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The God of This Age: Understanding today's worldview

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Cor. 4:4 NIV

And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves. Genesis 11:4

What is the current worldview of medicine and science, and of our culture in general? What are the foundational presuppositions of modern medicine? How is this foundation faulty, out of line with Truth, with God's Word?

Understanding the worldview underlying modern medicine requires quite a history lesson. We basically have to review all of Western civilization, which is quite an undertaking. We will just hit the high points here, focusing on the most important points in understanding how it applies to modern medicine. You can learn more from the suggested reading list and references at the end of this section.

Why is all this important? Basis for our entire way of looking at the world, for Western civilization and culture. Also because there is nothing new under the sun; helps to understand various worldviews and religions of today, how people think and how to answer them Biblically. Understanding our culture and how to reach it for Christ. How can we get the gospel to the Western postmodern world?

Philosophy: The Search for Truth

Philosophy in the sense in which the word was generally understood in the ancient world may be defined as the search after the truth about the nature of the universe and of man, a search which the ancient philosophers (with certain exceptions) believed could result in the attainment and sure knowledge of the truth sought. Armstrong p.1 Initially there was no separation between theology and philosophy. This is very important.

The Ancient World – Greek Civilization

Pagan pantheism – the ancients believed in a multiplicity of gods and demigods, and in magic, and the deification of nature and natural processes (and therefore nature is either sacred or feared, and therefore not studied). Also no belief in rational order of nature; if things happen

at the whim of capricious gods, then there is no reason to believe that something will happen the same way twice
Material world equated with evil and disorder (and therefore not worthy of investigation; higher things, thoughts and philosophy worthy of study/thought)

The Ionians (600 B.C.)

The Greek city-states of Ionia, on the coast of Asia Minor, represent the beginning of Greek philosophy. The richest and most powerful city was Miletus; sometimes they are referred to as Milesian philosophy. The Ionians wanted to know why things are as they are and happen as they do. They had a basic curiosity about the world. They had a certain detachment or indifference to religion. They were not anti-religious, and they participated in traditional Greek mythology. Their philosophy was in conformity with the basic assumptions of Greek mythology. However, they were more prone to observe the world and to form their own conclusions based on everyday observations.

“They certainly seem closer to our experience than any other group of Greek philosophers. They were unreligious without being antireligious, interested and expert in the new technical skills without being really scientifically minded, curious about natural phenomena, deeply influenced without knowing it by traditional ideas, inclined to sweeping generalization and jumping to conclusions on insufficient evidence – and finally very interested in the weather!” (Armstrong p.5)

Ionia was the country of origin of the Homeric poems, and these reflect the de-emphasis on the gods as objects of awe and complete omnipotence. Ionia was conquered by Persia in 546 and Miletus was destroyed in 494 B.C.

The Ionians:

- Curiosity about the world, how and why things happen as they do.
- Prone to natural rather than mystical explanations.

The Pythagoreans

During the later part of this century, the center of intellectual life moved to the cities of South Italy and Sicily. Here Pythagoras founded the Pythagorean Brotherhood. For the Pythagoreans the question was different. They wanted to be as much like God as possible, to escape mortal life and to return to the divine existence from which the soul had fallen. They believed that the soul was divine and immortal, trapped in material existence, and will continue to be trapped until it is pure enough to escape and to return to the divine world. For the Pythagoreans, the intellect was the center of the soul’s divinity, the power to know eternal unchanging truth. By contemplating the harmony of the universe, represented in the mathematical purity of musical scales and planetary bodies, the soul is purified.

The Pythagoreans:

- Wanted to be like god, to escape mortal existence
- The soul had divine existence but was trapped in material world
- Soul needed purification to escape
- Purification comes by contemplating perfection of the universe as represented by mathematics

The Pre-Socratics: 5th century B.C.

Heraclitus:

- World is in a state of flux and change.
- But governed by the *Logos*, the ruling principle which is rational and alive.

