

Preface

In this book, intended for readers interested in religious or traditional doctrines for personal reasons, and not for the specialist academic reader, our aim is not to engage the arguments of the New Atheists against theism and religion in any detail, nor do we wish to burden the reader with many selections from these writers. We do not wish to go over ground that has already been amply and excellently covered by the valuable works of well-known Christian theologians, Christian and non-Christian philosophers, as well as of certain scientists [see the Appendix]. Instead, we will examine the main presuppositions and ideas underlying the worldview of the New Atheists, and will make use of our explanations as a basis for presenting a worldview—that of the *Sophia Perennis* or Perennial Wisdom—which is diametrically opposed to this late manifestation of the modern secular mentality of autonomous man.

The underlying worldview of these New Atheists is not a matter of controversy. It is what has been called “scientism”, the notion that the empirical knowledge derived from the method of controlled observation and experiment and the resulting testable hypotheses is the only rational and reliable knowledge we can have of the world of man and nature. However, if modern science can be roughly characterized as a certain methodology of inquiry concerning observable and essentially quantifiable aspects of phenomena, then clearly, the notion that this method is the only one that can yield reliable knowledge is no more than an assumption

which the method of science itself cannot possibly confirm. Physical science is not capable of investigating such an assumption. Hence, how could scientists *know scientifically* that the assumption is true? And also, why is such an extravagant assumption even necessary to do science? Is it not enough to be satisfied that the scientific method yields a certain kind of knowledge? Why would one have to assert further that the results of scientific inquiry constitute the only possible knowledge? We will look further into all this in the pages ahead.

Many have noted that the books of the New Atheists are not serious philosophical works. The New Atheism, as the Wikipedia online encyclopedia puts it, is rather “a social and political movement in favour of atheism and secularism promoted by a collection of modern atheist writers who have advocated the view that ‘religion should not simply be tolerated but should be countered, criticized, and exposed by rational argument wherever its influence arises.’”¹ During the last few years this movement has become a “mainstream” and mass phenomenon,² as can be shown by the fact that an internet search for the terms “new atheism” and “new atheists” each yielded, as of March 2015, over 4.5 million results. A search for Richard Dawkins, the author of *The God Delusion*, yields an astonishing 17 million results. Absence of faith in God or denial of the “Supernatural”, is of course the most important feature of the purely secularist and naturalist-humanist worldview. It is the standpoint of many professionals today in academic and scientific positions,³ and it is also present in varying degrees in all sectors of modern societies. Even persons who characterize themselves as “religious” will almost invariably espouse ideas that stem from or are greatly influenced by the scientific and philosophical revolution that began in the Enlightenment period. The aggressive atheism and scientism spearheaded by the New Atheists has now entered the mainstream media and the educational institutions. As a result, many formerly religious

people, especially among the youth during their university studies, have abandoned their faith after reading the works of the New Atheists or after time spent on internet sites devoted to them.

Basically, only two main assertions underlie most of what the New Atheists have to say: that faith is an irrational superstition, belief unsupported by evidence, whose object is unverifiable by scientific means, and that religion is behind all the great evils of humanity, in that they are rooted in its irrationality, its superstition, and in the fanaticism which it invariably engenders. Underlying these two assertions is the view that religion is the main obstacle to science and the benefits it has brought and continues to bring to mankind. In their view, it is science, and science alone, which brings true knowledge, civilization, and progress. Science is responsible for having lifted man from the dark ages of his primitive and superstitious past. It is science which overcomes ignorance and inhumanity, and not religion, which on the contrary obstructs man's progress and creates fanatical animosity, so that it is morally imperative that science do away with and replace religion. And yet, as has been justly observed, the real opposition here is not between science and faith or science and religion, but rather the opposition between two philosophies, two worldviews, and therefore the opposition between a true metaphysics and a pseudo-metaphysics.⁴

Owing to the fundamentally polemical nature and intention of their works, it is to be expected that the writings of the New Atheists are not characterized by powerful and sophisticated philosophical arguments in support of their views. These are works intended to persuade the wider public by rhetorical means, and are not serious works engaging the issues at their most profound and difficult points. On the contrary, as it has been forcefully observed occasionally even by some of their atheist colleagues in university positions, serious arguments and a concern for scholarly accuracy are precisely what

they lack.⁵ However, the oft-noted absence of philosophical acumen in their writings, as well as the flagrant historical and religious ignorance they display, are not the only distinctive features of these writers, there is also their style of rhetoric: a cavalier attitude towards religion, along with caricatural representations of faith and religion, combined frequently with sarcasm or scorn, all of which are intended to disarm as well as intrigue or captivate the reader, perhaps especially the youth, but also those highly opinionated and belligerent, and often extremely crude and “primitive”, misinformed or uninformed, adults who are seemingly in no short supply in the online commentaries on sites dedicated to promoting atheism. In addition, one encounters the tactic of making use of emotionally impacting anecdotes selected to elicit bias and revulsion towards or contempt for religion, the regular repetition of certain main points of either a scientific or moralistic nature, as the case may be, aimed at exposing the apparent weaknesses and flaws of religions and of “believers”, and then presenting “reason” and “science” as solutions to such weaknesses or flaws. Finally, they insist that their view—which is that of scientism—is the one which best conforms to the most important and characteristic feature of the modern age, namely its scientific knowledge and technology.

It is indeed modern science and its technological applications which give modern man the feeling of quasi-absolute superiority in relation to less “developed” and hence more “backward” people and societies, including all those of the pre-modern past. It is as if these authors, as atheists, consider themselves the only legitimate spokesmen for the modern civilization of “reason” and “science”, whereas believers who may also be scientists, are held to be confused and even irrational individuals.⁶ To repeat: the power of these books, for the philosophically unaware and culturally naive, lies not so much in the worth of their arguments but in their rhetoric. In line with the modern commercial mentality, one might even ob-

serve that these works amount to strident “sales pitches” for the toxic product of an aggressive scientific and moralizing atheism.

The reasons for the sudden burst of atheist evangelism, together with its hostile and often crude and insolent anti-religious temper generally, have been variously traced by others to the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, the rise of the theory of “intelligent design” in biology, as well as to the rise of religious fundamentalism everywhere today. Be that as it may, the New Atheist phenomenon first came clearly into view in 2004 with the publication of a book titled *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, by Sam Harris, a neuroscientist; this was followed in 2006 by his *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins’ work *The God Delusion*, which is by far the most well known book of this group. In that same year, Daniel Dennett, a philosopher at Tufts University, published *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. In 2007, Christopher Hitchens, a journalist and social commentator, recently deceased, published *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. These four authors are the best known but are not the only authors known as the New Atheists. Others include scientist Victor Stenger, biologist Edward O. Wilson, physicist Stephen Hawking, cognitive scientist Stephen Pinker, British philosopher A.C. Grayling, British chemist Peter Atkins, physicist Steven Weinberg, and others. As for the term “New Atheists”, it is generally accepted that it was coined by the author Gary Wolf at the online magazine *Wired*.



Aside from modern rationalist and naturalist philosophies, without mentioning the infra-rational existential philosophies, the West still possesses, and has possessed for centuries, the philosophical and theological doctrines of the classical West-

ern heritage—from Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists, through the Church Fathers, to the Scholastics of the Middle Ages—which are completely at odds with the worldview of the New Atheists, and incomparably more profound.⁷ Unfortunately, however, such understanding in our time is not generally in the possession of even the more educated among the general population, but rather only of a small minority of unusually well-read and dedicated students and academic specialists.

As a result, even if a person believes that there is more to the universe than what science investigates and reveals (since it is clear, after all, that physical science deals only with the observable and measurable aspects of the natural world), the general belief is nonetheless that we cannot have any certain knowledge beyond what science reveals. Besides, it is also generally felt that the technology which results from scientific discovery is what gives us all the very considerable material advantages enjoyed by modern civilization, which no other civilization has ever come close to having. Thus, modern man, whether a religious believer or not, is almost invariably a “believer” in “science”, and in addition, he will readily point to the stream of continually emerging new technological wonders as justifications for his “faith” in scientific knowledge and the scientific enterprise.

It is generally considered in our time that belief regarding realities that transcend the universe is strictly a matter of faith, because we cannot have an empirically verifiable knowledge concerning them. Hence the fundamental split that is supposed to exist between faith and science. Moreover, it is also commonly thought that faith is a “feeling” in the “heart” and not a knowledge resulting from thinking by the “brain”. The certitude of the believer is deemed no more than a matter of emotion or sentiment, therefore, distinct from the certitude of knowledge. It is also noted that this emotional certitude is supported and nourished in the believer by his

Church and his clergy, and by his awareness that he is not alone in his faith, but that it is shared by millions, even by a majority. Of course, the New Atheists do not believe in the reality of Revelation, nor in the validity of Scripture anyway, no matter how many people may believe, and they are also skeptics in relation to the so-called evidence of the history of religion, so they insist that faith is nothing more than the irrationally maintained residue of a more primitive mentality, which for various reasons stubbornly persists. And the truth is that it is doubtless safe to say that hardly anyone in our day, believer or unbeliever, would want to “go back” to past ways of thinking and living; modern men in general believe that the past was worse than the present, for they believe in the reality of “progress”.

In a general way, one may say that science-technology is modern secular man’s real religion, it is what he really believes in, what fuels his sense of being at the summit of humanity, what makes him recoil at the thought of “medievalism” or at the lack of material “development” of traditional civilizations, as if any of this contributed one iota to man’s true and final end, or as if they could help him in the slightest when he has only few seconds left to live. It is as if Christ had never mentioned “the one thing needful”, or that one cannot serve two masters, or spoke of gaining the world, but at the cost of losing one’s soul, or as if the inner life of the spirit were a luxury for narcissists; or, not to put too fine a point on it, as if Christ were deficient in his knowledge of human nature and its true purpose, and of the true nature of the Real, so that mankind instead would have to await, for a millennium and a half in the “dark”, the “light” furnished by Newton, Darwin and the rest of the scientific company, not forgetting the “contributions” of such philosophical “luminaries” as Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Hume, Kant, Voltaire, and Rousseau. As a result of the blinding glare of such “light”, the possibility of knowledge of an entirely different and superior order all

but vanished from the consciousness of Western man after the Enlightenment.

