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A MEETING OF MINDS:

FREDERICK THE GREAT AND VOLTAIRE

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Washington and Lee University. Senior Honors Thesis

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### Bibliographical Note

Primary source material for this paper in addition to Frederick's and Voltaire's respective works was their correspondence which began in 1736 and ended in 1778. The original correspondence was exclusively written in French, but for this paper the selection and translation into English by Richard Aldington was used. Mr. Aldington includes two hundred and twenty-three of these letters. In his Note Mr. Aldington says:

"In selecting these letters I have tried to include as much as possible. The principles of omission adopted were these:

"1. All letters and almost all passages occupied solely with the correction of Frederick's French style have been left out.

"2. Most of the versified correspondence and verse passages have been omitted except where the retention seemed absolutely necessary.

"3. Letters and passages of letters repeating topics and ideas already discussed have usually, though not always, been omitted.

"4. Finally, all letters and passages of letters which to the translator's taste appeared less striking or interesting have also been omitted.

"The total number of letters preserved in this correspondence is 654, of which 223 are given here wholly or in part."

The letters were divided by date into sections representing significant periods of their acquaintance. Within each section the letters were considered according to subject

rather than chronology. After grouping the several letters into categories, their content was synthesised either by a quotation which in my estimation accurately contained the substance of all those particular letters or a paraphrase of that substance. Almost all of the letters dealt with philosophical or personal questions which have not lost their timeliness. Omitted were personal invectives.

## Frederick and Voltaire: 1736-1740

In 1735 the actual fighting of the War of the Polish Succession had come to a close and negotiations were being made which ended in the Treaty of Vienna, November 18, 1738. Central Europe was at peace.

Frederick's childhood had not been one of joy and princely leisure. After the Katte affair,<sup>2</sup> Frederick Wilhelm I had imposed a rigid probationary schedule on his son which included tedious hours of military drill, administration, economics, and the Calvinist religion. Bowing to the imperious will of a still hostile and unreconciled father, Crown Prince Frederick married Elizabeth of Brunswick, who was his father's choice (he, himself, being interested in an English Hanoverian princess). On this marriage he said, "When all is said and done ..... there will be one more unhappy princess in the world."<sup>3</sup> Gradually his father restored him to favor, increasing his provisions and his rank. In 1736 Frederick was established at Rheinsburg, a sizeable but relatively unimportant holding of Prussia on the Rhine River, and given command of a Regiment. Rheinsburg was Frederick's headquarters and home for the next four years; then he became King of Prussia.

Having a considerable measure of independence at Rheinsburg, being no longer under the strict supervision of three noblemen, Frederick "profited by idleness by devoting myself to the study of philosophy and history, and amused [himself] with poetry and music."<sup>4</sup> These pursuits had been precisely what had angered his father when Frederick was a younger boy, an anger which was precipitated into rage at his attempted flight, but Frederick Wilhelm I now made no objections. The main reason for this was that Frederick had convinced him of his sincere interest in armies, inspections, and affairs of state. Eventually quite a feeling of affection arose between father and son, the former incompatibles.

These quiet years at Rheinsburg were perhaps the happiest of Frederick's life; here he could devote himself to any occupation that he chose, as long as he reviewed his Regiment before lunch. These four years were Frederick's reflective years, when matters of state did not require so much of his time. In 1736 he was 24 years old.

Like his grandfather,<sup>5</sup> Frederick admired everything French. Except for German philosophy, little in the German language appealed to him for study. In 1736 he wrote to Voltaire, whom he greatly admired, asking that Voltaire

exchange correspondence with him and provide him with manuscripts of his work. At this time Voltaire was not enjoying official recognition nor immense acclaim throughout France; this would come later in his life.

In 1736 Voltaire was forty-two years old. His career to that date had been filled with exiles, arrests, surreptitious printings, epigrams, plays - successful and unsuccessful, - mistresses, and money. He had written his first play, Oedipe, which was produced in 1717 and enjoyed some success. His next play, Artemire, was a failure. He had written the Henriade, an epic about Henry IV, Marianne, L'Indiscret, Brutus, L'Histoire de Charles XII, Lettres Philosophiques sur les Anglais, Eriphyle, Zaire, and Temple of Taste. In 1733 Voltaire met Madame du Chatelet, who became a strong influence over him. In 1734 another one of those warrants was issued for his arrest following the condemnation of his Lettres and some unauthorized publications. Consequently, Voltaire fled Paris for Cirey and the hospitality of Madame du Chatelet. There, two years later, he received the flattering letter from the Crown Prince of Prussia and immediately replied. This initiated a steady correspondence between the two men. They did not meet personally until 1740.

This section of the paper treats of the interchange between the two men from the initial correspondence to their first meeting. These men were not concerned with things, but with ideas.

#### Interchange on Theologians and Religion

If there was one thing which the two men held in common, it was a feeling of contempt for religion and those who promulgated it in their day. Voltaire states his position clearly:

"It is very sad for humanity that those who term themselves the messengers of Heaven's command, the interpreters of the Divinity, in a word, theologians, are sometimes the most dangerous of all; that some of them are as pernicious to society as they are obscure in their ideas and that their souls are inflated with bitterness and pride in proportion as they are empty of truths. For the sake of a sophism they would trouble the earth and would persuade all kings to avenge with fire and steel the honour of an argument in ferio or in barbara.

"Every thinking being not of their opinion is an atheist; and every king who does not favour them will be damned." 6

Frederick is equally clear:

"As touching theologians, it seems to me that they are all alike, of whatever religion or nation they may be; their object is always to claim despotic authority over men's consciences; this suffices to make them persecute all of us whose noble temerity dares to unveil the truth;

their hands are always armed with the thunderbolt of anathema to crush this imaginary phantom of irreligion which, as they assert, they combat ceaselessly, but under the name of which in effect they combat the enemies of their fury and ambition. Yet, according to them, they preach humility, a virtue they have never practiced, and call themselves the ministers of a God of peace whom they serve with a heart filled with hatred and ambition. Their conduct, so incompatible with the morality they preach, in my opinion is itself sufficient to discredit their doctrine." 7

It is proper in this case to distinguish between religion and theologians, for though both were despised, each was despised for a different reason. We have begun with theologians. A theologian is, in their broad definition, anyone connected officially with ecclesiastical or sacerdotal positions. Before we take up this discussion of the ideas herein, let us first notice some possible influences on Frederick and Voltaire through personalities rather than through meditation.

Frederick was forced by his father to attend three church services each Sunday and to be instructed two hours a day in theological matters. These sermons, tracts, and discussions were undoubtedly dull and tiring and pedantic and in German; these things failed to shepherd Frederick into the fold, but do not seem to have been serious enough to make him despise all religion and all theologians. He was an astute student of history; he had a living example of the ambitious cleric in Cardinal Fleury. Since France

was becoming more and more a threat to Prussia, as he says later in his Considerations, it is indeed possible that this turned him; but, again, I think this line can be safely discounted.

With Voltaire, however, personalities have a markedly stronger effect. Frederick remonstrates with Voltaire about his tendency, like the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to refuse to forgive to the fourth generation. To the day of his death Voltaire was always under some sort of indictment by various Church authorities who objected strenuously to the mocking air which Voltaire assumed toward Christianity in his plays and works. More than once he was banned and exiled for this. It could well be that this pious bigotry blinded Voltaire then, as it did later. Also, one of his greatest ambitions was to sit among the forty of the French Academy. For a long time he was passed over for others who, he was convinced, were inferior to him in poetic stature, and it was ecclesiastical influence which kept him out. This, without question, was the crowning insult to Voltaire. The depths to which his personal vituperation could extend is well demonstrated by his diatribes and, in a single case, by the caning of a critic - though he attacked the wrong man. On the other hand, Voltaire owed much to the

Abbe Chateauneuf, both in thought and in political advancement, but the Abbe introduced Voltaire to the Society of the Temple, which was a center of free thinking which bordered on heresy. This man could be called an Abbe only because he bore the title and wore the gown. As in Frederick's case, there do not appear to have been enough ground to claim that the personal elements prevailed over sound judgment.

The political condemnation of theologians reflects the effect of the two Reformations. The Wars of Religion had been concluded nearly a century before, but the battling was not over. Obviously it seemed to both men that any government, Protestant or Catholic, which rationalized theocracy committed a moral evil, and this evil could be attributed directly to the usurpers themselves, the theologians, who blinded Princes and Subjects to their real duty and imposed a blanket of bigotry over the minds of men which obligated them morally to break even the most fundamental of universal laws. This last term is in some question in our day, but is to be defended according to Voltaire. Suffice it to say that to them universal law was reason checked by a rude empiricism, that is, a rational law universally agreed upon. For example, Voltaire challenged anyone to point out a single culture in which it is permissible to kill, say, a close relative - EXCEPT WHEN OBLIGATED BY RELIGION! Now,

Voltaire has presented a universal law which is not unknown in Twentieth Century Sociological doctrine: no murder in the in-group, no murder of relatives. The exception is Voltaire's own, and it is the exception which he is attacking. His prime example concerns two brothers Diaz: one remained Catholic; the other turned Protestant. When the former learned of this, he made the journey of many hundred miles to murder his own brother. Voltaire cites the Spanish philosopher Herrera who held that the brother demonstrated true Christianity by his action, "Estando firme con el exemplo de nuestro Salvadore Jesu-Christo, y de sus Santos."<sup>8</sup> Voltaire comments, "Herrera, with a holy religion completely opposed to cruelty, a religion which teaches us to endure and not to take vengeance, was convinced that probity might lead a man to murder and fratricide; and no one rose up against these infernal maxims."<sup>9</sup> It is this vein of argument that Voltaire now pursues; Candide is many years away. Thus there is agreement about the character of theologians: at base they are Inquisitors who perpetrate inhumanities on mankind in the name of God. Faggots are the reward of creative minds. At the same time they seek their own aggrandizement in political power. Frederick suggests, in the case of Catholics and other celibate clerics, that political ambition is all that is

left to such frustrated men.<sup>10</sup> The third aspect of clerics and theologians is that they accept uncritically a dogmatic superstition and expect all others to follow suit, on pain of death. The rather valid question is: What right has any group of men to monopolize all claims to truth and righteousness and to sit in judgment upon the rest of mankind, while it is obvious how fallible and given to error all men are, and how uncertain men's ideas of truth are? Ergo, theologians must either be charlatans, evil, or stupid.

Religion itself is superstition made hideous by fanaticism. In their thoughts it takes a stupid mind to believe all the sheer poppycock with which it is adulterated so that a basic moral conviction, which may be quite valid, is perverted. The more unlikely or fantastic the religion is, the more readily acceptable it is to stupid men. This attitude prevails in the years prior to 1740; the attitude of both men was modified, each along a different line, in later life. In Frederick's words, ritual, the height of religious exaltation, is "useless and frivolous ceremonies established by ignorance and superstition and supported by custom."<sup>11</sup>

In order to placate society and critics in Voltaire's case, and in order to secure the aegis of religious approbation from pious subjects in Frederick's case, both made ostensible concessions to religion, both using the analogy of Socrates, Voltaire saying, "Socrates sometimes sacrificed with the Greeks. It did not save him, but it might save" <sup>12</sup> me. Hemlock, in various forms, was rather often advised in Voltaire's case; Frederick could be censured by no one save his father, the Sergeant King, and he was satisfied enough when Frederick consented to go to church. Frederick: "I shall write a few psalms to raise a good opinion of my orthodoxy." <sup>13</sup>

Is it then to be construed that these two men were atheists? This construction has often been made, but more frequently in the case of Voltaire. However, this is not an accurate observation. Both men believed in a Supreme Being, but a God reached through philosophy rather than through religion. In their letters they agree on a basic catechism, despite a profound dispute which shall be treated later. This catechism, proposed by Frederick, includes:

I believe in and adore a Supreme Being who is both infinitely Good and infinitely Merciful. He requires only that I help my fellow humans, who are, on the whole, a stupid lot. I throw myself on the Will of the Creator

who disposes of me as he sees fit (Voltaire takes exception to this), and I have nothing to fear. <sup>14</sup>

### Interchange on Metaphysics

Frederick: "Metaphysical questions are above our capacity. We try vainly to guess at things which exceed our comprehension; and in this ignorant world the most probable conjecture passes for the best system." <sup>15</sup>

Voltaire: "Metaphysics contain two things; the first of all that men of good sense know, the second what they will never know." <sup>16</sup>

These statements were the first to pass between Frederick and Voltaire in their discussion of metaphysics. Voltaire, in modest Eighteenth Century fashion, reported that he divided his time among a little history, a little poetry, a little physics, and a little metaphysics. Frederick was inspired to the metaphysical quest by a disciple of Leibnitz, Wolff, who had been forcibly ejected from Prussia by Frederick Wilhelm the First. Although Voltaire was a firm advocate of Newton and an admirer of Bacon and somewhat less sympathetic with Descartes, he shows by his primary statement that he held reason and man to be limited and that he makes no suggestion that science would unlock all the keys of the universe.