Heraclitus: change, conflict, and the *Logos*

Heraclitus was an Ionian from the city of Ephesus and lived around 500 B.C. His thought focused on change as the law of all being. All things are in a state of perpetual flux and change; nowhere in the universe is there to be found eternal rest or stability. But his world is not that of pure chaos. It is governed by an immanent principle of order and measure; his name for this ruling principle is the *Logos*. The *Logos* is for Heraclitus “a universal principle which is the cause of order, proportion, balance, harmony and rationality in the continual flow of being and is at the same time vividly alive. It is this union of life and rationality which in the single concept of the *Logos* which is one of Heraclitus’s great contributions to our traditional inheritance of thought.” (Armstrong p.11)

Parmenides:

- First to focus on logical reasoning as a method of discerning truth

Parmenides and the beginning of rational thought

Parmenides lived in Southern Italy and was at his prime around 475 B.C. “The most striking fact about Parmenides’s way of thinking is that he is the first Greek philosopher who reasons. Earlier thinkers, as far as we know, had made no attempt to base their picture of the universe upon logical reasoning, or to defend it by rational argument. The logic of Parmenides, however primitive it may seem, is the starting-point from which Platonic dialectic, Aristotelian logic and the whole Western tradition of philosophical reasoning have developed.” (Armstrong p.12)

His basic proposition is, “That which is *is*, and it is impossible for it not to be.” Absolute non-existence is absolutely unthinkable.

Socrates and the Sophists (470-399 B.C.)

The Sophists:

- Humanistic agnosticism
- No interest in philosophy or cosmology
- Taught methods of success in public life
- Led to cynicism, nihilism, and immorality

The time of the pre-Socratics was a time of great upheaval in Greece. The Persian wars ended in 479, and what followed was the “Great Fifty Years” when Athens was the greatest power in Greece and Greece reached the height of its artistic achievement and material prosperity. However, it was also a time when the traditional foundations of Greek society were crumbling (does this remind you of today?). Greek religion and moral order were based upon tradition, and that tradition was not supported by either reason or revelation, and thus was prone to erosion by intellectual criticism and by change in social structure. War demoralized the people. Ionian philosophy disrupted ancient tradition without putting anything in its place.

As a result, the citizens of Greece turned their attention away from tradition and physical speculation (as had the Hippocratic physicians) and turned their attention to the proper art and business of life, of

success in public life. A group of teachers arose called the Sophists, who aimed to teach the art of success in public life. These teachers were internationally known and traveled from city to city, teaching the sons of wealthy families for a substantial fee. They primarily taught rhetoric and associated other verbal arts.

Interestingly, they had no interest in philosophy, i.e. physical and cosmological speculation. Their viewpoint was one of humanistic agnosticism. It is quite frightening how similar they were to today.

One of them wrote,

“Man is the measure of all things, of the reality of those which are, and the unreality of those which are not.... As to the gods, I cannot know whether they exist or not; too many obstacles are in the way, the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of life.” A successful civilized human life is the central concern; and there are no absolute standards of unchanging reality, religion, or morality with which the individual mind must conform.” (Armstrong p.23)

This helped the process of disintegration and demoralization; they destroyed the foundation of tradition and left nothing in its place, leading to cynical nihilism among the intellectual elite.

Socrates lived in the midst of all of this; his life spanned the time of physical and cosmological speculation to the humanism of the Sophists to the logical end of their worldview, put into practice by their pupils, which was cynicism, immorality, and inhumanity. Socrates dedicated his life to, in the midst of the confusion and disintegration, finding a better solution to the problem of the good life for man than superficial humanism or cynical immoralism or bad-tempered irrational clinging to ancestral custom.

Socrates:

- Man’s business is the care of his soul
- Soul is the seat of intellectual and moral personality, consciousness
- Everything in world ordered, happens for the best
- Right action always follows right knowledge

Socrates held that man’s business is to take care of his soul, to make it as good as possible. His concept of the soul was the intellectual and moral personality, the responsible agent in knowing and acting rightly or wrongly. (Before Socrates the soul was the life-breath, but not the seat of consciousness and source of action). “After Socrates the conception of the soul as personality and of the care of the soul as the most important thing in life becomes pretty well universal among thinking Greeks. It is one of the most important and decisive changes in the whole history of human thought, and it did more than any other development in Greek philosophy to prepare the way for Christianity.” (Armstrong p.29)

Socrates also had a teleological worldview, believing that everything was ordered for the best and that there is an appropriate and natural good which is the end of all movement and endeavor. This goodness was universal, objective, and unchanging. Socrates believed that the way to goodness was to know the good and then to act rightly. Virtue is knowledge of the good, right action follows inevitably from right

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Romans 7:18-20

knowledge. This of course fails to take into account our sin nature (Romans 7:18-20).

