A SYSTEMATIC CHALLENGING OF THE FREQUENT DEPICTION OF SÉBASTIEN LE PRESTRE DE VAUBAN, MARÉCHAL DE FRANCE UNDER LOUIS XIV, AS A HUMANITARIAN

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rutgers – New Brunswick

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the School of Arts and Sciences Honors Program

by

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March 2011
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Jennifer Jones for her guidance and assistance throughout the writing process. This paper would never have come about without her kindness of spirit and her generosity in sharing her time, experience and wisdom. I am privileged to have had the opportunity to work with a scholar of her caliber.

I would also like to thank Dr. James Masschaele and Dr. Alastair Bellany for their help. Dr. Masschaele’s guidance helped to keep me on track throughout the writing process. Dr. Bellany, meanwhile, was as diligent a secondary reader as I could have hoped for.

My family was, as always, incredibly supportive throughout this project. Kayvan and Sina, my mentors in life and work, were there for me at every turn. Hamid, as always, had an abundance of wise words and sound advice. Last, but never least, words cannot express my gratitude to Penelope for her encouragement and support. I love you mom.
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“[Vauban had] all his life been touched with the misery of the people and the vexations they suffered.”
-Saint-Simon\(^1\)

His principal care was the preservation of his men… His Kindness of heart, so characteristic of him, impregnates all his maxims and ideas.
-Lazare Carnot\(^2\)

The finest Frenchman of the long reign of Louis XIV.
-Sir Reginald Blomfield\(^3\)

He served Louis with a loyalty which stopped very far short of servility, and more than any other soldier of the time he had a concern for the mass of unimportant human beings who sometimes served the royal ambitions, and sometimes stood in the way of them.
-Christopher Duffy\(^4\)

INTRODUCTION

Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban was renowned for his prowess in the arts of engineering, architecture and besiegement. He was a pioneer in each of these fields who far outstripped his peers, forcing them to copy his methods in their attempts to emulate his success. His military accomplishments are particularly well documented, with European blueprints, memoires and siege records testifying to the effectiveness of his actions. Somewhere along the line, however, Vauban acquired an additional reputation for being a great humanitarian. This claim was first reported by contemporary French

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historian and courtier Saint-Simon, who lavished Vauban with praise for having been “perhaps the most honourable and the most virtuous man of his century... no man was ever more meek, more obliging, more civil, more respectful... protective to the point of miserliness of the lives of his men.” Since that initial depiction many historians have echoed Saint-Simon’s claims, often referencing little more than the claims that their scholarly predecessors had penned. As a result the image of Vauban as a great humanitarian has come to be seen as an accepted fact.

This belief has two major flaws. The first of these is that Vauban, empathetic soul or not, was first and foremost a military engineer. His job was to take what the enemies of France would not give by whatever means – money, arms, people – he thought necessary. It can be reasonably ventured that the undertaking of Le Prestre’s plans incurred upwards of one hundred thousand casualties. The second flaw in the depiction of Vauban as a humanitarian before his time is that there is relatively scant evidence of such leanings. Quotes can be found from a few of his letters to illustrate isolated instances of concern for others, but nowhere in his writings does Vauban intimate a collective concern for all of humanity. In fact, many of his actions indicate that his empathy was highly selective, and perhaps even rare.

Two categories of historians have written about Vauban. The first includes Ian Dunlop, Christopher Duffy, and Sir Reginald Blomfield. Their subjects of choice are

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This is a conservative estimation. 7,000 French casualties were incurred at the 1692 Siege of Namur alone, and – if we take Vauban’s eulogizer Fontenelle at his word – Le Prestre guided fifty-three sieges. One hundred thousand is a low estimate even if both numbers were extremely inflated, but is sufficiently striking for my purposes and does not risk inaccuracy.
disparate, ranging from Louis XIV to siege warfare to Le Prestre himself. They are united, however, by their willingness to buy into Saint-Simon’s characterization and perpetuate a fanciful and idealistic vision of Vauban. Fluffy statements such “he had a concern for the mass of unimportant human beings”7 and “he was constantly helping the lame dog over the stile”8 are thrown about without justification. The second category is composed of scholars such as John Lynn who do not give in to the aforementioned idolization of Le Prestre. Nevertheless, these historians still fail to point out the flaws in the dominant rhetoric. The misrepresentation of Vauban within the historical narrative has gone undisputed to this day.

The goal of this thesis is to challenge the simplistic depiction of Vauban as a humanitarian. This will be undertaken through several steps. First, Vauban himself will be introduced. This will not be a full biography; rather, it will be a brief snapshot of his life that can serve as background for the rest of this analysis. Second, the terms of the challenge will be laid out, and the vocabulary involved will be clarified. Third, Vauban’s environment will be contextualized in terms of the state, culture and practices of seventeenth-century France. Finally, Le Prestre himself will be examined through his writings, library, inventions, and sieges. The popular portrayal of Vauban will be thoroughly and systematically dissected throughout this course of action. The conclusion of this process will clarify and illuminate, once and for all, whether or not Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban was in fact a humanitarian.

One last note: certain terms such as ‘social-mindedness,’ ‘civic-mindedness’ and ‘social conscience,’ will be found in this paper. They should be read as exact synonyms

8 Blomfield. *Sebastien Le Prestre De Vauban*. 193
of ‘humanitarianism.’ The equivalence of all these words is challengeable, but necessary in order to avoid extreme overuse of the term ‘humanitarianism.’

THE MAN

Vauban, née Sébastien Le Prestre, was born in Burgundy on May 15 1633 to a family of the lesser nobility, in terms of both prestige and wealth. At the age of seventeen he joined the Prince of Condé’s personal regiment, an action that threw him into midst of the Prince’s uprising against the French monarchy. In 1653, however, he was captured and persuaded to pledge allegiance to Louis XIV. In 1665 the young officer was apprenticed to the Chevalier de Clerville, Louis XIV’s Commissaire Général des Fortifications. Vauban would study engineering and the art of siege warfare under Clerville for about fifteen years, after which he had surpassed his master in prestige and skill. This coup was cemented by an informal competition held in 1667 when Louis, desiring to refortify the re-conquered city of Lille, solicited unique proposals from Clerville and Vauban. Le Prestre’s plan was judged to have the most merit, instantly making him the most prestigious military engineer in France, though he would not claim Clerville’s title of Commissaire Général des Fortifications until the latter’s death in 1678. After Lille – which he would later refer to as his “oldest daughter” – Vauban’s career hurtled ahead like the cannonballs that his forts were designed to deter; in 1674 he became a brigadier, by 1676 he was a Maréchal de camp, by 1688 he was a lieutenant general, and in 1703, in his seventieth year of existence, he was made a Maréchal de

9 Virol, Vauban. 401
France, the highest military rank attainable. Mourning over the death of Vauban in 1707, King Louis XIV paid tribute to his valued servant: “Je perds un homme fort affectionné à ma personne et à l’Etat.”

THE TERMS

This thesis depends on the establishment of a static understanding of the terminology involved, which requires that I set forth a definition of humanitarianism that will be used and the grounds on which it was selected. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines humanitarian as being “a person promoting human welfare and social reform.” This definition, however, is too demanding relative to the era in which Vauban existed, as can be seen in this paper’s analysis of the French bureaucracy and military. Such a modern understanding fails to take into account the differing norms that apply to previous ages. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, humanitarianism can be better defined as a sense of commitment towards a morally sound treatment of and outlook upon other individuals and humanity as a whole. This definition depends in turn upon the establishment of a static definition of morality, which will serve both to clarify the manner in which it is being applied and to allow readers to distinguish what constitutes evidence as to its presence or absence from a person or thing. I have chosen to borrow a definition of morality from a more established scholar, as I believe that an overreliance on my own definitions will render this thesis fairly vulnerable to criticism. Some restrictions apply to any definition that will be chosen: it must be capable of being

11 Blomfield. Sebastien Le Prestre De Vauban. 188
Lynn. Giant of the Grand Siécle. 558-559
Duffy. The Fortress in the Age of Vauban. 71-72
applied to historical matters, it must take cultural and social factors into account, and it must be conclusive regarding in terms of what constitutes moral and/or immoral behavior towards others.

This criterion in mind, the optimal definition of morality is the one put forth by the noted philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas in his *The Inclusion of the Other*. One reason for its acceptability is his influence and fame: it is hard to imagine someone dismissing outright the words of a man whom Foucault treated as an equal, which in turn adds legitimacy to my own work. Another reason is that Habermas’ presence across multiple fields of study implies that he cannot afford to operate solely within a philosophical bubble, making his works much more practical and relevant to humanity as a result. My final reason is entirely self-serving: his book *The Inclusion of the Other* spends a large proportion of its pages discussing morality and the nature of human rights in a political context and fits simply and seamlessly into the needs of this paper as a result. The sole objection that could be raised against the use of Habermas’ definition of morality in this thesis is that a twentieth-century definition is incompatible with seventeenth-century history. Such concerns are baseless because I am defining humanitarianism in order to challenge the historians who have misrepresented Vauban, rather than the man himself. Since the vast majority of these men were published in the twentieth century, use of modern words and their definitions is entirely appropriate.\(^\text{12}\)

Habermas’ description of moral behavior is complex, but can be boiled down to a few simple parts. A “[moral] norm is valid when the foreseeable consequences and side effects of its general observance for the interests and value orientations of each *individual*

[sic] could be jointly [sic] accepted by all [sic] concerned without coercion.” 13 This can be summarized to mean that a concept of morality is acceptable when its implementation is harmless to all involved. Habermas’ thought process behind this encapsulation is discussed also when he states “I defend the rational content of a morality based on equal respect for everybody and on the universal solidarity and responsibility for all.”14 This essentially states that the aforementioned concept of morality should be based on universal respect for all humans. The Inclusion of the Other expounds upon the scope of this definition when the author notes “equal respect for everyone is not limited to those who are like us… This moral community constitutes itself solely by way of the negative idea of abolishing discrimination and harm and of extending relations of mutual recognition to include marginalized men and women.”15 Here, Habermas is stating that an acceptable concept of morality must not infringe upon the equal respect merited by all peoples, regardless of the familiarity of those involved.