It is obvious that both men regarded the study of metaphysics as an occupation for the intellectual elite only, and, conversely, that having the capacity to appreciate the study of metaphysics was the mark of an enlightened man. Thus the great body of mankind was denied an approach to the ultimate by their wanting capacity. On the other hand, those who make metaphysical claims beyond human capacity furthermore demonstrate themselves to be fools. The true metaphysician recognizes his own human limitations and strives to learn all he can within them.

What are the limitations of man in his metaphysical quest? Here Frederick and Voltaire disagree violently. Voltaire asserts that metaphysics must always be brought back to morality, that is to say, that metaphysics is not a valid system of study in itself, for, he continues, Reason says that God exists and, furthermore, Reason says that man cannot know what God is.

In paraphrase, Frederick replies: My thought is founded upon the idea that we should not voluntarily renounce the knowledge which we can acquire through Reason. Thus, I try to know all I can of God, and I find that He is

both Omniscient and Omnipotent; it is He who willed the Universe; it is He who carried it out, and it necessarily follows that He had an object in creating it. If so, all events lead to it. Men act accordingly whether they know it or not. Otherwise God is an idle spectator of nature, and the world is ruled by men's caprice. God is a watchmaker; and the hands of a watch do not move voluntarily, but according to the designs of the creator and the winder. The senses do not see why, but Reason tells us.

Voltaire: I agree that the universe is a matter of winding and watchmaking, but we are like the American Indian who saw a watch for the first time: all he could say was that it went - somehow. There is no demonstration of a Supreme Being independent of matter, that is, by successive thoughts. Geometrical proofs are a demonstration of truth, all right, but God cannot be demonstrated similarly; the Creative Mind cannot be revealed to a Human Mind except in His works. In analogy, we can comprehend a single number, but infinity is unthinkable. Probability, not finality, is the assurance which Reason gives us.

The argument shifts to a related field: the problem of freedom or determinism in this Watchmaker's universe. This argument was noted in the exception Voltaire

took to Frederick's catechism. Leibnitz had talked of Pre-existing harmony; Wolff had adopted this view; Frederick studied under Wolff. When Frederick Wilhelm learned of his son's adherence to this philosophical view, he was outraged. Unfortunately, he learned at a time when Frederick was already in enough trouble concerning the Katte affair. Frederick, in an effort to conciliate his stern father, swore to him that he had dropped and forgotten the doctrine of that "damned" predestination.<sup>17</sup> Now, six years later, it appears that he had not really dropped it as he faced Voltaire in this dispute. Voltaire holds for the more Deistic point of view. God made the world and then stepped back to let it run itself. Man is a free agent who can and does act according to his own caprice or his own lights.

Frederick asserts that this is ridiculous; this state is possible only if there were no God. Everything made by God is made for a reason, and the human mechanism

is no exception. Each man finds in the mechanism of his body a certain temperament and a certain humour; it is beyond our power to be of a character different from what we are. Next, this mechanism is placed in an environment, cultural and natural, over which the man has little control. "How can man determine a choice or an action if events do not furnish him with the occasion?"<sup>18</sup> Certainly life is a series of opportunities which we ourselves do not provide and to which our characters make us react. There is no freedom here; we do and act according to what we are and where we are, these being determined by God.<sup>19</sup>

#### Interchange on Man, Virtue, and Society

Voltaire: It is my observation that man is intended to live in Society; it is also my observation that every man has a conception of justice and injustice, even a savage cannibal whom I once examined. But different customs in different cultures do not allow all men to attach the same idea of justice to the same notions, that is, the principle

of cultural relativism is valid. Yet there is no society without laws, and all of the laws are directed toward the good of society. Therefore, the good of society is the immutable rule of virtue.

Frederick: It is true that virtue is relative to society, but the first principle of virtue is self-interest, for all persons are interested primarily in themselves; therefore, it is necessary to compromise all private interests and call it the public interest, and in that fashion justice is done to all.

Thus Voltaire argues that there are two innate principles in man: a tendency to live in the society of others and a sense of justice. Both of these are satisfied by laws, for the laws are made in the interests of the society and to serve society thereby is to be virtuous.

Frederick argues for egocentricity and the Social Contract, saying that this is the order of things and that there is nothing wrong with the egocentric type of virtue, because if a man did not care for himself, someone else would have to, thus "Law represses vice."<sup>20</sup>

Does not this attitude seem incongruous when adopted by these two men? Of all things Frederick, a Crown Prince,

should not speak of a social contract unless modified by Hobbes' Leviathan or a similar conception. His modification comes out as a secondary aspect to his Anti-Machiavelli which he was working on at this time. This idea is that the king holds the trust of his subjects. Their property, their lives, are his property, not to use according to his own caprice or his own design, but according to what is best for the subjects. No man likes to be taxed or to be drafted, and, if left to his own desires, he would consent to neither, but it is necessary for the public weal that he do so, and it is up to the King to see that he does his duty to his fellow citizens. Frederick, there is no doubt, thought that his reign would, by example, end once and for all the irresponsible monarchies of his neighbors. The King, then, is the keeper of the Public Interest.

It is also surprising for Voltaire to have such a generous attitude toward the body of tradition in general, and his statements concerning this natural virtue seem to reflect either a complete reversal of his later doctrines or a glaring inconsistency. I think this dilemma is solved when one considers that he thought that only a philosophical age was required to right all of the wrongs of tradition;

that Reason, properly applied, would release mankind from the choking bonds of the past superstition and would leave him free in the state of natural civilization which God intended but that men perverted. "Love of the public good should come first, should it not?" <sup>21</sup>

### On Philosophers and Kings

Voltaire undoubtedly was agreeably surprised to be approached by a Prince who was interested in philosophy. A continual compliment to Frederick was that he was a philosophical prince. Once Voltaire enjoined him: "Be King of Philosophers, other Princes are only Kings of men." <sup>22</sup>

Frederick replies in a similarly complimentary vein that, if he were, then his Empire would indeed be small, especially if the philosophers were of Voltaire's calibre. Then, in all seriousness, he returns:

"Are Kings needed to govern philosophers? The ignorant to lead the educated? In a word, men filled with passions to curb the vices of those who suppress them, not from fear of punishment, not from childish dread of hell and devils, but from love of virtue?

"Reason is your guide; reason is your sovereign." <sup>23</sup>

In this reply a real insight is found into Frederick's mind. It is apparent that he justifies his position in the world on the basis of the general stupidity of mankind. If all men were philosophers, there would be no need for kings, for men would act justly through their own volition and not through the force of the sovereign's power. Since only a few men are philosophers, there must be kings, and these kings must rule with absolute power according to justice. Therefore, it is quite certain that any democratic theory would be rejected by Frederick.

#### Interchange on Truth

Voltaire: "Truth is a statement of facts as they really are." <sup>24</sup>

Frederick: Yes, and the character of truth is that "it needs neither arms to defend itself nor violence to compel men to believe it; it has only to appear and, as soon as its light has dispersed the clouds which hid it, its triumph is assured." <sup>25</sup>

Both men apparently hold to the correspondence<sup>26</sup> theory of truth. Frederick is asserting that truth carries its own power to convince which cannot be rejected by a willing mind, as soon as the mind opens to it. But:

"Naked truth has little power over most men's minds; it needs the support of rank and of dignity and the protection of the great."<sup>27</sup>

This statement also comes from the Frederick of this period. Needless to say, it contradicts his former statement entirely. The only logical reconciliation which can be made would be to say that it took great men to disperse the clouds, but this would then take the power away from truth itself. Unfortunately, Voltaire is somewhat more reticent about truth in this period. The safest observation is that neither man had arrived at any firm conviction concerning truth at this period of their lives.

#### Interchange on the Soul

Frederick: Wolff has established the existence of a soul, different in being from the body, and immortal. Wolff says, "The Soul is created by God immediately and not successively, God can only destroy it by a formal act

of his Will."<sup>28</sup>

Voltaire: Wolff has not established any such thing, for such ideas cannot be proven formally. Besides, I challenge you to find your own soul.

Frederick's citation of a contemporary philosopher is not extraordinarily significant, nor is the idea, startling or unexpected. (Since man is above the animals, having reason, and below the divine, being limited, he garnishes his own existence by saying that God in a special act created man's soul (immediately) and therefore that the soul was not, for example, merely an attribute of the species as some of the nominalistic schoolmen were wont to call it. And, to escape the fear of death and seeming dissolution, men turn to the idea of immortality of the soul, saying that it survives after death.) The significant part is that Frederick considered the matter proven beyond doubt. This testifies to his faith in reason. Voltaire, rationalist though he was, could not accept such a proof and thereby testified again to his limitation on reason.

"Whether our soul perishes with us, or enjoys immortality - in these uncertainties you cannot choose a wiser course ..... which

is to give your soul ..... all the virtues, all the pleasures, all the instruction of which it is capable, to be happy and to render others happy." <sup>29</sup>

### Interchange on Personal Morality

Frederick: My code of morals fits yours. "I love pleasures and all that contributes toward them." <sup>30</sup> Life's brevity teaches us to enjoy them. The past is just a dream, the future is uncertain. The greatest pleasure is the cultivation of the fine arts.

"The Creator's wisdom has made nothing uselessly in this world. God desires that man should enjoy created things and to do otherwise is running contrary to His purpose. Only abuses and excesses render pernicious that which otherwise is good in itself." <sup>31</sup>

"The enjoyment of pure pleasure is for us the most real thing in the world. I mean the pleasure of which Montaigne speaks, such as does not plunge into the excesses of outrageous debauchery." <sup>32</sup>

Voltaire: "I am very much of an Epicurean, because I think pain an evil and pleasure a good. And, when everything is counted and weighed, I think there are infinitely more enjoyments than bitternesses in this life." <sup>33</sup>

"We are born with hearts which must be filled, with passions which must be satisfied without our being dominated by them." <sup>34</sup>

It seems that Frederick holds for a life of the greatest pleasure for the individual, saying that the only thing really real and the only thing worth doing is that which is pleasant. As it were, God himself expects man to enjoy his brief visit to this earth, the only stipulation being that the pleasures which lead to greater pain should be avoided. The greatest amount of pleasure comes from cultivation of the fine arts.

Does this idea cohere with the thoughts already discussed?

Voltaire holds that the good is the pleasant and the pleasant is the good, and in the last analysis of life there is a greater amount of pleasure (good) than pain (evil), so that life is worthwhile to the individual on these grounds, which are Epicurean.

Despite what Voltaire specifically contends, he is not an Epicurean, for an Epicurean holds that pleasure is the absence of pain, while Voltaire clearly says that he regards pleasure as the good and pain the evil. This more closely fits the Cyrenaic formula. If Voltaire claims to be Epicurean and yet employs the wrong formula,

then either he did not comprehend Epicureanism or he was making an emendation upon the basic formula, or he was using the term in its popular sense. The interchange offered a particular brand of hedonism not unknown to the Western World, being found, among other places, in the Protagoras and in a Hellenistic School of Philosophy, but not in Epicureanism. Therefore, neither man was an Epicurean. And most assuredly neither was a Puritan.

But are these men really hedonists? With Voltaire the answer is more devious; with Frederick the answer is a flat no. In these golden days while the student prince is enjoying a quiet life in Rheinsburg, it is highly likely that he did hold to this sort of hedonism - yet, throughout his writings, in letters, and in the Anti-Machiavelli, there is the insistent call to duty which, he acknowledged, takes precedence over his natural desires for self-indulgence. Obviously, there would come a time when he must choose between hedonism and duty; it did, and he chose duty. In doing this he establishes that there is something more to life than his own seeking of pleasure.

In personal morality, then, it is contended: That neither man presented accurately his ethics. This contention is predicated upon an analysis of the contentions

themselves, upon actual historical example, and upon coherence with other aspects in their interchange of ideas.