Plato (427-348 B.C.)

Plato was Socrates's greatest disciple and with him begins the tradition of Western thought. Socrates had taught that there was such a thing as moral goodness, that it was the same for all, and that by knowing it we could become good men. He did not try to define what sort of a thing this goodness was, and this is where Plato started. Plato took the moral doctrine of Socrates and combined it with the Pythagorean teaching on the nature of the soul. Plato taught that there exists a world of external realities, called "Forms", which are entirely separate from the world of our senses, and are knowable only by the pure intellect. They are realities independent of the minds which know them or the things which participate in them. They are the only objects of true knowledge, the unchanging realities which our mind perceives when it arrives at a true universal definition, e.g. justice as it is in itself, apart from individual cases or examples. The Form of Justice is the universal reality which lies behind them. All Forms are contained in and caused by a supreme Reality, the Good, which is a Form and more than a Form.

The soul is the part of man that can know the Forms. Like Socrates, Plato believed that the soul was the intellectual and moral personality. Plato took it a step further and thought that it was not only the most important part of man, but also the most real, far more real than the material body, an exact reversal of earlier Greek beliefs. Like the Pythagoreans, he believed that the soul was divine and immortal. In fact, it was due to immortality that it could know the Forms, for in knowing the Forms it was simply being reminded of that which it knew before in the divine realm. Christians later rejected the recollection theory, but kept the concept that God illumines the mind to know and to perceive truth.

He also believed in a moving and ordering cause, an intelligent Soul, and this too separate from the material world. This intelligent directing power "rules and orders all the material universe to good ends by bringing it into the most perfect possible conformity with the world of Forms." (Armstrong p.47) Plato compares this Soul to a divine, generous craftsman. This was certainly an improvement on the jealousy and grudgingness of the Greek gods, and "it certainly prepared the Greek mind to accept the Christian doctrine when revealed to it. So we find Plato's words applied to God the Creator by the great Christian philosophers; but with a meaning which goes beyond Plato." (Armstrong p.48)

Plato:

- The real world consists of the true nature of each thing (Form) which lies outside of our senses
- The (Socratic) soul is what knows the Forms, due to recollection
- The ordering Cause is an intelligent Soul, comparable to a divine craftsman

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

Aristotle was Plato's greatest disciple and made major contributions to every field of philosophy; indeed, he divided philosophy into distinct fields which still exist today. He made important contributions to biology, literary criticism, and to logic. Alexander the Great was a contemporary of Aristotle (Aristotle tutored him from 343-340)

His philosophical work starts with the rejection of Plato's theory of Forms. For Plato the world of unchanging Forms was the only real world, the only objects of true knowledge. The material world of change, growth and decay, the world perceived by the senses, is strictly speaking not real or knowable. The Soul is the intermediary between the material world and the world of Forms.

Aristotle:
Rejected Plato's theory
of Forms
Individual things
perceived by the senses
are the true realities

Aristotle was far more interested in the world of concrete, individual things perceptible by the senses. He agreed with Plato that our business as rational beings is to know objective truth and that the objects of true knowledge are immaterial and unchanging. But to him, the concept of Forms was so cut off from our experience of the world that they could not possibly be the primary reality or the primary means to knowledge of the truth.

“For Aristotle the individual things which we perceive by our senses are the primary realities. It is *in* this changeable world of individual things that we have to find somehow the unchanging objects of true knowledge which are necessary for science and philosophy.... Aristotle by no means denies the existence of universals, general characteristics of things, or supposes them to be creations of our minds. They exist objectively, but only as characteristics of individual things, not, as Plato had taught, in a transcendent world of separate substantial beings.” (Armstrong p.74)

Neo-Platonists (or early Roman Empire)

“From the point of view of the later history of philosophy, and especially of the traditional philosophy of Christendom, by far the most important development of Greek thought in the first century B.C. and the first two centuries A.D. is the revival of Platonism, that modified later Platonism which is the parent of Christian philosophy on the Hellenistic side; this revived Platonism contained a large Aristotelian element....” Armstrong p.141

Credo ut intelligam.
(I believe in order to
know). St. Augustine

Augustine (354-430)

Christian contemporaries of late neo-Platonists transformed Hellenistic philosophy and adapted it into the Christian theological tradition. Started in the first few centuries A.D. by the Christian apologists in Alexandria, but the final decisive steps were in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. by several great Christian theologians, the most important of whom was Augustine.