In summary, Habermas’ definition of acceptable morality is of a code that does not violate anyone’s interests or values, and is based on respect for all human beings. This concept of morality is perfectly suited for the purposes of analyzing Vauban, particularly because it acknowledges that humans possess a flexibility to either adhere to or ignore morality. As editors Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff acknowledge in their introduction to the English language version of The Inclusion of the Other, “Moral norms provide agents with weak cognitive motives grounded in the knowledge that they have no good reason to act otherwise, but provide them with no rational motives to act

13 Ibid. 42
14 Ibid. xxxv
15 Ibid. xxxv-xxxvi
Moral behavior, and in turn humanitarianism, is sharply defined, but adherence is entirely discretionary and perhaps even irrational. Adherence therefore implies a strong moral compass, while defiance of the humanitarian code is self-serving but not at all abnormal. The built-in implications of such a definition strongly suit an analysis of Le Prestre’s humanitarianism, and strictly shape the stakes of such a study: Vauban was either the kindest of men or merely a mortal.

CONTEXTUALIZING VAUBAN

THE STATE

An analysis of Vauban as a humanitarian is impossible to undertake without first understanding the circumstances in which he thought, worked and lived. He played many roles in his lifetime, but the factor that united all his undertakings was his status as a servant of the state. An examination of the state, with a focus on the personalities that oversaw and guided it, must therefore be undertaken in order to contextualize Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban.

The most important individual within the seventeenth-century French state was King Louis XIV, who was also the most powerful European monarch of his time. The Dutch political theorist Hugo Grotius sensed the Sun King’s potential as a boy, noting that “the Dauphin is not content with sucking his nurses dry, he tears at them with his

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16 Ibid. xi-xii
teeth. Let France’s neighbours [sic] be on their guard against such precocious voracity.”

In both perception and function the King and the state were all but synonymous. The monarchy in France had held a great deal of centralized power for some time; as supreme ruler the King made all of France’s major decisions, and, though the bureaucratic workings of the state were run by an assortment of functionaries, their tasks were undertaken only with the consent of Louis and the ministers who reported to him directly. These information sessions, in turn, were much more than mere summaries; the Sun King was notorious for demanding “le detail de tout’. With the help of the knowledge imparted to him by his ministers, Louis XIV could accurately claim sole mastery of the ‘métier du roi,’ the business of presiding over his state. Louis was also informed by works of literature, most likely including Machiavelli’s The Prince, which noted that “a prince who builds his power on the people… will be found to have established his power securely.” The acquisition and maintenance of power was a King’s first priority. A suspicious mind, recalling these prophetic words, is likely to view the King’s sporadic humanitarian actions, to be analyzed later in this piece, as utilitarian in nature.

Louis XIV spent much of his reign embroiled in large-scale wars, most of which he had instigated himself. These wars required massive armies, which were often raised by the glorified mobs known as press gangs. Yet being recruited involuntarily was the least of his soldiers’ problems. Their lives were constantly under threat during times of

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17 Dunlop. Louis XIV. 2
18 Mme de Caylus, in Ibid. 270
war, whether from enemy bullets, disease, starvation, or their own incompetent commanders. This poor state of affairs was the responsibility of the King – albeit indirectly – on whose authority the state acted but was not abnormal, despite Vauban’s occasional protests.\textsuperscript{21} Yes, Louis XIV sometimes allowed his soldiers to go without pay or with much-diminished rations for months, but that was a product of the poverty of the French state rather than any malicious intentions. The decrease in soldiers’ salaries over the course of Louis’ reign, as measured against silver and a pegged price index, occurred for similar reasons.\textsuperscript{22} Louis was in fact one of the few monarchs of his time to go above and beyond the call of duty in paying his moral debts to France’s soldiers, establishing the Hôpital des Invalides in 1670 as a home for elderly or disabled soldiers.\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore, prior to Louis’ reign it was common for troops to be incredibly poorly supplied; it could be argued that the majority had neither socks nor shoes. These problems would not be fully solved for decades, but some progress was made following the Sun King’s rise.\textsuperscript{24} His soldiers might have fared the worse for his ambitions, but it is impossible to accuse Louis XIV of having neglected or mistreated them more than any other seventeenth-century European monarch.\textsuperscript{25}

The Sun King’s policies on taxation, however, were harsh by any standard. As an almost uninterrupted stream of wars began to bankrupt the state in the 1690’s and 1700’s, Louis began to squeeze his subjects for all they were worth. Reports of people starving to death were widespread. Even when the wars ended the state’s poverty did not; Louis

\textsuperscript{21} Vauban, Sébastien Le Prestre de. Letter to Louis XIV. 6 June 1684. MS. Camp De Luxembourg. A^735 D43
\textsuperscript{22} Lynn. \textit{Giant of the Grand Siècle}. 151
\textsuperscript{23} Dunlop. \textit{Louis XIV}. 250
\textsuperscript{24} Lynn. \textit{Giant of the Grand Siècle}. 171
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
found nothing wrong with borrowing heavily to finance his military, and the debts would remain after the conflicts had ended. His willingness to treat his people as a resource to be milked can be traced to his a statement in his famous *Memoires for the Dauphin*, in which he explicitly stated that the “tranquility of subjects is found only in obedience.”

Whether out of pride or sincere belief that he was indomitable, the Sun King could not bring himself to back out of armed conflict. France’s population paid the price.

On occasion, Louis XIV would actually pass reforms with the express intention of alleviating the pressure facing the peasants of France. In January 1671, for instance, the Sun King passed a decree banning the seizure of livestock from peasants who could not afford to pay their taxes. His establishment of Invalides, as described above, is further evidence that Louis was not entirely indifferent to the struggles of his people. Louis was out to win loyalty, not subservience, and this vision required that he possess the admiration of his subjects. Still, even this motive failed to move Louis to institute truly lasting reform at the state level. The majority of his humanitarian interventions were of a temporary nature, and even those that weren’t were insufficient to counteract his people’s suffering.

The Bourbon monarch’s hunger for power explains his treatment of the nobility. Transgressions against the French populace had been overlooked for some time and were a symptom of their relative independence from the monarchy, which Louis XIV sought to eradicate. Their casual, arrogant attitude towards the troops under their command was challenged, and they were made to realize that misuse of their positions would not escape

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27 Dunlop. *Louis XIV*. 129
28 Ibid. 156
Louis’ notice. Examples were made. Perhaps the most notable was Nicolas Fouquet, Louis’ first superintendant of finances. Fouquet was guilty of the standard transgressions that came with the position, particularly using royal funds for his own extravagances. That might have been overlooked, but Fouquet used money from the royal coffers to turn his island home into a fortress complete with its own miniature army. Louis found the minister’s abuses intolerable, and moved to arrest him in September 1661. When documents surfaced detailing plans to institute a civil war in the event of his deposal, the minister’s downfall was sealed.\textsuperscript{29} Egos may have played a role in the removal of Fouquet from office, but in the end the arrest is just one event in Louis’ broader pattern of ingraining a sense of obedience into the nobility and reforming France’s bureaucracy. By letting the nobility know that they were not above the law, Louis in turn diminished opportunities for the abuse of peasants and bettered the quality of life of his subjects.

Despite some instances in which Louis XIV seemed to display a genuine sense of caring and respect for his subjects, the king took one action that paints him as a brutally ruthless despot: the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which Vauban strongly opposed.\textsuperscript{30} Louis’ grandfather, Henry IV of France, had passed the edict in 1598, guaranteeing certain religious and civil freedoms to French Protestants, known as Huguenots, enabling the long-needed peace that would allow Henry IV to go about revitalizing his country.\textsuperscript{31} In October of 1685, less than a century after his grandfather had signed the edict into law, Louis XIV signed the Edict of Fontainebleau, which repealed the Protestant faith’s protections within the borders of France. The repeal had been a long time coming; Louis,

\textsuperscript{29} Soll,. \textit{The Information Master}. 44-47
\textsuperscript{31} Dunlop. \textit{Louis XIV}. xvii
in his Memoires for the Dauphin, had referred to Protestants as being “guilty of imposture in all matters which concerned not facts but faith.” \(^{32}\) Besides causing a massive Huguenot exodus, the repeal paved the way for massive human rights violations. With the de facto backing of the state, Catholic civilians and troops were free to attack and plunder Protestant households. Previously peaceful communities fell apart as Catholics, both old and newly converted, fell upon their unprotected neighbors. Those that escaped often found that all of their worldly possessions had been sold or destroyed. Those that joined armed rebellions, attempting to stand up against the violence, fared even less well. These uprisings were usually put down almost instantaneously and those that remained alive were condemned to death. These transgressions were the results of the revocation alone, but the worst of the violations would come in the form of state policy with the blessing of Louis XIV himself. \(^{33}\) The single most reprehensible policy was known as the *dragonnade*, in which dragoons – already notorious for their violent tendencies – were billeted in Huguenot households. This action was undertaken with the understanding that their lodging would bring horrible troubles upon their hosts and in turn encourage them to convert to Catholicism. Others found themselves sentenced to work as galley slaves, a role universally referred to as a form of living death. Sitting six to a bench and completely naked, they were forced to row for up to twenty hours straight without rest, with overseers occasionally giving them morsels of bread soaked in wine so as to give them just enough energy to stay conscious. Blood flowed freely, and should a man collapse he would be whipped until it was proven that he could truly no longer go

\(^{32}\) Ibid. 269  
\(^{33}\) Ibid. 265-269
on, at which point he would be thrown overboard.\textsuperscript{34} Doubtlessly he had never seen the true horrors of galley life in person, but Louis XIV was still responsible for committing many Protestants to this hell on earth. Yes, his actions were based on his personal beliefs, and he truly believed that he was doing right by God, but zealousness does not justify the methods – as immoral as they were inefficient – that were used to encourage conversions. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes and his accompanying actions show Louis XIV’s capacity to act ruthlessly towards civilians within his own domain.

