Gulliver's Travels* that bring the philosophical character of Swift's satire into relief. They allow us to see the outlines of its broadly anti-Stoic positions: its scepticism about the beneficence of God and nature; its pessimism about the narrow limits of human wisdom and reason; its horror at the prospect of either inciting human pride. The second section of this chapter focuses on these darker tendencies.

### **Gulliver, perception and perspectivism**

One peculiarity of *Gulliver's Travels* is the heightened and intimate character of the physical perceptions reported by its narrator, especially in the first two Parts. In Brobdingnag Gulliver is lacerated by ears of corn, deafened by a cat's purr, nipped and be-slimed in a marrow bone, and knocked out by perfumes (123, 129, 152, 167). In Lilliput it is the visible world that makes deepest impressions. On first waking in Lilliputian bondage Gulliver is half-blinded by the sun while trying to glimpse his six-inch captors. Later, in a puzzlingly intense episode, Gulliver displays his sword for the king. Three thousand bowmen are poised to discharge their arrows, 'but I did not observe it, for mine Eyes were wholly fixed upon his Majesty' (53). As Gulliver draws his blade the sun shines 'and the Reflexion dazzled their Eyes'. These exchanges of bedazzlement and display, of curiosity and surprise, make odd and asymmetrical tableaux within the narrative. But their awkwardness conveys a basic naturalism of style and perceptive psychology, even within the fiction's fantastic setting. Soon Gulliver realises that his eyes are his great vulnerability. He saves them from arrows while raiding the Blefuscan fleet by the lucky expedient of spectacles – tools for sharpening perception repurposed as eye-armour (74). On falling from royal favour Gulliver learns that he is to be blinded: he preserves 'mine Eyes, and consequently my Liberty', only by flight (100, 105). It may also be significant, much later, that 'sight' is the final word of *Gulliver's Travels* (444; cf. 4). But what relevance does this have to the book's arguments about perception?

Swift took a position on contemporary debates about perception, and their significance becomes evident when we look more closely at the character of his descriptive naturalism. An important aspect of Gulliver's reports on his experiences is that in neither Lilliput nor Brobdingnag does the possibility of misapprehension or visual illusion arise. In Houyhnhnmland, by contrast, where bodily scale is undistorted, he fears his 'Brain was disturbed by Sufferings and Misfortunes [...] I rubbed mine Eyes often, but the same Objects still occurred' (341; cf. 13, 431). Why is Gulliver sure of his perceptions among the visual surprises of Parts I and II, but not in physically straightforward Part IV? After all, seventeenth-century philosophers warned their readers continually that the senses, and particularly sight, cannot tell us the truth about the world. Their function is to help us preserve our bodies, not to let us know what things are in themselves: 'our eyes generally deceive us in everything they represent to us', warned Nicolas Malebranche; 'we are very uncertain about the true size of the bodies we see and all we can know of it by sight is the relation between their size and our own'.<sup>14</sup> Gulliver pays lip service to this sort of argument: 'undoubtedly Philosophers are in the Right, when they tell us, that nothing is great or little otherwise than by Comparison', he pronounces. 'It might have pleased Fortune to have let the *Lilliputians* find some Nation, where the People were as diminutive with respect to them, as they were to me' (124). But the unreflective naturalism of Gulliver's descriptions, which seldom involve comparative calculation of scale, does not align with Malebranche's position. Although Gulliver may be a splendid liar, he gives us no reason to doubt his senses, or to think that the reports he gives of everyday experiences in Lilliput and Brobdingnag are prone to error. The naturalism of *Gulliver's Travels* directs us towards a position similar to the one George Berkeley took against Malebranche: that if no visual scale of size or diminution is right intrinsically, it is illogical to describe any given measure as illusive. Even when we understand Gulliver's reports as fictions, they are neither non-veridical nor veridical: 'by *Sensible Things* I mean those only which are perceived by Sense', Berkeley writes; 'in truth the Senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive immediately: for they make no Inferences'.<sup>15</sup> Gulliver tries to reason like Malebranche, but it is to Berkeley's universe of sensible things that he belongs.

Berkeley argues that sight gives us no immediate information about the magnitude of objects, for example, or their distance from us. Our senses make no direct inferences, although meaning is created, when one sense operates along with another, by the inferences we make between them.<sup>16</sup> The ideas we derive from sight and touch are 'twisted, blended, and incorporated together' especially closely, Berkeley emphasises, having 'a far more strict and near Connexion, than *Ideas* have with *Words*'.<sup>17</sup> The connection between seeing and touching in our efforts to make sense of '*sensible Things*' was also important to Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. This becomes clear in Part IV of the satire.