There was for Augustine no separation of theology and philosophy. The most important influence on Augustine's philosophy, apart from Scripture, was Plotinus the Neo-Platonist. However, Augustine always started from the Bible and worked his way outward, never the other way around. "Neither for Augustine himself nor for any thinker in the Augustinian tradition is a true philosophy distinct and separate from philosophy even possible. The reason for this lies in what is perhaps the most important foundation principle of Augustinian thought, **the utter helplessness of man to do anything right or think anything true by himself, without God.**" Armstrong p.209 emphasis added Augustine and the Christian thinkers differed from Plotinus, pagan, and Hellenic thinkers in their concept of God. "For the Christian, God is the single and only Absolute Reality. He is the fullness of Being (and therefore of Good, Truth, Beauty, Thought, and Life) who is in Himself everything that is relative and derived, created beings are and infinitely more." Armstrong p.210 The pagan Platonists believed in a Divine World, heirarchially ordered, with a number of divine beings, all deriving from a transcendent First Principle, but this is not the same as the Christian God, a single transcendent Divine Being. Augustine understood the truth that all knowledge presupposes belief; that is, that belief comes prior to knowledge, that everything is based on worldview.

The Middle Ages

Civilization decayed, Greek and Roman empires fell, barbarians ruled the land, and Europe passed into the Middle Ages. Not much happened, besides trying to earn a living off the land. But several developments set the stage for the change that was about to come. The Middle Ages have been viewed as a time when nothing developed, the dark ages, but this has been found to be untrue. What came out of ancient civilization and formed the basis of thought in the Middle Ages?

The Christian worldview of God as the Creator of the universe and of all things in it, of a personal God who was not arbitrary or capricious, whose attributes could be seen and known, made science both possible and necessary.

First is the belief in a rational order of things, emanating from the intelligible rationality of a personal being. In this sense God fit in with the Greek philosophers, but was taken to a greater extreme. This makes science possible, and explains why science did not arise from other cultures.

Second is the belief that the universe is contingent being, not necessary being. Necessary being means self-existence, without need to refer to anything outside of itself. If the universe is necessary being, then science is not necessary. If the universe is completely self-existent and there is no One outside of it, then there is little meaning to be found in the way things function, in the particulars of existence, for it is not the product of an intelligent Being. Therefore the ultimate secrets of the universe are to be found within the recesses of the human soul, where it makes contact with the great oneness of the universe. However, if the universe is the product of a Creator, if the universe is contingent on the existence of a necessary Being outside of it, then science becomes necessary as a way of discovering the mind of this Creator and how He has designed the universe to work. The world could not be derived from the mind of man. This is why Indian culture never produced science; it believes in a rational universe, but not a contingent one.

...if the world is not rational, science is not possible; if the world is not contingent, science is not necessary. Let me put the point more fully: On the one hand, the enterprise of science would be impossible if there were no principle of rationality in the universe. If every instrument reading in a laboratory were simply an isolated happening that could not be connected in an intelligible way with other readings, the whole enterprise would be futile.

But – and this is the other equally important fact – faith in the rationality of the universe would not sustain science without the concurrent belief that the universe is not necessary being but contingent being. Indian metaphysics has been totally committed to the rationality of the universe but has understood it as necessary being – part of the eternal cycle of evolution and involution. The universe is the emanation of Brahma, not the creation of a personal God. Its ultimate secrets are therefore to be discovered within the recesses of the human soul, where it makes direct contact with the cosmic soul. The discovery does not depend on meticulous observation of empirical phenomena and painstaking experiments to test theory against the findings of observation. Science in the sense in which it has developed in our culture is not impossible, but it is unnecessary. (Newbiggin, p.71)

