

The Critique of Modernism

scientism, evolutionism, psychologism and humanism

There can be no triumph over error through the sacrifice of any of the rights of truth

*St Iranaeus*¹

That which is lacking in the present world is a profound knowledge of the nature of things; the fundamental truths are always there, but they do not impose themselves because they cannot impose themselves on those unwilling to listen

*Frithjof Schuon*²

Our ignorance of the few things that matter is as prodigious as our knowledge of trivialities

*Gai Eaton*³

...if you ever really enter into this other world... you may never again be contented with what you have been accustomed to think of as "progress" and "civilisation"

*Ananda Coomaraswamy*⁴

Modernism: this term we may loosely define as the prevalent assumptions, values and attitudes of a world-view fashioned by the most pervasive intellectual and moral influences of recent European history, an outlook in conformity with the *Zeitgeist* of the times. One might classify the constituents of modernism under any number of different schema. Lord Northbourne typifies modernism as "anti-traditional, progressive, humanist, rationalist, materialist, experimental, individualist, egalitarian, free-thinking and intensely sentimental".⁵ S.H. Nasr gathers these tendencies together under four general marks of modern thought: anthropomorphism (and by extension, secularism); evolutionist progressivism; the absence of any sense of the sacred; an unrelieved ignorance of metaphysical principles.⁶ "Modernism" then, is a portmanteau word.⁷ We shall, in this part of our inquiry, uncover some of the significances it carries and examine these from a traditionalist point of view.

For the traditionalists modernism is nothing less than a spiritual disease which continues to spread like a plague across the globe, decimating traditional cultures wherever they are still to be found. Although its historical origins are European, modernism is now tied to no specific area or civilisation. Its symptoms can be detected in a wide assortment of inter-related "mind sets" and "-isms", sometimes involved in cooperative co-existence, sometimes engaged in apparent antagonisms but always united by the same underlying principles. Scientism, rationalism, relativism, materialism, positivism, empiricism, psychologism, individualism, humanism, existentialism: these are some of the prime follies of modernist thought. The pedigree of this family of ideas can be traced back through a series of intellectual and cultural upheavals in European history and to certain vulnerabilities in Christian civilisation which left it exposed to the subversions of a profane science.⁸ The Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment were all incubators of ideas and values which first ravaged Christendom and then spread throughout the world like so many bacilli. Behind the somewhat bizarre array of ideologies which have proliferated in the last few centuries the traditionalists discern a growing and persistent ignorance concerning ultimate realities and an indifference, if not always an overt hostility, to the eternal verities conveyed by tradition.

In books like *The Reign of Quantity* and *The Crisis of the Modern World* René Guénon detailed an unsparing critique of the philosophical foundations of modernism. Coomaraswamy's work, be it on art or on philosophy and metaphysics, repeatedly reminds us of the chasm which separates normal civilisations from the absurdities and anomalies of our own times. In most of Schuon's work the explication of metaphysics and the penetration of religious forms remains his central purpose; censures of modernism, tangential to this purpose, tend to be launched through a series of asides. In three works, *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, *Logic and Transcendence* and *To Have a Center*, and in several essays, Schuon has dealt more explicitly and in magisterial fashion with some of the pretensions of the modernist *weltanschauung*.⁹ His work as a whole represents an unyielding resistance to modernism and an even more damaging critique than that found in Guénon's frontal assaults.

The scope of the present work precludes any comprehensive rehearsal here of the traditionalist critique of modernism, on either the principial or the phenomenal level. We have already encountered some of the specific elements in the traditionalist indictment, and a good deal more can be inferred from the explanation of traditionalist principles rehearsed earlier. Rather than striving for any kind of inclusive treatment we shall isolate a few strands in the skein of modernism and scrutinise them from a traditionalist viewpoint. After some introductory remarks about scientism and its false claims to "objectivity" we shall turn to three especially insidious manifestations of modernism: evolutionism, psychologism and humanism. We shall spend a good deal of time on the first of these as this is one of the most destructive and typical of modern illusions. However, even here a few well-aimed shafts will have to suffice to indicate the lines along which a full-scale devaluation of evolutionism might be mounted. In the next chapter the comparison of traditionalism with various contemporary counterfeit forms of spirituality and a discussion of some divergent views of the perennial philosophy will give the traditionalist critique of modernism more weight and specificity.

It has become increasingly clear, to some thinkers at least, that modern European science is not simply a disinterested and, as it were, a detached and "objective" mode of inquiry into the material world; it is an aggregate of disciplines anchored in a bed of very specific and culture-bound assumptions about the nature of reality and about the proper means whereby it might be explored, explained and controlled. It is, in fact, impossible to separate the methodologies of modern science from their ideological base. This base we can signal by the term "scientism". Perhaps the central plank in the scientistic platform is the assumption that modern science contains within itself the necessary and sufficient means for any inquiry into the material world and that it can and should be an autonomous and self-validating pursuit answerable to nothing outside itself. Science and scientism are, if still distinct at all, certainly not separable in the modern context. This is an important preliminary point in protecting any debate about modern science from the rather transparent tactics used by some of its apologists.

The scientistic ideology does not hold the intellectual field unchallenged but few would dispute that it is the key to post-medieval European thought. Bacon, Galileo, Copernicus, Descartes, Newton, Locke, Voltaire, Darwin, Freud, Einstein - these are some of the luminaries of modernist thought, each making a seminal contribution to the triumph of scientism. Modern science is flanked on one side by philosophical empiricism which provides its intellectual rationale, and by technology and industry on the other, a field for its applications.¹⁰ It is rational, analytical and empirical in its procedures, materialistic and quantitative in its object, and utilitarian in application. By its very nature modern science is thus unable to apprehend or accommodate any realities of a suprasensorial order. Science becomes scientism when it refuses to acknowledge the limits of its competence, denies the authority of any sources which lie outside its ambit, and lays claim, at least in principle, to a

comprehensive validity as if it could explain no matter what, and "as if it were not contradictory to lay claim to totality on an empirical basis".¹¹ As to the much vaunted empiricism of modern science Schuon remarks, "there is no worse confession of intellectual impotence than to boast of a line of thought because of its attachment to experiment and disdain for principles and speculations".¹² Schuon states the nub of the case against modern science directly:

...modern science is a totalitarian rationalism that eliminates both Revelation and Intellect, and at the same time a totalitarian materialism that ignores the metaphysical relativity - and therewith the impermanence - of matter and the world. It does not know that the supra-sensible, situated as it is beyond space and time, is the concrete principle of the world, and consequently that it is also at the origin of that contingent and changeable coagulation we call "matter". A science that is called "exact" is in fact an "intelligence without wisdom", just as post-scholastic philosophy is inversely a "wisdom without intelligence".¹³

Critiques of scientism are much in vogue these days both from within the scientific community and from without. Scientists and others are increasingly becoming aware of the dangers of an ideology of science which is inadequate. The insecure philosophical foundations of modern science, its epistemological ambiguities, its inability to accommodate its own findings within the Cartesian-Newtonian frame, the consequences of a Faustian pursuit of knowledge and power, the diabolical applications of science in the military industry, the dehumanising reductionisms of the behavioural sciences - all of these have come under attack in recent times. Recent "discoveries" by physicists and the paradoxes of quantum theory throw conventional assumptions about time, space and matter into disarray: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle cuts the ground from under the "objectivity" on which science has so much prided itself; mechanistic conceptions and indeed the very language of a materialist science, are found to be useless in the face of bewildering phenomena to which it has until now been blind.¹⁴ Everywhere cracks are appearing in the scientific edifice.