As a result of this “spirit of the age”, there are very few indeed in the West, in the sphere of religious and philosophical writing today, who present a sustained and principled critique of the modern world and its mentality, although in the not so distant past, in the West, it was the Catholic Church, prior to Vatican II, which presented the most formidable opposition to modernity:

In a general we may say that modernism aims at that radical transformation of human thought in relation to God, man, the world, and life, here and hereafter, which was prepared by Humanism and eighteenth-century philosophy, and solemnly promulgated at the French Revolution... the Catholic publicist Périn (1815–1905), professor at the University of Louvain, 1844–1889... describes “the humanitarian tendencies of contemporary society” as modernism. The term itself he defines as “the ambition to eliminate God from all social life.” With this absolute modernism he associates a more temperate form, which he declares to be nothing less than “liberalism of every degree and shade”.⁸

“The ambition to eliminate God from all social life.” This summarizes quite well the program of the New Atheists.⁹



Contrary to all that might have been expected, the last century in Europe saw the sudden appearance of several truly remarkable writers expounding an implacable, lucid, and powerful critique of the modern world and its secularism, in the form of a prodigious re-manifestation and synthesis of the traditional and millennial metaphysical and cosmological knowledge and its corresponding worldview: namely, what is termed the “perennial wisdom” (*sophia perennis*). In the works of these authors the serious seeker will encounter the most profound expositions of metaphysical, eschatological, and

anthropological doctrines, together with the most exacting defenses of the great religious traditions, explanations of what constitutes the essence of traditional civilizations, solutions to many difficult religious and philosophical problems, and finally, a thoroughly devastating critique of modernism in all its forms. All told, the receptive reader will experience a clear and liberating way out of the intellectual chaos and confusion of our time.

At the beginning of this century, hardly anyone knew that the world is ill—authors like Guénon and Coomaraswamy were preaching in the desert—whereas nowadays, almost everyone knows it; but it is far from the case that everyone knows the roots of the evil and is able to discern the remedies. In our time one often hears that to fight against materialism, technocracy and pseudo spiritualism, what is needed is a new ideology, capable of resisting all seductions and all assaults, and of galvanizing those of good will. Now, the need for an ideology, or the desire to oppose one ideology to another, is already an admission of weakness, and all initiatives stemming from this prejudice are false and doomed to fail. What must be done is to counter false ideologies with the truth that has always been and that we could never invent, since it exists outside us and above us. The present world is obsessed by the bias towards dynamism, as if it were a “categorical imperative” and a panacea, and as if dynamism were meaningful and efficacious outside truth pure and simple.

No man in possession of his faculties could have the intention of substituting one error for another, whether “dynamic” or not; before speaking of strength and efficacy, one ought to speak of truth and nothing else. A truth is efficacious to the extent that we assimilate it; if it does not give us the strength we need, this merely proves we have not grasped it. It is not for the truth to be “dynamic”, it is for us to be dynamic thanks to the truth. What is lacking in today’s world is a penetrating and

comprehensive knowledge of the nature of things; the fundamental truths are always accessible, but they could not be imposed on those who refuse to take them into consideration.¹⁰

What we wish to do in these pages is to introduce some of the key ideas found in the works of these writers, together with corresponding selections from the greatest authority on the *Sophia Perennis*, Frithjof Schuon, along with a few others which, precisely, offer a “penetrating and comprehensive knowledge of the nature of things.” We shall be satisfied if this book helps the reader to clearly discern and reject the mortal error of modern naturalist secularism, scientism, and atheism, while also encouraging some persons of good will to study further the potentially life-changing works of the perennialist authors.



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Notes to Preface

1. See the *Wikipedia* article “New Atheism”, citing Hooper, Simon, “The rise of the New Atheists”, CNN. Retrieved 16 March 2010.

Also, in the same encyclopedia article,

In an interview published in *Wired* magazine [November, 2006], Dawkins estimated the number of non-religious people in the U.S.A. to be around 30 million and compared atheists’ struggle for recognition as equivalent to previous campaigns by other minority groups:

“I think we’re in the same position the gay movement was in a few decades ago”, said Dawkins. “There was a need for people to come out. The more people who came out, the more people who had the courage to come out. I think that’s the case with atheists. They are more numerous than anybody realizes.”

2. In his book *The Last Superstition*, Edward Feser notes the sudden rise of

ostentatious unbelief as the *de rigueur* position of the smart set... Atheist chic is now, out of the blue as it were, the stuff of best sellers, celebrity endorsements, and suburban reading groups ... by an unbroken series of social and judicial triumphs ... [and having] lost all inhibition ... offending against all sane and decent sensibilities as the mood strikes it.

Feser goes on to observe that in the minds of liberal secularists sexual libertinism and the advent of contempt for religion as public and mass phenomena “constitute the final victory of reason, twin fruits of the modern scientific worldview whose full consequences are only now becoming widely perceived over four centuries after its birth.”

Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition*, (South Bend, IN, St. Augustine Press, 2008), p. viii.

3. “Scientists and Belief” (Washington, DC, Pew Research Center, Nov. 5, 2009), www.pewforum.org/2009/11/05/scientists-and-belief/.

All these books were on the best seller lists for extended periods, which again shows they have reached mainstream readers. These four authors have been called “The Four Horsemen” of the New Atheism, and especially Dawkins has achieved much fame with his book, and was even termed “the leading light” of the New Atheism movement by Wolf in his *Wired* article. Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens are particularly strident, and for this reason they have been termed “the unholy trinity” of New Atheism.

On the whole, the books were received with enthusiasm by mainstream publications, as may be seen in the excerpts from reviews of *The God Delusion* in the Appendix (collected by the American Buddha Online Library: www.american-buddha.com/lit.goddelusiondawkins.ins.htm).

4. See for example, Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition*, South Bend, IN, St. Augustine’s Press, 2008, or his articles “The New Philistinism”, *The American*, March 26, 2010 [www.aei.org/publication/the-new-philistinism/], and “Recovering Sight after Scientism”, *The Public Discourse*, March 12, 2010 [www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2010/03/1184/].
5. Even some of their colleagues among philosophers and scientists have deplored their lack of seriousness and scholarship, their ignorance of the subjects they deal with, and their resorting to polemical means of argument (see the Appendix for numerous examples).
6. It is doubtless an embarrassment for Dawkins to accuse all believers of being irrational, and yet have to acknowledge the existence of renowned scientists and philosophers who are believers, with some of whom he has even engaged in debate.
7. ... the *philosophia perennis*, actualized in the West, though on different levels, by Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, the Fathers and the Scholastics, constitutes a definitive intellectual heritage, and the great problem of our times is not to replace them with something better—for this something could not exist according to the point of view here—but to return to the sources, both around us and within us, and to examine all the data of contemporary life in the light of the one, timeless truth.

It is evident that some doctrines are more profound than others, but that is not the question here, for a difference of level has nothing to do with “progress”, all the less so since such a difference is independent of temporal sequence. Aristotelianism is a kind of exteriorization of Platonism, that is to say of the doctrine represented by the line Pythagoras-Socrates-Plato-Plotinus. The Middle Ages showed at times an awareness of the superiority of Plato over Aristotle; thus, Saint Bonaventure attributes “wisdom” to the former and “science” to the latter.

Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, p. 33.

When one seriously comes to understand the classical philosophical tradition... and not merely the potted caricatures of it that even many professional philosophers, to their shame, tend to rely on—one learns just how contingent and open to question are the various modern and typically “naturalistic”, philosophical assumptions that most contemporary thinkers (and certainly most secularists) simply take for granted without rational argument. And since the classical tradition is theistic and supernaturalist through and through, one also comes to see how powerful are the rational foundations of the Western religious tradition... An irreligious worldview is ... deeply irrational... Secularism can never truly rest on reason, but only on “faith”, as secularists themselves understand that term (or rather misunderstand it...) An unshakable commitment grounded not in reason but rather in sheer willfulness, a deeply ingrained desire to *want* things to be a certain way regardless of whether the evidence shows they are that way.

Feser, *The Last Superstition*, pp. 5–6.

As Feser points out [*op. cit.*, p. 10], “it is by no means only those who believe in God who could possibly have an interest in the question of His existence.” Philosopher Thomas Nagel acknowledges that a “fear of religion” seems often to underlie the work of his fellow secularist intellectuals, and that it has had “large and often pernicious consequences for modern intellectual life.” He writes:

I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself. I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time. One of the tendencies it supports is the ludicrous overuse of evolutionary biology to explain everything about human life, including everything about the human mind.

Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word*,
pp. 130–131.

8. “Le Modernisme dans l’Église d’après les lettres inédites de Lamennais”, Paris, 1881), *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Modernism” [www.newadvent.org/cathen/10415a.htm].
9. Dawkins: “If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.” (Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 5); “I have set out to demolish the intellectual and moral pretensions of Christianity in its most committed forms...” (Harris, “Letter to a Christian Nation”, p. ix); “Religion poisons everything” (Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, p. 13).

I suspect—well, I am sure—that there are lots of people out there who have been brought up in some religion or other, are unhappy in it, don't believe it, or are worried about the evils that are done in its name; people who feel vague yearnings to leave their parents' religion and wish they could, but just don't realize that leaving is an option. If you are one of them, this book is for you. It is intended to raise consciousness—raise consciousness to the fact that to be an atheist is a realistic aspiration, and a brave and splendid one. You can be an atheist who is happy, balanced, moral, and intellectually fulfilled. That is the first of my consciousness-raising messages.

Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 1.

Assuming one really is a fully consequential materialist, one may well wonder how in good logic the moral judgments of the New Atheists are even possible, particularly when their conceptions of what is moral are, ironically, but not surprisingly, often clearly derived from the Western tradition, which is that of the Bible and classical theism.

10. Frithjof Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, pp. 75–76.

It goes without saying that what is in question here are not the altogether outward data with which experimental science can provide us, but realities that this science cannot handle, and which are transmitted to us by quite different channels, especially those of mythological and metaphysical symbolism, not to mention intellectual intuition, the possibility of which resides principally in every man. The symbolic language of the great traditions of mankind may seem difficult and disconcerting for certain minds, but it is nevertheless intelligible in the light of the orthodox commentaries; symbolism—it must be stressed—is a real and rigorous science, and nothing is more aberrant than to believe that its apparent naivety issues from a simplistic and “prelogical” mentality. This science, which we may term “sacred”, cannot be adapted to the experimental method of the moderns; the domain of revelation, of symbolism, of pure intellection, obviously transcends the physical and psychic planes and thus is situated beyond the domain of methods termed scientific. If we believe that we cannot accept the language of traditional symbolism because it seems to us fantastic and arbitrary, this only shows that we have not yet understood this language and certainly not that we have gone beyond it.