The Greeks had come close, but could not sustain it. Their civilization degenerated into the belief in a cyclical universe, and so did not fully develop science as we know it.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) played a significant role in setting the stage. Aquinas believed that man's will was Fallen, but not his intellect. Man could rely on his own wisdom about the world, and therefore could mix secular philosophy with Biblical teaching. In a certain sense, truth is truth, no matter what the source. But belief in the

unfallen state of the intellect, the mind of man, opens up the concept that man apart from God can draw conclusions about the nature of the universe. Aquinas relied heavily on the teaching of Aristotle and indeed introduced him to the Europe of the Middle Ages. In particular, he relied heavily on Aristotle's interest in the particulars, in individual things. Aquinas' teaching had the positive effect of emphasizing the normal world and man's relationship to it. The world and man's place in it were elevated consistent with Biblical teaching. But the negative effect was to emphasize the particulars, and especially man as a particular (without a fallen mind). While both Aquinas and Aristotle saw the particulars in light of their purpose and meaning, this was not to last. There was a humanism at root in Aquinas, which was to mushroom into unimagined conclusions.

The Modern Period

The Renaissance (1400-1600)

The Renaissance, the rebirth of art and culture, encompassed both the positive and negative effects of Aquinas. The importance of nature, of the world, of man and his place in the world, were emphasized, in accordance with Biblical teaching. But humanism also began to rise, particularly in the later Renaissance. There was a resurgence of interest in Greek and Roman writings, particularly in the ideas of human autonomy, that man is his own measure. The Renaissance really was the rise of humanism.

The problem of humanism

Humanism produces a very basic problem –

This problem is often spoken of as the nature-versus-grace problem.

Beginning with man alone and only the individual things in the world (the particulars), the problem is how to find any ultimate and adequate meaning for the individual things. The most important individual thing for man is man himself. Without some ultimate meaning for a person (for me, an individual), what is the use of living and what will be the basis for morals, values, and law? If one starts from individual acts rather than with an absolute, what gives any real certainty concerning what is right and what is wrong about an individual action? (Schaeffer 1976, p.55)

In diagram, it looks like this:

Grace, the higher: God the Creator; heaven and heavenly things; the unseen and its influence on the earth; unity, or universals, or absolutes, which give existence and morals meaning; purpose; values.

Nature, the lower: the created; earth and earthly things; the visible and what happens normally in the cause-and-effect universe; what man as man does on the earth; diversity, or individual things, the particulars, or the individual acts of man; facts.

The people of the later Renaissance struggled with this problem, and sought an answer but were unable to find one. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) struggled with it, ending his life in despondency. A telling foreshadowing of things to come.

The Revolt #1: The Reformation (1400-1600)

The Reformation was fundamentally a revolt against the humanism that had invaded the church (Schaeffer p.82). It was also a revolt against medieval rationality; man could not himself on the basis of reason think out the answers to the great questions which confront mankind. In reality, the Reformation and the later Renaissance were really responses to the same issues, but giving profoundly different answers.

...while the Reformation and the Renaissance overlapped historically and while they dealt with the same basic questions [what could give unity to life and specifically what universal could give meaning to life and to morals], they gave completely different answers. ...[T]o Thomas Aquinas the will was fallen after man had revolted against God, but the mind was not. This eventually resulted in people believing they could think out the answers to all the great questions, beginning only from themselves. The Reformation, in contrast to Aquinas, had a more Biblical concept of the Fall. For the people of the Reformation, people could not begin only from themselves, and on the basis of human reason alone think out the answers to the great questions which confront mankind....in contrast to the Renaissance humanists, they refused to accept the autonomy of human reason, which acts as though the human mind is infinite, with all knowledge in its realm. Rather, they took seriously the Bible's own claim for itself – that it is the only final authority. And they took seriously that man needs the answers given by God in the Bible to have adequate answers not only for how to be in an open relationship with God, but also for how to know the present meaning of life and how to have final answers in distinguishing between right and wrong. That is, man needs not only a God who exists, but a God who has spoken in a way that can be understood. (Schaeffer p.81)

The Reformation is significant because, though not free from error, it clearly articulated Biblical answers to man's greatest questions. This Biblical worldview was the first and only one to solve man's problem. It solved the dichotomy because the Bible gives such an answer that the problem does not even exist. No philosophy could ever come up with such a solution as this; it could only come from the mind of God.