The earliest indication of intelligence in the first two Houyhnhnms Gulliver meets is that their earnest survey of his person involves both looking and touching: 'The grey Steed rubbed my Hat all round with his Right Fore-hoof, and discomposed it so much, that I was forced to adjust it better'; the other, a brown bay, 'stroked my Right Hand, seeming to admire the Softness, and Colour; but he squeezed it so hard between his Hoof and his Pastern, that I was forced to roar; after which he touched me with all possible Tenderness' (337). In Brobdingnag a giant examined Gulliver's clothes, lifting the lappet of his jacket with a straw; now a Houyhnhnm 'felt the lappet of my coat', surprised to find it hang loose (126, 337). Swift is drawing attention to these gestures. The idea that a horse's hoof could be prehensile gives the scene a satirical spin, but it also appeals to our ideas about what intelligent persons look like when working out problems. Here and elsewhere the Houyhnhnms make gestures 'not unlike those of a Philosopher, when he would attempt to solve some new and difficult Phænomenon' (337; cf. 157 and 223). There is a strong current of psychological naturalism flowing beneath the satire and absurdity of Gulliver's encounter with the dapple-grey and brown-bay Houyhnhnms, and it makes its own argument. It shows Swift's position on the modes of intelligent perception – that they are plural – and his understanding that they are distinct from rational problem-solving. Swift's writing is not philosophical as such, but we can see how his friend Berkeley might have recognised it as congenial to his philosophical thinking, and especially to his preference for explanations of human cognition that focus on habitual, immediate, and associative processes, rather than cogitative or inferential ones.



The flatness of Swift's style in *Gulliver's Travels* has been remarked upon often.<sup>18</sup> The prose is polished to a dull burnish, as though to deflect our conjectures about what authorial intention or affect might lurk beneath its surface. And the book has a correspondingly flat ontology. Gulliver makes his reports on midget armadas and giant moralists, on flying islands, ghosts, and immortal Struldbrugs, with the same undistinguishing attentiveness. The kindling of Gulliver's level curiosity into a sort of devotion among the philosopher-horses is the norm-defining exception. At the other extreme of recognisability, there are several incidents in *Gulliver's Travels* in which differences in scale make very familiar objects unidentifiable. In Part IV, the Sorrel Nag is unable to see the small island that Gulliver spots five leagues off the Houyhnhnm-land coast: 'For, as he had no Conception of any Country beside his own, so he could not be as expert in distinguishing remote Objects at Sea, as we who so much converse in that Element' (423). In Part I two Lilliputian functionaries, charged with making an inventory, have mixed success at identifying the everyday contents of Gulliver's pockets.<sup>19</sup> When Gulliver shows the ship's captain who rescues him from Brobdingnag some souvenirs, including a comb made of beard shavings set in a thumbnail, we understand the complacency with which the captain accepts the report of their origin to be absurd (210). The more general point that Swift makes in each of these cases – that perception is itself governed by local experience and habit – is implicit throughout *Gulliver's Travels*.

The implication has parallels with a famous remark of the philosopher J.L. Austin, who disparaged both the attempts of other thinkers to define what they mean by the classification 'material things', and the objects they gave as examples: chairs, tables, book, pens, cigarettes and so on. 'But does the ordinary man believe that what he perceived is always something like furniture', Austin wondered, 'or like these other "familiar objects" – moderately-sized specimens of dry goods?'<sup>20</sup> Swift, who was quick to find humour in bundles of moderately-sized dry goods, would have enjoyed this, and also Austin's refusal to enter into ontological classifications of the things (including 'material things') that ordinary people ordinarily perceive. Berkeley took a similar line: 'the Word *Matter* shou'd never be missed in common Talk. And, in Philosophical Discourses, it seems the best way to leave it quite out'.<sup>21</sup> Swift, like Berkeley and Austin, is carrying out an exercise in philosophical

hygiene. The fictitious surprises that Gulliver reports to us are not in themselves lies or misrepresentations. Swift insists we read them as direct accounts of the visible and tangible qualities of sensible things, without groping irritably after the truth of their being.

