

WILLIAM BLAKE

(1757-1827)

Philosopher and Mystic

- VS Locke and Newton: common sense, scientific materialism and rationalism
- Vs Enlightenment thinkers: Deism and Atheism
- Belief in the Infinite in the finite:

*“to see a world in a grain of sand / And
a heaven in a wild flower, / Hold
infinity in the palm of your hand / And
eternity in an hour”*

Reality and Vision

- Attack on the modern industrial world
- Social conscience / Sympathy for the underdog / Democratic ideas / left-wing
- Embracing freedom (*The French Revolution*, 1791 - yet vs Reign of Terror), vs slavery
- *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793): vs enforced chastity and marriage without love

- Art as vision and revelation / Poet as seer and prophet
- Spiritual world in man / divine imagination

"The imagination is not a State: it is the Human existence itself"

- Spiritual over physical world

Syncretic religion / mysticism

- VS Established Church and any imposed authority – “mind-forg’d manacles” / Old testament God / suppression of earthly joy

Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & govern'd their Passions or have No Passions, but because they have Cultivated their Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion, but Realities of Intellect, from which all the Passions Emanate Uncurbed in their Eternal Glory
(A Vision of the Last Judgement, 1810)

- His own mythology (prophetic books, 1795-1820: *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*) – Apocalypse and regeneration
- Swedenborg: theory of correspondences, of yes/no, good/evil, of opposites
- Hindu: multifariousness – terrible/benevolent, trivial/cosmic, grotesque/sublime
- Neoplatonism: reality = shadows, illusions of the perfect world

Language

*He forgets that he is talking to men on
the earth in some language which he
learnt in heavenly places*

(Arthur Symons)

- Symbolic – to hint at what is beyond the physical
- Metaphorical – to substantiate the vision