Louis XIV was a complex individual who occasionally butted heads with Vauban.\textsuperscript{35} At times he sought to better the lives of his subjects, going to great lengths to institute reforms and prevent transgressions. And yet, he was capable of changing course at a moments notice. If war arose, he wouldn’t hesitate to squeeze his already strapped peasants for more cash. Should a subject be a Huguenot, Louis was inclined to condemn them to a lifetime of excruciating pain because of their religion alone. And should a person fall under the jurisdiction of a different state, he would impose contributions on them without batting an eye.\textsuperscript{36} According to Habermas’ definition of morality Louis XIV was not completely devoid of humanitarian inclinations, but the slightest social or international turmoil would result in their forswearing.

Louvois, Louis XIV’s Secretary of State for Military Affairs, had control over administration of the entire military. Within a state that made war as frequently as Louis XIV’s France, such a role brought a mountain of influence along with it.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} Dunlop, \textit{Louis XIV.} 151-2
\textsuperscript{36} Contributions, a method of extracting funds from enemy settlements during times of war, will be further explored in a later chapter
\textsuperscript{37} Lynn. \textit{Giant.} 85
humanitarian bent, or lack thereof, displayed by Louvois would manifest itself in the actions and attitudes of the army, which in turn was Vauban’s immediate milieu. Therefore, an understanding of Louvois’ social conscience will go a long way to contextualize and frame the humanitarianism of Sébastien le Prestre.

Louvois’ competence was legendary. Between his work ethic, creativity and intelligence he managed to create France’s most ambitious military administration to date by centralizing the state’s power over and knowledge of the military. In his role of Secretary of State for Military Affairs, Louvois undertook several socially minded reforms including his pioneering, alongside Vauban, the building of 160 barracks to dissipate the negative effects of billeting on the French population. This implementation spared some of the non-Huguenot population from the strains of billeting, which in turn spared the state from the turmoil and destruction that accompanied it. Another humanitarian action undertaken by Louvois was the allotment of money to provide soldiers with decent funerals. Though somewhat minor, this reform provides the impression that the Marquis, however stony and pugnacious, understood that his soldiers were human beings. These two actions are indicative of a trend in Louvois’ few humane actions: they occurred solely within the structure of the military administration, and they came at little to no cost to the French state.

Analysis of Louvois reveals a man who was occasionally sympathetic to the wants and needs of Louis XIV’s subjects. Overall, however, the Secretary of State for Military Affairs saw the state, the populace, and the armed forces, as a machine to be

38 Soll. *The Information Master*. 29
39 Dunlop. *Louis XIV*. 147
40 Lynn. *Giant*. 159
41 Dunlop. *Louis XIV*. 148
kept running as smoothly as possible. An argument could be made that such a mechanistic view might actually contradict Louvois’ cruel image, as he believed that each person was a part of a single entity rather than an individual. Either way, however, it cannot be denied that this perspective left little room for empathy towards others. To acknowledge or indulge the humanity within the machine would slow it down, and Louvois despised inefficiency more than anything.

The other key minister of Louis XIV’s France was Jean-Baptiste Colbert, most commonly known by his surname. It is interesting to note that outside of his normal role as Contrôleur Général des Finances, Colbert took the time to personally train Vauban to serve as an information gatherer. Colbert’s own communications regarding the pursuit of French success are the primary evidence against him possessing any sense of humanitarianism, particularly his stated belief that one country could only become rich if another became poor. Similarly, Colbert is on record as advocating enlightened despotism over any other form of government. However, another side, though rarely seen, existed within the minister: strong distaste for unjust bloodshed. During his time in office a region of France became caught up in a crusade against witchcraft, which supposedly had taken root. Colbert heard that local authorities were planning on executing several supposed witches and used his power to interfere, stopping the murders in the nick of time.

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42 Ibid. 145
43 Soll. The Information Master. 85
44 Dunlop. Louis XIV. 130
45 Soll. The Information Master. 159
46 Dunlop. Louis XIV. 128-129
Some historians have used the witchcraft instance to declare that the minister was strongly concerned with righting injustice and oppression. However, in light of his belief that wealth must – and should – be taken from others, as well as his obsession with rationalizing the state via data, such a conclusion is premature.\footnote{Soll. *The Information Master*. 69} It is much more likely that Colbert loathed irrationality, and saw an opportunity to prevent human stupidity from harming others. On the long scale, France’s human calculator, though brilliant, saw human rights as a secondary concern.

Louis XIV, Louvois and Colbert each had different personalities and different roles. What they had in common was a willingness to put the state before everything else, including the happiness, human rights, and lives of the people of France. Certain circumstances could bring them to act humanely, but only if such an action would not be detrimental to the state. The condition of the common man was an afterthought to each of these figures. None of them could be considered humanitarians under our Habermas-inspired guidelines.

**THE CULTURE AND PRACTICES OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE**

An exploration of the humanitarianism of the French monarchy and state goes a long way in setting the stage for an exploration of Vauban’s public-spirited nature. That said, a thorough analysis requires a review of the contemporary culture and practices of the state in which the great engineer lived. The social consciences of Vauban’s intellectual and bureaucratic peers must also be understood in order to contextualize
Vauban’s own conscience. This is because Sébastien le Prestre was a multifaceted figure who overlapped the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, and the armed forces, and as such no single perspective can encapsulate his public-spiritedness, or lack thereof. The quest to contextualize Vauban therefore requires an understanding of his intellectual peers.

It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which morality was of interest to seventeenth-century France’s scholarly community. Only a few decades earlier any discussion of the subject would have met with perplexity, but the philosophical and theoretical views of Europe’s intellectuals were gradually changing. The early years of the enlightenment had given rise to an intellectual network that took the form of correspondence exchange between its participants and the small-scale publication of members’ ideas. At the start of the seventeenth century the network – commonly known as the Republic of Letters – had been made up of a few scholars whose intellectual tastes were more or less limited to the composition of Latin poetry.48 At its height in the eighteenth century, however, the network would become what April Shelford describes as “a vernacular intellectual world that was relatively more public, open, and democratic.”49 As a result the brightest minds of the day were exposed to a myriad of fresh ideas.50 One of these ideas was the growing belief in the concept of an ideal human condition, which Descartes himself had acknowledged in his famed Discours de la Methode of 1638.51 Scholars began to place a particular emphasis on both personal


49 Ibid. 3


51 Descartes, René, and George Heffner. *Discours De La Méthode: Pour Bien Conduire Sa Raison Et Chercher La Verité Dans Les Sciences = Discourse on the Method : of Conducting One's Reason Well and of Seeking the Truth in the Sciences : a Bilingual Edition and an Interpretation of René*
The reading list Vauban recommended to his son, to be further reviewed later, listed an edition of Pierre Bayle’s *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, a journal dedicated to spreading the literature of the Republic, implying that he was aware of the network’s existence. It is therefore likely that Le Prestre was aware of the topic of morality’s circulation through the Republic of Letters.

Another manner of determining the degree to which contemporary scholars were aware of the concept of humanitarianism is through an evaluation of the era’s vocabulary via a seventeenth-century French dictionary, such as the 1694 edition of *Le Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française Dedié au Roy*. The fact that the Académie Française produced this dictionary implies that it was both royally sanctioned and representative of mainstream French scholarly thought. Upon examination the words humane and humanitarian are shown to be absent from *Le Dictionnaire*, and therefore from the core vocabulary of seventeenth-century French society, though it is possible that the appropriate words were simply deemed insufficiently important to be worth including.

This absence in no way changes the degree to which Vauban and his peers’ actions were moral or not. Still, it indicates that the French of the seventeenth century did not feel obliged to engage in respectful treatment of all people. This implies that to act as a humanitarian during Le Prestre’s era was to essentially function as a moral pioneer, while indifference towards others would go unquestioned.

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52 Hazard, *The European Mind*. 284
53 Virol. *Vauban*. 427
Another window through which Vauban’s behavior can be contextualized is via the Catholic Church. The Church was the largest non-state influence on seventeenth-century affairs and as a result played a major role in setting social and cultural norms, including views on the acceptability of war and bloodshed. Its influence was complicated, however, by the unofficial split between classical (read: Vatican-centric) Catholic doctrine and Gallicanism, which preached the authority of the Bourbon Monarchy over the affairs of the Church within French borders and constituted the dominant religious rhetoric within the French state.\(^{55}\) The Vatican was relatively cautious in its stance towards bloodshed and brutality, an attitude that manifested itself in Pope Clement IX’s negotiation of a treaty to end the War of Devolution. Contemporary Roman caution could also be perceived in the mainstream Church’s reaction to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, when Pope Innocent XI approved of the repeal but denounced the use of violence; Gallican leaders by contrast had no qualms with the Dragonnades, and the top tier of the faction congratulated Louis on his conviction without condemning the brutality of his policies.\(^{56}\)

A deeper understanding of the Gallican perspective on bloodshed and conflict can be found through an examination of the words of the faction’s leaders. One of the most noteworthy was Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, a historian and theologian who served as Preceptor to the Dauphin and Bishop of Meaux, and who heavily influenced both the French Catholic Church and the contemporary social elite; for this reason, his opinions on bloodshed and warfare can be seen as indicative of both his beliefs and those of French society. A window into Bossuet’s humanitarianism or lack thereof can therefore be


\(^{56}\) Ibid. 98
found in the oration he gave at the funeral of the Prince of Condé, who was first and foremost a military man and whose main accomplishments occurred on the field of battle. This speech, regarded as one of the greatest orations of all time, is peppered with telling phrasings. Bossuet glorifies the concept of the military as a soulless machine by praising emotionless actions, stating that “if [Condé] forbade them [his mourners] weeping, it was not because it was a distress to him, but simply a hindrance.” Such phrasing frames a cold-blooded mindset as virtuous, and in turn implies that consideration for humanity was not in a great general’s makeup. The adjectives used by Bossuet are even more telling of his attitude towards war, as can be seen when he refers to “the splendor of the most glorious victory!” No mention is made of bloodshed or death or injury or pain.

Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet’s words glorify war and conquest alone. The Gallicans – who were far more influential in French affairs than their Italian counterparts – are thus shown to have had few humanitarian concerns, which in turn implies an absence of those values in the extremely pious culture of seventeenth-century France. Conquest was perceived as glory, and bloodshed merited little consideration.

The last perspective from which Vauban’s humanitarianism should be viewed is that of the French military. That Vauban implemented many radical changes and helped to accelerate the evolution of the armed forces is indisputable. Still, the degree to which Vauban’s socially-minded actions represented a step forward is ill-defined, and, much


58 Ibid.

like his moral and social philosophies, require contextualization amongst the policies and traditions of the military service in which he found himself.

Under the Bourbon dynasty, France’s army grew so large that the state could no longer muster sufficient resources to feed, clothe and pay it. In order to fill the gap between what the military needed to survive and what the monarchy would grant them, soldiers took to pillaging and ravaging ostensibly friendly towns within the borders of France. John Lynn, in analyzing the effects of such behavior, which he termed the Tax of Violence, notes that “the result was violent abuse, strategic frustration, and fiscal collapse,” affecting both the attacked towns and the military itself. If the state would not give the military the resources it needed to survive, the military would take them by force. This violence, which in effect constituted an informal tax, was a direct result of the army’s period of transition as it adjusted to the demands of the Grand Siècle.

The costs of the Tax of Violence were brutal: on the civilian side, up to a fifth of the population of a town might die simply as a result of the army being quartered in that area. In turn such violence sparked retribution by the affected civilians, who were known to attack, disarm, and even slaughter the soldiers who had afflicted so much damage on their livelihoods. Such a system was far more costly than the government should have tolerated, and yet, whether out of laziness or a poor understanding of the consequences of the status quo, it was allowed it to continue for years. Such tolerance was not merely tacit, as shown by a 1660 ordinance granting amnesty for French soldiers and civilians in which Louis XIV himself admitted, “the disorders committed by our

\[60\] Lynn. Giant. 184
\[61\] Ibid. 188
soldiers have resulted only from the lack of their pay.” 62 Nor was it unprecedented: less than eighty years earlier, Henri III had allowed the civilians of France to sink to such a low that, rather than having animals to pull their plows, they themselves “served as animals, with ropes over their shoulders”. 63 And yet, no matter how acceptable the state deemed the status quo, the system was unsustainable and change was inevitable. Though Louis had gone along with the system at first his reign would also bear witness to the Tax’s decline, though it would never fully disappear; Lynn notes that in 1693 Vauban himself noted that troops on the move would engage in “an infinity of small pillages.” 64 Still, it should be noted that the decline of the Tax of Violence was due in large part to Louis’s refusal to tolerate the continuation of such behavior, a policy that he pursued by disciplining violators, their officers, and even those judiciaries that imposed improperly light penalties. The biggest reason for the Tax’s decline, however, was the rise of a new source of funds and resources for the armed forces: contributions. 65

At first glance, the policy of demanding contributions appears to be little better than that of the Tax of Violence. Contributions were essentially forced donations in which a military commander would demand that a town or region supply it with a certain sum; if the imposed-upon civilians failed to pay it their town would be burned to the ground, sometimes with the populace still inside. That said, contributions were, at least to the inflicting party, a major improvement over the Tax. To start with, it was imposed by high-ranking officers and was therefore more legitimate, enforceable, and reliable than discretionary pillaging by petty soldiers. An even more important distinction was that

62 Ibid. 188
63 Dunlop. Louis XIV. xvii
64 Lynn. Giant. 193
65 Ibid. 196
unlike the Tax of Violence, contributions were exclusively imposed on conquered and occupied territories outside of France. The policy was simple but brilliant: during war, ranks would swell but the army could become nearly self-sufficient, while in peace the diminishing of the military’s ranks would mostly offset the loss of contributions. This policy was a favorite of the battle-hungry Bourbon monarch. Lynn quotes Louis XIV, writing to General Villars in 1703, as asking that the commander “shall find [a] way to maintain my cavalry at the expense of the [German] enemy, and draw from him enough money in contributions to be used to pay parts of my troops.” Secretary of State for War Louvois echoed these encouragements, begging a bureaucrat stationed in occupied Holland “not to tire of your aggression but to push these matters with all the rigour imaginable.” These contributions represent more than fiscal strategy, however. The policy also exposes the state under which Vauban served as willing to harm innocent civilians for its own gain.

Another aspect of the Bourbon military institution against which Vauban’s humanitarian bent can be gauged is the state of fortress-building policies from before le Prestre’s time. This area of Vauban’s repertoire is relevant to the discussion of le Prestre’s social consciousness because his innovations and alterations to the status quo, which will be further discussed in another chapter, drastically changed the number of soldiers who could potentially die in an assault on a fortress as well as changing the standard manner in which a siege was conducted. For that reason, an exploration of the practices used before his time is required.

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66 Ibid. 196
67 Ibid. n199-200
68 Dunlop. *Louis XIV.* 150
Before Vauban rose to the pinnacle of his trade, Italian methodologies reigned supreme. Christopher Duffy, reflecting on the dominance of the engineers from the south, describes the product of their schemes:

> the walls of the new Italian fortresses were built on a thick, low-lying profile which provided spacious and solid artillery platforms, and offered a good static defence against cannon shot. The trace, or ground-plan, was redesigned on strictly mathematical lines – most notably the old towers were trimmed into four-sided angular works called bastions, which were so shaped as to eliminate any dead ground by which the besiegers might have approached the foot of the wall unscathed.\(^{69}\)

By the time Vauban came to power the fortress had diverged greatly from the classical image of a castle. Through both the standardization of gunpowder weaponry and fortifications designed to put up the maximum resistance possible to those weapons, not to mention the increasing number of troops committed to wars, siege warfare had attained a devastating nature. Duffy puts it best when he describes the century of evolution as “the march of a siege machine which seemed to grow every year in its power and precision.”\(^{70}\)

Before Vauban’s entrance onto the stage of the Grand Siècle, several specific siege tactics that showed disdain for the value of human life were commonly practiced. One of the worst offenders was that of the open escalade. This was the practice of sending groups of soldiers, sometimes numbering in the hundreds or even thousands, to use enormous ladders to try and scale the walls of a fortress. When successful, this practice would get a number of troops inside the fortifications and enable them to open the gates or drawbridges from within, thereby allowing the rest of the besiegers to storm the fortress without calling for a lengthy siege. However, successful escalades were rare.

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\(^{69}\) Duffy, *Fire & Stone*, 10

\(^{70}\) Ibid. 188
For starters, even the shortest walls would require ladders close to forty feet in height, while the largest ladders were so massive that they could require up to forty men to raise them up. The only chance of survival for the attackers was if they caught the defenders completely by surprise, which would require perfect planning and a lot of luck. More often than not an escalade mission could be referred to as a suicide mission without the use of hyperbole, and as such their use stains the commanding with the stigma of having been wasteful with the lives of his men.\(^{71}\)

The last siege-related practice that helps to contextualize the humanitarian of the pre-Vauban era is that of bombardment, the use of projectiles to destroy houses and general infrastructure in the hopes of demoralizing the civilians within a fortress. In contrast, the majority of artillery fire was used to destroy the defensive works. In the seventeenth century steps were sometimes taken to make bombardment particularly lethal. The worst of these steps was the innovation known as red-hot shot, in which cannonballs were heated in an oven until they glowed red, and, if enough were fired, it was inevitable that they would touch off something flammable and ignite a blaze. The effects of a fire within a city’s walls could be devastating: in the 1695 siege of Brussels, the majority of the city’s houses were reported to have gone up in flames. Like escalade missions, a commander’s use or avoidance of bombardment tactics can serve to gauge their value for human life.\(^{72}\)

The last area with which Vauban’s humanitarian bent could be analyzed was in the treatment of troops and military employees by their commanders. The welfare of their soldiers was not always in the hands of their superiors; mistreatment was often

\(^{71}\) Ibid. 119-120

\(^{72}\) Ibid. 122-125
simply the result of budget shortages, such as the underfunding that had once forced soldiers to resort to the Tax of Violence. Even after the Tax subsided, soldiers’ pay was frequently delayed, their equipment often subpar, and their rations sometimes short. Such problems were the result of the Bourbon monarch’s addiction to warfare, which by the twilight years of Vauban’s life had left the state all but bankrupt. In 1706 the Contrôleur Général des Finances recorded that the crown had existing debts of 105 million livres, anticipated expending 214 million more, and had only 51 million livres at its disposition.\(^{73}\) It can be safely assumed that such a state of affairs did nothing to ameliorate the hardships faced by grunt soldiers.

