

Telesio among the Novatores:
Telesio's Reception in the Seventeenth Century

Daniel Garber

René Descartes is now usually considered the father of modern philosophy. (This is not just my opinion: it can now be substantiated scientifically. Google “father of modern philosophy” and up comes Descartes.) But Descartes' contemporaries didn't think so. For them the father of modern philosophy was Bernardino Telesio, a sixteenth-century figure now largely forgotten, except among scholars of Renaissance Italian philosophy. This essay I would like to explore this curious figure, and how his thought was viewed in the seventeenth century.

Bernardino Telesio was born in Cosenza, in Calabria in 1509, and died there in 1588, though during his life he traveled widely in Italy and lived in a number of other places, including Milan, Rome, Padua and Naples. Coming from a privileged background, Telesio was able to devote much of his life to study.¹

His major work is the massive *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia* [DRN]. The first version came out in 1565, in two books, with the title *De natura iuxta propria principia*. A second revised edition came out five years later, again in two books, but with a new title, echoing the title of Lucretius's famous poem: *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia*. Then in 1686, two years before Telesio's death, a much expanded edition in nine books appeared.² In addition to the *De rerum natura*, Telesio published a variety of smaller treatises on questions in natural philosophy, which were collected together after his death and published as *Varii de naturalibus rebus libelli* in 1690. This collection included essays on comets and the Milky Way (“lacteus circulus”), on meteors (“De his, quae in Aere fiunt”), on the rainbow, on the seas, on the soul, against Galen, on respiration, on color, on taste, and on sleep. The modern edition of the *Varii* (Telesio (1981)) adds some further medical writings, as well as Telesio's answers to criticisms by Patrizi and a poem dedicated to Giovanna Castriota.

Telesio's main focus was a complete system of natural philosophy, a systematic alternative to the Aristotelian natural philosophy that dominated the intellectual world of his day, and would dominate it for some time to come.³ Telesio's orientation was resolutely empiricist. The *De rerum natura* begins with a call to investigate nature not through reason, but through the senses:

¹ For the biographical background to Telesio, see Mulsow (1998), pp. 1-14 and the references cited there.

² The current standard modern edition of Telesio (1586) is Telesio (1965-76), though volumes 1 and 2 of the set are sometimes difficult to find. In addition to the Latin text, it includes an Italian translation on facing pages. Telesio (2009) is a modern edition of Telesio (1570), which, again, contains both the original Latin text and an Italian translation on facing pages.

³ For general accounts of Telesio's thought, see De Franco (1995) and Bondi (1997). For shorter accounts of his thought see Boenke (2013) and Leijenhorst (2010).

The construction of the world and of the size and nature of the bodies contained in it should not be sought from reason, as the ancients did, but must be perceived by sense, and must be grasped from things themselves.⁴

Indeed, like Hobbes would later argue, Telesio argues for eliminating the intellect in favor of sense alone: “Aristotle shouldn’t have attributed man an intellect distinct from sense.”⁵ Books I-IV of the DRN is concerned with Telesio’s basic physics; in book I Telesio gives an outline of his basic system, supplemented in books II-IV by elaborations and responses to others, mainly Aristotle. Standard Aristotelian textbooks in physics begin with general principles of physics, definitions of space, time and motion, the principles of nature, and so on, and only then go on to discuss cosmology and sublunar physics.⁶ In Telesio’s exposition, though, the basic physics is deeply intertwined with his cosmology. On his view, there are three basic principles in the world. First there are heat and cold, which constitute the sun and the earth respectively. (DRN I.1) These two contrary and competing principles are incorporeal, but they cannot exist apart from body or matter, his third principle. (DRN I.4)⁷ Heat is mobile, light, and associated with rarified matter, while cold is immobile, dark, and associated with condensed matter. (DRN I.2) Furthermore, Telesio seems to attribute a kind of sensibility to all bodies, a kind of panpsychism. (DRN I.6)⁸ The surface on the earth, on which we live, is the zone where the two principles are both found, and where they exert their contrary influences. It is the battle between heat and cold that explains all the phenomena of the world, Telesio claims. As a result, there is no radical distinction in Telesio’s cosmology between the heavens and the earth: it is the same elements in both. (DRN I.1)

In book V Telesio turns to living things. There he argues that there are two kinds of souls, a soul “*e semine educta*,” which is responsible for the vital functions, and in humans, a special immaterial soul, given to us directly by God. (DRN V.2-3; VIII.15) Other than that, the human and the animal are largely the same. Indeed, since Telesio eliminates intellect in favor of sense, as I noted earlier, he even argues that animals have a kind of capacity for reasoning not unlike ours. (DRN VIII.14) In books V, VI and VII Telesio goes on to propose an account of sense perception that is based on the idea that sense is to be explained through the impingement of external bodies on the sense organs, and in book VIII, an account of reasoning. The *De rerum natura* ends with a discussion of the passions and ethics in book IX.

⁴ DRN I proem, Telesio (1586), 1. In my brief account of the philosophy of the DRN, I will focus on the third edition of 1586.

⁵ DRN VIII.11, Telesio (1586), 326. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 1-3.