#### Interchange on the Duty of a Prince

Voltaire: A great prince takes care of all ranks in his dominion and brings to them happiness. Love of the public good comes first. Moreover, the greatest prince is the least superstitious prince; use the power of a prince to overthrow the "monster of superstition and fanaticism," and ignorance, the mother of superstition.

Frederick: A prince definitely does have a duty and a trust in regard to his subjects. He must treat their property as his property so that he may use it in their best interests. He must offer continual vigilance over the welfare of his domains, exerting his royal absolute to see that virtue is the rule of life there.

Here certainly are two clear cut advocates of noblesse oblige. The prince is the prime benefactor, the prime educator, the prime arbiter of his people. The prince is absolute, but he exercises this power according to his reason for the public interest. This is beyond

question the ideal of the enlightened despot which characterized the age.

### Interchange on the Order of the World

Frederick:

"If providence were what people say it is, then the Newtons and the Wolffs, the Lockes and the Voltaires, the men who think best, should be masters of the world; it would then appear that the infinite wisdom which presides over all things, had placed in this world the wisest among human beings to govern the others; but as things go, everything appears to go by chance. A man of merit is not esteemed according to his true value; another is not placed in a post which suits him; a knave becomes illustrious and a good man languishes in obscurity; the reins of government of an empire are committed to inexpert hands, and men of experience are kept out of authority. Let people say what they will, they can never show me a good reason for this ridiculous state of destinies." 36

"What is this Reason, that prerogative of which men are so proud? Who possesses it? Men, who, in order to live together, have been obliged to choose superiors and to make laws in order to learn that it is unjust to kill, to rob, etc. These reasonable men make war upon each other, for vain arguments they do not understand; these reasonable beings have a hundred religions each more absurd than the one before; they like to live long and complain of boredom and the length of time during their whole life. Are these the results of that Reason which distinguishes them from the Brutes?" 37

And would you not expect from Voltaire a reply in kind? Would you not anticipate a hint of the Candide? But no, in this period Voltaire is an advocate of the opposite point of view, more moderate than the disciples of Leibnitz who held that, "All's for the best in this best of all possible worlds,"<sup>38</sup> but nevertheless, of the opinion that Reason will exert itself and clean up the mess of the world, and that, in the meantime, things were not too bad in this world.

#### Interchange on the Wealth of a State

Voltaire: I propose "a little essay on worldly morals wherein I try to prove that luxury, magnificence, the arts, and splendour in a state makes its wealth;" those who are against luxury are merely "ill tempered paupers."<sup>39</sup> The state is enriched by giving such pleasures to its subjects.

Frederick: Even though a state cannot always provide material wealth for its subjects, it can provide for their happiness by providing for them the fine arts, opera,

and science, "in a place where a large assembly of people give him a certain satisfaction; at such moments a man is happy, and he goes home with pleasant objects which he allows to control his mind."<sup>40</sup> "Pleasure is the most real good in this life; therefore, it is doing good to furnish society with a means of amusing itself."<sup>41</sup> Fine arts are the key to the wealth of a state. "Arts and Sciences are the children of abundance."<sup>42</sup>

Drawing upon the historical examples of Periclean Athens, Augustan Rome, and the France of Louis XIV, both men agree that the index of a state's wealth is the state of its fine arts, but then the ideas part, each to his own twist.

Voltaire holds an aristocratic attitude toward wealth and luxury, expressed in aesthetic terms. Splendor is something which must not be popularized, but should be reserved for those who can appreciate it. The mass of subjects to which this is denied shares indirectly in the glory of the state. Those who complain of this aristocratic luxury show themselves to be rude and are thus condemned. This certainly is not the Voltaire who is sometimes called a father of the French Revolution; indeed, it

shows him to be the opposite.

Frederick, on the other hand, holds the opinion that the fine arts should be popularized by the state for two general reasons: one, social control, providing a collective sense of participation and belonging to the subjects; two, elevation of minds, providing a means for the subjects to transcend their meager existence. This does not mean that Frederick had a lower estimation of the fine arts than did Voltaire; it only means that he believed that the fine arts could be shared with the subjects without sacrifice to the arts, while Voltaire held that art should not be cheapened by extending it beyond the elite.

#### Interchange on the Significance of History

Frederick:

"Few persons are indifferent to their reputation; however wicked they may be, they do not wish to be taken for such; and they would like to be cited as examples of virtue and probity and men of heroism. I think that under these circumstances, the reading of history and the monuments it leaves us of the evil reputation of those monsters nature has created cannot but have an advantageous effect on the mind of princes who read them; for, when they see the vices as actions which degrade and tarnish

reputation, the pleasure of doing good must appear so pure that it is impossible not to be moved by it. An ambitious man does not seek in history the example of an ambitious man who was detested; but whosoever reads the tragic end of Caesar will learn to dread the results of tyranny. Moreover, men hide the darkness and malice of their hearts as much as they can. They act independently of examples and have no other end but the gratification of their undisciplined passions. Moreover, if a wicked man wishes to excuse his crimes by the examples he does not need (be it said to the honour of our age) to go back to the origin of the world in order to find them; the corrupt human race presents them every day and thereby has more influence. In short, one has only to be a man to be able to judge of the wickedness of men in all centuries. It is not surprising that these reflections did not occur to you."<sup>43</sup>

Voltaire: We both agree that Louis XIV was a great king, but he lacked one thing: education. He had a good mind and he was wise, yet his education was limited to practical affairs and the arts. "He never read; if he had read, if he had known history, you would have fewer Frenchmen in Berlin. Your kingdom would not have been enriched in 1686 by the spoils of his."<sup>44</sup>

History, then, is the school for wise men. It is the repository of examples and guides which aid current life, if only the man has enough intelligence to profit by the lessons of history. It seems that history does not have a compulsory effect upon all men equally, but it does

present certain undeniable maxims to all who read it. Although it is possible, it is not necessary to use this same history to justify crimes, for contemporary example is plentiful, and neither serves the purpose of justification to the right thinking man. At the same time, history serves to condemn the evil and the mistakes of man by merely presenting his record.

History is recorded truth, for, Voltaire says, only free minds can write real History.

This is another idea which undergoes some interesting changes during the lives and thoughts of these two. We will take up this idea again in a later section.

#### Voltaire's Estimation of Frederick

All the world loves a Prince who is a philosopher, and a philosopher not like the flat-nosed Socrates, for you do not go around telling every one that they are asses; you content yourself with thinking it of most of the animals called men and yet, inspite of that, you think of how to make them happy.

"La Grece, je l'avoue, eut un brillant destin;  
Mais Frédéric est né; tout change; je me flatte  
Qu' Athènes, quelque jour, doit céder à Berlin;  
Et déjà Frédéric est plus grand que Socrate." 45

Frederick on Himself:

On considering my estate in life:

"At such moments I have realized that the advantages of birth and that vapour of grandeur with which vanity soothes us is of little service, or, to speak truly, of none. The distinctions are foreign to ourselves and but embellish outwardly. How much more preferable are the talents of the mind!" 46

Frederick on Voltaire:

You are my Luther and my Calvin; they set men's minds free from the Roman Church; you set my mind free from all superstition and lead me with Reason. I wish, above all else, to take you into my service.

Frederick and Voltaire: 1740-1750

This is a significant decade, both in European history and in this study. In 1740 Crown Prince Frederick became Frederick II, King of Prussia. In 1740 Voltaire released Frederick's Anti-Machiavelli at the Hague. In 1740 Frederick and Voltaire met for the first time. During this decade they were to meet four times.

In 1740 Emperor Charles VI died, leaving the fate of the Hapsburgs in the hands of Maria Theresa and the Pragmatic Sanction. In 1740 Frederick launched his regiments into

Silesia, the Prussian possession of which was acknowledged by Maria Theresa in 1742.

In this period the alliances between the great powers were fluctuating and inconstant to a confusing degree. Something of this was predicted by Frederick in his Considerations which he wrote during his Rheinsburg years, in which he maintained that the French were upsetting the balance of power, and that a Central European power (obviously Prussia) was required to restore it. By successfully realigning the balance of power, Frederick made Prussia one of the most respected powers in Europe, humbling Austria. In 1744 Frederick again sent out his regiments to secure his conquest before Austria could mobilize. This caused an impressive array of countries, Austria, Saxony, England and Holland, and, later, Russia, to oppose Prussia in the field. With the aid of France and Marechal de Saxe, Frederick defeated the Pragmatic army. In 1748 came the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle at which time Frederick was again assured the possession of Silesia. For the next eight years there was peace in Central Europe. Frederick, except for his continual inspections, was free to continue his intensive existence at Potsdam. Here he developed his private residence called, amusingly enough, Sans Souci. Or he was free to take the curative waters at

several Rhineland spas. During this hectic period he had maintained his correspondence with Voltaire, continually pressing him to join him in Prussia.

During this decade Voltaire continued his nomadic existence, accompanied or led by Madame du Chatelet. Her philosophical quest centered around Newtonianism; Voltaire said that she was one of the greatest men Europe ever had -

Car l'Europe la compte au ranc des  
plus grands hommes. 47

Voltaire produced Merope and Mahomet, worked on his Essai sur les Moeurs and Siecle du Louis XIV. In 1743 his bid to the Academy was again rejected, and in that year he made another visit to Frederick. By 1745 the climate of opinion at the French court was warming somewhat in his favor. In that year he was appointed Royal Historiographer, affording him both rank and wealth and a position at court. This appointment came about largely through the offices of Madame de Pompadour. In 1746 he achieved his highest ambition; he was elected to the Academy. Then, at the height of his seeming success, he again was so indiscreet as to fall from favor at court and again had to quit Paris. He joined Madame du Chatelet

at Sceaux and at Luneville. There she entered into a liason with an officer of the King's Guard, Saint-Lambert, and became pregnant. In 1749 there was a turning point in Voltaire's life: Madame du Chatelet died after childbirth. Before that year, Frederick had almost persuaded Voltaire to join him in Berlin and Potsdam, Voltaire requesting that Frederick not invite the Madame, but Madame's condition induced Voltaire to delay his journey. Frederick taunted him, calling him a midwife; yet Voltaire hesitated, saying that remaining with her was "a duty I consider indispensable." With the death of du Chatelet, Voltaire was free of all obligations, and determined to join Frederick.

This is a general account of this decade in regard to Europe, Frederick and Voltaire. The section that follows is an account of their visits and their interchanges of thoughts during this period, with a pause for a comparison at 1747, an appraisal of Frederick's policies in the light of his avowed philosophy.

#### The Meetings of Frederick and Voltaire: 1740

The place of their first meeting was Wesel, in Cleves. The time was September. Both exchanged notes of extreme

eagerness in anticipation of the first conversation; earlier Voltaire had requested that Frederick bring with him a strong cordial, for, he said he feared he might faint upon sight of the King. It was a short but expensive visit, with Frederick paying the bill. Unfortunately, their conversations were not recorded, although such an event was covered in the Gazettes of the day. Carlyle reports that:

"From the circumambient inanity of Old Newspapers, Historical shot-rubbish and unintelligible correspondences, we sift out the following ....."<sup>48</sup>

topics of conversation during their first visit. They discussed Immortality of the Soul, Fate, Liberty, and the Androgynes of Plato. With the conscientious modesty of that century, Voltaire later said of Frederick,

"He has the eloquence of Cicero, the mildness of Pliny, the wisdom of Agrippa; in short, he combines the collected virtues of the three greatest men of antiquity."<sup>49</sup>

And Frederick was no less complimentary of Voltaire, although he had some apprehensions about the cost of such a short visit. So, master and pupil have at last met. These two can now meet as philosophers, divorcing themselves from their estates in this world.

Their second meeting in 1740 was in December, at Rheinsburg. Did Voltaire return to continue his philosophical discussions with his friend? No, he came as a spy on the King of Prussia, reporting to Cardinal Fleury on Frederick's intentions in mobilizing such a large army. His ostensible visit was to work with Frederick on an improved edition of the Anti-Machiavelli. But Voltaire was not a very successful spy, for although Frederick opened his philosophical heart to Voltaire, he did not open his political mind.