Any welfare that was directly controlled by commanding officers, however, was generally treated as a secondary concern. Such a state of affairs was rooted in the policy of selling officer ranks to those who could afford them, allowing the crown to raise funds and giving nobles the chance to increase their prestige through pursuit of *le gloire*. As such, few officers thought of the men under their command as little more than means to an end, an issue encapsulated by a prominent 1689 incident in which the King’s minister Louvois confronted a nobleman on the premises of Versailles. Ian Dunlop quotes a lady of the court who witnessed the scene:

> The other day M. de Louvois said at the top of his voice: ‘Monsieur, your company is in a very bad condition.’ ‘Monsieur,’ he answered, ‘I was not aware of it.’ ‘You ought to be aware of it,’ said M. de Louvois; ‘have you seen it?’ ‘No, Monsieur,’ said M. de Nogaret. ‘You ought to have seen it.’ ‘I will see to it, Monsieur.’ ‘You ought to have seen to it. You ought to make up your mind, Monsieur. Either admit to being a courtier or do your duty as an officer.’\(^{74}\)

\(^{73}\) Dunlop. *Louis XIV*. 393

\(^{74}\) Ibid. 146
Such an incident illustrates the degree to which the fortunes of soldiers were entirely in the hands of men who sometimes thought of them as chips to be wagered in the game of life.

Vauban’s social-mindedness cannot be evaluated in a vacuum. Any judgment must be made with a full understanding of the norms and policies of each of the planes in which Le Prestre operated, from the world of political theory and philosophy to the institution of the military. With the basic characteristics of these fields now defined, a proper evaluation of Vauban’s humanitarianism bent can be undertaken.

VAUBAN THROUGH HIS WORDS AND POSSESSIONS

As mentioned in the introduction, two types of evidence emerge from an examination of Le Prestre’s humanitarianism. One type is the data that serves as an indicator of a certain leaning but does not suffice as concrete evidence for one reason or another. For brevity’s sake I will refer to this type as ‘soft’ indicators. The other type of evidence is that which serves as a solid and relatively non-subjective proof of a leaning, humanitarian or otherwise. Naturally, these will be referred to in the future as ‘hard’ indicators. When complete, the two categories should combine to cover all the evidence of the extent to which Vauban possessed a humanitarian bent, or lack thereof.

Perhaps the best source of soft indicators of Vauban’s humanitarian leanings is the contents of the reading list that he assembled for his son. For a book to be included by default entails that the great engineer almost definitely had read the tome and believed it to be indispensible to the education and shaping of a young man, either because it
contained lessons to be learned or because it held information that a nobleman should have knowledge of. In fact, the personal library in seventeenth-century France was seen as an indication of a person’s makeup; though the bibliotheque was oftentimes administered and filled by a subordinate, the bookshelves were perceived as mirroring their owner. The library that Vauban recommended for his son was mostly filled with history books, as well as a limited selection of science and classics, which were standard components of any contemporary nobleman’s library. Though the core was mundane in nature, the list also held a bevy of truly intriguing materials in the form of propaganda, philosophy and science written by people that the state was actively hostile towards. This collection indicates that Vauban was willing to entertain radical texts and beliefs. Even more radically, it indicates that he may have entertained notions that sharply differed from the official stances approved of by the state.

The first category of noteworthy books that Vauban recommended to his son falls squarely in the category of propaganda by or for the Bourbon monarchy. Possessing a plethora of books that paint despotism in an incredibly flattering light is a strike against the legend of Vauban as a man of the people; to work for the state is one thing, but to worship it is another thing entirely. The least controversial of these books would be such fare as *Les commentaries de César*, the possession of which merely portrays the words of a dictator as being worth reading. A more debatable book within the Vauban library was Barclay’s *Argenis* as translated by Pierre de Marcassus. This book was ostensibly a romance, but surreptitiously promoted monarchical control at the expense of the aristocracy. Though Vauban’s particular sympathies towards this sentiment are

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75 Soll. *The Information Master*  
76 Virol. *Vauban*. 421
unquantifiable, possession of such a book would lead one to think that Le Prestre was sympathetic to Louis XIV’s consolidation of royal power. That power grab in turn gave the monarchy more control over the French population, which in turn allowed for more abuses. This in turn allowed grass roots anger to focus on one target, and through this it could be argued that the original consolidation would eventually result in the French Revolution. Another title in this category is The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli. Earlier in the seventeenth century practically every member of the European nobility had read the book, but the title had fallen out of favor by the time Louis XIV ascended to the throne. Therefore Le Prestre would likely have had to seek out the text on his own, implying a high level of personal interest in the work. That Vauban recommended the book is further evidence that he respected and perhaps even agreed with Machiavelli’s philosophy of realpolitik, which advocates using any means necessary to maintain power. Such an association both illustrates the breadth of Vauban’s interests and hints at a utilitarian and self-interested side of Le Prestre.77 The title of most controversial pro-monarchy book recommended by Vauban, however, must go to Antoine Aubéry’s Des Justes Prétentions du Roy sur L’Empire. This book asserted that Louis XIV had a justifiable claim to expand his domain beyond the borders of France. Possession of this text, which had caused such uproar that Louis had been forced to jail Aubéry for three months to calm the international community, paints the owner as being at least willing to entertain the notion of national expansion. Such an association is somewhat damaging to the widespread idea of Vauban as something of a military pacifist.78

77 Soll. *Publishing the Prince*
In addition, the library recommended to Vauban’s son contained an additional number of titles that were controversial at best and illegal or heretical at worst. The most benign of these, for an extremely loose definition of benign, was *Nouvelles Pensées de Galilée*, an unimaginatively titled work written by Galileo Galilei. Part of Galileo’s fame as an astronomer and scientist is that he ran so afoul of the Catholic Church that his writings remained prohibited until the 18th century. Vauban’s mere mention of his work therefore raises questions. What was Le Prestre doing with a book so disparaged by the Church that it might as well have been written by satanic cultists? How did he even acquire it? These questions can only be answered with sheer speculation; the controversy surrounding the book is incentive enough to ensure that records of transactions or reflections, had they ever existed, would have been hidden or destroyed. Still, Vauban’s recommendation of this book indicates that he felt that held science held more weight than religion, and that he was willing to flout decrees from the highest level of the Vatican. Another book that Vauban possessed that did not adhere to the Church’s standards of appropriateness was Pierre Jurieu’s *Histoire du Calvinism et celle du papisme mises en parallèle*. Jurieu was a major Huguenot leader who caused such disruption with his unapologetic publications that he fled France out of fear of repercussions.\(^\text{79}\) The text itself was meant as a side-by-side comparison of Calvinism and Catholicism in an attempt to counteract what Jurieu saw as libelous condemnations of his chosen religion. As with *Nouvelles Pensées*, Vauban’s reasons for possessing the book are impossible to account for. Two possible reasons stand out: either Le Prestre secretly saw merit in the Huguenot movement, or he was seeking to educate himself more about

\(^{79}\) Ibid. 175
the people that Louis XIV was bent on destroying. Either way, Vauban was taking a
major risk by even referencing the book. Perhaps the most controversial book in the
reading list, however, was Francois Poullain de la Barre’s *De L’égalité des deux sexes.*
Poullain was a former Catholic priest who had converted to Protestantism and whose
writings applied the teachings of Descartes to existing gender inequality.  
And yet, letters by Vauban exist that paint him as feeling tentatively skeptical of gender equality;
in writing to his nephew du Puy Vauban in 1704, Le Prestre advised that “you should do
nothing in your household affairs without consulting [your wife]. But you must rigidly
exclude her from anything which has to do with the king’s service or your command…
Well-born little women who know that they are pretty are liable to get above themselves
and become difficult to live with.”  
De la Barre’s unconventional stance, as well as his
status as an abandoner of Catholicism, makes Vauban’s recommendation of this book
extremely risky and unorthodox, yet his statements to his nephew show that he does not
adhere to Poullain’s beliefs. By process of elimination, intellectual curiosity can be the
only reason for Le Prestre’s interest in the book.

Jean-Baptiste Colbert made a conscious effort to spread propaganda and suppress
critical histories, understanding full well that divergence from the sanctioned literature
represented a divergence from the state.  
In turn, divergence from the state represented a
partial rejection of the same entity that squeezed the peasantry and was constantly at war.
Therefore, Vauban’s reading of Galileo, Jurieu and Poullain, indicates that he possessed
an independent mind with a curiosity that far outstripped the boundaries within which he

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81 Duffy. *The Fortress in the Age of Vauban.* 72
82 Soll, *The Information Master.* 129
was supposed to operate. In turn, this raises doubts around the typical portrayal of him as a loyal and selfless servant of Louis XIV.

Other ‘soft’ indicators of Vauban’s sense of civic mindedness exist beyond the contents of his library, including letters, statements, and memoires. As with his books, these writings come with a myriad of implications that aren’t always easy to sort out. A large portion of this oeuvre has a strongly pro-humanitarian bent. For instance, Le Prestre left written opinions about matters such as siege tactics and specific military practices. Vauban took specific issue with the aforementioned bombardment of cities, stating in a 1691 letter to Louvois that “bombardments of Oudenard, of Luxembourg and even of Liège acquired not a single inch of territory for the king, and, quite the opposite, they consumed a great deal of ammunition uselessly and fatigued the troops greatly and weakened them… it seems to me also that it is a very bad way of reconciling the heart of the people”³³ In addition, several letters were written by Vauban to Louis XIV and Louvois requesting food or back pay or equipment for the men under his command in order to lessen their suffering. One letter dating from May 1679 is a good example, with Vauban writing to request higher pay for the workers under his command at Roussillon: “They are able, faithful and diligent. If you do not increase their salaries they will be obliged to quit or resort to theft.”³⁴ Similarly, in November 1670 Vauban applied for two thousand barrows to replace the hods that his workers were using to slowly and painfully transport earth. Louvois initially rebuffed him, but Vauban, refusing to give ground,

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³³ Vauban in Lynn. Giant. 508
³⁴ Vauban in Dunlop. Louis XIV. 168
eventually won out. By writing against barbaric practices and interceding on behalf of his men, Le Prestre is indicated to have had a somewhat empathetic nature.