Social commentators have become more alert to the dangers of this rationalist-materialist totalitarianism and its attendant technology. We see that rationality has been allowed to become man's definition instead of his tool. We sense that the disfigurement of the environment mirrors our internal state, that the ecological crisis is, at root, a spiritual crisis which no amount of science and technology can, of itself, remedy.¹⁵ We know the truth of Victor Frankl's claim that,

The true nihilism of today is reductionism... Contemporary nihilism no longer brandishes the word nothingness; today nihilism is camouflaged as *nothing-but-ness*. Human phenomena are thus turned into mere epiphenomena.¹⁶

We are awakening to the consequences of a science which is answerable to nothing but itself. Mary Shelley's nightmare vision in *Frankenstein* becomes a paradigm for our times. Commentators like Huston Smith, Theodore Roszak, E.F. Schumacher, R.D. Laing, Michael Polanyi, Jacob Needleman, Mircea Eliade and Bryan Appleyard awaken us to the provincialism of modern science and to the dangers of "Single Vision".¹⁷

The traditionalist critique subsumes many of the criticisms of modern science and scientism made by figures such as the ones just mentioned. What marks the traditionalist

position off from other animadversions of science is that the traditionalists do not appeal to some kind of vague humanism nor do they entertain a vision of a "reformed" science. Their impeachment of modern science is authorised by a set of clearly articulated metaphysical principles and by the truths and values enshrined in religious traditions.

Much of the traditionalist repudiation of modern science is predicated on the distinction we have already met in Guénon's work. We can recall it through Whitall Perry's words:

Traditional learning is basically qualitative and synthetic, concerned with essences, principles and realities behind phenomena; its fruits are integration, composition and unity. Profane academic learning - whether in the arts or sciences - is quantitative and analytical by tendency, concerned with appearances, forces and material properties; its nature is to criticize and to decompose; it works by fragmentation.¹⁸

Furthermore, traditional learning proceeds within a larger framework, that of religious values and of cosmological and metaphysical principles derived from Revelation and gnosis. Modern science, by contrast, asserts a Promethean autonomy and scorns all other avenues of knowledge. This is the crux of the problem. Here we shall address two issues: the cleavage between religion and science; and the epistemological limits of a materialistic science.

It is nowadays a commonplace that many of the ills of our time stem from the rift between "faith" and "science" but few people have suggested any convincing means of reconciling the two. Certainly the effusions and anxious compromises of the liberal theologians and "demythologizers" are of no help, marking little more than a thinly-disguised and often self-deceiving capitulation of religion to science. As Schuon remarks,

...the tragic impasse reached by the modern mind results from the fact that most men are incapable of grasping the *compatibility* between the symbolic expressions of tradition and the material discoveries established by modern science.¹⁹

This is a vital point. It is important to understand that the disapprobations of the traditionalists do not fall on the findings of science as such - they are not obscurantists - but on the absence of such principles as would situate these discoveries in a context which could preserve the incomparably more important truths enshrined in tradition. A concrete example will give the point more weight:

According to the observations of experimental science, the blue sky which stretches above us is not a world of bliss, but an optical illusion due to the refraction of light by the atmosphere and from this point of view it is obviously right to maintain that the home of the blessed does not lie up there. Nevertheless it would be a great mistake to assert that the association of ideas between the visible heavens and the celestial Paradise does not arise from the nature of things, but rather from ignorance and ingenuousness mixed with imagination and sentimentality; for the blue sky is a direct and therefore adequate symbol of the higher and supersensory degrees of Existence; it is indeed a distant reverberation of those degrees and it is *necessarily* so since it is truly a symbol consecrated by the Sacred Scriptures and by the unanimous intuition of peoples...The fact that the symbol itself may be no more than an optical illusion in no way impairs its precision or efficacy, for all appearances, including those of space and of the galaxies, are strictly speaking only illusions created by relativity.²⁰

In the light of this kind of metaphysical understanding many of the apparent contradictions between "science" and "religion" simply evaporate. It is not necessary, to say the least, to throw religious beliefs on the scrapheap because they are "disproven" by modern science;

nor is it necessary to gainsay such facts as modern science does uncover, provided always that what science presents as facts are so indeed and not merely precarious hypotheses.

No one will deny that, from one point of view, the earth is not the centre of the solar system; this is no reason for jettisoning the more important truth which was carried by the geocentric picture of the universe.²¹ (A heliocentric cosmology could also have been the vehicle for the same truth.²²) Indeed, without the protective truths of traditional symbolisms such material discoveries as do issue from a profane science are likely to be more or less useless or positively destructive. Another example: it is preferable to believe that God created the world in six days and that heaven lies in the skies above the flat surface of the earth than it is to know precisely the distance from one nebula to another whilst forgetting the truth embodied in this symbolism, namely that all phenomena depend on a higher Reality which determines us and gives our human existence meaning and purpose.²³ A materially inaccurate but symbolically rich view is always preferable to the reign of brute fact.

Though modern science has doubtless revealed much material information that was previously unknown it has also supplanted a knowledge which infinitely outreaches it. We see the fruits of this tendency in the complacencies and condescensions of those scientists who like to suppose that we have "outgrown" the "superstitions" of our ancestors. Here is a random example from a prestigious contemporary scientist:

I myself, like many scientists, believe that the soul is imaginary and that what we call our mind is simply a way of talking about the function of our brains... Once one has become adjusted to the ideas that we are here because we have evolved from simple chemical compounds by a process of natural selection, it is remarkable how many of the problems of the modern world take on a completely new light.²⁴

Here indeed is an "intelligence without wisdom" or what Roszak calls a "well-informed foolishness". This kind of materialism is presently "the reigning orthodoxy among philosophers of the mind".²⁵

In falling under the tyranny of a fragmentary, materialistic and quantitative outlook modern science is irremediably limited by its epistemological base. The apparent "impersonality" and "objectivity" of modern science should not for a moment blind us to the fact that it is and must be anthropomorphic in its foundations. No matter how inhuman may be its depictions of both man and the universe it remains true that "...the criteria and instruments which determine this science are merely and purely human. It is the human reason and the human senses which determine modern science."²⁶ Of the realities to which faith, Revelation and intellection give access modern science knows and can know absolutely nothing. As Schuon observes

There is scarcely a more desperately vain or naïve illusion - far more naïve than is Aristotelian astronomy! - than to believe that modern science, in its vertiginous course towards the "infinitely small" and the "infinitely great", will end up by rejoining religious and metaphysical truths and doctrines.²⁷

The ways in which the triumph of scientism has contributed to man's dehumanisation have been written about a good deal in recent years. It matters not a jot how quick

contemporary scientists now are to disown discredited "facts" which stood between man and any true self-awareness - the mechanistic theories of the seventeenth century for instance - on the grounds that these were, after all, only provisional hypotheses which a more "humane" scientific vision can now abandon. The simple fact is that modern science cannot be "humanised" or "reformed" from within itself because it is built on premises which are both inadequate and inhuman, not to say immoral. (To suggest that there is a contradiction between the fact that science is purely anthropomorphic and that it is inhuman betokens a failure to understand the issue: it is inhuman precisely because it is exclusively anthropomorphic. The same can be said of all the philosophies of "humanism": by denying the transcendent dimension of man they betray him.)

By now it should be clear enough why it is a dangerous prejudice to believe that a materialistic science is harmless enough if it be confined to its own domain - the material world. This realm does not exist *in vacuo* and to pretend that it does only breeds trouble, as the history of modern science so convincingly demonstrates. Titus Burckhardt, one of the most authoritative traditionalists in this field, exposes some of the issues involved here in writing

...modern science displays a certain number of fissures that are not only due to the fact that the world of phenomena is indefinite and that therefore no science could come to the end of it; those fissures derive especially from a systematic ignorance of all the noncorporeal dimensions of reality. They manifest themselves right down to the foundations of modern science, and in domains as seemingly "exact" as that of physics; they become gaping cracks when one turns to the disciplines connected with the study of the forms of life, not to mention psychology, where an empiricism that is relatively valid in the physical order encroaches strangely upon a foreign field. These fissures, which do not affect only the theoretical realm, are far from harmless; they represent, on the contrary, in their technical consequences, so many seeds of catastrophe.²⁸

These fissures might be probed at some length. However, enough has been said to provide a framework within which we can examine two manifestations of the scientific spirit, evolutionism and psychologism. Among the reasons why these two have been chosen are the fact that they each have a tenacious grip on the mentality of most Europeans and they have been especially malignant in their effects on the study of religion.