#### The Third Visit of Voltaire: 1742

Voltaire was again in trouble at the French court. His Mahomet had been the final straw; it was scheduled to be produced, and this could not be permitted in so Christian a country as France. The King politely suggested that an actor become ill at the last moment so that the opening would have to be cancelled. Under the shadow of the Bastille, Voltaire complied. In an effort to regain favor at Versailles, Voltaire, waving an invitation from Frederick, enquired of Fleury and Louis if his services as a spy were desired. It seems that Voltaire always wanted

to enter diplomacy and politics. His services were accepted; Voltaire joined Frederick. Fleury received during that visit several letters from Voltaire containing military intelligence and reports of an offer which Frederick made to establish Voltaire on an estate. This latter report, though undoubtedly valid, was most probably intended as a gentle hint.

#### The Year of Mutual Treachery: 1743

In August of 1743, Voltaire journeyed to Berlin on a secret diplomatic mission for Fleury. His mission again was to learn Frederick's intentions and if possible to relieve the pressure on France upon whom Nike was no longer smiling, this being the year of the Battle of Dettingen. At the same time, Voltaire had sufficient reason to be displeased with the French court; again he had been passed over in the Academy selections. So, in Berlin he relieved himself of his venom according to his usual fashion: epigrams, this time against King Louis XV. This was going on while he faithfully reported back to King Louis XV as a spy. There is some reason to believe that Frederick knew of Voltaire's double dealing, even that

he was amused by it. At any rate, he seized upon Voltaire's vitriolic verses as an opportunity to close France to Voltaire forever, trapping him in Berlin, by having the Epigrams on Louis XV published in Paris. This stratagem failed, proving to Frederick what he had always contended: that Louis was a stupid king, since he did not have sense enough to be insulted. For Voltaire it was a different matter; he was angered, doubly: once for Frederick's publishing endangering works and once for Frederick's successful parrying of the political questions which Voltaire had put to him in specific charges, requesting specific answers. It is fair to say that the extreme cordiality with which they parted this time was not all sincere, but in the succeeding correspondence both seemed to have forgotten or overlooked the unpleasanties connected with Voltaire's final visit to Frederick before joining him permanently - or so they thought.

A Letter to Voltaire

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Charlottenburg,  
6 June, 1740

My dear Friend,

My lot is changed, I have witnessed the last moments of a king, his agony, his death.

On coming to the throne, I had no need of that lesson to be disgusted with the vanity of human grandeur.

I projected a little work of metaphysics; it has changed into a political work. I meant to joust with the amiable Voltaire, and I must fence with the old mitred Machiavelli, Fleury. We are not the masters of our fate, Dear Voltaire .....

.....

Federic <sup>50</sup>

Thus was Voltaire notified of Frederick Wilhelm's death, and thus was he warned that Frederick was obliged to prefer politics to metaphysics. Like the Oxford lads, he put his games away. "I now owe myself wholly to my country."

#### Another Letter to Voltaire

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Rheinsburg  
26 October, 1740

My Dear Voltaire,

A most unforeseen event prevents me from opening my heart to you as usual and from chattering as I should wish. The Emperor is dead.

His death alters all my pacific ideas, and I think that in June it will be rather a matter of cannonpowder, soldiers, and trenches than of

actresses, of balls and stages; so that I am obliged to cancel the bargain we were about to make (Frederick's visit to Voltaire) ..... now is the moment for a complete change in the old political system; tis that falling rock striking the idol of four metals seen by Nebuchadnezzar, which destroyed them all .....

Federic <sup>51</sup>

Shortly, Prussian regiments invaded Silesia, but, even though Frederick was constantly in the field, he kept exchanging ideas with Voltaire.

#### Interchange of Ideas: 1740-1750

As might well be expected, Frederick was extremely occupied and therefore could not correspond with Voltaire as much as he had previously, and Voltaire's letters became accordingly somewhat fewer. As a general observation the interchanges between the two during this period are considerably more humorous than during the one before, and Frederick's philosophical reflections about the current order of things in Europe lend a rather tragic air. Voltaire's opinions on freedom and the self change and become like Frederick's. The invitations to Potsdam continue strongly. And Voltaire addresses Frederick as "Your Humanity."

Interchange on Frederick's Ode On War

The Ode on War by Frederick was a reflective lament about the least attractive sides of warfare and the pain it causes. This was written in French verse.

Voltaire: It is strange that the King who started this war should write the Ode on War; to me it sounds like the feelings of a trodden subject.

Frederick: "Do not be surprised by my Ode on War; I assure you those are my sentiments. Distinguish between the statesman and the philosopher and know that we may make war from Reason; that we may be politic from duty, and philosophic by inclination. Men are hardly ever placed in the world where they would choose; and that is why there are so many bad cobblers, bad priests, bad ministers and bad princes." <sup>52</sup>

Voltaire's question is extremely appropriate. How could Frederick write such sentiments while leading armies so coolly and so skillfully? His answer is existential to a degree; Frederick implies that he has no choice but to live out the roles which were provided

for him by circumstance to the best of his ability, and finding himself a prince, he prefers to be a good one rather than a bad one. It is his duty to do this, not his choice. And yet he was not entirely motivated by a sense of duty. He says elsewhere that he was prompted to move his Regiments for the sake of Glory.<sup>53</sup>

#### Voltaire on Frederick's Military Successes

Voltaire: You have proven yourself a great warrior; you will probably have everything except happiness. I wonder if you're happier in this clamouring glory now than at Rheinsburg?

Frederick: "I love Rheinsburg and its quiet days but we must adapt ourselves to our station and make our duties a pleasure."<sup>54</sup>

Voltaire's question is again appropriate and the reply again existential.<sup>65</sup> The question is basically: can the philosopher be happy when he does things which contradict his thoughts and dispositions? The answer is that the sense of values must fit the situation. This is hardly the answer one could expect from the age of moral geometry; it is more like an answer from this day.

## Interchange on Princes

Voltaire: I have confidence in your Reason, being able to discern what is good from what is evil. If God loved this world, he would bestow this same universality upon all princes. I imagine that it was for this they were originally made. But when will you and the kings your colleagues ever cease from ravaging this earth, which, you say, you so much desire to make happy?

"Au lieu de cette horrible guerre  
Dont chacun sent les contre-coups,  
Que ne vous en rapportez-vous  
A ce bon abbé de Saint-Pierre?" 56

(The abbe had a plan to end warfare as a means of national policy.)

Frederick: "Trickery, bad faith and duplicity are unfortunately the dominating characteristics of most of the men who are at the head of nations and should be the examples to them. The study of the human heart in such persons is a most humiliating thing....." 57

Reason is again placed on the Cross. Why can't princes bring happiness to their subjects by peace as the

promise? Because princes are personally base and corrupt. No wonder Frederick and Voltaire were interested in Machiavelli. Those who lived among the princes of the time observed that the methods of The Prince were being employed. The enlightened despot was the ideal of the day, but the Machiavellian despot was the order of the day. Yet Frederick justifies warfare among Kings. He has answered why there is no peace; now he argues why there will be war:

"So long as the abbe de Saint-Pierre's Platonic arbitration does not exist, kings will have no other means of deciding their differences except by using force to wrest from their adversaries the just satisfaction they cannot obtain by any other means. The miseries and calamities which result are like the diseases of the body." 58

This certainly is not the Frederick who wrote the Ode on War. This is evidence of a dichotomy in thought; in Voltaire we find a dichotomy between thought and character.

#### Interchange on Progress and Persecution

Voltaire: "Your Majesty is right to say that the age in which we live has many advantages over the centuries of darkness and cruelty,

Et qu'il vaut mieux, o blasphemes maudits  
Vivre a present qu' avoir vecu jadis.

Would to God that all princes might have thought like my hero. There would have been no religious wars, no faggots lighted to burn poor devils who pretended that God exists in a piece of bread in a manner different from that understood by St. Thomas. There is a Casuist who enquires whether the Virgin had any pleasure in the co-operation and obumbration of the Holy Ghost; he holds for the affirmative and adduces very good reasons. Handsome books have been written against him; but in this dispute nobody has been burnt and no towns have been destroyed. If the partisans of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and the Pope had acted in the same way there could have been nothing but pleasure in living with such people.

"These fanatical quarrels only exist now in France. The Jansenists and the Molinists keep up a quarrel which might become serious, because these fantasies are treated seriously.

"A prince need only jest at them and his people will laugh at them; but Princes who have confessors are rarely philosophers." 59

The idea of progress was an intellectual phenomenon of the next century, but this passage reveals a meeting of minds on the progress from persecution, the strong implication being that Reason is exerting itself over fanatic dogmatism and superstitious trifles. To them Reason and freedom seem to go together. Of course, the aim of the Inquisition and the Consistory was a rational one; heresies prevent God's children from entering heaven, ergo, cut out the cancer and let the body live. Fires and auto-da-fes had their mystical aspects besides the profound influence on would-be heretics. Why else would

a man like Descartes submit his philosophy to the Church? He did not wish a martyr's death. Frederick and Voltaire undoubtedly understood this reasoning, and it served as evidence of how religion could pervert reason. Toleration is the reasonable approach to life's controversies; there is a better chance of arriving at truth through dialectic than through dogmatic assertion, both seem to say. Thus both men were pleased at the advance in toleration of their day, with the exception of France, where Voltaire suffered for his want of piety and respect for the Church.

Voltaire's closing quip on princes and confessors is significant. In those times it was hard to find a French King who had not been influenced by a cleric, Louis XV being no exception. It is, in a way, a back-handed compliment to the modus operandi of the Jesuits in regard to Kings.

#### Voltaire Changes to Frederick's View of Freedom

In an earlier section <sup>to</sup> the controversy of Frederick and Voltaire over freedom and determinism was discussed. Then Voltaire held that man was a free agent in this

universe. In this period he candidly admits to Frederick that he is "now of your opinion of ten years ago." He no longer holds for freedom, but rather that man is a machine made by God to run a certain time, as God pleases. Thus the two minds meet in accord, and it is in this line of argument that Voltaire discusses in "Freedom" in his Philosophical Dictionary which was begun in Potsdam shortly thereafter. However naturalistic this may sound, it is most certain that these men did not hold for an absolute determinism. Rather it is that man is limited in his choices by his immediate environment over which he has little control. Within the limits of this environment, man does exercise a choice. It should be one of reason, but it does not have to be; thus, neither evil nor good is pre-established. The guilt for evil lies heavily on man.

A Touch of Vanity, of Modesty, of Humour

Frederick: Do not sulk because the public does not <sup>acc</sup> proclaim you.

Frederick:

"You say such fine things to me poetically that my head would be turned if I believed them.

I beg you let us have no more heroes, heroism, and all those big words which, now there is peace, are only fit to fill out a few pages of a novel or a few lines of a tragedy with pompous nonsense."

"It is fatuous for any man to think himself so remarkable that the whole universe must be informed of the details concerning him individually." <sup>61</sup>

Voltaire: How about conquering some southern territories so that I may have a comfortable place to convalesce?

Frederick: It is remarkable how much you suffer and yet you produce so much. Wouldn't it be regrettable if health and vigor should plague you?

Voltaire: "Madame du Chatelet and I, Sire, are still occupied by that same veneration of your Majesty and she easily prefers you to all the monads of Leibnitz." <sup>62</sup>

Frederick: "God created donkeys, Doric columns, and kings to bear the burdens of this world." <sup>63</sup>

And a Touch of Bitterness:

Frederick: "I am a galley slave chained to the vessel of state ..... The study of poetry

needs a man's whole time; the Muses demand solitude and a complete tranquility of mind."<sup>47</sup>  
These I do not have.

#### A Comparison: 1747

In 1747 both Frederick and Voltaire penned theses which merit some discussion; they reveal the gulf of interest between the two, and they reveal something of the current thought. In 1747 Voltaire wrote Zadig; in that same year Frederick wrote his secret Instructions to Generals.

Zadig is sometimes called a satire by critics, but it can also be considered a sincere effort, although it is flavored with the sandpaper wit of Voltaire which rubs the guilt off all conventional idols. The story is familiar: In the land of Babylon lived a princely sort of fellow named Zadig who, living by the word of Zarathustra, seemed destined for a happy and successful life. But, quite independently of his own volition, things kept happening to him which rendered his estate worse and worse. Each time that he seemed to have surmounted an adverse

circumstance, he would find that his well intentioned efforts had led him to more serious trouble. Zadig applied reason to his situations and managed to bring some order to them, but he could not avoid them, for in applying reason he insulted those who represented established convention. Yet, for those who would listen to him, he solved many problems, according to reason, from how to tell a faithful wife to the knowledge of God. In regard to this latter instance, an Egyptian, an Indian, a Chinese, a Greek, a Celt and several other strangers were dining together when the subject of God came up. Each man claimed absolute truth for his ethnocentric deity, and the discussion was nearing violence. Zadig rose and said, "My friends, you are going to quarrel about nothing, for you all hold the same views." <sup>65</sup> At these words, all his listeners cried out in protest. But is it not true, he continued, that each of you do not worship your particular idol for itself, but for that which made it possible? They agreed. Then, he said, you all think the same thing, and there is no reason for quarreling. Everyone embraced him. But, since he had been sentenced to be roasted over a slow fire, he fled.