### **Gulliver, Reason and Moral Perception**

Islands five leagues distant are not the only things that the Houyhnhnms have difficulty seeing. As Gulliver learns their language and begins to tell them about his home, it becomes clear that they have neither the verbal materials nor the cognitive scaffolding with which to build an understanding of everyday human life. Clothes, lawyers, 'Stargazing' and 'Free-Thinking' are all incomprehensible (351, 373, 375). It is not only for human practices that Houyhnhnms have blind spots. Gulliver finds that his moral vocabulary is untranslatable, particularly the terms '*Lying*' (which they fumble for as '*the Thing which was not*'), '*Opinion*' and, in the final paragraphs of his travels, 'Pride': regarding the last, 'the wise and virtuous *Houyhnhnms* [...] have no Name for this Vice in their Language' (354, 402, 444). The quick and natural rationality of the philosopher-horses is no help to them in their efforts to understand Gulliver's account of his moral life. Gulliver's Master suspects that usage might accustom him in time 'to such abominable Words'. Indeed,

although he hated the *Yahoos* of this Country, yet he no more blamed them for their odious Qualities, then [*sic*] he did a *Gnnayh* (a Bird of Prey) for its Cruelty, or a sharp Stone for cutting his Hoof. But, when a Creature pretending to Reason, could be capable of such Enormities, he dreaded lest the Corruption of that Faculty might be worse than Brutality itself. He seemed therefore confident, that instead of Reason, we were only possessed of some Quality fitted to increase our natural Vices; as the Reflection from a troubled Stream returns to the image of an ill-shapen Body, not only *larger*, but more *distorted*. (367)

Gulliver internalizes this idea, turning away 'in Horror and detestation of my self' when later he glimpses his reflection in a fountain (420; cf. 443). Once again, the visual register of the reflection metaphor is vivid, even though the object of the Master-Houyhnhnm's moral insight in this case is 'some Quality' discerned in Gulliver but not known. What he can work out about this quality is that it has to do with self-relation: the ill-shapen body in the

troubled stream is that of the European Yahoo subject, looking at itself. Otherwise, Houyhnhnms lack the conceptual resources to understand human reason. The poverty of the Houyhnhnms' intellectual system is one with the apparent perfection of their reasoning.

While he was writing *Gulliver's Travels* Swift adopted the Master-Houyhnhnm's pose of indifference to the cruelty of the *Gnnayh* in a famous sequence of letters to Alexander Pope. Swift begins with a paradox. Reflecting on the source of his energy as a writer, Swift decides that his animating indignation is triggered by the human being in abstract, or by any general categorization of human being (nation, profession, community), but not by individuals: 'Upon this great foundation of Misanthropy (though not in Timons manner) the whole building of my Travells is erected'.<sup>22</sup> In his reply Pope makes an awkward joke about Swift's determination to 'be employ'd as an Avenging Angel of wrath'.<sup>23</sup> Swift replies with a demurral, and an allusion:

I tell you after all that I do not hate Mankind, it is vous autr[e]s who hate them because you would have them reasonable Animals, and are Angry for being disappointed. I have always rejected that Definition and made another of my own. I am no more angry with -- th[a]n I was the Kite that last week flew away with one of my Chickins and yet I was pleas'd when one of my Servants shot him two days after This I say, because you are so hardy to tell me of your Intentions to write Maxims in Opposition to Rochfoucault who is my Favourite because I found my whole character in him.

Swift shares with the Master-Houyhnhnm his indifference to the bird of prey. But the satirist, writing *in propria persona*, does not avow any deeper resentment towards creatures who 'pretend' to reason (as Gulliver and his fellow non-Yahoo hominids do), and this distinguishes the author's position from that of his fictional creation. Swift attributes a truly misanthropic disappointment to Pope and his philosophical mentor Lord Bolingbroke ('vous autr[e]s'), but denies it for himself. Swift's allusion here to the French moralist the Duc de La Rochefoucauld suggests that he and Pope both saw their quarrel in a particular philosophical context, and that Swift recognised that context as the foundation of his satire.

