

Ignorance and Bliss

The great triumphs of modern science, from splitting the atom to unraveling the human genome, increasingly raise a troubling question: Is the pursuit of knowledge always a good thing? A long tradition in Western thought—largely ignored even by today’s critics of science—says it is not.

by Mark Lilla

“**O**nce upon a time there was a great rabbi in Prague.” Thus began a charming speech given in 1969 by the Jewish historian and thinker Gershom Scholem, who had been asked to preside over the dedication of a new computer at an Israeli research institute. He dubbed the machine “Golem Aleph” (or Golem #1), referring to the traditional Jewish myth of the golem, an artificial creature fashioned by men through the magical arts. There are many versions of this legend, but on that day Scholem had in mind the most famous one, which involves the 16th-century rabbi Judah Löw of Prague.

The story goes that Rabbi Löw made a clay figure and endowed it with the power of his own mind, though that power derived ultimately from God. The transfer was effected when the rabbi wrote God’s name on a slip of paper and put it into the golem’s mouth, animating the figure. From that moment on, the golem served the rabbi and did his bidding—except on Friday evenings, when Rabbi Löw would remove the slip of paper for the Sabbath and give the golem the day of rest all humans are obliged to observe. Yet rabbis, even great ones, are notoriously absent-minded. So it happened one Friday that Rabbi Löw forgot to remove the divine name from the golem’s mouth and left the creature home alone while he went to the synagogue. No sooner had he departed than the golem grew to giant proportions and began raging through the streets of the Prague ghetto, threatening all in its path. The rabbi was called from his prayers by the frightened population, and with some effort he managed finally to tear the paper from the golem’s mouth and render the creature powerless, a block of inanimate clay.

Scholem told the story humorously, making many witty comparisons between the clay golem of Prague and the new golems of transistors and wires.



The Poem of the Soul: The Passage of Souls (1855), by Louis Janmot

But as with most stories that begin “once upon a time” and include rabbis, this one had a serious point. Scholem finished with an exhortation to the creators of the modern golem: “Develop peacefully, and don’t destroy the world.” That for him was the lesson to be drawn from the golem legend. Although we are created in God’s image, our aspiration to become like God is fraught with dangerous temptations. For once we learn something from God, and use that knowledge to create, what need have we of our own creator? Scholem was convinced that Nietzsche’s pronouncement of the death of God was foreshadowed parabolically in the Cabalistic tale of the Prague golem, and he may very well have been right.

But Scholem’s speech overlooked a dimension of this version of the golem story that another great Cabalist, Sigmund Freud, probably would have seen. Among the many things Freud got right was that our myths, like our dreams, often mean more than they mean to mean; sometimes they enact the fulfillment of a wish we dare not admit to ourselves. Taken on its surface, Scholem’s golem fable appears straightforward. Like the ancient myth of Prometheus, or the modern one of Frankenstein, it is a cautionary tale about hubris, with the rabbi representing mankind and the golem representing man’s works—what we call today science and technology. The moral of the story appears to be simple, though important: Man must always beware that

the divine powers entrusted to him not escape his control.

But let us consider the story from a different angle. What if its subject is not human creation, but divine creation—that is, what if the golem is meant to represent man himself? Scholem hinted at this possibility in his speech when he remarked on the old rabbinic traditions that consider Adam to have been the first golem, who became human only after God breathed life into him. Let us pursue this possibility and assume, for the moment, that the golem represents us, mankind. What might the fable mean then?

It begins to sound like a lament, a cry of complaint against the cruelty of a God who created us in his image and breathed his powers into our lungs. We have no reason to doubt that the golem was content before it was animated by the rabbi; we can even imagine that it remained happy after receiving the divine name, so long as it could live and work without having to speak or think. But on that fateful Sabbath when Rabbi Löw forgot to remove the name and the golem grew in stature and power, not only did it become a threat to the good people of Prague, but it also lost the happiness of its innocent, pious existence. The fable describes the threatened destruction of Prague. With a little psychological sophistication we might see in it as well a symbolic representation of the golem's *own* loss, for its innocent world has also been destroyed. Only when the rabbi finally seizes the divine name from the beast's mouth is the wish buried in the dream fulfilled: The golem—and through him, mankind—is relieved of the burdens of mind and language and freed to return to its original state of ignorance and bliss.