It is rather convenient to claim, as is so speciously done in our day, that the religions have compromised themselves over the course of centuries and that their role has now ended. When one knows what a religion really consists of, one also knows that the religions cannot compromise themselves and that they are independent of human abuses; in fact, nothing men do has the power to affect the traditional doctrines, the symbols and rites, so long of course as human actions remain on their own level and

do not attack sacred things. The fact that an individual may exploit religion in order to bolster up national or private interests in no wise affects religion as message and patrimony.

Religion speaks to each man the language he can understand, provided he be willing to listen; this reservation is essential, for tradition, we repeat, cannot become bankrupt; it is rather of man's bankruptcy that one should speak, for it is he who has lost the intuition of the supernatural and the sense of the sacred. Man has allowed himself to be seduced by the discoveries and inventions of an illegitimately totalitarian science; that is, a science which does not recognize its own limits and for that reason is unaware of what lies beyond them.

An easy argument against religions is the following: the religions and denominations contradict one another, hence they cannot all be right; consequently none is true. It is as if one were to say: every individual claims to be "I", hence they cannot all be right; consequently, no one is "I"; all of which amounts to asserting that there is but one single man to see the mountain and that the mountain has but a single side to be seen. Only traditional metaphysics does justice to the rigor of objectivity and to the rights of subjectivity; it alone is capable of explaining the unanimity of the sacred doctrines as well as their formal divergences.

Scientism

As mentioned in the Preface, the governing idea of the works of the New Atheists is that science supplants religion and renders it obsolete. They begin with the assumption—for that is exactly what it is—that there is no reality beyond physical nature, the nature which we perceive with our senses. This assumption, moreover, is presented as an “obvious fact”. Therefore, natural science is held to be sufficient in principle to explain everything in the entire universe, including human consciousness, hence there is no reason at all to introduce God or the supernatural to understand reality. There is the universe perceptible to our five senses and their enhancement in such instruments as telescopes and microscopes, and that is all. The Psalmist affirmed that “the fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God.’” In the eyes of the New Atheists, however, it is faith which is foolishness. Faith is irrational, and science alone is fully rational, for it is able to support its claims with empirical evidence; its theories can be tested and either confirmed or else falsified with experiments. For the New Atheists, rationality means holding fast to the assumption that there is no reality but physical reality, and hence that empirical evidence is the only valid evidence. The circular nature of this argument quite eludes them. In addition, the posited irrationality of faith means that, in their eyes, religion is by no means a reliable and true source of morality. On the contrary, it is highly ambiguous in its morality, as is shown

by the barbarism of various passages in the Old Testament, as well as by the many abuses committed in the name of religion over the centuries, and they point out that it is deeply divisive of human groups, for it tends to foster the most bitter and bloody confrontations. Only a mentality free from faith-based irrationality is capable of furnishing rational criteria for human well-being. Thus, scientism, along with a humanist moralism, is the foundation of the worldview of the New Atheists and, like the Epicureanism of two millennia earlier, it is staunchly materialistic—not, to be sure, the atomist materialism of certain Greeks or of the Roman Lucretius, but the modern version, which takes into account modern physics and biology. But whether ancient or modern, reality, for the materialist, is the physical universe and nothing more. “The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.”¹ It is crucial for a coherent discussion to understand that this affirmation—that the physical universe comprises all of reality—is an assumption; and moreover it is an assumption that cannot by any means be verified by observation, measurement and experiment. In other words, it is a hypothetical notion and a personal philosophical choice, and nothing more.

If we start with this materialist or naturalist assumption, then by definition one has to conclude that everything that exists within the universe was produced by purely natural forces. There is no other option. The question is, why should one start with this assumption? The greatest minds in history have thought otherwise. Whether one starts in China, proceeds through Asia to India and Persia, throughout the Middle East, and all through Christendom, whether of the Latin or the Eastern churches, the greatest minds in all these traditional civilizations have acknowledged a transcendent, self-existent and eternal Supreme Principle. This truth is the summit of an entire metaphysical doctrine constituting the core of every known integral traditional civilization. And despite what may be thought by many modern “thinkers”,

it can be verified intellectually and spiritually. We shall have more to say about this later on. The New Atheist propaganda that religion has traditionally been based on emotional and irrational grounds, and not intellectually, is a calumny based on ignorance and incomprehension.

Our position, then, like that of all authentic traditional metaphysical and spiritual doctrines both East and West, is that naturalism and the secularism resulting from it are false and ultimately destructive. They are products of a fundamental restriction and subsequent abuse of the intelligence, beginning as a continuous process of decadence towards the end of the 13th century, which became definitively crystallized during the so-called Enlightenment. During this time the Western world progressively abandoned the fundamentally spiritual orientation of Christendom, according to which it was understood that man is not merely a body but a tripartite being: a body, a psyche, and, above all, endowed with an intelligence linked to the Spirit. Human intelligence is not confined to sensory perceptions, instincts, and passions like the animals, but is capable of objectivity, therefore of reason and language. Furthermore, being capable of objectivity, it is capable of both totality and transcendence. In other words, human intelligence can conceive of existence as such in its totality, and it can conceive of that which transcends it as its very Principle. Hence the essence and summit of this faculty is that it is capable of conceiving absoluteness, and therefore the Absolute as such—the absolutely Real. It follows that the essential function of human intelligence is to discriminate between the Absolute and the relative—between the unconditionally or “Necessary” Real and the relatively or “possible” real. In addition, the capacity for objectivity of human intelligence renders man capable of foreseeing his own demise, and thus of understanding that his earthly reality is neither eternal nor absolute but only contingent and relative; all this shows that man is endowed with an intelligent immortal ker-

nel rooted in the transcendent Divine Order: “That was the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9).

From this traditional and perennial human worldview Western humanity as a collectivity deviated some seven centuries ago, and began to “come down to earth”, and thus increasingly to focus all its energies on the world alone. So began the slide downwards that would end by conceiving the human being in the last analysis as no more than a living body, with its rather short lifespan, and not really different from the animals except in his possession of reason and language and the inventive or “tool making” faculty. Human nature thus reduced, its purpose becomes merely practical or pragmatic: to enable the creature to survive, and to improve the material conditions of its life. Not much more is added to this utilitarian conception other than the creation of arts, which, from once pertaining to sacred art, are reduced to mere cultural luxuries with no other end or significance than sensory and emotional gratification, not to mention their usefulness as ideological propaganda of one kind or another. The purpose of the sciences, as Bacon and Descartes foresaw, is to give power to man over nature. In this view, man, the upright and reasoning animal, lives out his roughly threescore and ten years and after that there is nothing. Death is the end for him because this life is all there is. There is no such thing as an immortal soul and its afterlife. Both the possibility of immortality as well as the conception of a benefic eternal and self-subsistent supernatural Intelligence and Power which is the First Principle or Cause of the world, as well as the indwelling or immanent Presence which orders and sustains it, were finally rejected as wishful thinking. The ancient conceptions were considered to be an imaginative “filler”—filling in the gaps resulting from ignorance of natural science. Science would at last “demystify nature”, as the dull, brutal, and basically unforgiveable phrase has it.

The intellectual trajectory just depicted tends inevitably towards the pure naturalism and materialism of the New Atheists. But materialism is a dead end, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Fundamentally it is a variation of nihilism. It is impossible to conceive of human life in purely material terms, and this is a simple and obvious truth, acknowledged even by elementary common sense, and despite attempts to do so by any number of academicians. No materialist could ever carry on with the business of life if he were fully consequential regarding his materialist philosophy, and human society would be impossible if people really believed it and acted upon it. It would amount to a collective insanity, and thus such a society would perish. Nevertheless it may be argued that there are “extremes” and “degrees” of materialism, just as there are “extremes” and “degrees” of atheism. But are there really? Either everything is nothing but matter or not, and if not, then what else is there? And either there is transcendent, intelligent, ultimate, eternal and self-subsistent Reality and First Cause or first Principle of the universe, or there is not.

So, two questions can be posed: How did entire sectors of humanity today come to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual dead end that is pure naturalism or materialism, and why do they keep believing in it so passionately? Why do they think, in effect, that “matter” amounts to a quasi-miraculous reality capable of “evolving” all by itself into organic chemical compounds, which in turn can accomplish the jump from these to primitive life forms, which can in turn further “evolve” into the entire amazing variety of living beings existing in a most complex equilibrium, and even, “given enough time”, evolve into conscious beings; and finally, into human beings capable of becoming aware, ironically—and also absurdly—that everything is “really” just matter? It amounts to endowing “matter” with divine qualities and powers, with miraculous potentialities—all of which are none

the less completely inaccessible to scientific investigation and confirmation. Of course, it will be said it really doesn't amount to that, because it is all a question of "natural selection" and "random mutation" operating over vast periods of time. But this is no answer, for it still amounts to purely material realities, quantitative accumulations, the increasing complexity of which is supposed somehow, again miraculously, to give rise to life and even to consciousness.

It is a truly remarkable fact that in academia today purely conjectural ideas can be presented with a straight face as incontrovertible truths. Men have reached the point where they seem incapable of getting beyond material conceptions, and are hypnotized, as it were, by the very fragmentary successes of an entirely "flat", superficial knowledge of the mechanisms of physical phenomena to the point where no other knowledge even seems possible to them. From this very fragmentary knowledge of the physical world they attempt to derive a fallacious and humanly destructive counterfeit "wisdom". According to the paleontologist Gaylord Simpson,

Although many details remain to be worked out, it is already evident that all the objective phenomena of the history of life can be explained by purely naturalistic or, in a proper sense of the sometimes abused word, materialistic factors. They are readily explicable on the basis of differential reproduction in populations (the main factor in the modern conception of natural selection) and of the mainly random interplay of the known processes of heredity... Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.²

So, for Simpson it is "evident" that the "history of life" can be explained by natural selection and random processes of heredity. But surely not. It is only evident to him because he cannot or will not conceive of anything other than material causality. To begin with, the question of origins is not an observable event, as Simpson readily admits in a previous

paragraph. It is not a question that can be asked or answered by physical science. Therefore, one can either choose to ignore the question and carry on with the business of science, or else have recourse to other types of knowledge to try to resolve the question. But, of course, materialists don't "believe" that any other kinds of knowledge are possible. This arbitrary opinion should actually be a matter of complete indifference, but unfortunately, as Johnson points out, "through an educational system insistent upon uncritical acceptance by students at all levels of the claim that purposeless material mechanisms were responsible for the creation of all forms of life, scientific naturalism is becoming the officially established religion of America."³

If we take life as a given, without concern for the question of its origin, Simpson's "history of life" becomes merely a synonym for the "process-myth" of "evolution". Besides, "evolution" is itself a very elastic term in the literature, as Phillip E. Johnson has explained exhaustively. Hence, to repeat, if by definition there is only natural reality, then only "purposeless and natural" processes "must" account for all observable phenomena. Nothing else is conceivable given that assumption. But the assumption by no means is a "categorical imperative". There is nothing about it that obliges the intelligence to accept it on pain of irrationality.