⁶ See, for example the *Physica* in Eustachius (1609), a popular textbook used in schools through much of the seventeenth century, both in Catholic and Protestant countries.

⁷ The view here is actually rather complex. Telesio is unclear whether matter, heat, and cold are all equally well substances or whether matter is the only real substance. Furthermore, he isn’t clear about the relation between *material*, *moles*, and *corpus*. On this question see Schuhmann (2004).

⁸ On the significance of this position for Telesio’s thought, see Giglioli (2010).

Throughout the *De rerum natura* are interspersed copious refutations of Aristotle and his followers: “perperam Aristoteles...,” “perperam Peripateticos...” are repeated over and over. Telesio leaves no doubt that he is firmly opposed to Aristotle and his philosophy, and that he is proposing a thoroughgoing and systematic alternative to the accepted philosophy of the schools.⁹

During his lifetime, and in the years immediately following, Telesio was an important figure in the Italian context, with a number of prominent followers and opponents. In his hometown Cosenza, he transformed the local Accademia Parassiana into the Accademia Telesiana, an academy for the study of nature. (After his death, it became the Accademia Cosentina.)¹⁰ Telesio’s system was attacked by the Aristotelian Giacomo Antonio Marta, and by the anti-Aristotelian Francisco Patrizi, with whom he had an exchange in 1572.¹¹ But he counted among his supporters Antonio Persio, the editor of the posthumous 1590 collection of his opuscula, Sertorio Quattromani, his successor as head of the Accademia, and perhaps his fellow citizen of Cosenza, the physician Agostino Doni. And, of course, Tomasso Campanella’s *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata* (1591) offered a spirited defense of Telesio’s philosophy.

Despite the initial stir that Telesio made, by 1612 or 1613, Francis Bacon could write in his *De principiis et originibus* that Telesio’s philosophy is “not very famous or well accepted (*philosophia scilicet non admodum celebri aut recepta*).”¹² Indeed, Telesio never developed the kind of following that Bacon himself would, or Descartes, or Galileo, or any of the later stars of the so-called Scientific Revolution. But even so, he was by no means forgotten.

It has been argued that some of the better known figures of the century, such as Hobbes or Descartes were influenced by Telesio’s views.¹³ But outside of Campanella, a younger member of the broad circle of Italian thinkers that included Telesio, who lived well into the seventeenth century, I know of very few detailed discussions of his work in the seventeenth century. There is a paragraph of general overview in Tobias Adami’s “Praefatio ad philosophos Germaniae” in his edition of Campanella’s *Prodromus philosophiae instaurandae* (1617), hardly surprising given Campanella’s relation to Telesio.¹⁴ There is a longer overview of Telesio’s physics in Gassendi’s *Syntagma philosophicum*.¹⁵ Given that Gassendi took it as his task to summarize every other important author on every main subject before presenting his own views, this isn’t altogether surprising either. There are a certain number of more focused discussions as

⁹ Telesio’s complex relation to the Aristotelian tradition is explored in Mulsow (1998).

¹⁰ See Lupi 2011.

¹¹ See Telesio (1981), 463ff for Patrizi’s objections.

¹² OFB 6:258-9. The date of the essay is contested, but Graham Rees puts it in the early 1610s. The original Latin is given on facing pages with an English translation by Graham Rees and Michael Edwards. I quote the English translation, but the citation gives both the Latin and the English.

¹³ For the claim about Hobbes and Telesio, see Schuhmann (1988); for the claim about Descartes and Telesio, see Hatfield (1992), 349.

¹⁴ See Campanella (1617), B2v-B3r. For a brief discussion of Adami’s remarks, see De Mas (1990), 176f.

¹⁵ Gassendi (1658), 1:245-46.

well. Jean-Cécile Frey was a Paris professor who, in 1628 offered his students a series of lectures refuting the views of a variety of *novatores* who had the temerity to oppose the philosophy of Aristotle, still then quite central to the philosophy curriculum at Paris and most other universities in Europe. In that series of lectures Frey offers a response to anyone who disagreed with a in any way. In his *Cribrum philosophorum*, the written version of those lectures later published by his students after his death, we find a long discussion and refutation of Telesio and Campanella on the claim that water is hot by its nature, and not cold, as Aristotle and his followers argue.¹⁶ In Nathanael Carpenter's *Geography* (1625), Telesio is one of the figure whose theories of the tides is mentioned in the course of his discussion of the question and survey of alternative points of view.¹⁷ No doubt there are other mentions as well. But at this point I would like to focus on two of the most interesting of the discussions, one by Francis Bacon in the earlier part of the century, and the other by Charles Sorel in the middle of the century. The difference between the two is quite illuminating, and may illustrate a change in his status over the course of the century.