The vocabulary that Vauban used in his letters is also of interest in the quest to detail the engineer’s humanitarianism. As detailed above, Le Prestre wrote several letters on behalf of his men in the hopes of improving their welfare. These papers, however, do not state that the humanity of Vauban’s soldiers is justification enough for satisfying their needs. Instead, the vocabulary used implies that the men’s actions made them deserving of humane treatment. Words and phrases such as “meritent,” “si courageus,” and “able, faithful and diligent” are particularly stressed, and are often accompanied by examples of the subjects’ merits. This vocabulary choice implies that Vauban’s kindness had to be earned, which in turn implies that he did not have automatic respect for all people and was not a true humanitarian according to Habermas’ definition of moral behavior. Still, the unreliable nature of the written word makes this evidence a ‘soft’ indicator of Le Prestre’s disposition; it is always possible that an exploration of the great engineer’s complete writings would unearth word choices that contradict the implications of the above vocabulary. Until then, however, the contents of these letters rebut the image of Vauban as a humanitarian.

From his reading list and his writings a vague image has emerged of Vauban as an exceptionally tolerant and thoughtful man, albeit not fully enlightened one in the modern sense. Perhaps the most concrete reinforcement of this situation is the collection of records left behind of Vauban’s thoughts on the 1685 passing of the Edict of

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85 Dunlop. *Louis XIV*. 166
87 Vauban in Dunlop. *Louis XIV*. 168
Fontainebleau, more commonly known as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Le Prestre’s reasons for opposing the Revocation are controversial. Some historians suggest that his objections stemmed from perceived economic and military disadvantages, while writers like Voltaire focused on Vauban’s tolerant nature. It is worth noting that the old engineer had in his travels come across several Protestants who had been punished for falling afoul of the Edict. Regardless of his motives, it is a matter of record that Vauban contacted Louvois and Louis XIV three times regarding objections and alternatives to the Revocation. Over the course of these objections Vauban went to the trouble of cataloguing the damage that the Revocation had inflicted on the French state. France’s stock of craftsmen and merchants had shrunk significantly, and the approximately eighty to a hundred thousand Huguenot emigrants had taken about thirty million livres with them. In addition as many as twenty one thousand and six hundred soldiers, sailors and officers had defected to enemy forces. Furthermore, Le Prestre went on to assert that the Edict of Fontainebleau had not effected a single voluntary conversion. Vauban went on to write up an alternative – the Edict of Nantes would have been restored with an additional 30 dollar-per-head tax on Huguenots – that, while most likely in the best interest of the state, was summarily rejected. When the dust had settled, about three hundred thousand Huguenots had fled as well as at least three-quarters of protestant priests. Vauban’s efforts had been in vain.

88 Lynn, The Wars of Louis XIV. 178
89 Adams. The Huguenots and French Opinion. 52.
90 Ibid. 28
92 Ibid. 35
On the other hand, Vauban’s written communications often imply a greater loyalty towards Louis XIV than to humanity as a whole. Some of these letters focused on technical aspects of military protocol, coldly portraying victims and casualties in terms of their value to the state or the armed forces. One example of this type of work is a letter in which Le Prestre recommends a man who can “presser les executions et d’apprendre a ces gens cy a payer”, referring to the policy of torching villages that refused contributions. In referencing a talented demolition artist, Vauban shows a cold and calculating side that defies his humanitarian legend.

Other examples of Vauban’s expressed lack of concern for violence include an occasion in which he recommended that France continue waging war, while knowing full well of the bloody consequences. In 1668, during the closing days of the War of Devolution, Vauban counseled further aggression in the hopes of capturing assets that could serve as collateral. “A fortnight spent on [the town of Condé] would conclude the matter and then you will not come to the conference table with empty hands.” That even in an ideal world the action would result in the loss of several hundred soldiers was all but ignored in the face of the state’s potential gain. Vauban never went so far as to bluntly state that the death of a man in the service of the state could be worthwhile, but the colder, tactical side of his mind betrays him. Though these letters barely skim the surface of the body of humanely motivated writings originating from Sébastien Le Prestre, they serve as a sufficiently thorough representation of his belief regarding the fair treatment of human beings. When the subjects were known to him, or fell under his

93 Vauban, Sébastien Le Prestre de. Letter to Louis XIV. 11 June 1702. MS. Liege. A^1577 D11, 9
94 Lynn. Giant. 57
95 Dunlop. Louis XIV. 161
command, or if the manner used to kill them was not economically sound, Vauban would spare no effort to try and prevent their death or at least lessen their suffering. Le Prestre saw any men outside of this category as little more than numbers in a ledger.

To take one of the ‘soft’ examples or categories expounded upon within this chapter and cite it as a definitive source above all others would be irresponsible. The truth, at least as far as Le Prestre’s words and books would tell us, is that he was a complex man with a broad intellect and whose value for human life varied according to the situation. The farther a dead man from his control or personal life, the more soundly Vauban could sleep. And though he did find death troubling, his allegiance to the state – and by proxy Louis XIV – was the strongest governor of his behavior. This portrait differs strongly from that of historians such as Saint-Simon but should not be too surprising: no man could possibly balance pacifism while serving as a military commander.

VAUBAN IN ACTION

“Strong reasons make strong actions” –Shakespeare, King John

INVENTIONS AND INNOVATIONS, BOTH REALIZED AND UNREALIZED

Words are subjective while actions are concrete, and ‘hard’ evidence is both easier to evaluate and of more consequence than ‘soft’ evidence. In the case of a prolific engineer such as Vauban, it is also significantly more abundant. ‘Hard’ evidence for Vauban’s humanitarianism or lack thereof comes in the form of sieges and other military
actions, the Dîme Royale, and his inventions. As these categories are explored, a clear picture of Vauban should emerge.

A vague standard order of operations for sieges was in place before Sébastien Le Prestre became the preeminent siege engineer of the seventeenth century. Warfare during the Grand Siecle represented an accumulation of a hodgepodge of previous ‘systems,’ with the dominant contributors being Italian mercenary engineers. Vauban’s arrival changed everything:

Before he came on the scene, the siege attack was an indiscriminate and senseless chaos, a labyrinthine accumulation of dangerous and numberless works. This was only because the resource of the besiegers was an inexhaustible courage, which was often more fatal than beneficial in its results.\(^{96}\)

Besides a general refinement of the preexisting medley of siege ‘styles,’ Le Prestre’s grand innovation was the introduction of siege parallels. Initially, a trench (sometimes just a geometric ray, sometimes a full circumvallation of the fortress) would be opened perpendicular to the direction in which offensive trenches would be dug. The attackers would then approach the fortress via a zigzag pattern of trenches, dug in such a manner so as to never open up towards the defenders and thereby avoid incoming fire. Once they were close the besiegers would dig a parallel – a trench mirroring the very first trench ray - which would allow them to plant artillery batteries in extremely close proximity to the fortress in question, to devastating effect. After the batteries had removed the soldiers and defending guns from the fortress parapets, sappers could approach the outer-most defenses of the works in question. Breaching batteries would then be moved up, and it was only a matter of time before the walls were gone and the besieging troops could

\(^{96}\) Lefèbvre in Duffy. *Fortress*. 81
storm the defenses. Prior to Vauban’s parallels attackers had no fail-proof way to clear the defending parapets, which mean that they would be under heavy fire throughout the whole siege. If parallels were implemented, however, an attack was all but irresistible.

King Louis XIV himself noted that the defenders, themselves veterans of siege warfare, were shocked to encounter Le Prestre’s siege parallels when they were first implemented at the Siege of Maastricht in 1673.97 Vauban’s siege parallels quickly turned French sieges into an irresistible force. “In so doing he made the process of attacking a fortress, previously one of the most dangerous stages of war, relatively harmless for the offensive forces. Once the opening trenches had been dug, it was just a matter of weeks – if not days – until the defenders would beat the chamade.98 By inventing the siege parallel, Vauban significantly reduced the number of casualties in a typical siege.99
Before Vauban burst onto the scene sieges were prolonged and brutal affairs. The Dutch and the Spanish had made a few advances in the art of the siege attack, but those ‘improvements’ had more to do with the ornate complexity of their trenchworks than any serious refinement. By contrast, even after Louis XIV came into power the French attack was so miserable that “à la française” had become a military synonym for a gory all-out charge against the defense’s front. One example of a pre-Vauban siege was the Siege of Nuremberg in which Imperial troops under Albrecht von Wallenstein surrounded the city, which was defended by troops under legendary Swedish General Gustavus Adolphus. Wallenstein, unable to take the fortress by force, was forced to hold his position for eleven weeks, which in turn led to the deaths of thirty six thousand of his troops from hunger, typhus and scurvy – prototypical problems of long sieges that would persist through the First World War. On the other side twenty thousand of Gustavus Adolphus’ troops and ten thousand of the inhabitants of Nuremberg passed away, bringing the death toll to sixty six thousand lives in less than three months. The 1632 Siege of Nuremberg further shows that before Vauban’s advancements, siege warfare was the cause of tremendous losses of life.\(^\text{100}\) Whatever his intentions, Le Prestre’s tactical innovations saved many lives.