For some examples of both scientific dogmatism and irrationality, there are these by Francis Crick, the discoverer of DNA: "Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved."

Why must they keep this in mind? And how does he know this? Clearly, because at all costs "natural"—that is to say, material—causes alone are allowed. In other words, truth is not the *goal*. Truth has already been found: it is that physical nature alone is real. This is the great and dogmatic "fact", which scientists must not be allowed to doubt. There is no

point in entertaining “metaphysical fantasies”. Crick, however, admits that

An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going.

The obvious implication here is that for now it all seems “almost a miracle”, but he clearly has “faith” that science will eventually “demystify” the miracle. So convinced of this was Crick, that he actually posited that life on earth was brought by alien beings from outer space. To such lengths will the naturalist mania go to avoid any supernaturalism. As the physicist John Polkinghorne remarked, “It is not at all clear why what is inconceivable here was able to happen somewhere else, but so desperate a remedy as Crick’s life-sent-in-a-space-capsule indicates the severity of the problem.”⁴

Further, Crick asserts, “You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”⁵

Polkinghorne appropriately remarks, in response to Crick’s position, that it is “ultimately suicidal”. Exactly. According to Crick, all experience is “nothing but” matter. But this patently demented idea destroys itself. Knowledge is not possible as between purely electro-chemical exchanges. The naturalist’s affirmation that such nonsense is “true” is rendered meaningless. For Crick and his ilk, intelligence—or “reason”—enables you to understand that everything is meaningless, and that there really is no such thing as intelligence. Can anything more absurd be imagined? If intelligence itself is an illusion, how is it possible to be aware of the fact? Here we are faced with nonsense presented as incontrovertible dogma.

According to the logical positivism of the naturalists,

an assertion that is not empirically verifiable is essentially nonsense if presented as truth rather than as simply opinion or personal taste. But in that case, logical positivism itself is nonsense. Like naturalism, of which it is the philosophical expression, logical positivism cannot be true on pain of negating itself, for there is no way to verify empirically that its assertion is true, and so it, too, amounts to the bias, opinion, and personal taste of the logical positivist. It is just one facet of the contradictory, hence incoherent, relativism which lies at the core of scientism.

In reality, the scientific enterprise necessarily rests on several unavoidable metaphysical and cosmological assumptions—in other words, on factors that lie outside the power of natural science itself to investigate or confirm; it must assume them, consciously or unconsciously, or it cannot act. Foremost among them are three: first, that phenomena really exist objectively. Second, that these objective phenomena can be investigated because they are intelligible. In other words, it must be assumed that the world around us is an order and not a pure chaos. Since it is an order, we can discover invariants and regularities; we can measure and predict experimental outcomes, and therefore we can form testable hypotheses and eventually tentative theoretical frameworks which interpret the data. And third, since we can do this kind of science, it means that there is a real correspondence between the world and our sensory faculties, as well as between our conceptual and logical capacities. In other words, the human mind must be taken to be adequate to the physical reality investigated by the scientific method.

Regarding the essential point that the scientific enterprise necessarily depends on metaphysical assumptions, Feser quotes E.A. Burt's *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* at length:

Even the attempt to escape metaphysics is no sooner put in the form of a proposition that it is seen to involve

highly significant metaphysical postulates. For this reason there is an exceedingly subtle and insidious danger in positivism. If you cannot avoid metaphysics, what kind of metaphysics are you likely to cherish when you sturdily suppose yourself to be free from the abomination?... in this case your metaphysics will be held uncritically because it is unconscious; moreover, it will be passed on to others far more readily than your other notions inasmuch as it will be propagated by insinuation rather than by direct argument... Now, the history of mind reveals pretty clearly that the thinker who decries metaphysics ... if he be a man engaged in any important inquiry, he must have a method, and he will be under a strong and constant temptation to make a metaphysics out of his method, that is, to suppose the universe ultimately of such a sort that his method must be appropriate and successful... But inasmuch as the positivist mind has failed to school itself in careful metaphysical thinking, its ventures at such points will be apt to appear pitiful, inadequate, or even fantastic.⁶

Feser very aptly comments:

Burt could have been writing about the New Atheists, for his words describe them “to a T”. Dawkins in particular ... constantly tries to frame the debates over the existence of God and the nature of the human mind as if they hinged on evolution, attempting thereby to transform the Darwinian method of analysis he is most comfortable with into a general metaphysic that holds the master key to every scientific and philosophical problem ... because this bad metaphysics is held by him more or less unconsciously, he has been able very effectively to propagate it by insinuation rather than argument to countless readers, and to remain blissfully unaware that there is any serious alternative to it.⁷

Another related and crucial matter about which the New Atheists along with other secularists seem either “blissfully

unaware”, or deliberately unaware, as the case may be, is that the Supreme Principle, namely God, is infinitely far from being the caricatural, or at best, childish anthropomorphic entity depicted in the works of the New Atheists—hence such puerile and impertinent remarks as the comparison of the reality of God with the possible existence of leprechauns, and the like. We have no wish to demean anyone’s faith, but it has to be acknowledged that the conception of Divine reality admits of degrees of depth, and it is in the interest of the scholar, as well as the serious and capable faithful, to learn the most profound or loftiest conceptions, such as are found in the works of the greatest intellectual and spiritual authorities of all the great religious traditions, which convey the perfume and the light of spiritual and intellectual certitude.

The scientist Richard Lewontin is quite frank regarding the *a priori* position of modern scientific investigation and thereby unmasks the entire scientific mentality and program:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real *struggle between science and the supernatural*. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because *we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door* [my italics].⁸

As John Haught aptly observes,

... the evolutionary naturalist will take any suggestion that purpose is operative in the life process or in the universe at large, to be a rival account to the suggestions of science. Final causal explanations seem to be a potential threat to the explanatory power of the notion of natural selection. *If we allow purpose to get its foot in the door, the naturalist claims, then the quest for true causes is over and science will lose its bearings.* Even a commonsense usage of the idea of purpose must be discarded as cognitively worthless... For Lewontin material causes are explanatorily sufficient, and any talk about purpose counts for nothing. As he concedes, however, the statement just quoted is not a scientific one, but instead *a profession of faith... it is not science per se but scientific materialism that contradicts* a theological (or teleological) understanding of nature [my italics].⁹

According to Richard Dawkins, “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.” Why “appearance?” Because “in fact”—so goes the hypothesis—what is responsible for this appearance are two completely blind forces: natural selection and mutation. We have already pointed out why this hypothesis is unacceptable. The key point, from a scientific point of view, is that the vaunted creative power of these two blind, purposeless forces has never been demonstrated. Now, the important thing to keep in mind is that purpose and therefore intelligence have been quite deliberately eliminated from this attempted explanation for natural phenomena. Why deliberately? Because, as Lewontin candidly admits, scientific materialism is the a priori position of modern scientific theory: “that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.”

Once the perfectly gratuitous postulate of universal materialism is rejected, as it must be if one is to sustain a coherent and even sane view of the world, evolutionary theory falls. It must be rejected along with materialism. Now, is there

anything in evolutionary theory that is acceptable? Yes, provided one draws a firm line between “micro-evolution” and “macro-evolution”. The adaptability of types or species within the framework of their type is both observable and testable; however, transformism—the transformation of one kind into another— has never been observed, and with good reason: it is not a possibility. What is unacceptable as “proven scientific fact” is the idea that natural selection, mutation, and other purposeless factors acting within a purely material cosmos are directly responsible for the diversity of the species, and for their evolution from primitive to less primitive and more conscious types. With this hypothesis, science oversteps its legitimate bounds and attempts to usurp the place of metaphysical knowledge.¹⁰

What modern biology does not grasp is that the species is what the Scholastics term a “form”, that is to say, the totality of qualities pertaining to a being or thing. We shall say more concerning this in the next chapter when we come to speak of nominalism, but suffice it to say that the form or essence of a thing is the informing unitive power and expression of an archetypal reality in the divine Intellect, and thus pertains to the domain of the immutable. A qualitative reality, which by definition is something unique, is always an expression of the unity and necessity of pure Being.¹¹ To take a familiar example, red is a distinctive quality, hence a unity, which is not something that has “changed” from being some other distinct color. Even mixtures of qualities are not just quantitative sums, but comprise properties or qualities that are unique. This is all the more apparent in the higher orders, such as plants and animals. The key point is that the ontological basis of the species is an archetype, which the individuals of a species merely manifest and embody temporarily, whereas the archetype in God is incomparably more real and does not, need not, and could not evolve. Also, the richness of an archetype means that the species will exhibit a range of

variations, but all of them remain projections of the same unique essential form.

Unfortunately, despite the fundamental implausibility of transformist or macro-evolution, owing to the scientific assumption we have been examining, the modern biologist sees no other option than to adhere to this hypothesis.