Many other misfortunes awaited him which were indeed hard for him to understand. Then he met the angel Jesrad, who chided Zadig for his lack of understanding of the world. "Men judge of everything without understanding anything." <sup>66</sup> Shortly Zadig asked, "What then! Must there always be crimes and misfortunes, and must misfortune fall on good people?" <sup>67</sup>

"The wicked," answered Jesrad, "are always unhappy: they serve to prove the small number of the just scattered over the face of the earth, and there is no evil of which good is not born." <sup>68</sup>

"But supposing," said Zadig, "there were only good and no evil?" <sup>69</sup>

"In that case," replied Jesrad, "this earth would be another earth, the concatenation of events would belong to another order of wisdom; and that order, which would be perfect, can exist only in the eternal abode of the Supreme Being, whom evil cannot approach. He has created millions of worlds, no one of which can resemble another. This vast variety is a symbol of the vastness of his power. On the earth there are no two leaves of a tree like to each other, and in the limitless plains of

the heavens no two orbs. All you see on the little atom where you have been born had to be, in its appointed place and time, in accordance with the immutable laws of him who embodied everything."<sup>70</sup> Men think that events are the result of chance. "Frail mortal, cease contending with that which is to be worshiped."<sup>71</sup>

Zadig then returned to Babylon where, after more adversities, he became King and ruled wisely and everything was strawberries and cheerios in Babylon.

What is the meaning of Zadig? It holds that in the end Reason prevails, aided by Providence which is benign to the good. It means that all the intrinsic evils of conventions can be eliminated by subjecting them to Reason. It means that there is a just reward. It means that evil is necessary. It means, in true Leibnitzian fashion, that if man could transcend his limited existence, he would perceive that the world is arranged according to infinite wisdom. It means that Reason is the ethical key for man's life.

Does this sound like the Voltaire discussed in the last section? The conception of God and the recommendations on the use of reason and its application to convention remain constant, but this affirmation of faith concerning benign Providence is profoundly

different, and it is significantly more strict than the position of Frederick, which he testified to have adopted. This doctrine of a strict concatenation of events according to divine wisdom places Voltaire in a precarious position in relation to his last position of evil. Then he had maintained that evil was the result of man's ability to exercise choice and his freedom to choose the wrong course. Under this strict system, evil can only be attributed to the power which ordains events. Therefore, in order for that Power to remain good, evil must be transformed into a vehicle for the good; that man sees good when he sees apparent evil. Yet, this system of Voltaire contains its intrinsic errors. He maintains that absence of evil is perfection and reserved for the dwelling of the Divine; yet he has already maintained that evil contributes to perfection and is therefore not evil..And he maintains that events are the result of divine will, yet he holds evil individuals responsible for their own actions. This sort of paradox is not peculiarly Voltaire's; it is rather common in Western thought.

However, if Voltaire admits any sort of individual choice, then he forfeits his position of absolute determinism. This he does. But Zadig is nonetheless significant for its effort to reconcile Reason and Providence, providing for a Reward.

Was the writing to which Frederick was devoting himself at this time equally profound? He was writing short verses, both philosophical and complimentary, but his really significant work was a secret technical manual for the military, his Instructions to Generals, which was issued only to his most trusted field marshals under strict interdiction to preserve the secrecy of it, never to take it into the field, and to return it to the king upon the imminence of death. In 1748 he revised it somewhat, changing the name to General Principles of War.

Being, as it were, a technical manual, it was not devoted to any philosophical questions per se, yet this work reveals the intricate analytical power of Frederick's mind. Frederick makes no pretensions to any sort of power save his own resources and the character of his troops and those of the enemy. With the calmness of a completely disinterested person, he describes the ethnic

strengths and weaknesses of friend and foe, recommending the precise amount of physical or psychological exhortation or intimidation necessary to accomplish the results he requires. He prescribes the order of battle against almost every conceivable terrain situation in Central Europe, with an eye on how to make the opposing troops lose heart and mill around their standards, preparing to break and run. He advocated one primary rule of discipline: make your own troops fear you more than they fear the enemy. If discipline were rigid, then he could employ these novel but so effective tactics upon the enemy. Briefly, he disposed light troops and cavalry to the flanks with the artillery. Infantry and more cavalry were held in reserve. The main body of infantry formed long lines across the front. Behind the infantry were Dragoons. The cavalry opened the battle with a charge and a skirmish to unnerve the opposition and to remove the threat of cavalry from the enemy, for at that time no Wellington had come to devise a means for infantry to withstand the charge of cavalry. Then the cavalry retired to the flanks to await the retreat of the opposing infantry. Patrols of Hussars awaited to

envelop the fleeing infantry and to turn them back into the cavalry. Then the infantry would attack, marching resolutely, rifle on shoulder, across the front. On command from the General, the infantry would echelon toward the enemy, having the effect of an enfilade slicing movement. The infantry advanced to well within range before returning fire; then they would fire rapidly, overwhelming the opposition. Then the lines would open to allow the dragoons to charge. Most often, the enemy was already in rout; if not, the infantry would over run them. To accomplish these maneuvers, timing cadence and mobility were essential; that is why there was so much drill in the Prussian army.

And yet, with all these impersonal instructions, a spirit of humanity comes in when Frederick gets around to prisoners and wounded. He seemed unconcerned with the number of soldiers killed, saying that victory is important, not the number of lives the general saves. But his tone becomes rather gentle as he orders his Generals not to mistreat prisoners and to care for the wounded, even enemy wounded. This is one of the few redeeming features of his Instructions to Generals; as a testimonial to his philosophical endeavor it is

useless; it reflects Frederick's ability to wear two hats, one to the exclusion of the other. The duty of a prince overrides the thoughts of a philosopher.

The year 1747 was selected as a sample year to serve as a marker for the current thoughts of Frederick and Voltaire. In both men it reveals a change, a reversal, or a dichotomy from what they had maintained before.

In 1749 Austria adopted Prussian Military Techniques, testifying thereby to the genius, not of the man who organized the army, (for Frederick did not) but of the man who used it so well.

#### Voltaire and Frederick: 1750-1753

This is one of the most comic and the most tragic periods in the lives of the two. Voltaire later said that 1753 was the year of great victory for the forces of superstition, for it was the year when the two most enlightened men of Europe<sup>72</sup> separated in disgust. One thing is certain: although some reconciliation was effected, they never really forgave each other. And, in all justice, it was not a one-sided affair. Each expected too much of the other.

With the death of Madame du Chatelet and the continuing hostility of the King, Voltaire decided to accept Frederick's invitation of long standing. In characteristic fashion, he first applied to Frederick for medals and decorations so that he would be assured of his reception in Germany; then he applied for a substantial sum of money in order to make the journey in style and in comfort, for he was, as usual, a sick man. Frederick hastily and with glee sent Voltaire his highest decorations and a letter of credit on his Paris Banking House. Unfortunately, the letter of credit was in French verse, and the banker had some hesitation about how to interpret it in terms of gold thalers. So Voltaire had to petition again for a more precise letter of credit, which was soon forthcoming.

Voltaire next had a very unpleasant task to perform; although he had been demoted by Louis XV from his position as Royal Historiographer, he was still a Gentleman of the Ordinary, which meant that he must have the King's leave to serve another King. Voltaire approached the King, declared his intentions in a timid and polite way, and received the insulted<sup>73</sup>

King's permission to join Frederick.

His journey was protracted, owing to Voltaire's illness. He must have stopped at every spa offering curative waters. Finally he arrived and was established at Potsdam in close proximity to the King.

Frederick did not alter his schedule just because his most respected friend and teacher had joined him. He still arose between four and five every morning, depending on whether it was summer or winter. Since Voltaire came in July, Frederick was on his summer schedule, which ran something like this: At 3:45 a fire would be lighted in his bedroom. At four, he would arise, put on a dressing gown, and receive the Adjutant-General, who would have the Potsdam security report and the Berlin security report, being largely dossiers on arrivals and departures of persons of note. Then he would receive dispatches from his Marshals and from his high ranking ministers. Then he would send for his secretaries three and dictate orders for the day and special orders to be sent out. He kept a memoranda book containing minute details to be accomplished and on what day they were to be accomplished. Then he dressed

in his favorite uniform, that of the First Battalion of Guards. After practicing a short while with his flute, he devoted himself to affairs of state, such as meeting visitors and ambassadors, until the middle of the morning. Then it was time to review the troops. After inspection on the parade ground, he had lunch with the friends, dignitaries and subordinates which were in Potsdam at the time. This meal lasted, perhaps, two to four hours, depending upon whether or not Frederick was enjoying the conversation. Then he devoted the rest of the day to writing or more state business. Sometimes in the early evening there would be a concert for a select group, with Frederick playing the flute. Voltaire seems to have had a sincere appreciation for Frederick's accomplishment on that instrument. Then would come the evening meal, when witty conversation was expected. In this group Frederick usually included Maupertuis<sup>24</sup> and other pensioners of the Berlin Academy. Repartee was Voltaire's specialty; in these conversations he shone to the disadvantage of the other gentlemen of wit. This did not endear him to the men who considered themselves with such high esteem and who were

jealous of Frederick's attention. Sometimes even Voltaire would go too far with Frederick, and the King-philosopher-friend would suddenly vanish, and in his place would be the King-royal-absolute. "Beware, Gentlemen," said Voltaire on one of these occasions, "the King of Prussia has entered."<sup>75</sup> After the evening meal, if Frederick were not disposed otherwise, he would invite Voltaire to join him in his apartment, and there they would laugh and satirize any and all, including those illustrious gentlemen they had just left in the drawing room, or they would attend to each other's works. Wilhelmina,<sup>76</sup> on an infrequent visit, remarks how biting indeed was Voltaire's wit when used at the table, but, since he was a favorite of hers, she enjoyed the humor at the expense of the others. All things considered, there was sufficient reason to anticipate a long term of friendship between the two men.

But Voltaire was one who never missed the opportunity to enter into intrigue. He had a weakness for the glamor of parlor politics; he considered it his prerogative, as the King's best friend, to deal with visiting Ambassadors in international politics. Voltaire

often spoke for the King, undoubtedly with the exhibitional air of the royal confidant, when actually Frederick never confided his political or military intentions to anyone. "The dissimulation of the general consists of the important art of hiding his thoughts."<sup>77</sup> If you form the finest plans in the world but divulge them (to anyone), your enemy will learn about them, and then it will be very easy for him to parry them."<sup>78</sup> Voltaire was even so indiscreet as to approach the Russian Ambassador. Much of Prussia's well-being depended upon the good graces of Russia, and Frederick was enraged when he learned of Voltaire's actions. "If you have a passion for intrigue and cabal," he said, "you have come to the wrong place."<sup>79</sup>

Frederick thought that he was providing a rich intellectual haven for a real philosopher; he hoped for an atmosphere of friendship which would encourage them both in the production of fine literature. But at the same time, Frederick never let Voltaire forget that he was an expensive guest. Voltaire, who came to be worshiped as well as in mutual respect, found this situation galling.

And, of course, although he may have paid philosophical lip service to the vanity of material wealth, at heart he was a usurer. Voltaire never was able to resist a good scheme to make money, and Frederick had provided one for him. In the Treaty of Dresden in 1745, Frederick had stipulated that Saxony, the defeated party, remit in full the face value of its badly deflated currency to Prussian subjects who held the script. The treaty actually stipulated that only such money as was held at the present time by Prussian subjects should be redeemed, but, of course, a black market traffic arose, which was very profitable to Prussian subjects: deflated Saxon tender would be purchased in Saxony, smuggled into Prussia, then turned in to the Saxon government for redemption. An easy profit was realized. There is some evidence that, not only did Frederick realize this situation from the outset, he trafficked in it himself. Unquestionably he fostered the trade, because, upon complaints, he continually promised to rectify the situation, and then did nothing.