Earlier I quoted Bacon's *De principiis et originibus* where he wrote that Telesio's philosophy was "not very famous or well accepted."¹⁸ He continued:

But I do not bother with such niceties. For I think well of *Telesio*, and recognize him as a lover of truth, a man useful to the sciences, a corrector of certain doctrines, and the first of the new philosophers [*novorum hominum primum...*].¹⁹

This is in the context of what is probably the longest and most serious explicit discussion of Telesio's philosophy in the seventeenth century. The full title of Bacon's essay reads (in English): "On the Principles and Origins according to the Fables of Cupid and Coelum, or, the Philosophy of Parmenides and Telesio and especially that of Democritus as it is treated of in the fable of Cupid."²⁰ It isn't entirely clear when or why Bacon wrote the essay, or at least the part of it that we have. (The essay was left incomplete, giving only part of the planned section on principles, and nothing at all on origins.) Graham Rees has suggested that the essay was written as part of a survey of current knowledge, which was intended to go in part I of his *Instauratio magna* project. He also suggests that it was probably written in 1613 or so. But none of this really matters for our purposes here. What is really important is the fact that significantly more than half of the essay is focused on the philosophy of Telesio.

The discussion of Telesio occurs about one third of the way into the text as we have it, after a discussion of the Aristotelian conception of matter and form, two of the three Aristotelian principles of nature. The discussion of Telesio's natural philosophy is intended to introduce an

¹⁶ See Frey (1646), 46-9. For a discussion of the background to the *Cribrum*, see the introduction by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber to Frey (2003). For a more general discussion of Frey, see Blair (1993) and Blair (1994).

¹⁷ Carpenter (1625), bk. II, 89-90. (Note that the two books of Carpenter (1625) are paginated independently.)

¹⁸ OFB 6:258-9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ OFB 6:196-97.

alternative to Aristotle's, though not one that Bacon himself would accept. In his discussion of Telesio, he begins by identifying Telesio as a follower of Parmenides,²¹ an identification that a number of his and Bacon's contemporaries made, though modern commentators are not at all sure that that is fair.²² In the course of his discussion, Bacon remarks:

But our business is not with *Telesio* as such, but him as a restorer of the philosophy of *Parmenides*, to whom much respect is due. But my main reason for going into this so fully is that in dealing with the one that comes first, I speak of many things which can be carried over to the refutation of sects further down the list ... and so I shall not have to say the same things time and time again.²³

Even so, it is Telesio whom Bacon treats in detail, and who offers him the occasion to reflect on certain questions in natural philosophy.

The discussion of Telesio is in the context of a broader discussion of principles of natural philosophy. After an introductory discussion of Cupid and Coelum, that is, principles and origins, and a discussion of Aristotle's principles of nature, form, matter, and privation, Bacon turns to a structured discussion of principles. He organizes his discussion into four parts: two categories of thinkers who recognize only one kind of principle, a third category of thinkers who recognize "many principles of things," and a fourth category "of those who constitute infinite, or at least numerous principles of things...."²⁴ In the first two categories (which Bacon doesn't carefully distinguish) he discusses Thales and his view that all is water, Anaximenes, who took air as his principle, and Heraclitus, who held fire. Such one-principle natural philosophies are obviously inadequate, Bacon argues:

But since such great armies of contraries appear throughout the universe, as of dense and rare, hot and cold, light and dark, animate and inanimate, and very many others, which attack, usurp, and slaughter one another in turn, to suppose that all these spring from some one source of material stuff, but still not disclose any of that stuff's mode of action, seems a kind of frantic speculation and a giving up of inquiry.²⁵

And so Bacon turns to the next category of natural philosophy, those that recognize multiple, but not infinite principles.

What follows is an extended discussion of Telesio's views on principles. (Indeed, this is where the discussion ends, with a discussion of Telesio that is significantly longer than the rest of the essay; Bacon never gets to any other account of principles.) Bacon discusses Telesio's views in some detail. The focus, as one might expect, is the principles of heat and cold. Bacon gives a detailed account of these two contraries, and how it is that they are integrated into Telesio's cosmology. He gives special attention to the domain between the heavens and the

²¹ OFB 6:224-5.

²² See, e.g., Patrizi in Telesio (1981), 463. On Telesio's Parmenideanism, see Lerner (1992).

²³ OFB 6:258-59. On Bacon's Parmenidean reading of Telesio, see Bondi (2001).

²⁴ OFB 6:210-11.

²⁵ OFB 6:222-23.

earth, where Telesio “finds all tumult, conflict and internal disorder, as is the case in empires in which we find that the borders are troubled by incursions and violence, while the provinces inland enjoy a secure peace.”²⁶ Bacon’s exposition of Telesio exclusively concerns the doctrine of heat and cold and the related cosmology from the opening books of the *De rerum natura*; there is no discussion of living things or the passions, also important elements of Telesio’s thought. But this may be only because in this particular essay, Bacon is focusing on principles, and not on the detailed account of the world that follows on the principles.