Fundamentally, the evolutionist thesis is an attempt to replace, not simply the “miracle of creation”, but the cosmogonic process—largely suprasensory—of which the Biblical narrative is a Scriptural symbol; evolutionism, by absurdly making the greater derive from the lesser, is the opposite of this process... In a word, evolutionism results from an incapacity—peculiar to modern science—to conceive “dimensions” of reality other than purely physical ones...¹²

... we are very far from accepting the “stopgap” theory of transformist evolutionism... Evolutionism is the very negation of the archetypes and consequently of the divine Intellect; it is therefore the negation of an entire dimension of the real, namely that of form, of the static, of the immutable; concretely speaking, it is as if one wished to make a fabric of the wefts only, omitting the warps.¹³

Materialists, even those who consider transformist evolution inexplicable and even contradictory, accept this hypothesis as an indispensable idea, which moreover carries us outside of science and into philosophy, or more exactly into rationalism with its reasonings cut off from the very roots of knowledge; and if the evolutionist idea is indispensable to them, it is because in their minds it replaces the concept of a sudden creation *ex nihilo*, which to them seems the only other possible solution.¹⁴

Later we shall see that this alternative—evolutionism or creationism—is not the only one possible.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, New York, Random House, 1980, p. 4. Sagan is not one of the New Atheists, but this remark echoes their idea. However, Sagan goes one step further than the New Atheists in that he subverts metaphysical truth by, as it were, divinizing the cosmos: “We are the local embodiment of a Cosmos grown to self-awareness.” This is nothing other than “pagan” pantheism, typical of the so-called “new age”.
2. Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, p. 144.
3. Phillip E. Johnson, “Creator or Blind Watchmaker?” *First Principles*, January, 1993.
4. John C. Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, p. 62.
5. All Crick’s quotes are from: Francis Crick, *Life Itself, Its Origin and Nature*, p. 88.
6. Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition*, pp. 84–85.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
8. Richard C. Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons”, *New York Review of Books*, January 9, 1997. [<http://goo.gl/RTjNXi>]. Also cited in Feser, *op. cit.*, p. 12, and in John F. Haught, “Darwinism, Design, and Cosmic Purpose”, in John B. Cobb, *Back To Darwin: A Richer Account of Evolution*, p. 322.
9. John F. Haught, “Darwinism, Design, and Cosmic Purpose”, in John B. Cobb, *Back To Darwin: A Richer Account of Evolution*, p. 322.

Wanting to believe only what they see, scientists condemn themselves to seeing only what they believe; logic for them is their desire not to see what they do not want to believe. Scientism in fact is less interested in the real as such—which necessarily goes beyond our limitations—than in what is non-contradictory, therefore in what is logical, or more precisely, in what is empirically logical; thus in what is logical *de facto* according to a given experience, and not

in what is logical *de jure* in accordance with the nature of things.

Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*,
p. 141.

A striking feature of modern science is the disproportion between the scientific, mathematical, practical intelligence and intelligence as such: a scientist may be capable of the most extraordinary calculations and achievements but may at the same time be incapable of understanding the ultimate causality of things. This amounts to a monstrous and illegitimate disproportion, for the man who is intelligent enough to grasp nature in its deepest physical aspects, ought also to know that nature has a metaphysical Cause which transcends it, and that this Cause does not confine itself to determining the laws of sensory existence, as Spinoza claimed. What we have called the inhuman character of modern science also appears in the monstrous fruits it produces, such as the overpopulation of the globe, the degeneration of humankind, and, by compensation, the means of mass destruction.

Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, p. 28.

It should not be forgotten ... that modern science operates with instruments—in the broadest sense—that in a traditional civilization could not exist; this means that there are kinds of knowledge that, strictly speaking, have no right to exist.

Schuon, *Roots of the Human Condition*,
p. 15.

There are two points to consider in created things, namely the empirical appearance and the mechanism; now the appearance manifests the divine intention; the mechanism merely operates the mode of manifestation. For example, in the human body the divine intention is expressed by its form, its deformity, its symbolism and its beauty; its mechanism is its anatomy and vital functioning. The modern mentality, having always a scientific and “iconoclastic” tendency, tends to over accentuate the mechanism to the detriment of the creative intention, and does so on all levels, psychological as well as physical; the result is a jaded

and “demystified” mentality that is no longer “impressed” by anything. By forgetting the divine intention—which nonetheless is apparent a priori—one ends in an emptiness devoid of all reference points and meaning, and in a mentality of nihilism and despair, if not of careless and brutal materialism. In the face of this deviation it is the child who is right when he believes that the blue sky above us is Paradise... Human science has limits of principle; what in traditional civilizations prevent man from overstepping these limits is his relationship with God, with all the consequences that this relationship implies.

We should specify: total or integral deiformity, for in animals too there is—or can be—a deiformity, but it is partial; similarly for plants, minerals, elements and other orders of phenomena.

Although a believer, Pasteur is supposed to have said that when entering his laboratory he left God outside; be that as it may, this plainly shows the false realism of scientists, while at the same time—in a quite different respect—it demonstrates the inferiority complex of those who are still believers towards the apparently victorious rationalists.

Ibid., p. 18.

One of the most pernicious abuses of language is to call erudite physicists “wise”; their intelligence—notwithstanding their genius—if they have any—is usually very ordinary and ignores all that transcends the physical world, in other words, everything that constitutes wisdom. Never has there been more talk of “intelligence” and “genius” than in our epoch of intellectual night, and never has it been more difficult to agree on the meaning of these words; what is certain is that men have probably never been so cunning and ingenious as in our day. There is plenty of “intelligence” to spare, but truth is something altogether different.

Schuon, *Form and Substance in Religions*,
p. 63.

10.

Another point that moderns do not grasp is that there is no reason for having to seek the cause of a phenomenon on the same plane it is produced, and that on the contrary

one has to consider the possibility of a non-material cause, above all when it is a question of a phenomenon whose beginning is unknown a priori, and unknowable materially, as is the origin of living beings. Transformist evolutionism is the classical example of the bias that invents “horizontal” causes because one does not wish to admit a “vertical” dimension: One seeks to extort from the physical plane a cause that it cannot furnish and which is necessarily situated above matter.

“The Veil of Isis”, p. 20.

... if a natural development were to lead up to a reflexive intelligence, to a sudden act of awareness that perceived the development for what it was, that outcome would be a reality falling entirely outside the realm of the evolutionary process; there would thus be no common measure between the act of awareness and the quite contingent movement that preceded it, and this movement, therefore, under no circumstances, could be the cause of the awareness in question. This argument is the very negation of the theory of transformist evolution...

Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, p. 12.

... if the spiritual faculty of man ... is merely a phase of a continuing biological evolution ... which seen as a whole can be compared to a curve or a spiral, then this phase cannot step out of the whole and say: I am part of a spiral. Anything that such an evolution-bound faculty could ever grasp or express would likewise be subject to evolution, and this leads to the Marxist view that there is no truth, but only biological pragmatism and utilitarianism...

The Human spirit does, in fact, have the faculty of placing itself outside biological contingency, of viewing things objectively and essentially, and of making judgments... The *Nous* (=Intellect=Spirit) is not the same as the activity of the brain; the latter “works over”, whereas the former judges and knows. The truly spiritual faculty—that of discriminating between true and false, of distinguishing the relative from the absolute—is related to the biological level, metaphorically speaking, as the vertical to the horizontal;

it belongs to another ontological dimension. And precisely because this dimension occurs in man, he is not an ephemeral biological appearance, but in this physical and earthly world, and in spite of all his organic limitations, he is an absolute center. This is also indicated by the faculty of speech ... which precisely presupposes the capacity to “objectivize” things, to place oneself behind and beyond appearances... The “noetic” faculty of man is related to biogenesis not as the eye is related to the other human parts, but rather as a part-process is related to a whole process... The eye can view the other limbs and organs, even if only in a mirror, but a part-process can never view the whole process of which it is a part. This has already been said by Aristotle: whoever asserts that everything is in a stream can never prove his assertion, for the simple reason that it can rest on nothing that is not itself in the stream; it is thus self-contradictory.

Burckhardt, *The Essential Titus*
 Burckhardt, p. 41–42.

Modern scientism wishes to reduce and confine the idea of knowledge to a single plane of reality, and this is by no means either a conclusive scientific datum or a valid inference. It is no more than an ultimately incoherent hypothesis, the vehicle of a fraudulent and inept metaphysics posing as scientific knowledge, and an arbitrary interpretation and abusive extension regarding the results of scientific investigation and its method.

In eliminating the subject, or in attempting to reduce it to the object, in favor of its materialistic bias, scientism eliminates at one stroke all intelligence, purpose, and meaning from the cosmos. Now, this incoherent and illogical initiative is the result of a philosophical bias and willfulness, and a flagrant abuse of intelligence. There is nothing “scientific” about it. Moreover, the object and the subject are necessarily complementary; it makes no logical sense to posit as uniquely real only one term of a complementary notion—a notion that is meaningless in the absence of its complement. It is as if one were to insist there is only up and not down, or only left and not right, or only masculinity and not femininity, and so on. Indeed, the entire cosmos is made up of such dualities or polarities. In addition

to the pole “object”, then, there is the irreducible reality of intelligence or consciousness, hence that of the subject, and above all, the necessary metaphysical reality of the absolute Subject, which bears the absolute Object within Itself as an indivisible plenitude, and which in the cosmos is polarized as “knowing” and “being”. The Divine “command” that a thing exist, in Genesis and other Scriptures, symbolically demonstrates that in the process of manifestation Principial knowledge of a possibility is metaphysically prior to its cosmic existence. The cosmos, which is a “surface” reflection of Principial reality, necessarily inverts this hierarchy, and thus the unconscious objects of the cosmos are manifested before conscious beings, which by no means signifies the absence of the pole of the subject, since the macrocosm could not exist for an instant without the immanent sustaining and ordering presence of the *Logos*, the cosmic axis or center, which prolongs the Divine Subject.

11. It is the Unity of pure Being which stamps all qualitative distinctions with its seal of unity, and which permits them to be distinguished. Multiplicity stems from Unity, and thus all possible distinctions are comprised synthetically in the Unity of the Divine Principle. This can be symbolized by the geometric point of origin of a circle, which both unites and determines the divergent directions of the radii issuing from it. Similarly, it is the one luminosity of pure or colorless light which enables each color of the spectrum to be viewed in its distinctiveness. In other words, Unity necessarily lies at the basis of any qualitative distinction, thanks to which we can say not only that something is, but that it is “this”. Without the stamp of unity, and thus of uniqueness, nothing could be distinguished from anything else, which amounts to saying that without the determining “Fiat Lux” of Unity there is only chaos. Thus, each thing is distinctively “something” or “itself” thanks to its participation at some degree or other in the Unity of Being, which alone really “is” and which, to repeat, contains synthetically—“fused, but not confused”, as Eckhart said—all possible positive and qualitative determinations. Being—namely God as the ontological and creative Principle—alone really *is* in contrast to the ceaseless becoming of created things. It is eternally self-subsistent and

sufficient unto itself, whereas the existence of the universe is entirely dependent upon it.