Evolutionism is one of the most beguiling and most treacherous of scientific ideologies. For the moment it may be defined as the concurrence of certain palaeontological and biological facts, assumptions and speculations wedded to a cluster of philosophical and socio-political ideas and values. Contemporary evolutionism is far more deep-seated than a mere lingering residue of the crude social Darwinism promulgated by Herbert Spencer and others. Many people are now sensitive to the pitfalls of extrapolating from the biological to the social plane although there are still a host of "naked ape" theories, supported by the pseudo-science of ethology, which fly in the face of any scientific prudence - the theories of Konrad Lorenz, Robert Ardrey and Desmond Morris are of this ilk.²⁹ No, the roots of the problem strike much deeper than this: the biological theory itself,

one of the props of modern science, is riddled with contradictions, anomalies, absurdities and lacunae.

Before turning to the traditionalist dissent a couple of preliminary points are in order. Evolutionism is under attack from several directions. Some critics take their stand on entirely the wrong ground and not all critiques carry the same authority although they do share the basic intuition that evolutionism is, in the words of one of its critics, "a hoax". We shall have to take care to maintain several crucial distinctions both between the biological hypothesis and the social ideology of evolutionism, and between well-attested scientific facts and the extravagant interpretations to which they have sometimes been turned. Michael Negus expresses the traditionalist viewpoint when issuing the following caution:

There is a need to avoid two errors: the first is the error of rejecting adequately established scientific fact, eg. the age of the earth or the space-time dimensions of the universe. This is the trap into which the biblical fundamentalists fall. The second error is that of accepting pseudo-doctrines like evolutionary progress with all its implications and thereby subverting Tradition. This is the trap into which the followers of Teilhard de Chardin fall.³⁰

The balance, from a traditionalist perspective, lies in first of all acknowledging the supremacy of traditional doctrines over any profane science whatsoever but at the same time accepting, within appropriate limits, such facts as scientific inquiry has uncovered even though these often have no relevance to man's spiritual destiny.³¹ The denial of such facts only taints legitimate opposition to evolutionism with the suspicion of crankiness and obscurantism. It is crucial not to confuse the traditionalist position with a literalist fundamentalism which goes on insisting, in the face of incontrovertible evidence, that the earth is only a few thousand years old or that all life was created in a few days.³² No traditionalist wishes to evade or cover up scientific discoveries but only to separate fact from fiction and to situate the former in a framework which allows of an adequate interpretation.

The traditionalists repudiate both the biological hypothesis and the social ideology of evolutionism. We shall take the biological theory first. Amongst the traditionalists, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings and Michael Negus have taken issue with the theory on purely scientific grounds. Such objections by no means exhaust the case but they are an important component of it. These traditionalists point to the growing body of literature by reputable scientists - palaeontologists, botanists, zoologists, geneticists and others - which throws many of the central tenets in the Darwinian hypothesis into very serious question. Scientific critiques of evolutionary theory by men like Douglas Dewar, Evan Shute, Guiseppi Sermonti, Roberto Fondi and L. Bournoure proceed through the premises and methodologies of modern science itself; the theory is being white-anted from within.³³ The debate hinges on some very complex biological and palaeontological evidence which cannot be reviewed here. Rather, we shall mention a few lines of approach taken by some of the scientific critics of the biological theory. We shall consider three aspects of the theory that have been assailed by traditionalists and scientists alike: the evolutionary conception of life's beginnings, the transformationist thesis of "mega-evolution" whereby one species evolves into another, and the notion of man's primate ancestry. We shall, for the moment, consider these matters from a material and logical point of view.

The conception of life's beginnings and its subsequent development as presented by the evolutionists is quite illogical and defies all common sense. A contemporary psychiatrist has this to say:

If we present, for the sake of argument, the theory of evolution in a most scientific formulation we have to say something like this: "At a certain moment of time the temperature of the earth was such that it became most favourable for the aggregation of carbon atoms and oxygen with the nitrogen-hydrogen combination, and that from random occurrences of large clusters of molecules occurred which were most favourably structured for the coming about of life, and from that point it went on through vast stretches of time, until through processes of natural selection a being finally occurred which is capable of choosing love over hate, and justice over injustice, of writing poetry like that of Dante, composing music like that of Mozart, and making drawings like those of Leonardo." Of course, such a view of cosmogenesis is crazy. And I do not mean crazy in the sense of slangy invective but rather in the technical meaning of psychotic. Indeed such a view has much in common with certain aspects of schizophrenic thinking.³⁴

Now, this passage itself is by no means beyond criticism but it does expose the fundamental illogic of the evolutionist conception. There is no empirical method of either verifying or falsifying the hypothesis outlined above: we are then, from a scientific point of view, thrown back onto the resources of logic and commonsense. Can life emerge from inert matter? Can consciousness develop from non-consciousness? Can Shakespeare derive, in any amount of time, from a primeval algal slime? Can the effect be divorced from its cause? Wherein lies the cause of life? These are questions to which the evolutionist response will seem plausible only to those already indoctrinated into accepting the hypothesis as established fact - and this is only the beginning of the embarrassment to which evolutionism can be subjected.

A keystone in the evolutionary theory is the notion that one species can, over time, be transformed into another. This process we shall call mega-evolution. The testimony of many reputable scientists on this subject calls for our attention. Martin Lings, drawing on the work of Evan Shute, points out that,

The only evolution that has been scientifically attested is on a very small scale and within narrow limits. To conclude from this "micro-evolution", which no one contests, that there could be such a thing as "mega-evolution" - that for example, the class of birds could have evolved from the class of reptiles - is not merely conjecture but perverse conjecture... micro-evolution demonstrates the presence in nature of all sorts of unseen barriers that ensure the stability of the various classes and orders of animals and plants and that invariably cause transformation, when it has run its little course, to come to a dead-end.³⁵

Jean Rostand, the French biologist:

The world postulated by transformism is a fairy world, phantasmagoric, surrealistic. The chief point, to which one always returns, is that we have never been present at one authentic phenomenon of evolution...we keep the impression that nature today has nothing to offer that might be capable of reducing our embarrassment before the genuinely organic metamorphosis implied in the transformist thesis.³⁶

Evan Shute:

Mega-evolution is really a philosophy dating from the days of biological ignorance; it was a philosophic synthesis built up in a biological kindergarten.³⁷

Lemoine and other European scientists have shown how the palaeontological record on which the evolutionists base their arguments in fact contradicts the transformist hypothesis.³⁸ The geological record shows, for example, the abrupt appearance of whole new species which flatly contradicts the conventional scenario of adaptation and natural selection. Not all evolutionists have been able to turn a blind eye to this evidence and so, rather than questioning the whole theory, have developed new hypotheses which are somehow assimilated into the Darwinian framework. Having scorned the idea of the Creator some evolutionists now find themselves endowing nature itself with powers of instantaneous creation - thus we have, for example, Schindewolf's theory of "explosive evolution" or Severtzoff and Zeuner's theory of "aramorphosis", or again the theory of "quanta of evolution" or "tachygenesis",³⁹ or recent "neo-Darwinian" speculations about "organicistic revolutions".⁴⁰ All of these theories involve what is, from an empirical viewpoint, so much hocus-pocus which is only concealed by the technical jargon which insulates these speculations from the inquiries of any lay person trying to follow the logic of the argument.⁴¹

The mega-evolution and transformist thesis is, of course, the platform for the idea that there is an essential continuity between man and the animals and that *homo sapiens* is a highly-evolved primate. This is open to question from any number of angles and we shall turn to some of these presently. For the moment we shall focus on one phenomenon only: man's ability to create an extraordinary number of artefacts. Now, according to the Darwinian theory of natural selection and adaptation this skill must evolve in response to environmental pressures; it represents an adaptation necessary for survival. In most species we find that an animal has only "evolved" the skills necessary to manufacture one artefact - say a nest in the case of a bird. (We will leave aside for now the awkward fact that where evidence is available it suggests that the species in question appeared with this skill ready-made: spiders, for example, were, as far as we can tell, always able to spin webs. There is not an iota of evidence to suggest that this "adaptation" "evolved" over a period of time.⁴²) In the case of man we are asked to swallow the same explanation for the fact that he is capable of making not one or even half-dozen different artefacts but hundreds of thousands if not millions. Wherein is the explanation of this singularity? Howbeit that man alone can evolve these skills in what, from a geological point of view, must have been a minuscule period of time in man's prehistory? The radical disjunction between man's unprecedented cultural achievements and the theory of adaptation and natural selection is one that no evolutionist has been able to explain in terms which have the slightest plausibility.