Because the Reformers did not mix humanism with their position, but took instead a serious view of the Bible, they had no problem of meaning for the individual things, the particulars; they had no nature-versus-grace problem. ...In the answer the Reformation gave, the problem of meaning for individual things, including man, was so completely answered that the problem – as a problem – did not exist. The reason for this is that the Bible gives a unity to the universal and the particulars. First, the Bible tells men and women true things about God....Second, the Bible tells us true things about people and about nature. It does not give men and women *exhaustive* truth about the world and the cosmos, but it does give truth about them. So one can know many true things about nature, especially *why* things exist and why they have the form they have. Yet, because the Bible does not give exhaustive truth about history and the cosmos, historians and scientists have a job to do, and

their work is not meaningless....So, as the Reformation returned to Biblical teaching, it gained two riches at once: It had no particulars-versus-universals (or meaning) problem; and yet at the same time science and art were set free to operate upon the basis of that which God had set forth in Scripture. The Christianity of the Reformation, therefore, stood in rich contrast to the basic weakness and final poverty of the humanism which existed in that day and the humanism which has existed since. (Schaeffer. pp.84-86)

The Revolt #2: The Scientific Revolution (1500-1650)

The Scientific Revolution overlaps with the later Renaissance and the Reformation. Now we have said that science is founded upon Christianity, upon Biblical thinking and theology. It is founded upon the idea that the universe is both rational and contingent. How did it come about?

Think of the notion of the universe prior to Copernicus (1473-1543). Rational deductive reasoning said that since man was the highest being, etc. that the earth and man were the center of the universe. Things were understood in terms of their purpose and end. There was little in the Bible to go against this. Simple observation of planetary bodies, including the sun, seemed to indicate that it all went around the earth. Copernicus was interested in how it happened, not just why, and armed with better technical instruments and the abstract concepts of mathematics, observed that indeed the earth and the planets went around the sun. The two theories were obviously in conflict; indeed, two ways of approaching reality were in conflict: deductive rationality, or inductive reasoning.

Now there was an interest in natural things (thanks to Aristotle) and how they worked. Galileo (1564-1642) too had such an interest, while his adversaries had complete theories as to why things happen. The scientific revolution was really an historical revolt against inflexible rationality and a return to the contemplation of brute fact, of nature and natural causes.

Bacon (1561-1626) introduced inductive reasoning, attention to facts, and the experimental and inductive method of eliciting general laws from them. He said, among other things, that "scientific knowledge is power" and that the aim of science "is to extend Man's power to the performance of all things possible."

The explicit realisation of the antithesis between the deductive rationalism of the scholastics and the inductive observational methods of the moderns must chiefly be ascribed to Bacon; though, of course, it was implicit in the mind of Galileo and of all the men of science of those times. (Whitehead p. 42)

Newton (1642-1727) forever bonded the inductive method with specific measurement of quantities (as opposed to mere classification).

Also utilized the ideas of the isolated system (reductionism) and analysis.

We cannot wonder that science rested content with this assumption as to the fundamental elements of nature. The great forces of nature, such as gravitation, were entirely determined by the configurations of masses. Thus the configurations determined their own changes, so that the circle of scientific thought was completely closed. This is the famous mechanistic theory of nature, which has reigned supreme ever since the seventeenth century. It is the orthodox creed of physical science. Furthermore, the creed justified itself by the pragmatic test. It worked. Physicists took no more interest in philosophy. They emphasized the anti-rationalism of the Historical Revolt. But the difficulties of this theory of materialistic mechanism very soon became apparent. The history of thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is governed by the fact that the world had got hold of a general idea which it could neither live with nor live without. (Whitehead p. 50).

The result of Newtonian mechanics, and indeed the rest of the scientific revolution, was that no reference to purpose, meaning, and ends was any longer necessary to explain reality and natural events. Cause replaced purpose. And the fate of Greek tragedy was replaced by the natural order of things, by mathematical laws that govern the universe.