Bacon’s long discussion of Telesio is followed by an even longer critique of Telesio’s views. He begins as follows:

Now what Telesio says would have been plausible if man along with the mechanical arts which vex matter were removed from nature, and the fabric of the World were regarded on its own [*Fabrica Mundi simpliciter spectetur*]. For his seems a kind of pastoral philosophy which contemplates the world calmly and as if in idleness.²⁷

For Bacon this is a fundamental criticism: Telesio’s is an arm-chair philosophy, one that teaches us how nature appears, but doesn’t allow us to control nature. Bacon also criticizes Telesio for his empiricism, someone “who philosophizes according to the sense alone,” a criticism that echoes his criticism of some of the ancients.²⁸ These two criticisms come together in one of Bacon’s first mentions of Telesio in the *Advancement of Learning* (1605), where he refers to the philosophy of “*Thylesius*, and his Scholler *Donius*” as “a Pastorall Philosophy, full of sense, but of no great depth.”²⁹ However, in the *De principiis et originibus* he also offers detailed criticism of Telesio’s two principles, heat and cold. He sees four basic problems with the view: (1) there are certain phenomena of bodies that cannot be explained by heat and cold; (2) there are certain circumstances in which heat and cold are created anew, and so arise from something else; (3) some things that are correctly explained by heat and cold come from “their efficient and instrumental cause;” and (4) Telesio’s association of heat with motion, light, and rarity and cold with immobility, darkness and density is confused.³⁰

There are numerous other discussions of Telesio’s philosophy in Bacon’s writings, but none of them is longer than a few lines.³¹ The discussion in the *De principiis et originibus* is by far the longest discussion of Telesio in Bacon’s writings. Indeed, it may well be the longest sustained discussion of any other philosopher in Bacon’s corpus. Bacon certainly took notice of Telesio’s work. In the literature, there are various claims about the relevance of Telesio on

²⁶ OFB 6:230-31.

²⁷ OFB 6:250-51.

²⁸ OFB 6:250-51; cf. OFB 6:220-21.

²⁹ OFB 4:93.

³⁰ OFB 6:256-59.

³¹ See Giachetti Assenza (1980) for a list and extensive discussion of all the references to Telesio in Bacon’s corpus.

Bacon's thought. Some commentators have focused on Bacon as a critic of Telesio's thought.³² Others have seen Telesio as a positive influence on Bacon. Nicoletta Sciacaluga sees Bacon's thought as reflecting Telesio's views on motion, for example.³³ Graham Rees, on the other hand, sees the influence of Telesio in Bacon's matter theory. Bacon's own matter theory posits two kinds of matter, spirit, which fills the heavens and dense, tangible matter, whose domain is earth, separated by an intermediate zone on the surface of the earth, where the two mix. Rees sees Telesio's mark on Bacon's account of spirit, and in his emphasis on the importance of the intermediate zone between the two where they mix, not unlike the intermediate zone in Telesio's philosophy where heat and cold mix.³⁴ I do not want to make any such assertions here, where my interest is less in Bacon than in Telesio and his later fate. Whatever influences there may have been in Bacon's thought, Bacon was not a simple follower of Telesio's philosophy. However, one cannot deny that Telesio was an important interlocutor for Bacon. Early in the century, then, in the generations of thinkers who followed the publication of the definitive edition of the *De rerum natura* in 1586, Telesio was a significant figure, someone who was taken seriously by other serious figures, like Bacon. He was for Bacon, in a way, the father of modern philosophy.

I would now like to turn to the treatment of Telesio's thought in Charles Sorel, the second figure I would like to discuss. Sorel is best known as a literary figure, the author of the daring romance *Francion* (1623 and 1633) and *Le Berger extravagant* (1627), among many other romances. But later in life, Sorel came to have more serious ambitions. In the 1630s, he began a project that he called the *Science universelle*, on which he worked for the rest of his career.³⁵ The first part, *La science des choses corporelles* came out in 1634. In the years that followed, Sorel published volume after volume, adding revisions and expansions. In the end it covered meteors, the vacuum, the immobility of the earth, cosmology, the stars, humans and animals, the immortality of the soul, inventions and arts that apply the universal science, and even ethics, in short, all the important topics covered in a natural philosophy and more. In 1655, at the culmination of the project, Sorel published a volume entitled *De la perfection de l'homme, où les vrays biens sont considérez et spécialement ceux de l'âme...* Included in that volume was a brand new and quite extended essay, "Le sommaire des opinions les plus estranges des novateurs modernes en la philosophie comme de Telesius, de Patritius, de Cardan, de Ramus, de Campanelle, de Descartes, et autres ; Et en quoy on les peut suivre."³⁶ Substantially the same essay was reprinted thirteen years later, in 1668 in a volume Sorel entitled *La science universelle*

³² See De Mas (1990), Margolin (1989), Posseur (1990).

³³ Sciacaluga (1997).

³⁴ Rees (1977), p. 118; introduction in OFB 6:xxxvii-xxxviii. See also Weeks (2007), 55-61.

³⁵ See Picardi (2007).