The debate about the "missing link" between man and the other primates now takes on the characteristics of farce. The spectacle of evolutionists falling over each other in their attempts to find this link shows no sign of ending. Nor is another vexing question any closer to solution: what precisely are the criteria which distinguish humans from apes? Why are scientists unable to answer these questions? In this context we might also note the words of an American palaeontologist:

You can, with equal facility, model on the Neanderthaloid skull the features of a chimpanzee or the lineaments of a philosopher. These alleged restorations of ancient types of man have very little, if any, scientific value, and are likely only to mislead the public.⁴³

That there are certain similarities between men and apes no one will deny: what is at issue is the significance of these similarities. We return to this question when we come to a metaphysically-based critique of evolutionism.

If the evolutionary hypothesis is far from being supported by the palaeontological and biological evidence why, it might reasonably be asked, has it survived for so long? Why does it still command the support of the overwhelming majority of scientists and of nearly everyone else? The answer is simple: evolutionism has taken on the status of a pseudo-religion with its own inviolable dogmas. This fact was remarked by the distinguished entomologist F.R.S. Thompson over half a century ago:

The concept of organic Evolution is very highly prized by biologists, for many of whom it is an object of genuinely religious devotion, because they regard it as a supreme integrative principle. This is probably the reason why the severe methodological criticism employed in other departments of biology has not yet been brought to bear against evolutionary speculation.⁴⁴

Rather than discarding a hypothesis with which the facts do not conform the evolutionists go on endlessly modifying, qualifying and hedging their theories with ever more subtlety and ingenuity whilst all the time clinging to the basic premises on which the whole edifice of evolutionary theory rests. As Murray Eden observes, "Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory has been modified to the point that virtually every formulation of the principles of evolution is a tautology."⁴⁵ It may be that the tide is turning. Certainly evolutionary theory has been subjected to more rigorous and penetrating criticism in the last quarter of a century and increasing numbers of people, scientifically trained and otherwise, are no longer prepared to accept the evolutionary account of life.

The traditionalists, as we have seen, have made some forays into the *scientific* debate about evolutionary theory. However, this is really only a side-show. The most fundamental grounds for a rejection of evolutionism are philosophical and metaphysical. The theory contradicts certain axiomatic principles; this fact alone robs it of any credibility. If it is in direct opposition to these principles then it could not be valid from any point of view, scientific or otherwise.

The whole evolutionary conception rests on the metaphysically absurd notion that the greater can emerge from the lesser. Whitall Perry sums up the basic article of faith in evolutionism thus: "In the beginning was flesh...and the flesh was made Word."⁴⁶ Schuon anathematizes this "dogma" in the severest possible terms:

...the evolutionary leap from matter to intelligence is the most arbitrary, the most inconceivable and the most foolish hypothesis possible, in comparison with which "simple faith" seems like a mathematical formula.

He goes on to elaborate the support for such a claim from a metaphysical point of view:

People accept transformist evolution as a useful and provisional postulate just as they are ready to accept no matter what on condition that they do not have to accept the primacy of Spirit. And yet, starting from this immediately tangible mystery which is subjectivity or intelligence, it is easy to

understand that the origin of the Universe is not inert and unconscious matter, but a spiritual Substance which, from coagulation to coagulation and from segmentation to segmentation - and other projections, both manifesting and limiting - finally produces matter by causing it to emerge from a more subtle substance, but one that is already distant from principal Substance.⁴⁷

We are not here concerned with alternative explanations of the origin of life and matter but this passage gives the clue. Furthermore, the cosmogonies in the different religious traditions do not contradict this account although they necessarily approach the problem from a more limited perspective.⁴⁸ The evolutionist position involves either an unabashed materialism wherein life and consciousness are evolutes of matter or some kind of mental contortionism whereby an attempt is made to reconcile the irreconcilable. One cannot accept both the primacy of Spirit and the evolutionist hypothesis about life's beginnings.

The notion of organic transformation, of mega-evolution, is from the outset quite incompatible with the doctrine of archetypes which finds one of its applications in the animal realm. Metaphysically, each species "...is an archetype, and if it is only manifested by the individuals belonging to it, it is nonetheless as real and indeed incomparably more real than they are."⁴⁹ Titus Burckhardt's discussion of the doctrine of archetypes as it applies to life forms concludes this way:

...it follows that a species in itself is an immutable "form"; it could not evolve and become transformed into another species, although it can include variants, all these being "projections" of a single essential form from which they will never become detached.⁵⁰

Darwinism postulates such variants to be "buds" of new species, a quite illegitimate assimilation and one that does nothing to hide either the gaps in the palaeontological "succession" of species or the fact that whole new species appeared abruptly. The facts which palaeontology has uncovered, in themselves indisputable, are amenable to a quite different interpretation, as Burckhardt demonstrates.

All that palaeontology proves to us is that the various animal forms such as are shown by fossils preserved in successive layers of the earth made their appearance in a vaguely ascending order, going from relatively undifferentiated organisms - but not simple ones - to ever more complex forms, without this ascension representing, however, a univocal and continuous line. It seems to move in jumps; that is to say, whole categories of animals appear at once, without real predecessors. What means this order, then? Simply that on the material plane, the simple or relatively undifferentiated always precedes the complex and differentiated. All "matter" is like a mirror that reflects the activity of the essences by inverting it; that is why the seed comes before the tree, and the leaf bud before the flower, whereas in the principal order perfect "forms" pre-exist. The successive appearance of animal forms according to an ascending hierarchy therefore in no wise proves their continual and cumulative genesis.⁵¹

All traditional teachings affirm that there is a radical discontinuity between humankind and other life forms. The fact that some oriental exotericisms understand this distinction in terms of *karma* rather than ontologically in no wise affects the principle itself. The privileged and axial position of man in the cosmos is completely ignored by evolutionism which would have it that man is a kind of superior ape. How can the similarities between man and the primates be explained without resort to evolutionary speculations?

The anatomical similarities between men and apes are always explained tendentiously by evolutionists. However, if we start from the doctrine of archetypes and the multiple states of being, these physical correspondences appear in a completely different light.

However paradoxical this may seem, the anatomical resemblance between man and the anthropoid apes is precisely explainable by the difference, not gradual but essential, separating man from all other animals. Since the anthropoid form is able to exist without that "central" element that characterises man - and that moreover is manifested anatomically by his vertical position, among other things - that form must exist; in other words there cannot but be found, at the purely animal level, a form that realises in its own way - that is to say, according to the laws of its own level - the very plan of the human anatomy. It is in this sense that the monkey is a prefiguration of man, not as an evolutionary phase, but in virtue of that law that decrees that at every level of existence analogous possibilities will be found.⁵²

It is, of course, for this very reason that it is impossible to define the differences between the apes and man in purely physiological terms. Man's especial estate is not due to the fact "that he has two hands which he manipulates or that he can make planes that fly or calculating machines that perform difficult mathematical operations in a short time. These and other abilities are no more than accidental to his real nature".⁵³ This real nature is something about which a materialistic science can tell us nothing.