12. Titus Burckhardt, "The Theory of Evolution", *The Essential Titus Burckhardt, op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

The world postulated by transformism is a fairy-like world, phantasmagoric, surrealistic... we have never been present, even in a small way, at one authentic phenomenon of evolution... We keep the impression that, in the matter of the genesis of species as in that of the genesis of life, the forces that constructed nature are now absent from nature...

I firmly believe—because I see no means of doing otherwise—that mammals have come from lizards, and lizards from fish; but when I declare and when I think such a thing, I try not to avoid seeing its indigestible enormity, and I prefer to leave vague the origin of these scandalous metamorphoses rather than add to their improbability that of a ludicrous interpretation.

Jean Rostand, *Le Figaro Littéraire*, April 20, 1957, cited in Burckhardt, *ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

13. Schuon, *To Have a Center*, pp. 50-51.

Transformist evolutionism offers a patent example of "horizontality" in the domain of the natural sciences, owing to the fact that it puts a biological evolution of "ascending" degrees in place of a cosmogonic emanation of "descending" degrees. Similarly, modern philosophers—*mutatis mutandis*—replace metaphysical causality with "physical" and empirical causalities, which no doubt demands intelligence, but one that is purely cerebral.

Schuon, *Roots of the Human Condition*, p. 5.

Regarding the transformist thesis put forth as "fact", Burckhardt comments:

... it is no more than a hypothesis as its most serious defenders admit; no valid proof of it has ever, in fact, been made, and if in spite of everything it keeps its hold,

this is because modern minds can only conceive of a genesis which takes place in time; the “vertical” genesis of specific forms from the supra-formal and animic degrees of existence is beyond them. None the less, scientific honesty demands that one should make a distinction between proof and hypothesis ... and that one should not build a whole philosophy ... on an entirely conjectural basis.

Burckhardt, *Ibid.*, p. 43.

The chief reproach to be leveled against modern philosophy and science is that they venture directly or indirectly on to planes which are beyond their compass, and that they operate without regard to indispensable data; the most patent example of this is evolutionism, which replaces what might be termed suprasensory “spaces” with fantasies projected into time. The position of science is exactly like that of a man who, by hypothesis could grasp only two dimensions of space and who denied the third because he was incapable of imagining it; now what one spatial dimension is to another, so is the suprasensible to the sensible, or more precisely, so is the psychical to the corporeal, the spiritual to the animic, and the Divine to the humanly spiritual...

Schouon is here referring to the three principal degrees of existence or of universal manifestation: the corporeal or “physical” degree; the animic or subtle degree of existence; and the supra-formal spiritual degree. Creation is a projection of the archetypes issuing from the Divine Intellect or Divine Word “downwards” or “outwards”.

Once again, it is by no means obvious why the peremptory denial of causes lying outside sensory experience should be regarded as conforming to reason, or why it should be reasonable to label as “impossible” things which at most appear improbable or extraordinary from the viewpoint of current experience. The equating of the supernatural with the irrational is characteristic in this respect: it amounts to claiming that the unknown or the incomprehensible is the same as the absurd. The logic of a frog living at the bottom

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of a well is to deny the existence of mountains: this is logic of a kind, perhaps, but it has nothing to do with reality.

Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*,
pp. 40-42.

14. Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, p. 88.

The Modern Deviation

The West has been transformed from a normal society based on perennial metaphysical principles to a humanly and historically anomalous society. Above all, this society owes its distinction to an accelerating and now out of control material development that, like a cancer, is capable of destroying the entire globe. Of course, the factors leading to the change from the traditional civilization of Christendom to the modern world are exceedingly complex. All we can do in a very short compass is to try to identify a few of the main intellectual trends without which such a change in outlook would not have been possible, and which allow us to appreciate the stark differences in mentality. To begin, we may take a glance at ancient Greece.

The seeds of the West's deviation may be traced back to the "classical Greek" era of the 6th century BC—not surprisingly greatly praised by the West since the time of the Renaissance. The classical Greek mentality was prolonged in Rome until its fall in the 5th century AD. Thereafter, what gradually took place was an immense and millennial rehabilitation of the West in the form of Christianity; gradually, the West was Christianized, and this traditional human world endured until the 14th century. It is of course true that the Greek inheritance was crucial to the development and exposition of Christian doctrine, but this inheritance was uneven; portions of it transmitted not only something of ancient wisdom but

also its specifically “classical” form containing the seeds of the Western deviation in the form of philosophical rationalism and artistic naturalism. Pagan naturalism resurfaced in the Renaissance—precisely the “rebirth” of certain aspects of the ancient classical Greco-Latin Mediterranean culture, modified by the remnants of medieval Christendom. This period saw the first definitive manifestations of Western humanism, individualism, naturalism, and rationalism—and in due course this new focus on himself and on this life alone of the now fundamentally extraverted Western man gave rise to the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, at which time the modern mentality comes into view unmistakably.

What constituted the classical Greek deviation from the traditional normality of the rest of humanity? It is not that other traditional cultures had not degenerated and then disappeared prior to this, but they left no residues that would be exhumed centuries later in Europe. René Guénon has pointed out that it is a very remarkable fact that the historical period only begins at the 6th century BC. Prior to that point, it is as if an invisible barrier were in place, all events get classified by historians as being more or less legendary and for which no precise chronology is available, even in the case of such well-documented civilizations as the Egyptian and the Chinese.¹ In Greece, the 6th century, as is well-known, was the start of the so-called “classical” period. At this time there took place a partial re-adaptation of the previous tradition, but “on the other hand there very soon appeared something of which there had been no previous example, and which, in the future, was to have an injurious effect on the entire Western world: We refer to that special form of thought that acquired and retained the name of ‘philosophy’.”² Guénon acknowledges that in principle this word can convey a perfectly legitimate meaning, whose literal signification is “the love of wisdom”, the required predisposition for the acquisition of wisdom. Similarly, Schuon notes that “it should

be possible to restore to the word ‘philosophy’ its original meaning: philosophy—the ‘love of wisdom’—is the science of all the fundamental principles. Subjectively speaking, the essence of philosophy is certitude; for the moderns, on the contrary, the essence of philosophy is doubt... Everything is doubted but doubt.”³ Guénon goes on to note that the “love of wisdom”, however, is not the true or final end of wisdom, but only a step towards it. What took place with the Greeks was to take this “transitional stage” for an end in itself, implying a forgetting of the true nature of wisdom, which in integral traditional worlds is bound up not only with metaphysical doctrine, but with the practice of initiatory contemplative methods having the goal of assimilating with one’s whole being the theoretical knowledge imparted. In other words, what was originally conceived as a sacred and supra-rational wisdom comprising an all-encompassing and transformative spiritual practice, gradually devolved into a purely human and “profane” activity requiring nothing of the person beyond mental assent. “Thinking” became an end in itself to the detriment of “being”. However, the higher reaches of knowledge are not accessible to mere thinking; they must be “seen” with the “eye of the heart” at the center of one’s being, the point of contact with the Spirit or Intellect, which is not an individual faculty, but is supra-formal and supra-human.

The tendencies of this new profane and extraverted mentality would be pushed to the extreme in the modern world. What is above all in question here is the reduction of intelligence to reason alone and correspondingly a disproportionate importance given to purely rational and discursive thought to the detriment of reasoning in connection with what the Greeks called the *Nous*, the spiritual, and not merely mental, faculty of direct perception of intelligible realities. The awareness of the Intellect became progressively veiled in the Greek culture, as witnessed by the simultaneous degeneration of the Greek religion. During the Enlightenment, the West finally arrived at

“rationalism”, namely the attitude which flatly denies the existence of the supra-rational Intellect and indeed everything that transcends the sensory and the rational. As Schuon observes,

The solution to the problem of knowledge—if there is a problem—could not possibly be this intellectual suicide that is the promotion of doubt; on the contrary, it lies in having recourse to a source of certitude that transcends the mental mechanism, and this source—the only one there is—is the pure Intellect, or Intelligence as such. The so-called “enlightenment” did not suspect its existence; for the Encyclopedists, all that the Intellect had offered—from Pythagoras to the Scholastics—was merely naive dogmatism, even “obscurantism”.

It is the sophists, with Protagoras at their head, who are the true precursors of modern thought; they are the “thinkers” properly so-called, in the sense that they limited themselves to reasoning and were hardly concerned with “perceiving” and taking into account that which “is”. And it is a mistake to see in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle the fathers of rationalism, or even of modern thought generally; no doubt they reasoned ... but they never said that reasoning is the alpha and omega of intelligence and of truth, nor a fortiori that our experiences or our tastes determine thought and have priority over intellectual intuition and logic, *quod absit*.⁴

Guénon noted the increasing advance of purely profane philosophy among the Greeks, which reached a low point in the moralism of the Stoics and Epicurus, in whom metaphysical intellectuality is totally absent; skepticism became widespread and the ancient sacred doctrines were no longer understood, so that the religion degenerated into a form of “paganism”. Alexandrian Hellenism was a reaction to this degeneration, but it was not enough. The Greco-Latin cycle had come to its end, and something entirely new was required to regenerate the West. It was Christianity that accomplished this

prodigy, and once the barbarian invasions had completed the destruction of the old order, we see the emergence of the period of Christendom lasting from the time of Charlemagne to the end of the 13th century.

The seeds of a fundamental change were already present in the late 13th century, but the process of transformation was suddenly accelerated by a watershed event that struck Europe in the 14th century: the black plague ravaged it, in some places killing from 50 to 80 per cent of the population, reducing the overall population of Europe perhaps by as much as half, thereby giving the organic traditional fabric of society a mortal wound, and creating a gap between the previous and the following times. Unquestionably this was a great factor in what became the definitive disruption of Western Christian civilization. But it was scarcely the only one. Prior to that event there had been serious philosophical and political changes. In the realm of philosophy and theology, there was the emergence of nominalism, which introduces a kind of mortal fissure between creation and the Divine order. The political and revolutionary philosophies of the 18th century all take their birth from these developments in the mid and late 13th century, developments that came to a head in the rather chaotic fourteenth century, which was like an isthmus between two qualitatively different ages. In addition to the excessive quarrelsomeness and ambition of the nobility, the Church in its turn committed itself to excessive interventions and initiatives in the political sphere. These, and other grave factors, which were pointed out during the Reformation, had as a consequence upheavals which completely changed Western society.