Science has never shaken off the impress of its origin in the historical revolt of the later Renaissance. It has remained predominately an anti-rationalistic movement, based upon a naïve faith. What reasoning it has wanted, has been borrowed from mathematics which is a surviving relic of Greek rationalism, following the deductive method. Science repudiates philosophy. In other words, it has never cared to justify its faith or to explain its meanings.... There persists...throughout the whole period the fixed scientific cosmology which presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute matter, or material, spread throughout space in a flux of configurations. In itself such a material is senseless, valueless, purposeless. It does just what it does do, following a fixed routine imposed by external relations which do not spring from the nature of its being. It is this assumption that I call "scientific materialism." Also it is an assumption which I shall challenge as being entirely unsuited to the scientific situation at which we have now arrived. It is not wrong, if properly construed. If we confine ourselves to certain types of facts, abstracted from the complete circumstances in which they occur, the materialistic assumption expresses these facts to perfection. But when we pass beyond the abstraction, either by more subtle employment of our senses, or by the request for meanings and for coherence of thoughts, the scheme breaks down at once. The narrow efficiency of the scheme was the very cause of its supreme methodological success. (Whitehead pp.16-17)

Should be pointed out that the majority of these revolutionaries – Newton, etc. had a Biblical worldview, and many were even Christians (Newton wrote more on Christ than he did on math). Remember, it was the Christian worldview that made their science both possible and necessary. Theirs was not the fault (although there are logical errors in the inductive method). They viewed science as a means of knowing about God through His creation; they viewed God and man, who was made in His image, as standing outside of materialistic science. The universe indeed was an open system, was contingent, not necessary.

This revolt was necessary to correct inconsistencies and errors in the rationalism of the time, just as the Reformation was necessary to correct the humanism of the time. Unfortunately, the pendulum swung too far, and science and humanism met up and joined forces in the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment (1700-1800)

The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the ideas of progress, human achievement and advancement, hope for human perfectibility, hope for a utopian society, was fully grounded on the humanism of the Renaissance. It embraced science as its method and its justification. Science was taken to be the doctrine, the justification, the proof, the method, of humanism. Man could, starting with only himself, through the scientific method (inductive reasoning) attain to a complete understanding of and mastery of nature, of reality, in all its forms. Facts are the authority, and revelation, tradition, dogma, or appeal to purpose or meaning has place. We are products of the enlightenment, and it has formed the basis of not only the natural sciences but also psychology, social sciences, economics, and political systems.

Descartes (1596-1650) applied the scientific method to philosophy (I think, therefore I am).

Darwin (1809-1882) applied it to man and his origins, to biological life. Interestingly, was the basis for the (bloody) French Revolution, Marxism, communism, and Nazism.

Science was taken off its foundation of a Christian worldview and placed on humanism, and we have been paying the price ever since. Created the problem again that we discussed before, how to go from statements of fact to value. In fact, it cannot be done if statements of fact do not include statements of purpose. Watch example (Newbiggin p.37).

The Rise of Modern Pessimism, Cynicism, and Hopelessness

Philosophers since time of Descartes have tried to deal with this problem, and have fallen short. It was Nietzsche (1844-1900) who pointed out the logical conclusions of scientific materialism; this however did not lead him to reject its presuppositions, rather, he accepted them and their conclusions, and went mad

Scientism

La science sans conscience, ce n'est rien que la mort de l'âme.

François Rabelais

(science without conscience is nothing but the death of the spirit)

Despite the fact that scientism – scientific materialism – was shown to be logically inconsistent shortly after it arose, and despite the fact that it violates our common-sense experience of ourselves and the world, and despite the fact that modern science actually disproves the theory – it continues to be the dominant worldview of modern Western man.

Issues such as the procedures and validity of rational thought and argument are presuppositions on which scientific thought and experiment rest, but they are themselves not “scientific”: they are philosophical. Science depends on philosophy for the validity of its terms and procedures and the determination of the uses to which scientific knowledge will be put. To say, with the radical empiricist, that only factual statements have validity is to be not only dogmatic but self-contradictory, since the statement itself is not factual. (Aeschliman p.20)

It is not only the fact that we can never get away from presuppositions that haunts scientism; the inductive method itself is logically flawed because it must always be based on rationality.