The source of the proverb “Ignorance is bliss” is a poem by the 18th-century English poet Thomas Gray, who wrote in passing: “Where ignorance is bliss,/ ’Tis folly to be wise.” Though the poem is now forgotten, the verse remains very much alive in the English language and reminds us of an important and often forgotten element of our intellectual and spiritual tradition, especially as that tradition has been filtered through the European Enlightenment. The assumption of the Enlightenment was that ignorance is, always and everywhere, a curse, and that lifting it is the duty of all magnanimous thinkers. This is not to say, as some have charged, that the Enlightenment was in the grip of its own ignorance—a naive optimism about our ability to reason, or a blind faith in the progress to be expected once the shackles of religion and despotism were removed. The mainstream of the Enlightenment was actually quite pessimistic about how much ground an army of writers and scientists could hope to gain against the well-trained battalions of cardinals and privy councilors. Their optimism lay not in their faith in ultimate success but in their unquestioned assumption that every inch of terri-

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tory won back from the forces of darkness would be transformed into a garden. Knowledge, they believed, could only contribute to happiness.

Malleable though it may be, this equation of knowledge with happiness can be found at the very root of the Western philosophical tradition—one is tempted to say, it *is* the root. Plato's *Republic* takes a long detour through the issues of politics in order to establish to the satisfaction of two young men that knowledge, virtue, and happiness are identical. The crux of the conversation is to determine what *constitutes* knowledge, virtue, or happiness and what is the genuine object of each, and the questions are complicated by the recognized difficulty of turning recalcitrant human nature around and enticing it out of the cave. But genuine knowledge, were we to achieve it, would be happiness; that is the Socratic position. And although no subsequent thinker has been so bold as to defend without qualification the equation of knowledge with happiness, it remains an inspiration to the mainstream of philosophical and scientific tradition down to our time.

Of course, there have been important modifications. Aristotle contrasted intellectual virtue with the moral virtues and distinguished the kinds of happiness each could bring; the Stoics and Skeptics, ancient and modern, raised doubts about our capacity for knowledge and the existential posture we should adopt toward ignorance; Kant tried to wean us from vain metaphysical speculations and to refocus our attention on the moral duties revealed through practical reason; Marxists and structuralists cast dark shadows of ideological suspicion on any claim to impartial knowledge; American pragmatists attempted to reorient our thinking from the search for unshakable principles to the continuous revision of intellectual constructs in line with practical demands and interests. Yet in every one of those cases, however strong the critique of our faculties or the prudential warnings against over-reliance on them, and however developed the recognition of the variety of human pursuits and the kinds of happiness they can bring, knowledge as such is never considered to be a potential source of unhappiness, or ignorance a kind of bliss.

There is, however, a countercurrent in the Western tradition that rejects the Socratic equation, and not merely on skeptical or stoic grounds. This current of thought portrays the human pursuit of knowledge, whether about the world or the self, as a curse under which we suffer and from which we should struggle to free ourselves. In this countertradition, which is mythical, religious, and sometimes philosophical, many charges have been brought against knowledge and its pursuit, and they are not always consistent and coherent. But it is possible to distinguish two different indictments: the charge that the pursuit of knowledge is impious, and the charge that the acquisition of knowledge corrupts the young.

The charge of impiety assumes a theology—that there is a god (or gods) who is offended by our behavior, and that angering a god seldom contributes to one's well-being. But whether or not we share the theological assumption, we can all see the psychological force of the charge, for it focuses on a characteristic of our behavior about which we clearly have mixed feelings. That characteristic is human curiosity. By the time of the European

Enlightenment, curiosity had been so thoroughly rehabilitated as a virtue that Kant's challenge — "*Sapere aude!*," dare to know — was taken up by the man in the street, who now asserted his right to be curious. Yet for many centuries, curiosity had been considered a serious vice, closely associated with vanity, and both were taken to be targets of divine retribution. To dare to know is to tempt the gods and risk losing their favor, without which no one can be happy. "Know thyself," interpreted theologically, means know thy place.