During the 14th century the process of disintegration and decadence set in in earnest and has continued without a break—in fact, continually accelerating—to the present day. Guénon considers that the Renaissance and the Reformation were more in the nature of results, made possible only by the

preceding developments and initial decadence, and completing the rupture with the traditional world of Christendom. As he points out, the Renaissance was a “rebirth” of the old Greco-Latin civilization in a fragmentary way only, and by no means a complete reversion to its outlook and mentality. The essence of the Renaissance was humanism, the fall from the “heavenly” orientation to the purely “earthly” and human—or “all-too-human”—orientation. In terms of philosophy it meant a departure from the metaphysical and cosmological knowledge of the heritage of Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists, as it was integrated in the Christian worldview according to the great Fathers of the Church, as well as in the works of the great Scholastic writers such as St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, and others.

It is a very remarkable fact that the loss of the mentality and civilization of Christendom in Europe occurred so quickly. By the onset of the Enlightenment in the 17th century, people had completely lost the awareness of what had actually been lost. There had occurred a total change in the collective mentality. In several brilliantly insightful passages Schuon depicts the nature of the change:

It was only from the time of the Renaissance that the European became “reflexive”... At the Renaissance man began... to be interested in the “subject” pole to the detriment of the “object” pole; in becoming “subjective” in this sense, he ceased to be symbolist and became rationalist, since reason is the thinking *ego*. It is this that explains the psychological and descriptive tendencies of the great Spanish mystics, tendencies which have been wrongly taken as evidence of a superiority and as a kind of norm.

... in losing a symbolist and contemplative perspective, founded both on impersonal intelligence and on the metaphysical transparency of things, man has gained the fallacious riches of the *ego*; the world of divine images has become a world of words. In all cases of this kind, heaven—

or a heaven—is shut off from above us without our noticing the fact and we discover in compensation an earth long unappreciated, or so it seems to us, a homeland which opens its arms to welcome its children and wants to make us forget all Lost Paradises... The Renaissance thought that it had discovered man, whose pathetic convulsions it admired; from the point of view of laicism in all its forms, man as such had become to all intents and purposes good, and the earth too had become good and looked immensely rich and unexplored; instead of living only “by halves” one could at last live fully, be fully man and fully on earth; one was no longer a kind of half-angel, fallen and exiled; one had become a whole being, but by the downward path. The Reformation, whatever certain of its tendencies may have been, had as an overall result the relegation of God to Heaven—to a Heaven henceforth distant and more and more neutralized—on the pretext that God keeps close to us “through Christ” in a sort of biblical atmosphere, and that He resembles us as we resemble Him. All this brought with it an apparently miraculous enrichment of the aspect of things as “subject” and “earth”, but a prodigious impoverishment in their aspect as “object” and “Heaven”... The seemingly infinite multitude of things on earth called for an infinity of activities, which furnished a pretext for rejecting contemplation and with it repose in “being” and in the profound nature of things; man was at last free to busy himself, on the hither side of all transcendence, with the discovery of the terrestrial world and the exploitation of its riches; he was at last rid of symbols, rid of metaphysical transparency; there was no longer anything but the agreeable or the disagreeable, the useful or the useless, whence the anarchic and irresponsible development of the experimental sciences. The flowering of a dazzling “culture” which took place in or immediately after these epochs, thanks to the appearance of many men of genius, seems clearly to confirm the impression, deceptive though it be, of a liberation and a progress, indeed of a “great period”; whereas in reality this development repre-

sents no more than a compensation on a lower plane such as cannot fail to occur when a higher plane is abandoned.

Once Heaven was closed and man was in effect installed in God's place, the objective measurements of things were, virtually or actually, lost. They were replaced by subjective measurements, purely human and conjectural pseudo-values, and thus man became involved in a movement of a kind that cannot be halted, since, in the absence of celestial and stable values, there is no longer any reason for calling a halt, so that in the end a stage is reached at which human values are replaced by infra-human values, up to a point at which the very idea of truth is abolished. The mitigating circumstances in such cases—for they are always present, at any rate for some individuals—consist in the fact that, on the verge of every new fall, the order then existing shows a maximum of abuse and corruption, so that the temptation to prefer an apparently clean error to an outwardly soiled truth is particularly strong. In a traditional civilization, the mundane element does all it can to compromise in the eyes of the majority the principles governing that civilization; the majority itself is only too prone to be worldly, its worldliness is not however aristocratic and light-hearted, but ponderous and pedantic. It is not the people who are the victims of theocracy, it is on the contrary theocracy that is the victim, first of aristocratic worldlings and finally of the masses, who begin by being seduced and end in revolt.⁵



Towards the end of the Middle Ages, a gradual decline, not in mental acuity, but in intellectuality, may be observed with the appearance of nominalism. Generally speaking, nominalism introduces a scission between creation and the Divine order, and thus all but eliminates the Divine immanence in creation and thereby the vision of the essential reality of all beings and things in the Divine Unity. Nominalism rejects the notion

that the qualities which the mind can abstract from existing things are objectively real, independently of their existence as general ideas in individual minds. These qualities, which are the essential reality of things, constitute the symbolism—and therefore the true meaning—of all that exists. Nominalism fosters a mentality that will eventually lead to a rejection of the Divine Archetypes or “Ideas”, which thereby entails a denaturing of the key metaphysical idea of the *Logos*, so crucial to the Christian Revelation, which must affirm the truth that all positive existing things are a sort of reflection of their prototypes in the Divine Intellect, the Word, “by which all things were made”.

The important thing to grasp is that if the reality of the essences of things is rejected, there is a passage away from objective and certain knowledge furnished by the light of a faculty superior to the individual—by the “true Light that lighteth every man”—acting in concert with the mind’s rational faculty, to a purely individual and thus subjective state of knowledge limited to the functioning of the discursive mental faculties alone. Truth gets progressively “subjectivized”, or “individualized”, in this way and, inevitably, increasingly relativized. Intelligence thus gets limited practically to the plane of existence of individual phenomena—the plane of appearances only—and blocked from all “vertical” intuition penetrating and transcending their plane of existence and relaying all things back to their essences in the Divine Unity. Thus, European thought passes to philosophizing with the use of the rational faculty alone, without data furnished either by the spiritual Intellect (*Nous*) or by Revelation—and in this it harkens back, as Schuon mentioned, to Protagoras and the Sophists, as well as to such materialists as Epicurus and Lucretius. It is a manifestation of the individualism which is one of the hallmarks of the anti-traditional spirit.

Henceforth there was only “profane” philosophy and “profane” science, in other words, the negation of true intel-

lectuality, the limitation of knowledge to its lowest order, namely, the empirical and analytical study of facts divorced from [metaphysical, hence universal] principles, a dispersion in an indefinite multitude of insignificant details, and the accumulation of unfounded and mutually destructive hypotheses and of fragmentary views leading to nothing other than those practical applications that constitute the sole real superiority of modern civilization—a scarcely enviable superiority, moreover, which, by stifling every other preoccupation, has given the present civilization the purely material character that makes of it a veritable monstrosity... in attempting to reduce everything to the stature of man taken as an end in himself, modern civilization has sunk stage by stage to the level of his lowest elements and aims at little more than satisfying the needs inherent in the material side of his nature, an aim which is, in any case, quite illusory, as it continually creates more artificial wants than it can ever hope to satisfy.⁶

Metaphysically, the world exists thanks to its participation in the archetypes or essences in the Universal Intellect which is the *Logos*, by which “all things were made” (John 1). It is important to understand that these essences are not distinct substances, and hence are not existent as such in the universe. One must not confuse, as did the nominalists, the archetype or divine “idea” with its reflection in the mind as a general idea. Obviously, as mental forms these general ideas are merely abstractions from particulars perceived in the world. However, the abstraction necessarily presupposes the objective reality of the essence which makes possible the mental operation; and more profoundly, if the general idea did not correspond to the more than phenomenal reality of the essence or archetypal “Idea” comprised in the *Logos*, the abstraction would not correspond to objective truth, or, in other words, to knowledge. To deny this amounts to denying the possibility of knowledge. If it be objected that these

essences are “unknowable” as such, the reply is that, precisely, they are knowable only in and by the spiritual faculty, the *Nous*. Where there is no intellectual intuition there is no knowledge of the archetypal essences of things, no “vertical” grasp of the roots of things in the Divine order.⁷

The Archetypes are reflected in the things and beings of this world as the formative essences which confer on existing things their qualitative distinctiveness. In other words, “what” something is is due to its formal cause or formative essence, which, to repeat, does not exist as such in isolation in the world; rather, the phenomenal existence of a thing is due to the union of the formative cause or essence with the receptive substantial or potential pole, its *materia*, at a given degree of existence. A very evocative symbolism of this is furnished by the crafts. A potter, for example, has an idea for the design of a pot; the mass of formless clay will be the matter that will embody his model. The resulting pot is thus a union of the potter’s model and the material substance of clay. The existence of the pot represents the plane of creation, whereas the potter, the bearer of the formative cause of his idea, represents the *Logos*, the Word of God or the Spirit. It is the agency of the potter that will shape the clay in accordance with the idea, just as it is the agency of the *Logos* which is the “shaper” of the worlds in accordance with the Ideas or Archetypes in pure Being. It may be said that the formative idea is “above” the existence of the pot, and the unformed clay stands “below” the plane of the manifestation of the pot. These two poles, symbolically masculine and feminine, are like the indivisible “two hands” of the *Logos*. Corresponding to these in the Bible are the “spirit of God” and the “waters”. Their conjunction reveals or manifests the cosmos.

This polarization may be discerned even *in Divinis*, beginning with the intrinsic and indivisible aspects “Necessity” and “Freedom” in the Essence itself, as relating respectively to Its absoluteness and Its infinitude. And creative Being, which is

the “Uncreated Word”, seen “from below” is polarized into the Divine Intellect and the Divine Substance, whose “product” is the “created” Word or the cosmic *Logos*, the Center and efficient cause of the universe; the *Logos* in turn is polarized into an active and a passive pole, as mentioned before, namely the Universal Intellect and the Universal Substance. We shall have more to say about these two degrees of the Divine Word, the ontological and the cosmic, further ahead.