Vauban’s complex nature can be further explored through an examination of the Dîme Royale, which called for the imposition of a universal tax in proportion to each taxpayer’s revenues and which was to be implemented alongside the abolition of all existing taxes and exemptions. Vauban used a myriad of statistical evidence to argue that his proposition would solve the state’s financial woes, also noting that that such a tax had

worked in other countries for over a century “pour le plus grande bien de leurs sujets”.  

The proposal created a stir in court at Versailles, as the nobility – many of whom had acquired exemptions from taxation – was loath to sacrifice their own wealth on behalf of the peasantry. Vauban foresaw protests from several groups who would be adversely affected by the Dîme, stating in his work that “the King should be even more on his guard against those who will make objection to this system,” but his prediction was for naught. The Dîme Royale was rejected and the print run that Vauban had prematurely commissioned was pulped. Vauban spent the last days of his life trying to reacquire the copies he had distributed to friends, and no mention of his efforts towards tax reform were made in his eulogies.

The Dîme Royale is one of the few evaluable works by or related to Vauban that is perfectly straightforward to understand. Le Prestre explicitly stated in his work that the primary virtue of tax reform was decreasing the burden on the French peasantry: “Je me sens obligé d’honneur et de conscience de représenter à Sa Majesté qu’il m’a paru que de tout temps on n’avait pas eu assez d’égard en France pour le menu people”. The Dîme was intended to alleviate human suffering and therefore casts Vauban in a humanitarian light.

Some confusion may exist as to why Vauban’s publication of the Dîme Royale is included among the ‘hard’ evidence intended to facilitate the evaluation of his character. The difference is this: while the majority of his work was centered around technical

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102 Dunlop. Louis XIV. 393

103 Ibid. 392-4

subjects or at least privy only to one or two other individuals such as Louvois, the Dîme was a public refutation of state policies. Though Vauban’s proposition took the form of a request for the King, he was nevertheless trying to enact widespread social change. This characterization of the Dîme Royale episode remains static even if, as some historians have suggested, it was actually written by Jansenists and published by Vauban in order to give it added legitimacy. Vauban felt strongly enough about aiding the peasantry and reforming the crown’s finances to put his reputation on the line, and is thereby thoroughly deserving of any credit or blame that should result.

An examination of Vauban’s personality, at least as it is represented by the Dîme Royale, leaves the reader with an impression of the man as being incapable of not thinking or evaluating or engineering at any point in time. It serves to reason, therefore, that Le Prestre created several inventions and innovations during his lifetime. The most important of these is indisputably the siege parallel, but others were almost as noteworthy. As with the records of his sieges these inventions are serviceable ‘hard’ evidence worthy of a thorough evaluation – particularly as several were used to kill people.

The most devastating of Vauban’s innovations was ricochet fire, a tactic in which cannon, placed at the second parallel, were packed with reduced charges so that their payload would be lobbed rather than fly flat. This was done with the intention of clearing defenders from the defenses, and would in turn make the attackers’ job of approaching the fortress through trench-digging significantly easier. Experiments using this technique were first undertaken in 1674, but it would not be used on a large scale until the Siege of

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105 Virol. Vauban. 346
Ath in 1697. Tir à ricochet’s success at Ath was indisputable: in six hours, the ramparts were completely devoid of enemy soldiers.

Another of Vauban’s innovations that changed the face of siege warfare was the cavalier de tranchée, a raised platform placed about thirty yards from the outermost defenses. This platform served as an area for infantrymen to fire down on defenders, whose cover was negated by their attackers’ height advantage. Cavaliers de tranchée made their debut at the 1684 Siege of Luxembourg to great effect. Vauban favored their use as a manner of preserving his troops’ lives, as he believed that forces without cavaliers were likely to lose about 75% of their troops when storming the outermost defenses. Vauban’s invention both addressed and prevented excessive deaths, or at least those on his side of a conflict. Even if cavaliers contributed to greater deaths on the part of his opponents, news of their contribution to the effectiveness of sieges spread quickly. After a while it was well-known that a well executed siege was all but irresistible for a defense to overcome, in part because of the cavaliers de tranchée, and commanders began opting to surrender rather than watch their troops die unnecessarily. Vauban’s cavaliers were responsible for saving many lives, and – together with siege parallels and ricochet fire – round out the trifecta of Vauban’s main contributions to the art of laying siege.

In addition to refining the art of the siege, Vauban also produced an original weapon called the pierrier. This weapon was essentially a mortar designed to throw a barrel’s worth of stones, shrapnel or gravel at a time, usually loaded in a wicker basket to avoid damaging the bore. When fired, enemy troops who had been incautious enough to

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106 Lynn. Giant. 570
107 Ibid. 570-571
stray from cover were as good as dead. The *pierrier* is a rare example of a time when Vauban sought to create something with the power to kill on a large scale. Perhaps he saw it as a manner in which to safeguard the lives of his own troops in the kill-or-be-killed sense. Nevertheless, the sheer brutality of the *pierrier* damages Le Prestre’s credibility as a so-called humanitarian. 

Besides inventing his own weapons from scratch, some of Vauban’s inventions were little more than improvements on previously existing pieces of technology that Vauban felt needed improvement. Le Prestre, perhaps frustrated by a lack of reliability, had a tendency to tinker with his troops’ weaponry. For instance, a minor modification by Vauban in the 1680’s altered the face of armed warfare by altering the bayonet to plug into a holster that hung just below the musket barrel, rather than directly into the barrel as had previously been standard. (Lynn’s *The Wars* p60) This made it possible for his soldiers to alternate between firing and hand-to-hand combat without having to remove the bayonet and in turn made short-range fighting more efficient. Over three hundred years later Le Prestre’s *baionette à douille* remains a fixture of every major military force. Whether his invention made hand-to-hand combat less bloody is debatable, but it certainly made battle more fluid.

Vauban’s inventions and innovations in the field of war varied in size and scope, but each represented a large step technological or strategic step forward. Not all of them contributed particularly to Le Prestre’s supposedly beloved goal of the preservation of human life, however, with the *pierrier* and the socket bayone serving to make killing far

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more efficient. That said, the *cavaliers de tranchée* and ricochet fire both served to diminish casualties among Vauban’s attacking troops. In addition, they both helped to escalate French siege warfare into an art so irresistible that defending commanders ceased to put up much of a fight, knowing full well that they were doomed either way. These advances could therefore be interpreted as steps towards an increasingly humane manner of waging war. Still, Vauban’s military innovations and implementations have the common theme of lessening the suffering of his own troops while enabling the slaughter of the enemy. Le Prestre emerges from this analysis as a man who was empathetic to his men, but certainly not a friend to all of humanity.

**VAUBAN IN CONTRAST:**

**THE 1692 AND 1695 SIEGES OF NAMUR**

With both the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ evidence of Vauban’s humanitarianism fully explored, the final step is to examine the ways in which his leanings manifested themselves. Sieges, the actions for which he is best known, represent the ultimate test of his moral convictions as well as the way in which he could most directly implement his own values. Furthermore, if his approach to siege warfare could be compared to that of a contemporary of equal brilliance and power, the degree to which Vauban was the exception rather than the rule could also be resolved. Fortunately a man of these exact specifications not only existed but on one occasion actually engaged Le Prestre in battle.
His name was Menno Van Coehoorn, though his contemporaries sometimes called him the ‘Dutch Vauban.’  

Coehoorn was born in Lettinga, in what is now Holland, in 1641. After joining his father’s infantry regiment he began climbing the ranks, and directed his first siege at Bonn in 1689. Van Coehoorn, finding himself face to face with adversity at every step, would not be made Ingenieur General for the Allied Forces until 1695, three years after he would defend Namur across from Vauban’s forces. His reign at the peak of European engineering was short lived: despite being granted the governorship of West Flanders in June 1701, the 1702 death of his patron William III – who had recently commissioned him to re-fortify all of the Netherlands – sent his career into a downward spiral. His secretary’s escape to France with all of the Dutch engineer’s plans and mémoires sealed Coehoorn’s fate. When the great engineer passed away in 1704, his family was so poor that they could scarcely afford bread. 

Beyond the great distance that divided their styles of attack, the one thing that greatly differentiated Coehoorn from Vauban was his lack of administrative support. Le Prestre was fortunate enough to have the financial wizardry of Colbert and the organizational mastery of Louvois on his side, ensuring that he would always have sufficient resources and undisputed control over his sieges. Where Vauban could command by decree, Coehoorn had to petition the commanders under whom he served to take his advice.

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111 Duffy. *The Fortress*. 63-64

112 Ibid. 65
The importance of Menno Van Coehoorn as a counterexample to Vauban is not in his great intelligence, which historians describe as similar to his French rival, but in his differing style of attack. Vauban ‘systemized’ his siege attack in such a way that, with a few modifications, it could be all but universally applied to the attack of fortresses. Coehoorn, despite believing that the siege attack was a matter of applying informed intelligence, preferred instead to bring an end to the conflict by charging the defenses at just the right moment, which he had a gift for spotting. Vauban strongly disapproved of his Dutch rival’s tactics, believing them to be borne of foolishness rather than brilliance, but his harsh words failed to prevent the latter’s growing fame.113

It is a rare event in history that two men, on opposing sides of a war, should each have the opportunity to besiege the same city within three years of each other. For that reason the 1692 and 1695 sieges of Namur by Vauban and Coehoorn, respectively, are a gift from history for the purpose of this work. Little had changed in the three years between the first and second sieges, and for that reason the differences between each siege master’s proceedings can therefore be seen as encapsulation of their differing styles and philosophies.