The mythological warnings against curiosity are many and well known: the story of Prometheus, and the related myth of Pandora and her box of trouble; in Genesis, the account of the tree that brings knowledge of good and evil, and the story of the tower of Babel. The folk-tale of the golem echoes the same fear expressed in those earlier myths: that by seeking knowledge, we seek to become like God, and for punishment will be placed a little closer to the beasts. Less dramatic, but no less effective, is the ambiguous lesson the Hebrew Bible teaches regarding curiosity. Take, for example, those verses that address the momentous question of whether we are to seek God's face, and, if so, how we are to go about it. In the First Book of Chronicles (28:9), David tells Solomon, "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever" — which is a promise but not a command. The psalmist, however, sings of precisely such a command delivered by his heart and of the fear it evokes in him: "In Thy behalf my heart hath said, 'Seek ye my face.' Thy face, lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face from me" (Psalm 27:8-9). Stronger still is a verse from the prophet Amos, which carries with it an implied threat: "For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel: Seek ye me, and [ye shall] live" (5:4). From those verses, it seems we are to conclude that, as God's creatures, we are duty bound to seek him out. He is not a completely hidden god, though sometimes he covers his face; neither is he an idol always present for inspection. He must be sought out — and that implies, or at least has been taken to imply, a certain sanction for our curiosity about him and his creation.

Yet the Hebrew Scriptures are also careful to hem in our curiosity, lest it excite our pride. "The knowledge of the All-Holy is understanding" the proverb goes, though we are first warned that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). In seeking knowledge of God, we must seek wisely, and wisdom, it turns out, is not derived from the knowledge we pursue: Wisdom is acquired through piety, and tempered by fear. "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5) is not a sanction for willful ignorance, as many mystics, mainly Christian, would later assume. But it does set a precondition of piety on any fruitful pursuit of knowledge, and therefore on happiness. "I love them that love me," another proverb states, "and those that seek me earnestly shall find me" (8:17). That is, only if we love God can we expect to be loved in return, and only then will he reveal his face to us. If we do not love God, our pursuit will be in vain — or worse, if the haunting words of Ecclesiastes are to be believed: "In much wisdom is much vexation, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (1:18).

That paradoxical message, which conditions knowledge of God on piety toward the God we wish to know, is maintained in almost identical terms in the Christian gospels. Jesus preaches, “Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7), which seems to promise that our curiosity will be divinely rewarded. But he also teaches what the primary object of our search must be: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Jesus holds out the promise that “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), but in the preceding verse of the Gospel of John he lays down the following condition for attaining the truth: “If ye shall continue in my ways, then are ye my disciples indeed.” First things first, Jesus teaches: No one comes to knowledge, or happiness, except through me.

In St. Paul, however, any ambiguity in this message disappears, to be replaced, within a major tradition of Christian thinking, by a frontal attack on the impious pretension of philosophy, and by a celebration of holy ignorance that has no antecedents in orthodox Judaism. Perhaps the most notorious figure in this tradition is the early church father Tertullian, who equated philosophy with heresy by asking contemptuously, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” Martin Luther followed in this line when he held up Abraham as an example of someone who knew how to “imprison his reason”: “Listen, Reason, thou blind and stupid fool that understandest naught of the things of God. Cease thy tricks and chattering; hold thy tongue and be still! Venture no more to criticize the Word of God. Sit thee down; listen to His words; and believe in Him. So do the faithful strangle the beast.” Yet Tertullian and Luther are only the most prominent and rhetorically accomplished figures in a tradition that flows directly from St. Paul and his fiery attack on philosophy in his first letter to the Corinthians:

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. . . . Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1: 19-21, 25).