Immediately upon arrival, Voltaire decided to try his hand at this, but he was not satisfied with minor profits; he wanted large ones. So he hired a stooge

named Hirsch. But the stooge cheated Voltaire rather comically. Voltaire's code name for this venture was: purchasing diamonds and furs. So that is just what the man brought him for his tremendous investment: a handful of diamonds far below the value of the investment. Voltaire was legally stuck, but instead of taking the loss, he tried to pull rank. He demanded of Frederick that the man be imprisoned until he restored his money. Frederick turned his back in disgust; his protege was fighting in the mud with a lower class merchant.

Then Voltaire tried the courts, after trying to bribe the judges. In Frederick's Prussia, however, it behooved a judge to be incorruptible. Hirsch was a Jew and therefore could not be examined under oath by the Christian court, but he made his case upon the evidence: Voltaire's code contract was clearly for diamonds, and Voltaire had received diamonds. But Voltaire, not to be denied, forged evidence to contradict the Jew, and thus won the case. Nevertheless, the whole enterprise cost Voltaire a tidy sum.

Frederick was so disgusted that he sent word to Voltaire to avoid him until the mess was over;

he even sent Voltaire to the country to keep him out of his sight. Voltaire wrote pleading letters asking to be reinstated in the good graces of Frederick, and finally he was so reinstated. Frederick wrote a comic satire upon this affair, which is indeed amusing, and he wrote to Wilhelmina, "Voltaire filoute les Juifs."<sup>80</sup>

It is in this period that jealousies and court intrigue led "friends" to report to each man something said by the other. Whether they did or not, is not certain; in later years they claimed it to be malicious slander, but at the time each believed that the other had made unkind remarks. Supposedly, of Voltaire Frederick said, "When we have squeezed the orange dry, we will throw away the peel." And Voltaire of Frederick, whose verses he polished, "I am weary of washing the King's dirty linen." After the continual flattery which customarily passed between them, this must have been a raw insult, indeed.

The real comedy comes in in the Akakia affair. Back in the thirties, when the Berlin Academy was still a dream for Frederick, Voltaire had suggested a French geometer named Maupertuis as an excellent man to

head the Academy. In 1740 Maupertuis had come to Prussia, but as a soldier. He took part in the first Silesian War, seeing service at the Battle of Mollwitz, which was Frederick's baptismal battle. In 1744 he returned to Prussia from France to take the position of Perpetual President of the Berlin Academy which had been founded shortly after Frederick came to the Throne. Apparently Maupertuis was something of a geometer; the Encyclopaedia Britannica recommends him as such. But after Voltaire's arrival, they vied for supreme favor with Frederick. It is quite proper for geometers to seek the principles of cosmology in any age; many have offered possible solutions; but Maupertuis came up with one he styled as final and definitive and stated that no further search was necessary, for he, Maupertuis, had found it. Whether Voltaire liked the man or not, it fits his character to resent any such pompous audacity as this statement represented. But Maupertuis did not stop here. The principle he had discovered was the Law of Thrift which is ~~that~~ "Nature is superlatively thrifty in this affair of motion" (as Carlyle renders it); but it is easier to understand as the law of minimums: that

nature puts out the minimum force necessary to accomplish motion, which is all well and good; indeed, it excited the scientific world of that time to the extent that Maupertuis made a still further claim: that his formula,  $AR$  plus  $nRB$  as a minimum, was the only proof necessary to prove beyond a doubt the existence of God. A well meaning member of the Berlin Academy named Konig sent to the illustrious Perpetual President a letter which he had received, in good faith, as a copy of Leibnitz's letter on this same subject, in which Leibnitz had contended that motion was either a maximum or a minimum, and that it was impossible to tell which. Naturally, this letter was upsetting to Maupertuis, for it meant on one hand that he was not the originator of the idea, and, on the other hand, Leibnitz, a great authority, had considered the question unanswerable. This left the Perpetual President's claims somewhat questionable, if not destroyed. Being scientific at heart, the President immediately called a meeting of the Berlin Academy, the upshot of which was, months later, that the Academy voted unanimously that the President was right and that Konig was mistaken, if he

was not lying. Konig resigned his seat in the Academy, but Maupertuis pursued him to Holland by letter, asking the Dowager of the House of Orange to censure and silence Konig in order that he would not embarrass Maupertuis any further. To put the cap to this situation, Voltaire was a friend of Konig. Voltaire said that it was time for a Swift; he wrote and published anonymously a short satire in the form of a letter to a member of the Paris Academy. Frederick, anxious for the reputation of his Academy, joined the ranks of the anonymous and wrote an answer to Voltaire's letter. Then Voltaire wrote his Diatribes on Dr. Akakia, which really revealed the comic and ridiculous situation of the Perpetual President; this he showed to Frederick. Frederick enjoyed that satire very much in his private chamber, but he expressly ordered that Voltaire not have it printed. Again, he was thinking of the Academy's reputation. Voltaire then got permission to print another work, but at the printer he substituted Akakia for the licensed work. If he had been successful in this ruse, the diatribe would have come out bearing the arms of Frederick himself, but Frederick caught this before it happened. Voltaire was

again warned. Then he had the Akakia surreptitiously printed and circulated. Frederick was furious. He had all copies he could get his hands on burned by the public hangman. All Europe enjoyed this struggle. Voltaire, in his politic way, became extremely ill and could not be disturbed.

It is then that the two men decided that they must part company. Voltaire overtly requested reinstatement by Frederick, but he wrote to others that he was leaving as soon as he could escape. Apparently he thought that Frederick would detain him. He secured permission to depart; he returned all of Frederick's decorations to him. (Once to a small girl who had stared at the decorations he remarked that they were just bagatelles.) But Frederick magnanimously returned them, saying that "for your poetry you deserved statues, but for your conduct you deserve chains," and that the medals were for the former. Since Voltaire continued his vicious attacks, Frederick changed his mind and ordered that Voltaire return his private edition of the King's works and the medals. He undoubtedly feared what the vindictive Voltaire would do with them. It would have been better

for Voltaire if he had returned them then, as directed, but he was in Leipzig and out of Frederick's immediate jurisdiction. It was while he was there that he received the threat of Maupertuis, a challenge by letter which promised, among other dire things, "vengeance la plus eclatante." Voltaire's reply is a classic in witty insult: After wishing the President health, and lamenting the false understanding which made Akakia seem to insult him, Voltaire complains as usual of his sickly nature, and then closes:

"Poor me, indeed, you will find in bed; and I shall have nothing for you but my syringe and vessel of dishonour; but so soon as I have gained a little strength, I will have my pistols charged cum pulvere pyrio; and multiplying the mass by the square of the velocity, so as to reduce the action and you to zero, I will put some lead in your head;- it appears to have need of it. Adieu, mon Presidente.

Akakia" 81

Then came the unfortunate affair at Frankfort. Frederick had ordered the resident not to let Voltaire pass without surrendering his volume of poetry and the medals, and had promptly gone off to the Silesian reviews. When Voltaire arrived in Frankfort, he was arrested and the volume was demanded of him. He said that

it was in his baggage which was following. The distressed resident decided that Voltaire should remain in Frankfort until the volume was rendered. It was not as if Voltaire had been thrown into the deepest dungeon, as it seems when you read his version. He was merely paroled to a comfortable inn. Once he tried to escape, which necessitated continual guards thereafter. The baggage came, the volume was rendered, and Voltaire demanded permission to depart, but the cautious resident detained him until he could check with Berlin. Of course, the King was not there, and the minister in charge did not know exactly what was happening, so it was some time before Voltaire was released. His screams of indignation were heard throughout Europe; he saw to that.

This account manifestly demonstrates why there were no great philosophical ideas passed between the two while Voltaire was in Prussia, because either the men talked behind closed doors or they were not speaking at all. It is unfortunate for the men but fortunate for us that this schism came.

Was there any significance at all in Voltaire's visit in regard to Philosophy? At least one critic, G. R. Havens, contends that this visit freed him finally of all the restraints to which he was accustomed due to Madame du Chatelet.. It is true, however, that there is a significant change in thought after Potsdam and Prussia.

Though his Prussian years were not especially productive, Voltaire did produce some works of philosophical note. While he was in Prussia, he began his Philosophical Dictionary, wrote his Siecle de Louis XIV, his Micromegas, his Poeme sur la Loi Naturelle, and his Essai sur les Moeurs.

The Siecle de Louis XIV congratulated that age as being one of the greatest in history, lacking only two things, characteristically: rationalism and a hatred for superstition.

The Loi Naturelle and the Essai sur les Moeurs maintain in favor of a universality of rational morality, despite ethnic and cultural differences. These ideas are not unlike those already proposed.

Micromegas is somewhat different. In a way it is another slap at Maupertuis who led an expedition to Lapland (Northern Poland) to do some celestial measuring and the like. There, supposedly, they met two visitors from another world. The visitors and the scientists conversed. In physical mathematics and geometry the scientists proved themselves proficient and accurate, which is what is expected, knowing that Voltaire was influenced by Newton. But on questions of morality and what is inside rather than what is external, the scientists reveal themselves wholly stupid. By no coincidence, there was a representative for every opinion prevalent at the time, from Aristotelian, Cartesian, Lockean, Leibnitzian, and Thomistic.

A secondary aspect of this story is the emphasis upon how little earth is in relation to the universe. The real significance in Micromegas lies in the question: What is the profit in all the exact sciences if they tell us nothing which will solve life's ultimate problems? Science by official opinion, coming from Newton, had limited itself somewhat short of the metaphysical quest, turning to How, not Why, the universe is motivated. Of course, Voltaire thought metaphysics to be somewhat

wasted time, and no doubt he thought it proper for there to be scientific quests - he dabbled in science himself, as did many of the age, but he feared that men, especially intelligent men, would turn from a philosophical quest, no longer seeking the ultimate, and thus estopping moral progress through reason by limiting their endeavors to the new science. The French popularizer of Newton foresaw this danger.

#### The Last Years: 1753-1778

Upon leaving Prussia, Voltaire really had no place to go, as even France was closed to him. He settled near Geneva, and in 1758 he, being a wealthy man, purchased two large estates, Ferney and Tourney. There he established himself as a wealthy lord, enjoying the best of material comforts, receiving the homage of admirers from near and far, and continuing his literary efforts. Never far removed from economic ventures, Voltaire established a watchmaker's factory on his estate which was extremely profitable; even the Turks sent orders to his factory. It can safely be said that

Voltaire lived out his life without any mundane cares. Shortly before his death, he returned to Paris in triumph, hailed by crowds, saluted by the Academy, acknowledged by the nobility, but never forgiven by the Church, which, no doubt, he relishes to this day as his greatest compliment and accomplishment.

Frederick was soon to return to the battlefield. The Seven Year's War began in 1756. It is in this war that the strength and genius of Frederick were really displayed. United against Prussia were the overwhelmingly superior forces of Austria, Russia, and France, which meant also that Prussia was open to attack from all sides. Any impartial observer at the time would have predicted the end of Prussia; the Allies had even decided how to divide the Prussian monarchy; even Frederick was in secret despair, but, rather than await his doom, he set out to seek it. He, the underdog, attacked first. Utilizing the mobility of his armies, he fought each opposing army separately, trying to prevent a union. He raced his armies back and forth across Prussia, defeating the French, Austrian, and Russian armies with brilliant strategy. And he was now fighting armies patterned after his own. But he could not be

everywhere at once. Berlin was burned. In 1760 George III came to the English throne and stopped his subsidies to Frederick. Now defeat was inevitable. But Prussia was given another chance when Russia dropped out of the war, due to the death of Elizabeth of Russia, who hated Frederick personally. Her successor, Peter III, was an admirer of his, but Peter was deposed in favor of Catherine the Second, but she did not continue the war. Frederick continued to win battles and to defeat the opposing armies. In 1763 the war ended; in the treaty of Hubertusburg Frederick was found to be victor. Prussia's territory remained intact. After a short return of hostilities in the War of the Bavarian Succession, 1778-1779, Prussia was at peace. Frederick turned his full attention to his subjects, providing aid and encouragement to commerce, agriculture, manufacturing and education. He put into practice many of the philosophical ideals of which he had spoken.

