

Sarpi: Disconnecting the Mind from the Universe

The following is excerpted and abridged from Michael Kirsch, "Venice and Leibniz: The Battle for a Science of Economy," where references are provided: <http://canadianpatriot.org/venice-and-leibniz-the-battle-for-a-science-of-economy/>.

Sarpi's program was to sever the mind from its compatibility with the universe entirely. This was accomplished in three steps:

First, Sarpi defines the nature of the universe, and the nature of actions of bodies in the universe, as reduced merely to the sensual depiction of the bodies themselves, i.e., the fact that they can be described with length, depth, and breadth, and that they move around in certain ways.

Sarpi argues, according to a summary by Prof. Vittorio Frajese (1994):

"The matter of natural things is nothing else than extended body, understood as being what persists through transformations and never ceases to be. The body is indefinite extension, which, delimited by surface, line and point, assumes a shape. It constitutes, of itself, an infinite and unordered continuum upon which infinite orderings and infinite figures may impress themselves.... Universals have no existence whatsoever. What do exist are bodies, extended and shaped, which determine and cut into matter so as to make up individual objects which man may perceive through external, passive senses, and matched to one another depending upon how they resemble one another, thanks to an active and internal sense."

The next step, to define how man related to that infinitely boring and extended universe, was based on the "man" of Sarpi's nature.

Since the universe of the unseen doesn't exist, the man of Sarpi's mind has no ideas, but only considers



Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623)

sensations. Therefore, Sarpi claims that reason is non-existent: "We distinguish between our senses and our reason, only in order to be able to disclaim responsibility for our acts." [This and subsequent quotes are from Sarpi directly—ed.] In this way, all connection

between the sense perceptions observed by the mind back to the mind itself is removed, in effect, severing the senses from their own subjective origin, in which the power of hypothesis lies. The "scientist" is relegated to using descriptive formulas of Sarpi's so-called "laws," to mechanically extrapolate "future events based upon constant repetition of events past."

Third, since it is only these kinds of laws which mankind can hope for, in a universe which contains and consists of no universals whatsoever, Sarpi defines the Creator of such a universe as powerful, but not necessarily reasonable, and the created and creation itself, unknowable.

And since there was nothing man could seek to discover for himself or posterity, Sarpi explained that orientation to the future, a key to mankind's commitment to the continuity of discovery, was merely an irrational waste of time. Be degenerate he says: "Do not follow opinion that wears the title of truth, but rather opinion that wears the title of pleasure or usefulness."

The wise man, writes Sarpi, "recognizes that his efforts at obtaining knowledge always come up against the infinite, and, knowing this is beyond his grasp, he stops and comes to no final decision on any matter, deciding to live according to the day-to-day appearance of things and, in public, support those beliefs which are commonly held...."

"The end of man, as of every other living creature, is to live ... simply live in the here and now."

In other words, to free oneself from projecting the imagination into the past or future, and enjoy the present time, not for anticipation of the future, but for itself. Like a beast, forget the past and future, trust not in the mind, live for the present means, enjoy the present pleasures, and let the ends work out for themselves.