What do we know about this philosophical context? For Pope's part, the project of writing 'Maxims in Opposition to Rochefoucault' is on the side of moral optimism, and opposed to Swift's moral anger. 'As L'Esprit, Rochefoucauld, and that sort of people prove that all virtues are disguised vices', Pope explained later to Joseph Spence, 'I would engage to prove all vices to be disguised virtues'.<sup>24</sup> The allusion is to one of La Rochefoucauld's best known maxims, which claims that 'what we take for virtues are really only vices which resemble them, and which self-love has disguised from us'.<sup>25</sup> The plan Pope makes to turn it upside down is fulfilled in 'Epistle II' of his philosophical poem *An Essay on Man*. Self-love in La Rochefoucauld is an obscure, restless, corrupting principle of the unconscious mind. In the *Essay* Pope gives it a positive role, as energy source for our moral passions ('Active its task, it prompts, impels, inspires'), and as counterbalance to slow, comparing reason.<sup>26</sup> The virtues are like grafts upon the 'savage stocks' of those passions: 'What crops of wit and honesty appear', Pope exclaims (perhaps with Swift in mind), 'From spleen, from obstinacy, hate, or fear!'<sup>27</sup>

Pope is positioning himself within a tradition of British moral thought that might be described as Christianised Stoicism. It saw human beings as benign in their deepest moral impulses, and it sought to explain their place in what is ultimately a rational universe.<sup>28</sup> Despite their closeness as friends and writers, as Tories and Scriblerians, Pope recognises Swift's allegiance to an opposing philosophical tradition, that of the seventeenth-century French *moralistes*. This tradition included thinkers like La Rochefoucauld, Montaigne, Jacques Esprit and Blaise Pascal, who (following St Augustine) saw the human will as radically depraved by the fall [Fall?], and continually complicated by *amour-propre*, the self-love that 'gives man this inclination to disguise himself', as Esprit put it, 'because if he appeared as he really is, a self-idolator without concern or affection for any of his fellow creatures [...] he would cause them to rise up against him'.<sup>29</sup> The party lines between Stoic optimism and Augustinian pessimism are less distinct than Pope's scheme implies, but they help to organize the field of ideas in which he and Swift were working.

We need Pope to explain that context because Swift does not do so. A failure to make direct reference to the French seventeenth-century thinkers whom Pope, his closest literary friend

and antagonist, understood to be Swift's immediate intellectual peers, is not inconsistent with the play on self-disguise, pride and hypocrisy evident throughout *Gulliver's Travels*. However, Swift's approach to these topics does not quite match that of his favourite La Rochefoucauld. The *Maximes* focus on the internal experience of *amour-propre*, and on the intricacy of the operations by which pride blinds the subject to its own faults: 'nature', La Rochefoucauld observes, 'which has so wisely arranged the organs of our body for happiness, has also given us pride to spare us the pain of knowing our deficiencies'.<sup>30</sup> Swift is preoccupied more with the external spectacle that this process of delusive self-reflection presents to a virtuous and ideally rational observer. Such is the distorted image refracted by 'some Quality' unknown, like 'the Reflection from a troubled Stream'; such is the 'Lump of Deformity, and Diseases both in Body and Mind, smitten with *Pride*', that breaks the measures of Gulliver's patience in Part IV's climactic paragraphs. Although Gulliver is as full of distorting *amour-propre* as the rest of us, he has a crucial role in that tableau of external observation, because the Houyhnhnms cannot even see the moral character of semi-rational Yahoos without his explications. 'Certain good qualities are like physical senses', writes La Rochefoucauld: 'people who lack them altogether can neither perceive nor understand them'.<sup>31</sup> Houyhnhnm-land is Swift's conjecture that the reverse would also be true for bad qualities, if beings who lacked them could be imagined.

At the beginning of this essay we saw how the motif of travel was used by early modern philosophers as a figure for their different journeys through the realm of ideas. Gulliver's own stolid rationale for his voyage-writing refuses philosophical subtlety: 'a Traveller's chief Aim should be to make Men wiser and better,' he pronounces, 'and to improve their Minds by the bad, as well as good Example of what they deliver concerning foreign Places' (436). But the inconsistency of this sentiment with Gulliver's statements on his irregular and compulsive motivations for travel, as someone 'condemned by Nature and Fortune to an active and restless Life', is evident enough (117; cf. 112, 218). If we take the perspective of the French Augustinians, Gulliver's restlessness looks less like a metaphor for the curiosity proper to a modern philosopher and more like a primary symptom of his fallenness. Suspended between two states, Houyhnhnm '*Perfection of Nature*' and Yahoo baseness, Gulliver's exile from Houyhnhnm-land plunges him into the dilemma that Pascal rehearsed