There are plenty of other puzzles concerning early man which embarrass evolutionary science. To think clearly about these matters involves balancing the modern scientific preoccupation with time, matter and change with traditional conceptions of space, Substance and Eternity. One then has a more comprehensive framework within which to work and all sorts of new possibilities present themselves. To give but one example: it is possible that the first humans in this particular terrestrial cycle left no solid traces, either because their bodies were not yet so materialised or because the spiritual state normal in those times, together with the cosmic and cyclic conditions then obtaining, made possible a resorption of the physical into the subtle body at the moment of death.⁵⁴ One mentions this possibility only to indicate how these questions can be approached from many different angles and not only from those proposed by modern science. So deeply is evolutionism embedded in the modern consciousness that it is no easy matter to explore different modalities of thought on the questions with which evolutionary theory deals.

Darwin's biological hypothesis became something of a Pandora's Box for 19th century social theory. His work was pillaged for new tools of social and historical analysis and for new categories of thought. The evolutionist schema and its methodology soon came to be applied to non-biological categories such as classes, races and nations, even religions. The original authors of what came to be known as "Social Darwinism" were E.B. Tylor and Herbert Spencer. The earliest formulation of their ideas actually preceded Darwin's *Origin of the Species*; in its earliest form social evolutionism was not an illegitimate offspring of Darwinism but an elder cousin who later exploited the family name. Indeed, it was Spencer rather than Darwin who coined the term "survival of the fittest", a slogan under which all manner of social, racial and imperial brutalities were to be justified. The ideology of Social Darwinism was to be harnessed to a wide range of purposes: the assertion of Anglo-Saxon racial and cultural superiority; the colonial exploitation of other countries and peoples; the

justification, in pseudo-scientific terms, of a rapacious capitalism and of various policies of social and economic *laissez-faire*; the shoring up of various nationalist and racist ideologies, not only in Britain but in Europe and America as well.

More than most theories, Darwinism lent itself to such stratagems of persuasion, enjoying not only the prestige and authority attached to science, but also the faculty of being readily translated into social terms. That this translation was rather free and loose was an added advantage, since it gave licence to a variety of social gospels.⁵⁵

The story of the growth of Social Darwinism is a dismal one which need not be narrated here.⁵⁶ Rather we shall pinpoint a few social and political ideas which it has sponsored.

The traditionalists have been concerned, in the main, with the effects of evolutionism on attitudes to religion, to the past, to tradition; in all these areas they find evolutionism's bequeathals to be malign. The enervating effects of both biological and social Darwinism on attitudes to the Christian faith are well-known. E.F. Schumacher echoes the traditionalist position in writing:

Evolutionism is not a science; it is a science fiction, even a kind of hoax... that has imprisoned modern man in what looks like an irreconcilable conflict between "science" and "religion". It has destroyed all faiths that pull mankind upward and has substituted a faith the pulls mankind down... it is the most extreme product of the materialistic utilitarianism of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

Through its connections with a false gospel of Progress, evolutionism has seeped into our way of looking at history and has subverted the whole idea of tradition. Although social Darwinism has been thoroughly discredited on a theoretical and scholarly level the average mentality is still very much under its sway. The idea of progress maintains a tenacious hold; it is, after all, one of the most comfortable of illusions. It is still not uncommon to find formulations such as this one from a very well-known and influential anthropological theorist: "Man has made objective progress in improving his society and...we in the West seem at this stage to have the best society in recorded history."⁵⁸ This is a staggering claim. It is a measure of the influence of the idea of progress, buttressed by evolutionism, that this kind of statement will be swallowed without demur by many people today. Nor did a popular television programme entitled *The Ascent of Man*, compered by Jacob Bronowski, raise many eyebrows. One could catalogue a more or less endless list of the tokens of evolutionist assumptions in almost every aspect of contemporary thought.

The idea of progress and of evolution finds not a whit of support in any of the traditional doctrines concerning man and time in terms of any spiritual criteria - quite the contrary.

All the traditional doctrines agree in this: From a strictly spiritual point of view, though not necessarily from other much more relative and therefore less important points of view, mankind is becoming more and more corrupted; the ideas of "evolution", of "progress" and of a single "civilisation" are in effect the most pernicious pseudo-dogmas.

The intention impelling Schuon in such a passage is not merely critical but positive and affirmative, calling as it does for a rehabilitation of our attitudes to the past:

We say not that evolution is non-existent but that it has a partial and most often quite external applicability; if there be evolution on one hand, there are degenerations on the other, and it is in any case radically false to suppose that our ancestors were intellectually, spiritually or morally our inferiors. To suppose this is the most childish of "optical delusions"; human weakness alters its style in the course of history, but not its nature.⁵⁹

We are left, in Shakespeare's words, to "commit the oldest sins the newest kinds of ways".⁶⁰

The ideal of Progress is by now looking very tawdry to those who see our present situation clear-eyed. Theodore Roszak accents the incongruity of the idea when considered against our present global circumstances:

The Last Days were announced to St John by a voice like the sound of many waters. But the voice that comes in our day summoning us to play out the dark myth of the reckoning is our meager own, making casual conversation about the varieties of annihilation... the thermonuclear Armageddon, the death of the seas, the vanishing atmosphere, the massacre of the innocents, the universal famine to come...Such horrors should be the stuff of nightmare... They aren't. They are the news of the day... we have not stumbled into the arms of Gog and Magog; we have *progressed* there.⁶¹

Evolutionist ideas not only distort our attitudes to the past but prepare the soil for sentimental Utopianisms of one sort and another. One might have thought that twentieth century history would have immunised us once and for all against the seductions of Utopianism but no, they still abound.⁶² Utopian scenarios pre-date evolutionism but they received a new fillip when the theory of evolution was wedded to Enlightenment theories about the perfectibility of man and 19th century optimism about the inexorability of progress. The worldly Utopia - so often a grotesque parody of Augustine's "City of God" but now a "City of Man" - is dangled before the credulous in many guises: the classless society of the Marxist fantasy, the anarchist dream of the "free" society, the pseudo-spiritual effusions of the "cosmic consciousness" pundits, the quasi-theological aberrations of a Teilhard de Chardin. Each of these Utopianisms, by definition, is a form of profane humanism envisaging a human destiny which leaves no room for the transcendent, the divine, the sacred, the traditional - in a word, no room for God. As one representative of Russian Orthodoxy put it, "All the tragedy of man is in one word, 'godlessness'".⁶³

It is a sign of the times that an anti-traditional, evolutionist Utopianism should find its way into domains where it should not for a moment have been countenanced. The work of Teilhard de Chardin is a conspicuous example of what results when one tries to reconcile the platitudes of evolutionist ideology with a traditional theology. The attempt is ingenious, even subtle if somewhat opaque, but the result is none the less dangerous for that. Kurt Almqvist has rightly pilloried it as a "...pseudo-metaphysical synthesis of neo-modernism, where evolutionist and pantheist materialism substitutes itself for religion by means of subversion and parody."⁶⁴ That the Catholic hierarchy should, however uneasily, allow this to be passed off as "Catholic" thought in any sense whatsoever is in itself a sad commentary. Would that we could still confidently accede to G.K. Chesterton's remark that "the Church is the only thing that saves us from degrading slavery of becoming children of our times".⁶⁵ In this context we might also recall Coomaraswamy's question, "What becomes of the spiritual power, if she cannot or does not speak with *authority*, but takes part in a

discussion with profane teachers as if on equal terms? It is not for the Church to argue, but to *tell*."⁶⁶

Before leaving the subject of evolutionism let us remember these sobering words from Schuon:

...evolutionism - that most typical of all the products of the modern spirit - is no more than a kind of substitute: it is a compensation "on a plane surface" for the missing dimensions. Because one no longer admits...the supersensible dimensions... one seeks the solution to the cosmogonic problem on the sensory plane and one replaces true causes with imaginary ones which, in appearance at least, conform with the possibilities of the corporeal world... In doing this, one forgets what man is, and one forgets also that a purely physical science, when it reaches vast proportions, can only lead to catastrophe...⁶⁷

Psychologism is another view of man built on the sands of a profane science, and as such, another symptom of modernism. Its intrusion into the religious realm has been attended by consequences no less disturbing than those coming in the train of evolutionism. As Coomaraswamy so neatly put it, "While nineteenth century materialism closed the mind of man to what is above him, twentieth century psychology opened it to what is below him."⁶⁸ Psychologism, as Schuon notes, is both an end-point and a cause, being a "logical and fatal ramification and natural ally" of other profane and materialistic ideologies like evolutionism.⁶⁹

Psychologism can be described as the assumption that man's nature and behaviour are to be explained by psychological factors which can be laid bare by a scientific and empirical psychology. Before we proceed any further an extremely important distinction must be made between modern psychology and traditional pneumatologies with which it shares some superficial similarities. The latter derived from radically different principles, applied different therapies and pursued different ends. Just as it is misleading to talk about modern European philosophy and traditional metaphysics in the same breath and under the same terms, so too with modern psychology and traditional pneumatology. A good deal of confusion would be averted if people would resist such terms as "Buddhist psychology" or "Zen psychotherapy". It would also help clarify the issues at stake if many of the amateurish "experts" in this field would abandon the extraordinary notion that the techniques of Western psychology can lead to the "liberation" spoken of in the Eastern traditions.⁷⁰ This is to confuse two quite different planes of experience.

Modern psychology can be censured against the backdrop of traditional doctrines in this fashion:

Psycho-analysis doubly deserves to be called an imposture, firstly because it pretends to have discovered facts which have always been known... and secondly and chiefly because it attributes to itself functions that in reality are spiritual, and thus in practice puts itself in the place of religion.⁷¹

Psychology of the modern kind defines itself by its inability to distinguish between the psychic plane, the arena in which the more or less accidental subjectivities of the individual ego come into play in the depths of the subconscious, and the infinite realm of the spirit

which, in terms of the human individual, is signalled by the capacity for the plenary experience and which is thus marked by an "inward" illimitation and transcendence. The muddling of the psychic realm of the subconscious with the mystical potentialities of the human soul and the infinite reaches of the Intellect has given birth to all manner of confusions. There is indeed a science which reveals the way in which the play of the psyche can communicate universal realities; this is one of the fields of traditional pneumatologies. But, and the proviso is crucial, such a science cannot flourish outside a properly-constituted metaphysic and cosmology. In this context the following passage from Burckhardt deserves the closest attention:

The connection with the metaphysical order provides spiritual psychology with qualitative criteria such as are wholly lacking in profane psychology, which studies only the dynamic character of phenomena of the psyche and their proximate causes. When modern psychology makes pretensions to a sort of science of the hidden contents of the soul it is still for all that restricted to an individual perspective because it has no real means for distinguishing psychic forms which translate universal realities from forms which appear symbolical but are only vehicles for individual impulsions. Its "collective subconscious" has most assuredly nothing to do with the true source of symbols; at most it is a chaotic depository of psychic residues somewhat like the mud of the ocean bed which retains traces of past epochs.⁷²

The confusion of the psychic and the spiritual, which in part stems from the artificial Cartesian dualism of "body" and "mind", was discussed by René Guénon at some length in *The Reign of Quantity*. The confusion, he said,

appears in two contrary forms: in the first, the spiritual is brought down to the level of the psychic; in the second, the psychic is... mistaken for the spiritual; of this the most popular example is spiritualism...⁷³

The first form of the confusion thus licenses a degrading reductionism and relativism, often as impertinent as it is inadequate. The "sinister originality" of psychologism lies in its "determination to attribute every reflex and disposition of the soul to mean causes and to exclude spiritual factors."⁷⁴ This tendency is often partner of a relativism whereby everything becomes

...the fruit of a contingent elaboration: Revelation becomes poetry, the Religions are inventions, sages are "thinkers"... infallibility and inspiration do not exist, error becomes a quantitative and "interesting" contribution to "culture"... there is... a denial of every supernatural, or even suprasensory, cause, and by the same token of every principal truth.⁷⁵

Like evolutionism, psychologism attempts to explain the greater in terms of the lesser and excludes all that goes beyond its own limits. In this sense, historicism, relativism and psychologism are all cut from the same cloth:

The mentality of today seeks to reduce everything to categories connected with time; a work of art, a thought, a truth have no value in themselves and independently of any historical classification... everything is considered as an expression of a "period" and not as having possibly a timeless and intrinsic value; and this is entirely in conformity with modern relativism, and with a psychologism... that destroys essential values. In order to "situate" the doctrine of a scholastic, or even a Prophet, a "psycho-analysis" is prepared - it is needless to emphasize the monstrous impudence implicit in such an attitude - and with wholly mechanical and perfectly unreal logic the "influences" to which this doctrine has been subject are laid bare. There is no hesitation in attributing to saints... all kind of artificial and even fraudulent conduct; but it is obviously forgotten... to apply the same principle to

oneself, and to explain one's own supposedly "objective" position by psychological considerations: sages are treated as being sick men and one takes oneself for a god... it is a case of expressing a maximum amount of absurdity with a maximum amount of subtlety.⁷⁶

As Schuon remarks elsewhere, relativism goes about reducing every element of absoluteness to a relativity while making a quite illogical exception in favour of this reduction itself.⁷⁷

Clearly these strictures do not apply with the same force to each and every attempt by scholars to detect and explain historical and psychological factors relating to particular religious phenomena. It is possible, for example, to take these kinds of considerations into account in a sympathetic and sensitive way without falling prey to a reductionist relativism. Nevertheless, Schuon's general point remains valid. It can hardly be denied that a kind of iconoclastic psychologism runs through a good deal of the scholarly literature on religion. In addition to the many schools, cliques, factions and splinter groups marching behind the various banners of Freud, Jung, Adler, Maslow, Skinner et. al., a new and militant psychologism is abroad in Academe - a "feminist psychology" bent on reducing religious manifestations to the camouflaged machinations of an oppressive patriarchy.⁷⁸ It is true that feminist scholarship has opened up some new vistas, articulated new questions, and uncovered much hitherto neglected material but much of the enterprise is disfigured by a wholesale sociological and psychologistic reductionism.

A psychologism unrestrained by any values transcending those of a profane science can help to corrode religious forms by infiltrating the religious sphere itself. Schuon notes, by way of an example, the part psychologism has played in discrediting the cult of the Holy Virgin:

...only a barbarous mentality that wants to be "adult" at all costs and no longer believes in anything but the trivial could be embarrassed by this cult. The answer to the reproach of "gynecolatry" or the "Oedipus complex" is that, like every other psycho-analytic argument, it by-passes the problem; for the real question is not one of knowing what the psychological factors conditioning an attitude may be but, something very different, namely, what are its results.⁷⁹

The practice of dragging spiritual realities down to the psychological plane can everywhere be seen when religion is reduced to some kind of psychological regimen. Some of the neo-yogic, meditation, "self-realisation" and "New Age" movements are of this kind.

One of the most insidious and destructive illusions is the belief that depth- psychology... has the slightest connection with spiritual life, which these teachings persistently falsify by confusing inferior elements [psychic] with superior [spiritual]. We cannot be too wary of all these attempts to reduce the values vehicled by tradition to the level of phenomena supposed to be scientifically controllable. The spirit escapes the hold of profane science in an absolute fashion.