“**T**he foolishness of God is wiser than men.” Ever since St. Paul, the holy fool has been a central motif in the Christian imagination, and he appears and reappears in various guises in the secular literature of Christendom—from Cervantes’s *Quixote* to Dickens’s *Mr. Pickwick*, from Melville’s *Billy Budd* to Dostoyevsky’s *Prince Myshkin*. The Christian holy fool is taken to be pious, and therefore happy, *because* he is ignorant—*because* his ignorance is preferable to the wisdom of men.

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But why should this be? It might perhaps be more reasonable, theologically speaking, to assume that his ignorance would tempt him into impiety or sin, because he would know no better. There seems to be no explicit sanction for this sort of ignorance in Judaism, not even among those, such as the Hasidim, who seek an immediate, ecstatic experience of the divine. (Gimpel the Fool is no Prince Myshkin.) But in Christianity there *is* such a sanction for ignorance, in explicit opposition to the Jewish ideal of being learned in the law.

Why is that so? What is it about Christianity that permits it on occasion to idealize human ignorance, and in all cases to be profoundly sympathetic to it? This is a deep question that cannot be fully answered without taking up the old—and now rather scandalous—issue of the uniqueness of Christianity. But however we stand on that issue, we must still concede that a significantly new element of the Christian message was its glorification of innocence—the innocence of the child, whose ignorance is next to the godliness of the saint. For it was Jesus himself who, when asked by his disciples who is the greatest in heaven, answered by calling a child to him and saying:

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3-4).

And again:

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein (Mark 10:14-15).

Christianity is unimaginable without these images of innocence. The most significant one, of course, is that of the Christ child swaddled in the manger, an image as venerated by Christians as the image of Christ on the cross. Indeed, because the holiday of Christmas has now totally eclipsed Easter, one is tempted to say that the baby Jesus is more important to Christians today than the crucified Christ, who has become something of an embarrassment.

Other images of innocence include plants (“Consider the lilies of the field”) and animals (“Behold the Lamb of God”). What lilies and lambs share is the original whiteness of creation, a sign of their purity; what lambs and children share is a lack of maturation, the assumption being that the forces of nature that develop a creature to its final end actually spoil it. This much is clear: Whoever or whatever would rob the child of his innocence is guilty of corrupting the young. But the images imply something more, which is that development itself, whether natural or artificial, is suspect because it occurs at the cost of innocence (even Thomas Aquinas did not succeed in uprooting that assumption from the Christian mind). “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like these” (Matthew 6:28-29). If



Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me (1538), by Lucas Cranach, the elder

the lilies toil not, if they trust completely in God's bounty, why are we so eager to expand our knowledge and master our fate?