³⁶ Sorel (1655).

tome quatriesme, with a slightly different title: “Des novateurs modernes en la philosophie ... avec un examen sommaire de leurs principales opinions.”³⁷

Sorel’s use of the term ‘*novateur*’ was quite deliberate and significant. By the early 1620s, there emerged in the philosophical literature of the day a group of thinkers that were together often identified as the “novatores,” “novateurs,” or in English, the “novelists,” thinkers who were pioneers in rejecting Aristotle and Aristotelian natural philosophy in favor of something new. Unsurprisingly, Telesio was almost always associated with this group. In Mersenne’s 1623 *Quaestiones ... in Genesim*, Telesio was grouped together with Campanella, Bruno, Kepler, Galileo, “and other disciples of the moderns,” objecting they are wrong in saying that all Catholics are dogmatic Aristotelians.³⁸ In his *Apologie pour tous les grand personnages qvi ont esté accusez de magie* (1625), Gabriel Naudé included Telesio among a variety of thinkers, including, Patrizi, Campanella, Bacon, Bruno, and Basson, who have “no aim but to elbow out this philosophy [i.e. the philosophy of Aristotle] and to lay waste to this great building which Aristotle and the more than twelve thousand who interpreted him have been trying to build for a long time.”³⁹ Despite these negative comments, in his *Advis pour dresser une bibliotheque* (1627), Naudé nevertheless recommends that this group of “novateurs” be included in a good library.⁴⁰ One can find very similar lists in numerous writers of the seventeenth century, including Bacon, Descartes, Adrien Heereboord, John Webster, and Robert Boyle.⁴¹ There are many variations from one to another: Telesio, whom Bacon lists as “the first of the new philosophers” and “the best of the *Novellists*”⁴² is on most all of the lists, as are Francesco Patrizi, Tommaso Campanella, Giordano Bruno and William Gilbert. Among older figures, Girolamo Fracastoro, Petrus Ramus and Girolamo Cardano, occasionally appear, but interestingly enough, rarely Paracelsus. Many later figures also appear with notable frequency. Among the better known figures there are Johannes Kepler, Galileo, and Bacon. As his reputation spreads, Descartes makes the list, and occasionally Pierre Gassendi. But there are many lesser-known figures who appear with great regularity, including Sebastien Basson, Nicholas Hill, Nathanael Carpenter, David Gorlaeus, and Godifredus Chassinus.

It is an interesting and diverse group. One might think of the *novatores* as a kind of alternative party to the Aristotelians. But there was an important difference. As different as the Aristotelians might have been from one another, they had texts in common: in natural philosophy the authoritative texts of the *De anima* and the *Physica* that they shared. Among the *novatores* the only thing that they had in common what that they rejected the authority of Aristotle and the Aristotelians; beyond that, there was little in the way of a common thread. Telesio explained

³⁷ Sorel (1668). See Del Prete (2001), Picardi (2007), 255-97.

³⁸ Mersenne (1623), “Praefatio et prolegomena ad lectorem,” 6r.

³⁹ Naudé (1625), 331-2.

⁴⁰ Naudé (1627), 135.

⁴¹ See OFB 12:8-9; Descartes (1996) 1:158; Heereboord (1654), 28; Webster (1653), 106; Boyle (1674), 223.

⁴² OFB 6:258-59; Bacon (1626), expt. 69.

everything in terms of hot and cold, Gilbert explained everything in terms of magnetism. Others, like Basson, Gorlaeus and Gassendi, were some variety or another of atomist. Galileo wasn't really a natural philosopher in the sense of offering a system of explanation at all but did offer non-Aristotelian doctrines of cosmology and motion. Figures like Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes are usually grouped together as a kind of "progressive wing" of the new philosophers, what many twentieth- and twenty-first-century commentators have in mind when they talk about The New Philosophy. But when we examine them more carefully, we have to acknowledge that their programs were quite distinct and substantially different from one another. Though all the *novatores* from Telesio to Descartes and beyond agreed in rejecting Aristotle and Aristotelianism, they could hardly be said to form a uniform school of thought.

This group did not necessarily have a good reputation in the seventeenth century. In many camps, novelty was suspect. The term "novator" has its origin in the context of the debates between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century.⁴³ For the Protestants, the Catholics were the innovators, bringing new doctrines and practices into the Church, and they, the Protestants, were simply returning the Church to its original state. For the Catholics, on the other hand, it was the Protestants who were innovating. When, in the early seventeenth century, those terms migrate into natural philosophy, they carry much of their negative connotation. Mersenne names the *novatores* in order to counter what he takes to be their slander against the Catholic church, that they are dogmatic Aristotelians. In a 1624 pamphlet written against Etienne De Clave and Antoine Villon, two *novatores*, Jean-Baptiste Morin wrote:

There is nothing more seditious and pernicious than a new doctrine. I speak not only in theology, but even in philosophy. For if ... the true knowledge of visible and corporeal things, that is, the true natural philosophy raises and delights us toward the knowledge and love of invisible and incorporeal things, ... it is quite certain that the false philosophy or knowledge of the things in nature cannot lead the mind to the same end, and can only lead it to errors, heresies, and atheism.⁴⁴

Morin goes on to observe that almost all heresies involve departures from the philosophy of Aristotle. This view was widely shared. It is no surprise that Telesio's philosophy had been put on the Index in 1596. Later, of course, innovation will gain a much better name. But in the beginning, at least, to be listed among the *novatores*, as Telesio characteristically was, was no compliment.