Let us examine some of Frederick's reforms with the purpose of observing the ramifications of his actions. Did he follow what he proposed as a Crown Prince? Did he rule with reason for the benefit of his

subjects? Even a list reveals the overwhelming affirmative of the answer:

Abolition of legal torture,  
 Founded the Berlin Academy,  
 Freedom of Religion,  
 Freedom of the Press,  
 Abolition of Serfdom,  
 Codified and modernized the legal code, including guaranteed litigation within one year,  
 Built roads and canals and drained marshes,  
 Provided homesteads to skilled immigrants,  
 Provided education,  
 Established district banks,  
 Encouraged manufacturing and shipping, and  
 Opened government magazines in times of famine.

Of course, all of these improvements were possible only because of heavy taxes and universal military conscription. This latter point may completely cancel out all his reforms to a person who is anti-militaristic, but the same observation must also be applied to the United States now. While we have two years' service as the price of democracy, Prussia had three or more years of service as the price of German liberty.

Frederick's last years were, then, without serious conflict for Frederick also. He maintained his rigid daily schedule and his frequent inspections and reviews, yet he had more time to reflect and to take up the philosopher's robe again.

For four years nothing passed between Frederick and

Voltaire. Perhaps pride would have kept them separated had it not been for a crisis. At the outset of the Seven Years' War, Frederick wrote in despair to Voltaire, saying that he would commit suicide before he would see Prussia defeated. This was Voltaire's opportunity to repay Frederick for all his indignities, real or imaginary, and Voltaire was not one to forgive easily. But he did. He wrote a kind letter back to Frederick on the vanity and uselessness of suicide. In Roman times, he said, such a move would be appreciated and respected, but not in these times. Frederick considered himself the Don Quixote of the North, a martyr for liberty fighting alone.

"Oh, Austrians! Your ambition, your desire to dominate everywhere, would soon raise you up other enemies; and the liberties of Germany and Europe will never lack defenders." 83

Here he whistled in the dark. Later he was to blame Louis XV for promoting the war.

Despite the extreme premium upon his time during the war, Frederick resumed his correspondence with Voltaire. As time went on, more and more humor is exchanged between the two, especially after Voltaire

erected his church (Deo erexit Voltaire) and Frederick gave protection to the Jesuits who were being turned out of Spain, Portugal and France. (Frederick utilized their skill and education.) Voltaire called Frederick his Jesuit friend, and Frederick called Voltaire his Capuchin friend - very ironic and very amusing.

It seemed for a while that Voltaire might again go to Prussia to live. He requested lands and provisions to found a philosopher's colony in Cleves; Frederick granted his request, on condition that the philosophers observe some respect where it was due, that is, to Frederick himself. But Voltaire's plan fell through. He complained that St. Ignatius could get several fanatics to follow his superstitions, but that he, Voltaire, could not get any true philosophers to follow him.

In discussing the thought of their closing years, the tedium of their remonstrations and forgivings of the Potsdam years will be omitted. Suffice it to say that words did pass on occasion, but on the whole it seemed that the breach was healed. Voltaire, true to himself, secretly wrote a bitter and unkind satire on

Frederick after their correspondence had been resumed, but he did not have it published. Frederick read it in manuscript after Voltaire's death and was not too pleased. But he had expected something of the sort, as he wrote to Voltaire in 1759, the same year in which Voltaire was working on this satire, "You will have the pleasure of writing a malicious couplet on my tomb, and I shall not mind; I absolve you beforehand." <sup>84</sup>

#### Interchange on Man and Human Nature

Frederick: "I am ashamed of humanity.....  
 Let us admit the truth; philosophy and the arts are only diffused among the few; the great mass, the people and the vulgar nobles, remain as nature made them, that is, malevolent animals." <sup>85</sup> "In spite of philosophic schools man will remain the most malevolent beast in the Universe; superstition, self-interest, vengeance, treason, ingratitude, will produce bloody and tragic scenes until the

end of time, because we are governed by passions and very rarely by reason." <sup>86</sup> Man "discovers a few truths only with immense labour." <sup>87</sup> "The mob does not deserve to be enlightened." <sup>88</sup>

Voltaire: Is this not what I have always maintained? "When I begged you to restore the fine arts of Greece, my request did not go so far as to beg you to re-establish the Athenian democracy; I do not like government by the rabble." <sup>89</sup>

No, Voltaire, that is not what you have always maintained (See pages 17-18). This is what Frederick has maintained, an idea which you accepted. Frederick holds that Law represses vice, or, that is, terror of the law promotes virtue; man, left to his own measures, is not virtuous, only philosophers are. The group of philosophers remains small, but they are the only hope for human nature and society. Only the philosopher is able to transcend his natural malevolency (i.e., original sin) through his use of reason. Reason properly applied to society results in laws whereby the punishment fits the crime, so that a man, faced with the opportunity to

commit a heinous crime, knows that a heinous penalty will be exacted from him if he does, and therefore refrains. This theory of penology reveals the underlying assumption of pleasure-pain associations in the psychology of the individual which remains constant throughout society. This idea coheres with their other ideas.

The idea of an intellectual elite is even more significant when its ramifications are examined. It is implied that only a chosen few have the capacity to transcend passions and to live by reason alone. This serves as justification for an absolutistic government; this serves as sufficient grounds to subject other men. But each person has the opportunity to be a member of this elite, for it is by reason, "by the talents he displays," that he distinguishes himself as a member, not by any artificial or cultural or physiological means. Therefore, education is extended in the hope of bringing out this potential in the elite, and, short of that, to help control those who are not, even though they do not deserve to be educated. But the numbers

are still disappointingly small; this observation reinforces the proposition.

#### Interchange on Immortality

Voltaire: "But for eternity, the matter is a little more doubtful; we are surrounded by the empire of doubt, and doubt is a disagreeable state.... Is there anything to hope for after the moment of life?" <sup>90</sup>

Frederick: "We have sufficient degrees of probability to reach the certainty that post mortem nihil est." <sup>91</sup>  
 "Man is not a double being, we are only matter animated by movement, and that, as soon as the worn-out parts refuse to work, the machine is destroyed and its components dissolved." <sup>92</sup>

The system which provided the answer is not strict rationalism taking the mind to a priori certainty; it is rather a reasoned chain of probabilities, more inductive than deductive, which after a certain point cross the boundary into probable certainty. This kind of certainty is that on which the philosopher bases his life and thus escapes the error of thinking himself capable of absolute knowledge. This system in itself reflects

intellectual humility.

The answer is a different matter. Post mortem nihil est is rather limited in its ramifications. Yet, if Frederick maintained that there was no hereafter, then all the recompenses of rewards are denied, such as are offered in the Christian Heaven. This emphasized that the two believed in virtue for its own sake and not for rewards. Certainly they did not believe in rewards in this life, for "nothing is so dangerous as to be in the right."<sup>43</sup> And a strict dualism, Cartesian or otherwise, is denied; but this is not startling, since Leibnitz was in vogue.

#### Interchange on Progress

Frederick: "The progress of human reason is slower than people think. Here is the true reason: Almost every one is contented with vague ideas of things; few have the time to examine and scrutinize them. Some, strangled by the chains of superstition from their childhood, will not or cannot break them; others, given up to frivolity, have not a word of geometry in their heads and enjoy life without ever

interrupting their pleasures by a moment of reflection. To them add timid souls and fearful women and the total makes up society. If there is one man in a thousand who thinks, 'tis much." <sup>94</sup> "The thick mist which blinded humanity in the Tenth and Thirteenth Centuries is dispersed; yet most eyes are purblind; some have their eyelids stuck down." <sup>95</sup>

Voltaire: "It is true that at the present time we may notice an emulation among nearly all sovereigns to distinguish themselves by great and useful institutions. It even appears that in some courts superstition is diminishing. But where is the prince who approaches your philosophy?" <sup>96</sup>

Frederick: "... and we shall lament the sad destiny of men, who from weakness or stupidity, are falling back into fanaticism." I "await until the age is sufficiently enlightened for one to be able to think aloud with impunity." <sup>97</sup>

This interchange is hardly consistent as it is presented here. This will be resolved shortly. First, let us note the two drives which are implied to be

found in history: one, the drive toward enlightenment; two, the drive toward fanaticism. Enlightenment is the supreme expression of reason; fanaticism is the supreme expression of passion. Why are these drives in history? As far as man is concerned, it is due to his original sin and a tendency to be intellectually lazy.

"The ages when nations produce Turennes, Condes, Bossuets, Bayles, and Corneilles do not follow each other closely; such were the ages of Pericles, of Cicero, of Louis XIV. Everything must prepare men's minds for such an effervescence. It appears to be an effort of nature, followed by a period of repose when nature has lavished at once its fecundity and its abundance. No sovereign can contribute to the creation of so brilliant an epoch. Nature must place geniuses in such a way that those who have received them can employ them in the station they have to occupy in the world. And misplaced genius is often like abortive seed which produces nothing." "Some centuries from now they will translate the good authors of the time of Louis XIV as we translate those of the age of Pericles and of Augustus..... Those who come after us will be born with less enthusiasm for the masterpieces of the human mind, because the time of effervescence is over. It is limited to the first achievements, which are followed by satiety and the taste for good or bad novelties." 98

This is at base a cyclical theory of history; things are not getting better and better, nor worse and

worse. There appear times of effervescence followed by decline until a new era of effervescence. Notice that men are the means, not the cause, of these periods of greatness. In this system it is not clear whether it is Providence or chance which places genius in fortunate positions; (Nature is an emasculated word, a mere convenience, signifying only "other than man") it is merely a philosophic observation - this is the way it is. Inherent in the age besides the geniuses who produce the greatness are those who have the capacity to appreciate it. The mixture of the two produces the "first achievements" which are lost on the succeeding generations as a whole, who have neither the capacity to produce nor to appreciate artistic brilliance. Some, of course, in every age can appreciate, even if they cannot produce.

Even the tools of culture must contribute to this time of effervescence. Language, for instance, is extremely important, for words must be used in the communication of thought; if there is not an adequate speech, how can the genius communicate? 99

To complete the system it is necessary to point out that the time of effervescence and the time of enlightenment are one and the same. And whether it is the height or the depth of history, life goes on, Reason remaining the guide throughout for those who can use it.

Therefore, it becomes clear why both Frederick and Voltaire could report progress from the depths of medieval fanaticism, predict an imminent return to fanaticism, and foresee a period of greater enlightenment in the future, when one is able to think out loud with impunity.

An interesting omission in the list of ages of effervescence is the Renaissance. If the Victorian Age had preceded the Age of Enlightenment, the Renaissance would surely have been noted.

#### Interchange on War

Voltaire, the author of Candide, remonstrates with Frederick about the brutality of war; he even tries to mediate a peace in the Seven Years' War. Chapters two and three of the Candide ask the question about war which defies synopsis.

Frederick: "Do you think I take any pleasure in this dog's life, in seeing and causing the death of people unknown to me, in losing my friends and acquaintances daily.....?<sup>100</sup>

"I certainly know the value of tranquillity, the charms of society, the pleasures of life, and I like to be happy as much as anybody. Although I desire all these good things, I will not buy them with baseness and infamy. Philosophy teaches us to do our duty, to serve our country faithfully at the expense of our repose, to commit our whole being to it."<sup>101</sup>

Here again is that sense of duty reinforced by philosophy which takes precedence over personal desire. But this point has been adequately covered before; it is brought up again for one reason: Voltaire is hailed as one of the great war haters of all times, yet he begged Frederick to send his regiments, then peacefully drilling, against the Turks. When Frederick said that there was no need to go to war; Prussia was in no danger, Voltaire held out lands and fame, and, failing

in this, implied that Frederick had lost his heart.  
All this was from the great war hater.

#### Interchange on L'Infame and Superstition

In an earlier section, we have noted the hostility these two had toward theologians and the Christian religion; in almost every section there is an allusion to superstition and fanaticism; finally in the theory of history all these tend to be unified in the depths of history's cycles, because these are the destroyers and the enemies of the enlightenment. Ergo, destroy the destroyers. *Ecrasez l'infame*, Christianity, and with it all other superstitions as well. Why? In order to worship the Supreme Being. A paradox? No.

Voltaire coined the phrase, but before too long the two men referred to Christianity as our Infamous.