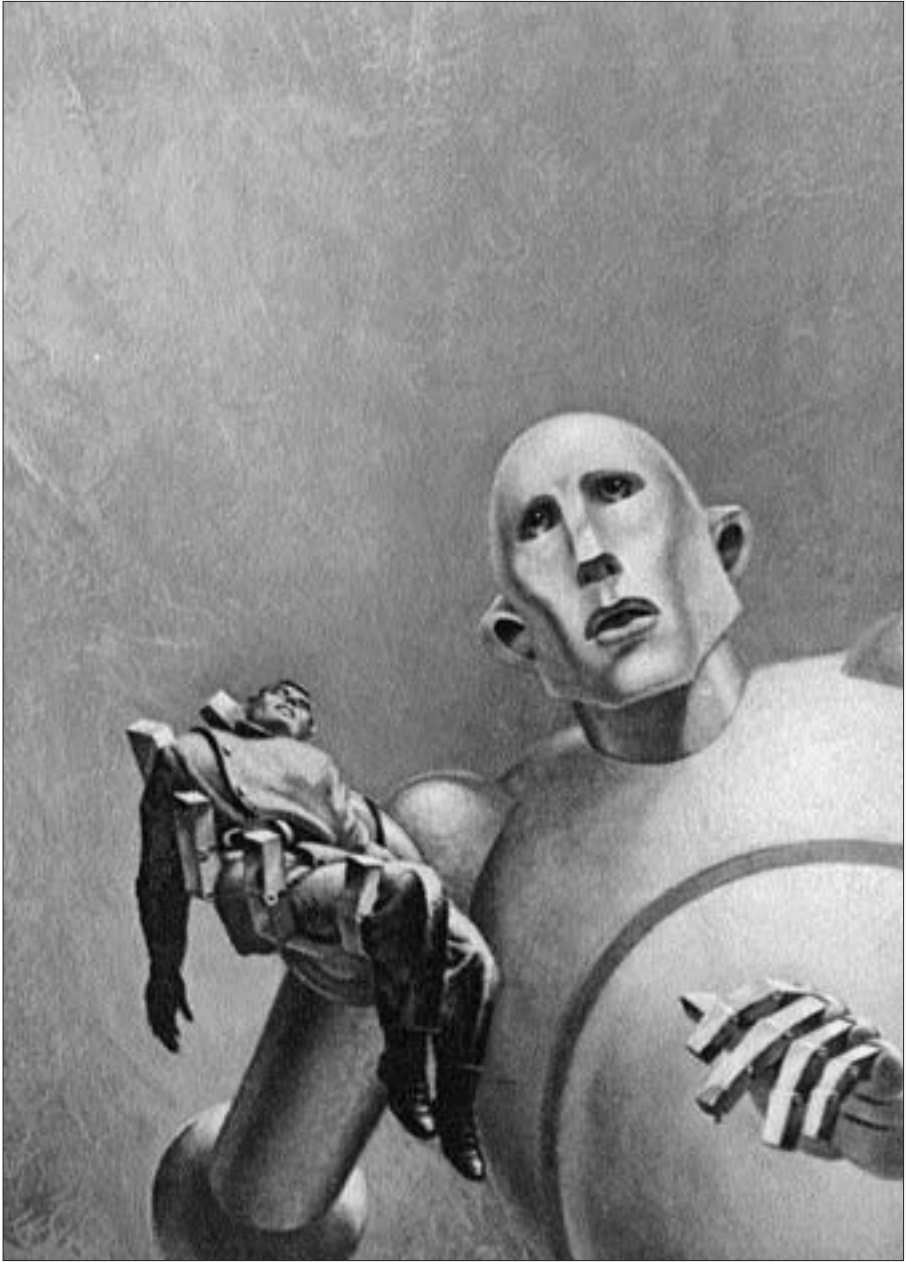
Among the many spiritual and social forces that corrupt our childlike innocence, St. Paul and Tertullian singled out for special condemnation the pretension to wisdom, especially through philosophy. "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world," Paul writes, "let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:18-19). Or again, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Believers are to shun philosophy not only because it questions revealed truths and propagates falsehoods, but because it robs us of that innocent, childlike ignorance into which we are reborn through Christ Jesus. As we have learned to expect, it was Tertullian who followed the logic of this thought to its most extreme conclusion, declaring in no uncertain terms that "it is better for you to remain in ignorance, lest you should come to know what you ought not because you have acquired the knowledge of what you ought to know."

Orthodox and rationalist forces within Christianity have continually had to do battle with this moral ideal, which lies at the heart of countless enthusiasms and heresies. So powerful is the ideal that it has even managed to outlive belief in Christian revelation in our secular age. Misgivings about human curiosity have not fared so well, for it has proved difficult to express them in any terms but those of piety, and an impious age such as ours is unlikely to feel their force. In the mid-17th century, Pascal could still write that "the greatest illness afflicting man is his nervous curiosity about things he cannot know," but he was the last great religious critic of this vice until Kierkegaard.

A century after Pascal, however, the charge of corrupting the young through reason and the accumulation of knowledge was given new life, independent of belief in Christian revelation, by Jean Jacques Rousseau. The work that first made Rousseau famous, his *Discourses on the Sciences and Arts* (1750), sang the praises of “the happy ignorance in which eternal wisdom has placed us,” and his song soon became a rousing chorus heard from one end of Europe to the other. Never before the appearance of Rousseau’s writings had the lives of simple people and simple minds appeared so attractive and the pursuit of knowledge seemed so perverse and destructive of happiness.