In 1692 Coehoorn was commissioned by the Allied forces to design Fort William, a citadel on the outskirts of Namur. Coincidentally, this was the point in time during the Nine Years War that Louis XIV decided to try and take the same city. It was for this reason that when all 60,000 French forces arrived on the 25 of May Coehoorn was still in the midst of the renovation process, but he found himself in command of Fort William nonetheless. Meanwhile, Vauban, who was in charge of the French siege, set up batteries

113 Lynn. Giant. 576-577
that were retrospectively referred to as being “the best manned and equipped batteries
that were ever seen”\textsuperscript{114}. It is worth noting for our purposes that such a strategy was
incredibly effective at keeping the French troops safe while unleashing bloody mayhem
on the defenders. Contemporary historian Racine noted that the artillery had killed two
hundred Allied men in two days, and that upon their entry to the defenses French forces
“found the outworks full of headless bodies which had been decapitated by the cannon
balls as neatly as if they had been severed by swords.”\textsuperscript{115} On the 5\textsuperscript{th} of June, the
defenders yielded the town of Namur and retreated to Fort William. Before assaulting
this citadel Vauban turned his attention to a remaining redoubt known as La Cachotte, an
action that is only relevant to our purposes because of a speech Vauban delivered before
he authorized his troops to storm the defenses: “My children… I don’t want to see you
get yourselves killed to no purpose… As soon as you hear the drums beat, don’t lose any
time in falling back to your positions.”\textsuperscript{116} The taking of La Cachotte was successful, and
Vauban was able to turn his attention to Menno Van Coehoorn and the remaining troops
lurking within Fort William.

Le Prestre used sappers to approach Fort William from above and below,

designating them the ‘high’ and ‘low’ attack respectively. The weather had rendered
trench-digging conditions miserable, but persistence won the day and by 22 June the
trenches were close enough to the citadel that Vauban felt comfortable ordering an all-out
assault. Coehoorn, seeing that a do-or-die conflict was nigh, felt it necessary to
dramatically order his own grave to be dug. Such romantic posturing was for naught:

\textsuperscript{114} Duffy, \textit{Fire & Stone}. 204
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. 204
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. 205
though the low attack was momentarily delayed, the high attack won out and the
defenders were overwhelmed. During the defense Coehoorn was wounded by a mortar
and was incapacitated, and the leaderless Allied troops did not hesitate to beat the
chamade. On 23 June the garrison emerged, having been granted an honorable
evacuation, and Menno Van Coehoorn found himself face to face with a very intrigued
Vauban. Accounts of their exchange differ, though each frames the conversation as
having been peppered with niceties and compliments about each other’s skills and
intelligence. The Dutch recording of the meeting includes a touch of snootiness on the
part of Le Prestre, who it claims attempted to console Van Coehoorn by reminding him of
“the honour of being attacked by the greatest king in the world.”

When all was said and done the French had lost 7000 casualties, only three hundred more than the defending
forces, a relatively light rate given the difficulty of attacking such strong works.

After his victory in 1692, Vauban spent parts of the next three years repairing the
damage he had done to Namur and adding additional defensive works to both the town
and Fort William. It stands to reason, therefore, that when the Allied forces returned to
retake the town in 1695 they faced a somewhat more difficult task than Vauban had in
1692. Unlike Coehoorn in 1692 Le Prestre would not be around to command the
defenses of either Fort William or the town of Namur, but his added works nevertheless
contributed to the difficulty that the Allies encountered. The attacking forces first arrived
on July 2 under the command of the Earl of Athlone. The Dutch Director-General of
Fortifications and the Grand Master of Artillery immediately initiated the siege and in a
fit of unimaginativeness opted to try and retrace Vauban’s 1692 siege operations, failing

117 Ibid. 206-207
118 Lynn. The Wars of Louis XIV. 226
to note that Le Prestre had reinforced the same points that he had originally chosen to
attack. It is important to understand that Coehoorn had no real authority over the siege;
his options were limited to suggesting courses of action and swallowing his pride should
his superiors ignore him. The Dutch officers’ plan boiled down to a series of bloody full-
frontal assaults on the defensive works, which – while successful – were even more
destructive to the attackers than they were to the defenders. On August 4 the soldiers
occupying the town of Namur conceded in the face of the continuing war of attrition,
opting instead to retreat to Fort William.

Though the attack on Namur was undertaken without input from Van Coehoorn,
the Dutchman finally managed to make his voice heard by the time the Allies’ attention
turned to Fort William. Coehoorn went about planting artillery batteries and immediately
put them to bombarding the citadel. Meanwhile, Allied troops were busily digging
assault trenches in the direction of the Fort. A lack of money caused enough delays that
by the end of August Coehoorn’s troops were still not close enough for a traditional
storming of Fort William, but the engineer opted to undertake the assault nonetheless.
On 30 August, almost two months to the day after the start of the Siege of Namur, Allied
troops operating on a prearranged signal sprinted a full six hundred yards to the Fortress.
Two thousand men died for the sake of four spots in the outermost French defenses that
the Allies could hold. Still, rather than risk more of his men’s lives, the defending
general capitulated on 1 September on the condition that his troops would be allowed to
evacuate safely.119

119 Duffy. Fire & Stone. 208-214
Both engineers were present for the entire course of their respective sieges, albeit with varying degrees of involvement. Therefore, the true difference between the two lies in the strategies each used to take Fort William. Vauban was methodical and took many precautions and yet the French managed to take all of Namur in less than a month, perhaps due to Louvois’ prodigious skill in administering provisions and supplies. When he did deem conditions to be decent enough to mount an assault, he still saw fit to counsel caution to his men. Every advantage was found to make his troops’ duty as simple and easy to fulfill as possible, and victory came swiftly as a result. Coehoorn, meanwhile, took almost the same amount of time to take Fort William that it took Vauban to take all of Namur, though this could be attributed to inferior military organization on the part of the Alliance. Some similarities to Le Prestre hold in terms of specific strategic choices, particularly the effort to bombard the defending troops to a point where an assault would be most effective, but there the similarity ends. Where Vauban’s quiet perseverance won the day, Coehoorn’s decision to throw caution to the wind and put his faith in a charge spanning over half a kilometer put thousands of his troops in harm’s way for zero direct rewards. The decision of the Fort’s commander to end the bloodshed and capitulate was most likely borne of an understanding that survival was out of the question; had he opted to stay the course and inflict as many casualties on the enemy forces as possible, as some of his contemporaries did, Coehoorn’s losses could have spiraled out of control. Vauban himself had nothing positive to say when he heard of his Dutch rival’s victory. “I see it as one of the most stupid mistakes that has ever been made in siege warfare. We should be very fortunate if God puts it into the heads of
our enemies to keep on attacking us in this way.” 120 It must be remembered, however, that prior to and outside of Vauban’s influence on European battle tactics similar to those used by Coehoorn were prevalent. Comparing the attacks on Namurs of 1692 and 1695 proves that, though Sébastien Le Prestre brought major advances to the art of the siege, his patient and relatively bloodless strategies were far from the norm. Analysis of Vauban alongside the other preeminent military engineer of his time casts the Frenchman in a thoroughly positive light.

CONCLUSION:

With the Jürgen Habermas–inspired definition of humanitarianism as a sense of commitment towards a morally sound treatment of and outlook upon other individuals and humanity as a whole, the context surrounding Vauban’s life and work becomes very clear. Louis XIV and his ministers, the only men who truly had power over Vauban, were strictly utilitarian in nature. Louis’ morally sound actions, such as the reigning in of the abusive nobility, benefited himself first and foremost and were more than counterweighted by his cruelty and intolerance in other instances. Louvois and Colbert, meanwhile, prioritized the welfare of the state over the welfare of the French people, to whom they were more or less indifferent. The scholarly community was little better. Morality was a growing topic within the Republic of Letters, and yet the term ‘humanitarian’ was absent from the scholarly vocabulary. Even the church was uninterested in the suffering of the masses. The military in particular was practically

120 Rochas d’Aiglun, in Ibid. 213
medieval, with a bevy of common practices that were either cruel or negligent. In total, the reign of Louis XIV was a hotbed of reprehensible violence and ambivalent attitudes towards suffering.

Into this era stepped the complex persona of Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban. His library showed a curiosity for the taboo. He reduced the bloodshed that accompanied the order of siege operations out of a love of efficiency, but that same love may have motivated him to invent a slew of violent weaponry. Vauban’s communications displayed a discontent with bloodshed when it was economically unsound or involved familiar subjects, occasionally expressing a reticence to lose men under his command. This reluctance, as well as his tactical superiority, is proven through comparison to his contemporary Menno van Coehoorn.

Through all this Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban emerges as very much a moderate with his life and circumstances examined. He had a frigid streak, but also strongly disliked unnecessary bloodshed relative to the era. This disposition is evidenced in a famous incident in which impatient officers pushed him to hasten his attack, drawing the retort “Burn powder and spill less blood!” \[121\] The affair of the Dîme Royale is further evidence that he would prefer that the common man not suffer. That said, Vauban was not a saint. If either the state or the King acted in violation of his moral compass he was given to protest, as in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, but he always ceded to the crown in the end. The depiction of the great engineer as a humanitarian, embraced by the scholarly community for over three hundred years, is therefore a gross misrepresentation. Louis XIV’s praises for his dying servant as “un homme fort

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\[121\] Originally “Brûlons de la poudre, et versons moins de sang!” Ibid. 29
affectionné à ma personne et à l’État” were more accurate than all the books published since the great engineer’s passing: Vauban was empathetic, but his strongest affections were for the King and the state. Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, talented, charismatic, and accomplished though he may have been, was not a humanitarian, not even avant la lettre.

122 Blomfield. Sebastien Le Prestre De Vauban. 188
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