Sorel's 1655 essay "Le sommaire des opinions les plus estranges des novateurs modernes en la philosophie" was intended as a defense of the *novateurs*. In the essay, Sorel treats a large number of figures, almost all of whom appear regularly on various lists of *novateurs*: Telesio, Patrizi, Cardano, Ramus, Copernicus, Galileo "& autres Astonomes [Kepler is included in the chapter]," Bruno, Gorlaeus, Carpenter, "Enchyridion de la physique restituée [Jean d'Espagnet]",

⁴³ For a brief account of the history, see Garber (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Morin (1624), "a Monseigneur Halligre...", 3. (Note that the dedicatory letter is paginated separately from the rest of the pamphlet.) For an account of the larger context in which this pamphlet was written, see Garber (2002) and the references cited there.

Basson, Campanella, Descartes, “les novateurs chymistes, de Paracelse & autres, & particulièrement d’Estienne de Claves, Henry de Rochaz [Rochas].” Sorel’s essay contains both a criticism of Aristotle and Aristotelianism on the one hand, and a defense of the *novatores* whose writings he summarizes in some detail. (In the 1655 edition, the essay runs 66 pages.) Sorel has good things to say about Aristotle, and doesn’t dismiss him by any means. Aristotle is to be taken seriously, he argues, though we must recognize that we have learned much since the time Aristotle wrote.⁴⁵ But Sorel does argue strongly against those who defend everything Aristotle said, and reject any kind of novelty: Aristotle shouldn’t be considered infallible.⁴⁶ Sorel offers interesting analyses of why the Aristotelians are so resistant to allowing others to express their view. He suspects that the dogmatic Aristotelians think that they will lose students because of that. But, he thinks, the evidence of the success of the *novatores* in attracting students shows that they are wrong about that.⁴⁷ He suspects also that if the dogmatic Aristotelians discover imperfections in Aristotle, are they worried that they won’t know who to follow.⁴⁸ Sorel is not impressed by the fact that Aristotle is supported by the Roman Catholic Church: don’t people know that in earlier times, Aristotle had been rejected by the Church?⁴⁹ Furthermore, don’t they know that these days people aren’t required to follow the opinions of the pagans?⁵⁰ Others are read and corrected, why not Aristotle? Sorel refers to those who refuse to correct Aristotle as “aveugles volontaires”.⁵¹

Over and against the dogmatic Aristotelians, Sorel advocated for a tolerant attitude toward the *novatores*. He admitted that while the views of some are “fantastiques et imaginaires,” “the others address themselves to solid truths, and are to be praised the more for being hidden.”⁵² He continues:

Although the very name of “*novateur*” might be odious to many people, we must be careful that even if it is to be feared in matters concerning theology, it isn’t so in natural and human philosophy.⁵³

He admits that there are some who are *novateurs* simply out of a spirit of contradiction.⁵⁴ But he praises others for their courage to point out the errors of Aristotle. Sorel ends with a plea for being open-minded. We shouldn’t accept the ancients dogmatically, nor should we reject them

⁴⁵ Sorel (1655), 211-12; 273-4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 270-71.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 271-72.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 210; cf. 267.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 267; cf. 210.

all. “One should take the middle way in this matter,” accept a view when it warrants being accepted, and suspend judgment in all things uncertain.⁵⁵

It is in this context that we find Sorel’s discussion of Telesio. Since, Sorel claims, “les premiers Novateurs ont paru en Italie,”⁵⁶ he begins his account with the Italians. And among the Italians, Telesio is the first to be taken up.⁵⁷ The entry on Telesio is rather long; it goes for a full four pages.⁵⁸ The focus is on Telesio’s *De rerum natura*, in the 1686 edition of nine books. Sorel goes through the text, book by book, offering brief summaries of its content. He then adds some criticisms of Telesio’s philosophy. There is no single theme to his comments. He begins by claiming that heat and cold are not substances or principles, but qualities, and that cold, merely a privation of heat, in particular, cannot be considered a principle or an agent. He claims that the origin of the seas cannot be in question since Scripture tells us that they were created directly by God. He also disputes what Telesio says about heat and cold with respect to water. But he also adds some compliments, agreeing with Telesio in the claim that neither air nor fire enter into the composition of mixtures, about how the heat of stars diffuses below, and about the motion of celestial bodies, the generation of animals, and other matters.⁵⁹ Sorel ends with a summary of the criticisms that Jean-Cecile Frey presented in his *Cribrum philosophorum*, mentioned above.⁶⁰

Though he disagrees with him on some points, Sorel is clearly sympathetic to Telesio. We are obliged to him for “having had the courage to collide with this ancient master of philosophy, to aid in freeing those who had subjected themselves entirely to his laws from his servitude.”⁶¹ It was Telesio’s example that “excited many philosophers to search for knowledge different from that of the ancient.”⁶² There is no suggestion that Sorel thinks that we should revive Telesio’s views: what was particularly important about Telesio was that he was the first: “We must praise the greatness of Telesio’s courage to have dared to be the first to criticize the ancient errors.”⁶³ His main virtue seems to be not in the specific doctrines that he held, but in the fact that he was the first to oppose the dominant Aristotelianism.