We must observe the immediate occasion, and *use reason* to elicit a general description of its nature. Induction presupposes metaphysics. In other words, it rests upon an antecedent rationalism. You cannot have a rational justification for your appeal to history till your metaphysics has assured you that there *is* a history to appeal to; and likewise your conjectures as to the future presuppose some basis of knowledge that there *is* a future already subjected to some determinations. The difficulty is to make sense of either of these ideas. But unless you have done so, you have made nonsense of induction. (Whitehead p. 44)

Scientists animated by the purpose of proving that they are purposeless constitute an interesting subject for study
–Alfred North Whitehead

Beyond its logical inconsistencies and flaws, common-sense, and observation of our lives, says that purpose matters and meaning is important, indeed that these things exist. But scientism says that they are not part of the world of fact; therefore, we cannot really know anything about them. Therefore such things as values, etc. are relegated to the private world (vs. public sphere) and personal choice and opinion, and are separated from fact.

And yet purpose remains an inescapable element in human life. Human beings do entertain purposes and set out to achieve them. The immense achievements of modern science themselves are, very obviously, the outcome of the purposeful efforts of hundreds of thousands of men and women dedicated to the achievement of something that is valuable – a true understanding of how things are. A strange fissure thus runs right through the consciousness of modern Western man. The ideal that he seeks would eliminate all ideals. With dedicated zeal he purposes to explain the world as something that is without purpose.... We all engage in purposeful activity, and we judge ourselves and

others in terms of success in achieving the purposes that we set before ourselves. Yet we accept as the final product of this purposeful activity a picture of the world from which purpose has been eliminated. (Newbigin pp. 35,78)

Scientism is the vice of those who do not practice science itself but are intoxicated by the triumph of scientific, and even more of technological, discoveries and devices, i.e., the vice of the masses in almost all countries on the earth.

– Richard Kroner

So if scientism violates our common-sense experience of the world, and is itself internally inconsistent, why is it the dominant force in the world today? Because it arises out of humanism, which is our fundamental rebellion against God, His authority, and His right to our lives. The world worships it because it works. It has not only great practical benefits – free-market economy, human rights (autonomy), science and technology, etc. but also has spiritual benefits. Under this system, all value statements are relegated to the realm of private choice, and nothing factual (judgmental) can be said about them.

It is at this point that we touch the central core of our culture, which is an ideal of knowledge of what are called the facts, a knowledge that is supposed to be quite independent of the personal commitment of the knower. ...The facts thus understood are value-free insofar as the idea of value is related to an end or purpose for which the thing in question is or is not well fitted. Here is the origin of what MacIntyre calls the folk-concept of fact that dominates the consciousness of modern Western man. There is in this view a world of facts that is the real world, an austere world in which human hopes, desires, and purposes have no place. The facts are facts, and they are value-free. The personal beliefs and value judgments of the student do not enter into the picture. They have their place in another realm of discourse, in that area where the personal opinions, tastes, and convictions of individuals are freely exercised in a pluralistic society.... Science thus relieves one of the responsibility of deciding whether or not to commit himself to the truth of its statements. They are just facts. (Newbigin pp. 76-77)

In diagram, it looks like this:

Universals, absolutes, values, meaning, purpose, optimism, hope
Particulars, cause-and-effect, reason, facts, scientific pessimism

The end result is the decay and destruction of civilization, as we see all around us. As Nietzsche observed “Everything is permitted.” The result is, as C. S. Lewis put it, the abolition of man.

And it is in an important sense the ultimate effect of scientism to dissolve the absolute qualitative distinction between persons and things – the very heart of the metaphysical tradition...– reducing persons *to* things, denying man’s rational soul and his transcendence of the physical, giving him a value no higher than that of a camel or a stone or any other part of nature. This reduction of the human category to the natural runs parallel with a whole series of reductions from quality to quantity, from value to fact, from rational to empirical. If the doctrine of man as rational moral being, qualitatively distinct from and incommensurate with nature, is weakened or destroyed, the grounds for expecting moral conduct are similarly weakened....This is indeed treating man as a “thing,” as a “common object of the countryside,” as a part of nature just like a camel. It is not only an inhumane procedure, it is simply false according to ordinary standards of reason, although it is no less widespread for

that. It is the great modern religion, our established church, with a whole panoply of priests, evangelists, saints, and bishops, and massive means of publicity and propaganda. It has the power, if it is allowed to grow uncontested in enough human minds, to bring about the end of homo sapiens. It may indeed prove to be the abolition of man. (Aeschliman pp. 52, 55)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man.... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind.... Romans 1:18-23a, 28a

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