Similarly,

It is not the positive results of experimental science that one is out to deny... but the absurd claim of science to cover everything possible, the whole of truth, the whole of the real; the quasi-religious claim of totality moreover proves the falseness of the point of departure.⁸⁰

Of course the traditionalists are not alone in unmasking "the misdeeds of psychoanalysis". Thomas Merton, for instance:

Nothing is more repellent than a pseudo-scientific definition of the contemplative experience... he who attempts such a definition is tempted to proceed psychologically, and there is really no adequate "psychology" of contemplation...⁸¹

Lama Govinda, more alert to this danger than some of his colleagues now in the West, warns of the "shallow-mindedness" of those who teach a kind of "pseudo-scientific spirituality".⁸² Mircea Eliade makes a more general point in writing,

Psychoanalysis justifies its importance by asserting that it forces you to look at and accept reality. But what sort of reality? A reality conditioned by the materialistic and scientific ideology of psychoanalysis, that is, a historical product: we see a thing in which certain scholars and thinkers of the nineteenth century believed.⁸³

Psychologistic reductionism, has ramifications on both the practical and the theoretical level: on the one hand we have the notion that psychological techniques and therapies can take the place of authentic spiritual disciplines; on the other, the pretension that psychological science can "explain" religious phenomena. Both of these are related to the first form of the confusion of the psychic and the spiritual.⁸⁴ Let us turn briefly to the obverse side, that of falsely elevating the psychic to the spiritual. There is a vast spiritual wasteland here which we cannot presently explore but Whitall Perry identifies some of its inhabitants in writing of those occultist, psychic, spiritualistic and "esoteric" groups who concern themselves with

spirits, elementals, materialisations, etheric states, auric eggs, astral bodies, ids, ods and egos, ectoplasmic apparitions, wraiths and visions, subliminal consciousness and collective unconsciousness, doublings, disassociations, functional disintegrations, communications, obsessions and possessions, psychasthenia, animal magnetism, hypnoidal therapeutics, vibrations, thought-forces, mind-waves and radiations, clairvoyances and audiences and levitations, telepathic dreams, premonitions, death lights, trance writings, Rochester knockings, Buddhic bodies, and sundry other emergences and extravagances of hideous nomenclature...⁸⁵

all the while imagining that these are stuff of the spiritual life. Much of Guénon's work was directed to reasserting the proper distinctions between psychic phenomena and spiritual realities and to sounding a warning about the infernal forces to which the psychic occultists unwittingly expose themselves. As Schuon remarks, "...modern occultism is by and large no more than the study of extrasensory phenomena, one of the most hazardous pursuits by reason of its wholly empirical character and its lack of any doctrinal basis."⁸⁶ Without the protective shield of traditional doctrines and disciplines, such as those which guarded the shamans, any incursions into these realms are fraught with perils of the gravest kind. In a traditional discipline the psychic can be reintegrated with the spiritual but without the necessary metaphysical framework and religious supports psychism becomes wholly infra-intellectual and anti-spiritual.

The anti-traditional temper of modernism can also be gauged in one of its most typical offspring, namely humanism. Humanism is not, of course, a single-head monster but an ideological hydra stalking the modern world seeking whom it may devour. The humanisms of such representative figures as say, Bertrand Russell, Julian Huxley and Jean-Paul Sartre,

present different philosophical countenances, some more unattractive than others.⁸⁷ However, we can isolate a defining characteristic in all these secularist humanisms be they atheistic or agnostic, "optimistic" or "pessimistic", Marxist or existentialist or "scientific": the insistence that man's nature and purpose is to be defined and understood purely in terms of his terrestrial existence. This amounts to a kind of first principle in humanism wherein man is seen as an autonomous, self-sufficient being who need look no further than himself in "explaining" the meaning of life and who need pay homage to nothing beyond himself. We may take Marx's dictum as a kind of central "dogma" of secular humanism: "Man is free only if he owes his existence to himself."⁸⁸ Man, in other words, is indeed the measure of all things.

Such a principle blatantly contradicts the teachings of all the religious traditions without exception and is the most fundamental point at issue between humanism and traditionalism. Schuon states the traditionalist position plainly enough:

To say that man is the measure of all things is meaningless unless one starts from the idea that God is the measure of man...nothing is fully human that is not determined by the Divine, and therefore centered on it. Once man makes of himself a measure, while refusing to be measured in turn...all human landmarks disappear; once cut off from the Divine, the human collapses.⁸⁹

Or, more succinctly, "to find man, one must aspire to God".⁹⁰ As one commentator recently observed, "If anything characterises 'modernity', it is a loss of faith in transcendence, in a reality that encompasses but surpasses our quotidian affairs."⁹¹ Humanism is both cause and result of this loss of faith.

One of the most implausible tenets of humanism, explicitly avowed or not - it is inescapable - is that God is a fiction which has played our ancestors false. To this Schuon makes the following reply:

There are those who claim that the idea of God is to be explained only by social opportunism, without taking account of the infinite disproportion and the contradiction involved in such a hypothesis: if men such as Plato, Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas - not to mention the Prophets, or Christ, or the sages of Asia - were not capable of remarking that God is merely a social prejudice or some other dupery of the kind, and if hundreds and thousands of years have been based intellectually on their incapacity, then there is no human intelligence, and still less any possibility of progress, for a being absurd by nature does not contain the possibility of ceasing to be absurd.⁹²

Humanism often goes hand-in-hand with an evolutionist perspective on the past which suggests that we have "progressed" beyond the superstitions and obscurations which blinkered our ancestors.

Opinions now current prove that people think themselves incomparably more "realistic" than anyone has ever been, even in the recent past. What we call "our own times" or "the twentieth century" or "the atomic age" seems to hover, like an uprooted island or a fabulously clear-headed monad, above millennia of childishness and fecklessness. The contemporary world is like a man ashamed of having had parents and wanting to create himself, and to recreate space, time and all physical laws as well, and seeking to extract from nothing a world objectively perfect and subjectively comfortable, and all this by means of a creative activity independent of God. The unfortunate thing is that attempts to create a new order of Being can only end in self-destruction.⁹³

So much does the humanist philosophy depend on this condescension to the past that it is difficult to imagine any contemporary humanism divorced from the evolutionism which supports it.

The humanist failure to recognise the transcendent dimension in human life and its indifference or hostility to the very idea of God has all manner of ramifications: it impoverishes our view of reality, breeds all kinds of false definitions of man, and produces a chimerical "humanitarianism", as well as encouraging negative attitudes to the past and to tradition itself. Humanists, by definition, are sceptical about the claims of the great religious teachings. The humanist outlook is seen, by its exponents, as "open-minded", "sane", unfettered by "prejudices" and "superstitions". It seems not to occur to humanists that their own attitudes are simply the prejudices of a modernist rationalistic materialism, nor that scepticism may be a function of ignorance rather than knowledge.⁹⁴ As Schuon remarks,

Men think they have "solid earth" under their feet and that they possess a real power; they feel perfectly "at home" on earth and attach much importance to themselves, whereas they know neither whence they came nor whither they are going and are drawn through life by an invisible cord.⁹⁵

The denial of God and of the transcendent leads to a debased understanding of human nature and to corrupting definitions of "man". Pressed to define "man" the humanist will more often than not resort to some evasive evolutionist tactic. Man, we might be told, is a large-brained and exceptionally intelligent animal, or a tool-making or game-playing or language-using or self-conscious or rational or political animal. To the traditionalist ear such definitions simply sound inane: as Schumacher remarks, one might just as well define a dog as a "barking plant" or a "running cabbage".⁹⁶ Furthermore,

Nothing is more conducive to the brutalisation of the modern world than the launching, in the name of science, of wrongful and degraded definitions of man, such as "the naked ape". What could one expect of such a creature...?⁹⁷

The fabrication of dehumanising social forms on the external plane depends on our assent to thought-forms which deny or distort our real nature. Here humanism is more part of the problem than the solution.⁹⁸

The social idealism and "humanitarianism" on which humanists pride themselves is a sentimental illusion which is fed by an ignorance concerning man's true nature and his ultimate ends. The humanists would have us forget the first of Christ's two great commandments and have us pursue the second as a kind of social principle or ideal. But, as Schuon points out,

Love of God could not defraud creatures: we may forget men in loving God without thereby lacking charity towards them, but we cannot, without defrauding both men and ourselves, forget God while loving men.⁹⁹

In this context it might be noted that humanist values have played a part in perforating the fabric of Christianity and in denaturing it into a kind of sentimental humanitarianism which envisages the Kingdom of God as a kind of earthly Super Welfare State.¹⁰⁰

All of the "-isms" that have been under discussion in this chapter, as well as countless other modernist ideologies with which they consort, amount to bogus philosophies because they betray our real nature. Let us end this chapter with a reminder from S.H. Nasr as to wherein lies the key to man's real nature. Nasr's statement is one that would be endorsed in all the religious traditions and one which, by the same token, would be rejected by humanists:

Man's central position in the world is not due to his cleverness or his inventive genius but because of the possibility of attaining sanctity and becoming a channel of grace for the world around him... the very grandeur of the human condition is precisely that he has the possibility of reaching a state "higher than the angels" and at the same time of denying God.¹⁰¹

It is the latter choice which gives modernism its essential character.

