Beliefs and means of persuasion coexist in critical ways. If anticlericalism, anxiety over one’s salvation, and despair over the injustice of the world led one to build an “atheistic” worldview, then Nietzsche’s “God is dead” should have been proclaimed long before. Religious anger and anxiety were always there. What was new? Printing and the rapid increase in the number of publishers, the exponential growth of primary and secondary education, and the rising tide of laymen among those educated, all created a dramatically more secular reading public. Debates that Christian theologians dealt with \textit{intra muros} were now extramural. Travel literature, wildly popular, introduced new European readers not only to functioning non-Christian cultures but also to cultures that some missionaries themselves described as atheistic (thereby creating the bestsellers of missionary literature).

Ryrie trumpets at the outset a desire to account for a culture without God only to conclude with an “atheism” indistinguishable from an anti-Christian critical deism or various heterodox theisms. Atheism in its fullest sense—a disbelief in God—is not simply a variety of heresy, but a belief that one lives in a world without design, plan, or care for its creatures. Why did some readers and listeners reach that belief and disbelief? To answer that question in terms of both emotions and thought, from the outside looking in, would require a unified field theory of cognition. I’ll wait.

—\textit{Alan Charles Kors}


Abraham Bosse (c. 1604–76) was a well-known French printmaker and a zealous propagator of Desargues’s perspectival technique, which basically was an elaboration of the linear perspective invented by Florentine painters of the fifteenth century. For a book of 1647 called \textit{The Universal Technique of M. Desargues}, Bosse made an etching, untitled but commonly referred to as \textit{Les perspecteurs}, in which we see an almost empty space with three well-dressed men placed at different distances and in different orientations. They seem to look for something to paint, since they are represented each with an “eye pyramid.” The top of the pyramid—Desargues called it “le rayonnement de la vue” (the radiation of the gaze)—is the point between the two eyes. That point is connected by straight lines to the four corners of the supposed visual field of the viewer. This pyramid is meant to help the artist to calculate the right proportions for the objects in his paintings.

Emmanuel Alloa uses this image to illustrate a problem often associated with perspectivism in philosophy: in Bosse’s etching, the men do not see one
another; their gazes do not meet; each seems to live in a separate world. Those men embody the “banal” or “weak” conception of perspective that Gilles Deleuze criticizes. Instead of connecting people, the notion of perspective as an eye pyramid, a kind of tunnel, induces them to avoid encounter. It corresponds to the notion of perspective used to put an end to discussion by saying that we all have our different viewpoints, thereby dissolving a disagreement instead of learning from each other’s standpoints.

Contrary to the “perspectivers” depicted by the printmaker, Alloa asks whether we can try to “share perspectives.” By examining that question in response to Deleuze’s challenge, Alloa develops a stronger version of perspectivism. He emphasizes that any perspective is a perspective of someone on something—on some thing, quelque chose, not all things, toutes choses—which means that a perspective, intrinsically limited, always cries out for completion by other perspectives. Inspired by Nietzsche (“the more eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity’”), Alloa constructs in other ways and independently an epistemology akin to that of Sandra Harding and other proponents of “standpoint theory.” Against recent objections to a perspectivism that is too closely linked to relativism, Alloa advances a “new perspectivism” that demands and even celebrates plurality without abandoning the notions of truth and objectivity.

—Thibault De Meyer

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Kevin Binfield, ed., Writings of the Luddites

When I mentioned to a friend that I was going to review this book, he replied: “Luddites? You mean, the Flat Earthers?” There is a distinction, I reminded him, between science and technology, and the Luddites had no problem, qua Luddites, with modern science, really only with problems with a few machines that were ruining their lives as artisans in the English textile industry. I could have added that Jeffrey Burton Russell’s book Inventing the Flat Earth demonstrates that, “with extraordinarily few exceptions, no educated person in the history of Western Civilization from the third century BC onward believed that the Earth was flat” and that even the belief that people had believed the Earth was flat did not arise until around 1870, in a time of controversy between scientists and the general culture over the theory of evolution. My friend is not a historian or scientist (but then neither am I), and I concluded that his remark meant no more than “It’s high time you got a cell phone.” When reading an article on historiog-