in his *Pensées*: ‘Man does not know on which level to put himself. He is obviously fallen from his true place without being able to find it again. He looks for it everywhere restlessly and unsuccessfully in impenetrable darkness’.<sup>32</sup> La Rochefoucauld had a similar sense of human restlessness, although he expressed its consequences more mildly: ‘Whatever discoveries have been made in the realm of self-love,’ he predicted, ‘many unknown lands remain there still’.<sup>33</sup> Retired finally to his smallholding near Newark, Gulliver may finally have completed his travels to those unknown lands, but Swift has no reason to grant him a philosopher’s peace.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Nagel, *What Does it All Mean?* Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Boyle, ‘Proemial Essay’ to *Certain Physiological Essays*, 1661, pp. 1-36, at 11; cf. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, ed. David Womersley, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Ian Gadd and others, 17 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), vol. 16, hereafter cited parenthetically by page number; (436): ‘I have not been so studious of Ornament as of Truth’.

<sup>3</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, tr. Charles Cotton, 3 vols, 1685, vol. 3, p. 320 (‘Of Vanitie’, III.9).

<sup>4</sup> René Descartes, *A Discourse of a Method for the Well-Guiding of Reason*, 1649, pp. 26-7.

<sup>5</sup> Swift may have been echoing Descartes, or he may have been referring to Cicero’s *De divinatione*, in *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, ed. W.A. Falconer, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 505 [2.58.119]: ‘Somehow or other no statement is too absurd for some philosophers to make’.

<sup>6</sup> George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, 1713, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Swift to Thomas Swift, 3 May 1692, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift D.D.*, ed. David Woolley, 5 vols, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999-2014, vol. 1, p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> Pope and Bolingbroke to Swift, 15 September 1734, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 759.

<sup>9</sup> John Boyle, Earl of Orrery, *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr Jonathan Swift*, 1752, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Journal to Stella*, 7 to 27 April 1713, *CWJS*, vol. 9, p. 528.

<sup>11</sup> On their shared rejection of Irish representational theories of ideas see David Berman, *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy*, London: Continuum, 2005, pp. 39, 97-102, 125-6.

<sup>12</sup> Dirk F. Passmann and Heinz J. Vienken, *The Library and Reading of Jonathan Swift: A Bio-Bibliographical Handbook. Part 1: Swift’s Library*, 4 vols, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003, vol. 1, pp. 180-188.

<sup>13</sup> Perspectivism is associated especially with Nietzsche: see Alexander Nehemas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 42-73.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, tr. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 32, 25, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> George Berkeley, *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, 1709, pp. 172-3 [CXLVII].

<sup>17</sup> Berkeley, *New Theory of Vision*, p. 56 [LI].

<sup>18</sup> For example Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J.C. Bryce, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 38-9; Barbara Everett, ‘The Sense of Nothing’, in *The Spirit of Wit: Reconsiderations of Rochester*, ed. Jeremy Treglown, Oxford: Blackwell, 1982, pp. 1-14, at 7.

<sup>19</sup> ???

<sup>20</sup> J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962, pp. 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Berkeley, *New Theory of Vision*, p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> Swift to Pope, 29 Sept 1725, *Corr.* vol. 2, p. 607.

<sup>23</sup> Pope to Swift, 15 Oct 1725, *Corr.* Vol. 2, p. 612.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. James M. Osborn, 2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, vol. 1, p. 210 (no. 517).

---

<sup>25</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections*, tr. E.H. and A.M. Blackmore and Francine Giguère, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 173 (IV:172); from the fifth edition of 1678 it became the epigram for the collection.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, ed. Tom Jones, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 35 [II.68].

<sup>27</sup> Pope, *Essay on Man*, p. 42 [II.185-6]; the suggestion that Pope has Swift in mind here is from Dustin Griffin, *Swift and Pope: Satirists in Dialogue*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> See John Spurr, "‘Latitudinarianism’ and the Restoration Church", *Historical Journal*, 31 (1988), 61-82; Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau*, Princeton University Press, 2012, pp. 101-26.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Esprit, *De la fausseté des vertus humaines*, 2 vols (1709), vol. 2, p. 233, cited by Michael Moriarty, *Fallen Natures, Fallen Selves: Early Modern French Thought II*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 241.

<sup>30</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims*, pp. 12-13 [V:36]; cf. pp. 132-3 [V:494].

<sup>31</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims*, pp. 94-5 [V:337].

<sup>32</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, tr. Honor Levi, ed. Anthony Levi, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 8 (no. 19).

<sup>33</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims*, p. 5 (V:3); cf. p. 147 (I.i) and p. 55 (V:191) on restlessness.