Yet Rousseau was no Tertullian, let alone a Luther, and therein lay his power. Rousseau was willing to concede that the happy ignorance of the natural state left us stunted, and that we could perfect ourselves only by leaving it and developing our mental faculties. Such a move was necessary, and inevitable. Yet it also meant the loss of the only complete happiness we will ever have known, and it carried the threat of moral corruption. Our blessed innocence could not be recovered, certainly not through the kind of Christianity preached by St. Paul, Tertullian, and Luther. Instead, the most Rousseau thought possible was the establishment of a counterideal of sincerity and authenticity, to be cultivated by a new education devised to keep our curiosity well directed and within moral bounds. His insight, which he elaborated in the treatise *Émile* (1762), may be summarized as follows: The only way to challenge the artificial world that human curiosity has bequeathed to us is to construct a morally responsible yet equally artificial system of education that will preserve our natural innocence for as long as possible before sending us into the world. The draft of the sequel to *Émile*, left unfinished at Rousseau’s death, suggests that even this carefully crafted education will be insufficient to ward off the corruptions the world prepares for the innocent.

“Learn to be ignorant,” Rousseau beckons in *Émile*, “you will betray neither yourself nor others.” The artfulness of this dictum is that it takes the Christian ideal of innocence and (almost) makes it speak Greek, persuading us that the only way to know oneself genuinely is to maintain a prudent ignorance of much that lies beyond the self, and an unreasoned attachment to what is originally one’s own. In Rousseau’s hands, this aspiration is made to sound beautiful and noble, and it remained so in the imaginations of Goethe and Schiller, whose classical ideal of “recaptured naïveté” (*wiedergewonnene Naïvetät*) owes much to Rousseau. But beginning in the 19th century and continuing down to our time, the modern ideal of learned ignorance, in coarser hands, took on an altogether different character and became harder and more willful. Once freed from Christian humility, the myth of lost innocence created a powerful thirst in Europe for a re-enchanted world that would fill the voids and erase the indifference that modern man, following Rousseau, now believed to be inseparable from modern life. This yearning is familiar to us in all its forms today: aesthetic, religious, philosophical, political. What is perhaps less apparent is how precisely the sacred image of the innocent child entering the Kingdom of God was transformed into Rousseau’s daydream of *Émile*, only to become the grotesque nightmare of Wagner’s Siegfried.



The Gulf Between Man and Robot (1953), by Frank Kelly Freas

The most profound figure to think through this myth of innocence and make it his own was undoubtedly Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was not taken in by Siegfried, for he quickly discerned Wagner's psychological shallowness and ersatz nobility. Yet Nietzsche's abandonment of lugubrious Bayreuth, and half-serious promotion of Bizet, was inspired by an even deeper appreciation of the link between ignorance and human happiness. Nietzsche begins his famous essay "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life" not with the words of the Gospel, "Consider the lilies of the field," but with the exhortation "Consider the herd grazing before you"—for it is the cow, slowly nibbling its grass, ignorant of the past and unconcerned about the future, that

inspires Nietzsche's admiration. The cow is a master of forgetfulness, an art that modern man, burdened above all by historical knowledge and consciousness, has lost. Man's new historical knowledge weighs him down; he knows what great men have achieved and feels himself to be small; he knows that other civilizations have risen and collapsed, and feels his own to be contingent and ephemeral. Man's pursuit of knowledge, now extended from the physical world to the historical world, has rendered him smaller than he once was: The more he knows, the less he is, and the less he is, the less happy he is. "Whoever cannot settle on the threshold of the moment forgetful of the whole past," Nietzsche writes, "whoever is incapable of standing on a point like a goddess of victory without vertigo or fear, will never know what happiness is, and worse yet, will never do anything to make others happy."

In his later books, Nietzsche developed a whole psychology based on his insight that two antagonistic drives are at war in the human soul: the will to knowledge and the will to ignorance. Both wills are present in every human being and every culture, Nietzsche teaches, but a human being or a culture can be healthy and strong only if the battle between the two drives reaches the highest intensity. In an age of total darkness, Nietzsche might have written in praise of the light of knowledge; yet he felt himself to be living in an age of blinding illumination, in which the modern European seemed to stand utterly naked, paralyzed by his smallness and weakness and in despair of ever recovering his strength. In such an age, Nietzsche was convinced he had no choice but to celebrate "a suddenly erupting decision in favor of ignorance, of deliberate exclusion, a shutting of one's windows, an internal No to this or that thing, a refusal to let things approach, a kind of state of defense against much that is knowable, a satisfaction with the dark, with the limiting horizon, a Yea and Amen to ignorance."