Voltaire:

"Thus spoke the Lord: 'This is he whom I announced; he shall make flat the high places and raise them that are low; behold he comes; he shall teach the children of men that a man may be brave and merciful, great and simple, eloquent and a poet; for I have

taught him all these things. I illuminated him when he came into the world, so that he should make me known as I am and not as the foolish children of men have painted me. For I take all the spheres of the universe as witness that I, their founder, was never scourged nor (crucified) in that little globe of the earth; that I never inspired any Jew nor crowned any Pope; but in the fulness of time I sent my servant Frederick, who is not called my anointed; but he is my son and my image, and I said to him: "My son, it is not enough to have made thine enemies thy footstool and to have given laws to thy kingdom, but thou shalt drive superstition forever from this globe."

"And the great Frederick said unto Jehovah: 'The monster of superstition have I driven from my heart and from the hearts of all that are near me; but, Father, you have arranged this world in such a way that I can only do good in my own house and even then with some difficulty. How do you expect me to give common sense to the people of Rome, Naples and Madrid?'

"Then said Jehovah: 'Thy lessons and thy examples shall suffice; give them long enough, O my son, and I will cause these seeds to grow and to produce fruit in their time.' (like the mustard seed)

"And the great prophet answered and said: 'O Jehovah! You are very powerful, but I defy you to make all men reasonable. Take my advice, and content yourself with a small number of the elect; you will never have more for your share.'" *102*

There is more thought than humor in this passage; it reveals rather concisely the totality of the two men's thought on this matter. The whole situation is intentionally

ludicrous, emphasising by humorous sacrilege just how far removed they were from religion. Jehovah is a comic character whose sole purpose is to establish that Christianity is not the true worship of God. This point is made more specifically in other passages:

Voltaire:

"This good woman of Bethlehem never expected that one day so many sacrifices would be made to her and her son. Human blood has flowed for them a thousand times more than for the pagan gods." <sup>103</sup>

Frederick:

"It is true as you say that the Christians grossly plagiarized the fables invented before them. I can forgive them the virgins on account of several beautiful pictures the painters have made of them; but you will admit that neither antiquity nor any other nation has imagined a more atrocious and blasphemous absurdity than that of eating God. It is a most revolting dogma, insulting to the Supreme Being, the height of madness and folly. It is true, the Gentiles made their gods play somewhat ridiculous parts by attributing to them human passions and weaknesses. The Indians attribute thirty incarnations to their Sommona-Codom; but these races do not eat the objects of their adoration. Only the Egyptians would have been allowed to devour their god Apis. This is how the Christians treat the autocrat of the universe." <sup>104</sup>

The question which Frederick, the son of god, asked is a valid one, and the answer he received was

equally genuine, according to their thought:

Voltaire:

"You are quite right to say that the infamous will never be destroyed by force of arms, for it would be necessary to fight for another superstition which would only be accepted if it were more abominable. Arms can dethrone a Pope, dispossess an Ecclesiastical Elector, but not dethrone a delusion." "..... I realize you will only destroy the Christ worshipping superstition by the arms of reason." 105

Reason and example are the arsenal of truth and the hope for the enlightenment. These men, recall, were attacking religion on profoundly moral grounds. Yet the recalcitrance of human nature, rooted in the passions, renders truth ineffectual to the large body of mankind.

Frederick:

"Its roots plunge to the whole universe; it is the daughter of timidity, weakness and ignorance. This trinity dominates vulgar souls as imperiously as another trinity in theological schools. What contradictions may not be allied in the human mind!" 106

There remain only the philosophers who can worship the Supreme Being as he should be worshiped, through reason. (And this is not a strict rationalism.) But:

Frederick:

"Believe me, if the philosophers founded a government, within half a century the people would create new superstitions and would devote its worship to some object striking the senses; or it would make itself little idols or it would revere the tombs of its founders, or it would invoke the sun, or some similar absurdity would overwhelm the pure and simple worship of the Supreme Being.

"Superstition is a weakness of the human mind; it is inherent in that mind; it always has been, it always will be. The objects of adoration may change like your French fashions; what does it matter ..... The choice is not worth the trouble; the superstition is the same and the reason gains nothing." 107

So philosophers can never erect anything lasting; the extension of reason is a continual process, a battle which must be maintained in every age by those who are enlightened, yet genius is not evenly distributed in all ages. Thus there will be that cyclical flux.

#### The Exaltation of Reason

The totality of their thought is directed toward this end. Frederick began his philosophic career a strict rationalist, looking to theorems and postulates of moral geometry for absolute and certain knowledge. This position he abandoned, joining Voltaire on a stand of intellectual humility, regardless of how much arrogance each may

have had personally.

This more moderate position limits metaphysics to the acknowledgment of a Supreme Being. (Atheism is harmless, religious fanaticism is harmful, neither is likely to be true, says Voltaire in effect.) Whether this Supreme Being is benign Providence or His Majesty Chance, man can have no absolute certainty. Certainly there seems to be both elements mixed into life. Both acknowledge this Supreme Being to be the author of the physical and psychological laws which further limit man and nature. Voltaire to his death remained agnostic on further metaphysical questions; Frederick often held in a light but sincere manner that Dr. Pangloss was not too far wrong.

Reason was also the key to ethical and epistemological questions. This reason merely subjected the significant activities of man to analysis and the question: Does the result of the action accomplish what the accepted accomplishment is said to be? Thus all the inconsistencies of tradition and culture can be recognized, if not eliminated. Secondly, choices can be made on the basis of reasonable probability. This does

not mean that, under given circumstances two equal men will make the same choice necessarily; it means that they probably would make the same choice.

Implied then in this use of reason is morality; ethical requirements of life are met by the use of reason; that is to say, reason is good. <sup>108</sup>

#### A Final Note on Personal Morality

Frederick often congratulated Voltaire on his being able to "cultivate his garden" as he wished in peace. Voltaire had no material cares other than his own; these did he tend to. Yet he was free to write and to think. But Frederick had no misapprehensions about Voltaire; he knew him well:

"Loving pomp, yet despising the great, he behaves without restraint to his superiors, but with reserve to his equals. Polite on first approach, he soon becomes freezingly cold. He delights in yet takes offense at courts. With great sensibility he forms but few friendships, and he abstains from pleasure only from the absence of passion. When he attaches himself to anyone, it is rather from levity than choice. He reasons without principles, which is the cause that he, like the herd of mankind, is subject to fits of folly. With a liberal head he has a corrupted heart. He reflects on all and turns all into ridicule. A libertine without stamina, a moralist destitute of morality,

and vain to the most supreme degree. Yet is his vanity inferior to his avarice. He writes less for fame than for money, and may be said to labor only to live. Though formed for enjoyment, he is never weary of amassing." 1756  
 (Note: there is somewhat of a semantic difference in this quotation from the other quotations; this is the English of a century ago, while the others are more contemporary.)

This is the actual philosophy by which Voltaire lived, which separates the man from his thought. Although he cultivated his garden, he always raised a cash crop.

Frederick likened himself to the archetype of the Stoic philosophy, Marcus Aurelius, and this is a valid observation. Frederick, despite his claims, never lived by any form of hedonism. Placing Duty, Service, and Reason to the forefront of his life, and feeling himself united with a transcendent teleos, he qualifies for a Stoic's epitaph, no matter how unkindly critics may treat his actions.

#### FINIS

In my opinion Frederick was the greater of the two, both in life and in thought. He can never be as

witty nor as biting as Voltaire, but in his constant and conscientious struggle to reconcile his life to his profound thought, he gives us the example of the man who establishes for himself a philosophy which is more ideal than practical, and then tries to live by it. Placed against those of his contemporaries in similar situations, he is again outstanding. In contrast there were several gifted encyclopedists and satirists, although Voltaire remains a perennial favorite.

## Footnotes

- 1 Richard Aldington, Letters of Voltaire and Frederick the Great, Plymouth, 1927, p. 17.
- 2 Friedrich had attempted to flee the oppression of his father aided by his friend Lt. Katte. They were captured at the border. Friedrich was imprisoned; Katte was executed before his eyes.
- 3 Reddaway Frederick the Great, N.Y. 1904 p. 45.
- 4 Aldington op. cit. 55
- 5 Friedrich I, first King of Prussia
- 6 Aldington op. cit. p. 25
- 7 Ibid p. 30.
- 8 Ibid 149
- 9 Ibid 149
- 10 I take this observation to be intentionally ludicrous
- 11 Aldington op cit 145
- 12 Ibid 116
- 13 Ibid 133
- 14 Ibid 46
- 15 Ibid 46
- 16 Ibid 63
- 17 Leibnitz's pre existing harmony, that the necessary imperfections of the individual monads contributing to the perfection of the Supreme Monad which is totally on God was established before creation. Calvinistic predestination holds that God has ordained the order of the Universe and man by his Will from the Beginning.  
It might seem that Friedreich Wilhelm I was not a Calvinist on this ground, but at this time there was the Arminian school of Calvinism which denied predestination.
- 18 Aldington op. cit. 101.
- 19 Later it will be shown that Voltaire adopted Friedreich's position. See "Liberty" in Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary.
- 20 Aldington op. cit. 101

- 21 Ibid 114
- 22 Ibid 58
- 23 Ibid 60
- 24 Voltaire Philosophical Dictionary Truth (a more precise statement than my paraphrase) Redmond, The Portable Voltaire N.Y. 1949.
- 25 Aldington op. cit. 31
- 26 Correspondence theory of truth: the idea in the mind corresponds with reality.
- 27 Aldington op. cit. 60
- 28 Ibid 45
- 29 Ibid 47
- 30 Ibid 42
- 31 Ibid 42
- 32 Ibid 34
- 33 Ibid 115
- 34 Ibid 113
- 35 Ibid 129
- 36 Ibid 131
- 37 Ibid 68
- 38 Actually this is more of an interpretation of Leibniz made by his disciples.
- 39 Aldington op. cit. p. 89.
40. Ibid 130
- 41 Ibid 130
- 42 Ibid 130
- 43 Ibid 106
- 44 Ibid p. 50
- 45 Ibid p. 58
- 46 Ibid p. 19
- 47 Ibid 62

- 48 Carlyle Frederick the Great 219 Vol III Boston.
- 49 Ibid 230 Vol IIV
- 50 Aldington op. cit. 135
- 51 Ibid 142
- 52 Ibid 190
- 53 Ibid 145
- 54 Ibid 164
- 55 This word may prove misleading; in its present context it is not intended to be associated with any particular existentialist who is familiar to the reader. Rather it refers to the notion shared by many existentialists of the relation of the individual to his situation: to them it is of no use to ask why, for one is already there; one is trapped by his existence, for he cannot change it. What is left is resolute action within that situation.
- 56 Aldington op. cit. 159
- 57 Ibid 158
- 58 Ibid 165
- 59 Ibid 168
- 60 see p. 17
- 61 Ibid 178
- 62 Ibid 177
- 63 Ibid 156
- 64 Ibid 193
- 65 B. R. Redmond The Portable Voltaire N.Y. 1949
- 66 Ibid
- 67 Ibid
- 68 Ibid
- 69 Ibid
- 70 Ibid
- 71 Ibid
- 72 according to Voltaire

- 73 insulted because a subject would prefer service to another King
- 74 see p. 75 for brief biography of Maupertuis
- 75 Reddaway op. cit.
- 76 Friedrich's Sister, the Margravine of Bayreuth
- 77 Instogen
- 78 Ibid
- 79 Aldington op cit 221
- 80 This is the account found in Carlyle
- 81 Carlyle op cit.
- 82 Voltaire professes poverty on every occasion; actually he was quite wealthy thanks to inheritances, royal pensions, and successful business ventures
83. Aldington op. cit. 243
- 84 Ibid 266
- 85 Ibid 249
- 86 Ibid 257
- 87 Ibid 324
- 88 Ibid 279
- 89 Ibid 346
- 90 Ibid 313
- 91 Ibid 331
- 92 Ibid 515
- 93 Ibid 337
- 94 Ibid 277
- 95 Ibid 282
- 96 Ibid 360
- 97 Ibid 312
- 98 Ibid 358-9
- 99 I do not wish to force a comparison, but it seems to me that the "spirit of the Times" of which Hegel speaks and the "Genius of the Time of Effervescence" of which Friedrich speaks are very similar indeed.

100 Aldington op cit 255

101 Ibid 255

102 Ibid 316, 317 318

103 Ibid 337

104 Ibid 373

105 Ibid 291

106 Ibid 323

107 Ibid 282, 3

108 I am certain, parenthetically, that both Frederick and Voltaire would have been disgusted by the enthronement of Reason in Notre Dame during the Revolution.

109 Friedrich Works, Vol. XIII, Epilogue London 1790.

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