For nominalism, only particulars in the world are real: the essences are no more than mental forms, abstractions from the particulars. Thus, in such a perspective there is no such thing as the objectively real nature of a kind or a species—that of the human being, for example. This makes the notion of reliable knowledge very problematical outside mere sense perception and general conclusions derived from it. Without reference to the formative essences of things, there is no possibility of getting beyond their mere appearance and workings—precisely the limiting condition needed for the entire modern enterprise.

Although nominalists—or “conceptualists”—such as Ockham did not do away entirely with “formal causes” and from the understanding that it is by means of the incorruptible intellectual soul that we understand, the nominalist tendency nonetheless comprises an imperfect or incomplete understanding of the *Nous*. Intelligence gets cut off from an effective continuity with its luminous divine root, the “true Light” of the *Logos*—which contains the essences—and therewith from the possibility of contemplative supra-sensual and supra-mental knowledge. At the same time, denial of the objective reality of the essences amounts to removing the sacral quality from the cosmos and its creatures as Divine manifestations, since the essences of their forms are traceable back to their Origin in the Divine Word. Without the double amputation of the denial of the objective reality of the formative essences of things and of

the reality of the supra-individual faculty of the Intellect, the modern world would not be possible.

The nominalists accused the Scholastics of rationalizing God, and instead posited what amounts to a subjectivized and anthropomorphized notion of God. This they accomplished by insisting on the primacy of the divine Will over the Divine Intelligence, thereby giving priority to the Divine Freedom over the Divine Necessity, rather than understanding them as complementary perfections. As for knowledge of God, for the nominalists it is only faith in Revelation that gives such knowledge. The world cannot give it, nor is there an Intellect in which principial truths are inherent. The universe is such as it is because God willed it to be that way, and He could have willed it to be some other way. Moreover, since things have no shared essences, and since God could have arbitrarily instituted a different sort of causality had He so willed, it follows that there can be no certain knowledge, but only probable knowledge. Morality is reduced to registering Divine commands, and, moreover, had God so willed He could have made what we conceive as hateful lovable, and what is forbidden allowed. This introduces into the plane of morality an element of unintelligibility and even monstrousness, whereas according to the perennial wisdom, God is the supreme Good, and hence there is intrinsic morality, which is the reflection of the Good in the profound nature of the human being as “made in the image of God”.

All this leads to a type of fanaticism which is called *fideism*. It is a kind of human disequilibrium and abnormality resulting precisely from the denial of the spiritual and extra-cosmic dimension of intelligence, and from the entry of a passional and sentimental element, or bias, into the domain of intellectuality. In Christian terms, it represents an extreme consequence in the sphere of religion of the Fall of man from original perfection and completeness “made in the image of God”. The “image of God” implies above all the presence

of the spiritual Intellect, and the original human perfection implies the full and unobstructed access to it. Moreover, all too common in fideist climates is the error of wishing to reduce intelligence to the purely “natural” level, so as to favor faith in Revelation alone, thus ignoring that intelligence by its very nature comprises a supernatural root and essence, to which the notions of the Absolute and absoluteness bear witness, and which are the basis of a spirituality based on metaphysical certitudes.

Evidently, individualism can arise without the influence of the specific philosophical phenomenon of nominalism. Whenever man’s spiritual or intellectual center, the Intellect, is denied or lost sight of, individualism in one form or another is the inevitable consequence. Man then becomes more or less exclusively identified with the earthly individual outer man, unaware of the deepest roots of his subjectivity in the *Logos*, and hence also of being the microcosmic summary of the total macrocosm, and therefore of being *pontifex*. The phenomenal particular, the earthly and mortal individual, alone is henceforth considered real, and the profound link with his immortal spiritual Center is covered over, and man soon becomes capable only of empirical knowledge. In a word, nominalism does away with what Schuon terms “the metaphysical transparency of phenomena”, including above all the metaphysical significance of humanity. The human state is a central state, the direct image of the cosmic Axis which is the Word, and that is why man can conceive of God, the absolutely Real, and that is why, with the grace of God, man can aspire to the Intellect’s reintegrating awareness of his pretemporal state in the Divine Unity, transcending the cosmic illusion.

Humanity is essentially a Divine Idea, and this essence or archetype is a concrete reality far more real than the individual earthly men, who are its temporary projections and embodiments. The unity of humanity is in the universal reality

of the Word—“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You” (John 17:21). It is the awareness of this essential and sacred Unity in the Divine which is the basis of all normal social structures.



The “individualization” of God consequent upon nominalism means that intellectuality becomes almost irrelevant in religion. The entire accent is on the individual’s faith resting largely on emotional factors, as in the Protestant reaction,⁸ and this reduction in turn opens the door to the modernist rejection of faith on purely empirical “evidential” grounds. Moreover, in nominalism, freedom is practically conflated with the arbitrary, rather than being understood as an essence, a divine perfection. As a result, the conception of Divinity is disfigured into a more or less unknowable and fearful Personage—a being, rather than pure Being—so that the entire accent is on more or less arbitrary Divine Commands rather than on the intelligible beauty and goodness of the Divine Qualities. This favors the development of the sentimentalism and moralism typical of today’s religious conceptions, offering barely anything to the intelligence.

Another development from nominalism was an excessively exteriorized, and thus superficial, mental activity favoring the exercise of the inventive powers of the mind and the mathematical sciences, but scarcely able to proceed in contemplative depth; the essences of things are rejected, and only their mental abstractions are considered real; thus words no longer refer to ideas insofar as they are connected to the objective reality of the essences. And this in turn will mean that things are no longer viewed in relation to their formal and final causes—that is, in relation to their true essence and reason for being. Now, modern science precisely ignores these capital factors of causality. Without them there is no metaphysical connection between the world and its originating and sustaining Princip-

ial order, and the result is the disappearance of all meaning from the world and from life in the world. To summarize: the removal of intelligence, and above all of Divine Intelligence, from one's worldview is essentially nihilistic and eventually catastrophic.

Returning briefly to the sphere of society and politics, prior to the existence of the modern world, it was generally considered that a normal, fully legitimate, and specifically human society had as its governing center and framework a sacred tradition, which effectively attached it to immutable principles, and thus to the Divine order. Indeed, the whole point of religion is to attach man effectively to this order. In his book *Sacred Royalty*, the scholar Jean Hanin points out that traditional society and political power rest on a triple foundation: metaphysical and religious, social, and cosmological. The metaphysical doctrine, which is to say the principal and universal truths, expressed in a certain symbolical language, are the basis of everything in an integral traditional civilization, hence social, political and cosmological thought is always attached to it and proceeds from it as applications. Essentially, the governing metaphysical idea makes it clear that the creation is a manifestation of the supreme Divine Principle [Gen. 1:1 & John 1:3] and absolutely depends upon it for its very existence at every moment. In metaphysical terms, first there is self-evident and self-existent eternal Being, and then, entirely dependent upon it, there is universal Existence, the "created" or manifested universe. Being is the sphere of the immutable and eternal, while Existence is the sphere of becoming. Becoming is dependent upon Being—the changeful is dependent on the Changeless. Therefore, as a primary consequence, the spiritual, which is the immediate manifestation of the Changeless Principial or Divine order, is superior to the temporal and material order. In Christianity, this relationship was expressed in the doctrine of the "Two Swords", which refers to the spiritual and temporal powers governing society. According to it, the

temporal power of the king and his government depend for their full legitimacy upon their consecration by the spiritual authority. The first and foremost duty of the temporal power is to preserve justice and order within its society for the sake of its spiritual and contemplative life above all, and to defend the realm from all threats to the traditional sacred order. It is the spiritual tradition, comprising a revelation as its substance and core, that legitimizes a society and consecrates its government, and transmits its vivifying and stabilizing spiritual influence, while in turn, the temporal power submits to the divine law and exercises justice and magnanimity. Such is the traditional conception and ideal. In Christendom, it is of course Christ who is the celestial prototype of the Two Swords, since the *Logos*, incarnated by Christ, is the source of both spiritual authority and temporal power. Christ is not only the Revelation, the saving and illuminating Redemption, but also the universal King, namely the *Logos*. Legitimate authority originates not in the human sphere, but has its archetype and source of legitimacy from On High; just as Christ informed Pilate that he would have no authority had it not been bestowed by God as its principle. Similarly, the idea that the things of Caesar pertain to Caesar means that normally society is subject to a twofold authority, which is a hierarchical unity. The idea is to make the distinction, not to assert the independence of the one from the other, which is rather a modern conception of political power and one that is anti-traditional. There is no traditional society that does not exhibit in some fashion this two-fold hierarchy which is the mirror of the harmonious relationship between Heaven and Earth.

In the sphere of politics, the normal equilibrium is disturbed whenever the authorities overstep their respective legitimate functions. The spiritual power intrudes in the sphere of the temporal, or else the temporal power seeks to be autonomous and rebels against the legitimate authority of the spiritual power, thereby improperly absolutizing itself.

Once rebellion is initiated it is difficult to re-establish the normal hierarchy, since such a rebellion usually signals a loss of understanding of the principles underlying its own tradition and its proper function within it. The rebellion, if successful, leads inevitably and eventually to the destruction of the royal power itself, and therein lies the origin of purely secular regimes and the power of the autonomous state that lacks any real and effective connection to the Divine order.⁹



Let us turn now to the key figure involved in the intellectual changes which took place in the West during the Enlightenment, and which make the mentality recognizably modern. This figure is René Descartes, and in particular his work *Discourse on Method*.

Descartes wishes to skirt all skepticism and start from zero. Normally, human beings take the reality of their empirical experience as a given. They do not worry whether the sun, the moon, and the stars, the earth and its creatures, including themselves and their loved ones, are real or not. And they assume that what they perceive is a providential order. All Scripture similarly takes for granted that the God-created cosmos exists, and bases its language and above all its symbolism on the way that the world of nature actually and naturally appears to man in his day to day concrete experience—not as it appears through a telescope or a microscope. It is true that metaphysical science properly situates the reality of human experience of the world in the hierarchy of being, but it does not outright deny it. Descartes, however, wished to throw all this into doubt, and to doubt even his doubt. This is considered an act of intellectual heroism, whereas it is nothing of the kind. A critical sense, to be sure, can be a good thing, but its abuse can also lead to a solution that is far worse than the imagined problem.