Nietzsche's "Yea and Amen" to ignorance is a loud, aggressive cry that rings differently to our ears than does the rueful lament of Ecclesiastes, "He who increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow," or the whispered invitation of Jesus, "Become as little children." Yet if we listen closely to all three voices, I think we begin to hear not the strains of influence, still less those of harmony, but a common chord of *moral* doubt about the Socratic equation of knowledge with happiness. I stress the *moral* to distinguish this kind of skepticism from epistemological doubts about the possibility of genuine knowledge. Epistemological skepticism raises genuine issues about the status of modern science, but it does so in the skeptical spirit of the sciences themselves, which breathe the oxygen of systematic doubt. Moral skepticism about the pursuit of knowledge in general, and the modern sciences in particular, is of a different order: It accepts that genuine knowledge and science are possible but questions their worth, on the assumption that the issue of "worth" is not one the sciences can decide. And on this point, at least, the moral skeptics are in agreement with modern science, which was

founded on the explicit assumption that knowledge breeds happiness—and then abandoned that assumption in the last century on the grounds that it could be supported only on the basis of nonscientific “values.”

The moral critique of science runs back many centuries, but it lacked a coherent and responsible voice in the century just past, though it did echo disturbingly in the thought of Martin Heidegger. The sciences have come under attack recently by academic critics who believe themselves to be inspired by Nietzsche, yet these critics stubbornly avoid discussing the morally ambiguous ideal Nietzsche defended: the “health” of the species. In reading our contemporary critics, one senses the moral revulsion against science that animates them and wonders why they don’t examine the nature of that revulsion. Instead, they cast a shadow of suspicion on the knowledge claims of science, which are entirely beside the point. The deeper issue is not whether knowledge through science is possible (it is); the issue is whether that knowledge is good, and on this question serious minds have been divided since the very beginning of our civilization.

In her novel *Daniel Deronda* (1874–76), George Eliot writes, “It is a common sentence that Knowledge is power; but who hath duly considered or set forth the power of Ignorance?” Eliot understood that ignorance is not simply the absence of knowledge, that for many it is an aim and a motivating force in its own right. It is good to be reminded of the moral significance of the old notion that ignorance opens a path to happiness, for if we are to judge by the history of our sacred and profane literature, the wills to knowledge and ignorance are permanent features of the human psyche. All human beings may, as Aristotle thought, desire to know; but our tradition, in which the golem legend has a small place, also teaches that we sometimes actively wish not to know—that we prefer to remain in the dark, convinced that it is warmer there. That is an understandable wish, is it not? Yet like so many wishes, it has the power to draw us toward mad schemes that promise to satisfy it—and that cause us to ignore the human price we would pay for achieving what we desire.

When the Spanish thinker Miguel de Unamuno heard Goethe’s apocryphal last words—“Light, light, more light!”—he famously retorted, “No, warmth, warmth, more warmth! For we die of the cold, not of the darkness. It is not the night that kills, but the frost.” The assumption of the Enlightenment—indeed of every Enlightenment since the time of Socrates—has been that darkness and coldness are inseparable, and that the light generated by the sun will also warm us. The assumption of the countertradition I have been describing is that the darkness, or at least the twilight, is a more appropriate setting for us, that we will be happy only if we learn to live within this more limited horizon. This countertradition prides itself on its piety, and indeed it does have something to teach us about respecting our place between “the beasts and the gods.” Yet it also expresses the impious, perhaps Gnostic, wish that the drama set in motion in Eden had never begun, that the divine name might still be snatched from our mouths, that we might return to what is more elemental in us—dissolve back into the earth and experience once again the bliss that preceded creation. □