Sorel’s treatment of Telesio suggests to me that he is directing his comments at an audience is no longer familiar with Telesio’s views, and needs to be informed about what they are. Furthermore, Telesio is just one among many of the discussions of *novateurs*; even if he is the first, Telesio is part of a large group of other figures, special mainly for coming first. In

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 273-4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁷ See Bianchi (1992); Picardi (2007), 259-64.

⁵⁸ Sorel (1655), 215-18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 217-18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 217.

⁶² *Ibid.* 218.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 267.

Sorel's essay, Telesio is not an interlocutor in a serious conversation about the nature of things, as he was for Bacon. He is one rogue among many in a rogue's gallery of curious opinions. Or better still, he is an exhibit in a museum, hidden *in a forgotten corner of a dusty wunderkammer*.

It is striking the distance that Telesio fell since the days in the 1570s and 1580s when he had his own academy and was at the center of a lively debate, or since the 1610s when he was still a live option of sorts for a figure like Bacon is considerable. In his *The grand prerogative of humane nature namely, the souls naturall or native immortality* (1653) Guy Holland, an English Jesuit, included Telesio among a group of "soaring spirits" who "but newly sprung, yet are grown already into neglect."⁶⁴ By the 1650s, I think, Telesio had become a name on a list for some, a curiosity for others, but was no longer part of the active conversation among natural philosophers in Europe. Though his name was remembered, it isn't entirely clear how much his doctrines were.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bacon, Francis. 1626. *Sylva Sylvarum, or A Natural History in Ten Centuries*. London: W. Lee.

Bacon, Francis. 1996-. *The Oxford Francis Bacon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
(Abbreviated as OFB. References given by volume and page number.)

Bianchi, L. 1992. "Des novateurs modernes en philosophie: Telesio tra eruditi e libertini nella Francia del Seicento." In *Bernardino Telesio e la cultura napoletana*, ed. R. Sirri and M. Torrini, 373-416. Naples: Guida editori.

Blair, Ann. 1993 "The Teaching of Natural Philosophy in Early Seventeenth-Century Paris: The Case of Jean-Cécile Frey." *History of Universities* 12:96-158.

Blair, Ann. 1994. "Tradition and Innovation in Early Modern Natural Philosophy: Jean Bodin and Jean-Cécil Frey." *Perspectives on Science* 2:428-54.

Boenke, Michaela. 2013. "Bernardino Telesio." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2013 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. URL = [<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/telesio/>](http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/telesio/)

Bondi, Roberto. 1997. *Introduzione a Telesio*. Rome and Bari: Laterza.

⁶⁴ Holland (1653), 89. Others included in this group are Patrizi, Petrus Ramus, Sebastien Basson, and Pierre Gassendi.

- Bondi, Roberto. 2001. "Bacon e la restaurazione di Parmenide." *Rivista di Filosofia* 92:327-339.
- Boyle, Robert. 1674. *The Excellency of Theology Compar'd with Natural Philosophy*. London: Henry Herringman.
- Campanella, Thomaso. 1591. *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata*. Naples: Horatius Salvianus.
- Campanella, Thomas. 1617. *Prodromus philosophiae instaurandae, id est, Dissertationis de natura rerum compendium*. Frankfurt: Ioannes Bringerus sumptibus Godefridi Tampachii.
- Carpenter, Nathanael. 1625. *Geography Delineated Forth in Two Bookes*. Oxford: John Lichfield and William Turner.
- De Franco, Luigi. 1995. *Introduzione a Bernardino Telesio*. Soveria Manelli: Rubbettino.
- De Mas, Enrico. 1990. "Bernardino Telesio e la falsità di Aristotele : il giudizio di Bacone e di Tobia Adami." In *Convegno internazionale di studi su Bernardino Telesio* (Cosenza, 12-13 maggio 1989), 167-79. Cosenza: Accademia Cosentina.
- Del Prete, Antonella. 2001. "Charles Sorel et l'Italie: une interprétation de la Renaissance." In *Sources antiques de l'irréligion moderne*, ed. D. Foucault and J.-P. Cavaillé, 171-80. Toulouse: Université Toulouse-Le Mirail.
- Descartes, René 1996. *Oeuvres de Descartes*, eds. C. Adam and P. Tannery. 11 vols. Paris: J. Vrin.
- Eustachius à Sancto Paulo. 1609. *Summa philosophiae quadripartita*. Paris: Carolus Chastellain.
- Frey, Ianus Caecilius. 1646. "Cribrum philosophorum qui Aristotelem superiore et hac aetate oppugnarunt." In *Opuscula varia nusquam edita...*, 29-89. Paris: Petrus David.
- Frey, Ianus Caecilius. 2003. *Cribrum Philosophorum*. Lecce: Conte Editore. [This is a facsimile reprint of Frey (1646), with an introduction by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber.]
- Garber, Daniel. 2002. "Defending Aristotle/Defending Society in Early 17th C Paris." In *Wissensideale und Wissenskulturen in der frühen Neuzeit (Ideals and Culture of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe)*, ed. C. Z. a. W. Detel, 135-60. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

