

Enlightenment Contexts

Dr. Theresa Thompson
English 2130
Fall 2009

Medieval Christian Europe



- **Cosmic Dualism**
 - Religious or theological system which explains the universe as the outcome of two eternally opposed and coexisting principles, conceived as good and evil.
- 1486: publication of Malteus Maleficarum (The Witches' Hammer)
 - established rules for trial, judicial examination and torture of suspected witches
 - heavy emphasis on women as evil
- 1492: Columbus lands in America
 - Most Europeans believed Non-Europeans were in the possession of Satan & in need of rescue by missionaries.
- 16th-C. Jesuits & the Counter-Reformation

FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)

- Scientific Method.
- Focus on this world forces (some) rethinking of the human condition.
 - Montesquieu: Political structures, personal freedoms, idea of the individual in a political framework.
 - Adam Smith: Laissez faire economics and global capitalism, colonization, economic exchange.
 - Social sciences.

René Descartes (1596-1650) Rationalism

- **Four rules for knowledge:**
 - Never accept anything except clear & distinct ideas.
 - Divide each problem into as many parts as are needed to solve it.
 - Order your thoughts from the simple to the complex.
 - Always check thoroughly for oversights.
- **Descartes' argument for God**
 - A being that doubts is an imperfect being. I doubt; therefore I am an imperfect being.
 - I can only know I am imperfect by having the concept of perfection; therefore I do have the concept of perfection.
 - I could not have received the concept of perfection from something imperfect; therefore my concept was not derived from myself.
 - Therefore my concept of perfection was derived from something that is in fact perfect.
 - Only God is in fact perfect, so I derived my concept of perfection from him, & therefore he exists.