- Garber, Daniel. Forthcoming. "Historicizing Novelty."
- Gassendi, Pierre. 1658. *Opera Omnia*. 6 vols. Lyon: Laurentius Anisson and Ioan. Bapt. Devenet.
- Giachetti Assenza, Valeria. 1980. "Bernardino Telesio: Il Migliore dei Moderni. I Riferimenti a Telesio negli Scritti di Bacone." *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia* 35:41-78.
- Giglioni, Guido. 2010. "The First of the Moderns or the Last of the Ancients? Bernardino Telesio on Nature and Sentience." *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 16:69-87.
- Hatfield, Gary. 1992. "Descartes' Physiology and its Relation to his Psychology." In *Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. J. Cottingham, 335-70. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heerboord, Adriaan. 1654. *Meletemata philosophica, maximam partem, metaphysica*. Leiden: ex officina Francisci Moyardi.
- Holland, Guy. 1653. *The grand prerogative of humane nature namely, the souls naturall or native immortality, and freedom from corruption* London: Roger Daniel.
- Leijenhorst, Cees. 2010. "Bernardino Telesio (1509-1588): New fundamental principles of nature." In *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, ed. P. R. Blum, 168-80. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- Lerner, Michel-Pierre. 1992. "Le 'parménéidisme' de Telesio: Origine et limites d'un hypothèse." In *Bernardino Telesio e la cultura napoletana*. Atti del Convegno internazionale, Napoli 15-17 dicembre 1989, ed. R. Sirri and M. Torrini, 79-105. Naples: Guida.
- Lupi, F. Walter. 2011. *Alle origini della Accademia telesiana*. Cosenza: Brenner.
- Margolin, Jean-Claude. 1990. "Bacon, lecteur critique d'Aristote et de Telesio." In *Convegno internazionale di studi su Bernardino Telesio* (Cosenza, 12-13 maggio 1989), 135-66. Cosenza: Accademia Cosentina.
- Mersenne, Marin. 1623. *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim*. Paris: Sebastian Cramoisy.
- Morin, Jean-Baptiste. 1624. *Refutation des theses erronees d'Anthoine Villon ... et Estienne de Claves*. Paris: Chez l'Autheur.

- Mulsow, Martin. 1998. *Frühneuzeitliche Selbsterhaltung: Telesio und die Naturphilosophie der Renaissance*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Naudé, Gabriel. 1625. *Apologie pour tous les grands personnages qui ont esté faussement soupçonnez de magie*. Paris: François Targa.
- Naudé, Gabriel. 1627. *Advis pour dresser une bibliotheque*. Paris: François Targa.
- Picardi, Mariassunta. 2007. *Le libertà del sapere : filosofia e "scienza universale" in Charles Sorel*. Napoli: Liguori.
- Pousseur, Jean-Marie. 1990. "Bacon, a Critic of Telesio." In *Francis Bacon's Legacy of Texts: 'The Art of Discovery Grows with Discovery'*, ed. W. Sessions, 105-117. New York: AMS Press.
- Rees, Graham. 1977. "Matter Theory: A Unifying Factor in Bacon's Natural Philosophy?" *Ambix* 24:110-125.
- Schuhmann, Karl. 1988. "Hobbes and Telesio." *Hobbes Studies* 1:109-33.
- Schuhmann, Karl. 2004. "Telesio's Concept of Matter." In *Karl Schuhmann: Selected papers on Renaissance philosophy and on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. P. Steenbakkers and C. Leijenhorst, 99-116. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Sciaccaluga, Nicoletta. 1997. "Movimento e materia in Bacone : uno sviluppo telesiano." *Annali della Scuola normale superiore di Pisa, classe di lettere e filosofia* Ser. 4, 2:329-55.
- Sorel, Charles. 1655. "Le sommaire des opinions les plus estranges des Novateurs en Philosophie." In *De la perfection de l'homme*, 209-75. Paris: Robert de Nain.
- Sorel, Charles. 1668. "Des Novateurs en Philosophie." In *La science universelle tome quatriesme*, 360-449. Paris: Theodore Girard.
- Telesio, Bernardino. 1565. *De natura iuxta propria principia liber primus et secundus*. Rome: Antonius Bladus.
- Telesio, Bernardino. 1570. *De rerum natura juxta propria principia, liber primus, & secundus, denuo editi*. Naples: Josephus Cacchius.

Telesio, Bernardino. 1586. *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia libri ix*. Naples: Horatius Salviianus.

Telesio, Bernardino. 1590. *Varii de naturalibus rebus libelli...* Venice: F. Valgrisius.

Telesio, Bernardino. 1965-76. *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia libri ix*, ed. and trans. (Italian) Luigi De Franco. 3 vols. Vols. 1 and 2: Cosenza: Casa del Libro. Vol. 3: Florence: La Nuova Italia.

Telesio, Bernardino. 1981. *Varii de naturalibus rebus libelli*, ed. Luigi De Franco. Florence: La nuova Italia.

Telesio, Bernardino. 2009. *La natura secondo I suoi principi*, ed. and trans. (Italian) Roberto Bondi. Milan: Bompiani.

Webster, John. 1653. *Academiarum Examen, or the Examination of Academies*. London: Giles Calvers.

Weeks, Sophie. 2007. *Francis Bacon's Science of Magic*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Philosophy, University of Leeds.