Notes

¹ St Irenaeus quoted in F. Schuon: "On the Margin of Liturgical Improvisations" in *JN SG* p353.

² F. Schuon: "No Activity Without Truth" in *JN SG* p28.

³ Gai Eaton, cited as an epigraph in *TOMORROW XII*, iii, 1964; p191.

⁴ A.K. Coomaraswamy: "Philosophy of Mediaeval and Oriental Art" in *AKC SPI* pp46-47.

⁵ Lord Northbourne *Religion in the Modern World* J.M. Dent, London, 1963; p13.

⁶ S.H. Nasr: "Refections on Islam and Modern Thought" *The Islamic Quarterly* XXIII, iii, 1979; pp119-131.

⁷ It will already be clear to the reader that we are not here using "modernism" in its restricted meaning, signalling various "experimental" early twentieth century movements in the arts, but in a much more wide-ranging sense.

⁸ For a profound analysis of this process see S.H. Nasr *Man and Nature* Allen & Unwin, London, 1976, esp. Chs 1&2, pp17-80. See also Whitall Perry *The Widening Breach: Evolutionism in the Mirror of Cosmology* Quinta Essentia, Cambridge, 1995.

⁹ Apart from several essays which will be cited shortly mention should be made of the following: "Usurpations of Religious Feeling" *SCR II*, i, 1968; "Concerning the Proofs of God" *SCR VII*, i, 1973; "The Contradictions of Relativism" *SCR VII*, ii, 1973; "Letter on Existentialism" *SCR IX*, ii, 1975; "To Be Man is to Know" *SCR XIII*, i & ii, 1979; and "To Have a Center" in *FS THC*.

¹⁰ See P. Sherrard *The Rape of Man and Nature* Golgonooza Press, Ipswich, England, 1987, esp. Ch 3. (Asian Edition published by the Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, Colombo, 1987, and the American edition published by Lindisfarne Press under the title *The Eclipse of Man and Nature*.) See also *FS LAW* p111.

¹¹ *FS LAW* p34.

¹² *FS SW* p40.

¹³ *FS LAW* p117.

¹⁴ Some of these developments are discussed in F. Capra *The Tao of Physics* Fontana, London, 1976.

¹⁵ As well as the works by S.H. Nasr and Philip Sherrard already cited in this chapter see S.H. Nasr *Sufi Essays* Allen & Unwin, London, 1972, Ch10; W. Smith *Cosmos and Transcendence* Sherwood Sugden, La Salle, 1984, esp Ch2.; and K. Klostermaier: "World Religions and the Ecological Crisis" *Religion* III, 1973. A useful starting point for an understanding of the "ecological crisis" is the following observation from Kenneth Cragg: "...nature is the first ground and constant test of the authentically religious temper - the temper which does not sacralize things in themselves nor desecrate them in soul-less using and consuming. Between the pagan and the secular, with their contrasted bondage and arrogance, lies the reverent ground of a right hallowing where things are well seen as being for men under God, seen for their poetry, mystery, order and serviceability in the cognizance of man, and for their quality in the glory of God." *The Mind of the Qur'an* Allen & Unwin, London, 1973; p148.

¹⁶ Quoted in E.F. Schumacaher *A Guide for the Perplexed* Jonathan Cape, London, 1977; p15. For a chilling account of the brutalities to which scientific reductionism inevitably leads see T. Roszak *Where the Wasteland Ends* Doubleday, New York, 1972.

¹⁷ These critics of scientism have been chosen because their positions overlap with that of the traditionalists to a greater extent than those of many other commentators whose lines of attack only exacerbate the confusion. For a sample of the work of these commentators see works by Schumacher and Roszak already cited, and H. Smith: *Forgotten Truth* Harper & Row, New York, 1977; *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* Quest, Wheaton, 1982; R.D. Laing *The Politics of Experience* Penguin, 1967; M. Polanyi *Personal Knowledge* Uni Chicago Press, 1958; J. Needleman *A Sense of the Cosmos* Doubleday, New York, 1974; M. Eliade *The Sacred and the Profane* Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, New York, 1974; B. Appleyard *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man* Picador, London, 1992. See also Kathleen Raine: "The Underlying Order: Nature and the Imagination" in A. Sharma (ed) *Fragments of Infinity: Essays in Religion and Philosophy* Prism, Bridport, 1991; pp198-216.

¹⁸ WP *TTW* p731. S.H. Nasr makes a more explicit distinction between modern and traditional science: "...modern science studies change with respect to change, where a traditional science studies change *vis-à-vis* permanence through the study of symbols, which are nothing but reflections of permanence in the world of change." *Sufi Essays* p88.

¹⁹ FS *SW* pp8-9 (emphasis mine). See also Lord Northbourne *Looking Back on Progress* Perennial Books, 1970; pp23-41.

²⁰ FS *LAW* pp36-37 (emphasis mine).

²¹ See FS *THC* pp171-177.

²² See FS *RHC* p27.

²³ *ibid.*; pp38-39.

²⁴ F. Crick *Molecules and Men*, quoted in T. Roszak: *op.cit.*; p188. For an almost identical profession by a scientific popularizer see C. Sagan *The Dragons of Eden* Ballantine Books, New York, 1978; p10. For some commentary on this kind of thinking see H. Smith *Forgotten Truth* pp60ff; T. Roszak: *op.cit.*; pp178-219; FS *EPW* p17, and FS *SPHF* p49fn.

²⁵ Daniel Dennett quoted in H. Smith: *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* pp135-136.

²⁶ S.H. Nasr: "Reflections on Islam and Modern Thought" p121.

²⁷ FS *DI* p156. See also FS *RHC* pp15ff.

²⁸ T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" p131. Some of these fissures are dealt with in RG *RQ* esp Ch XXIV and following. See also P. Sherrard: "Science and the Dehumanisation of Man" *SCR* X, i, 1976; pp74ff., and Gai Eaton *King of the Castle* Bodley Head, London, 1977; pp142-164.

²⁹ For a sample from this disturbing genre of pseudo-scientific "research" see K. Lorenz *On Aggression* Methuen, London, 1969; R. Ardrey *African Genesis* Collins, London, 1961; D. Morris *The Naked Ape* Jonathan Cape, London, 1967. For some critiques see F.A. Montague *Man and Aggression* OUP, New York, 1968.

³⁰ M. Negus: "Reactions to the Theory of Evolution" *SCR* XII, iii&iv, 1978; p194. See also SHN *K&S* pp 205-214, esp. p205.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Nor is it of much use to put forward counter-theories of a quasi-scientific kind which are even less credible than those of the evolutionists. See Michael Negus's review of Anthony Fides's *Man's Origins* in *SCR* XIII, i&ii, 1979; pp126-127.

³³ For some of this literature see D. Dewar *The Transformist Illusion* Dehoff, Tenn., 1957; L. Bournoure *Determinisme et finalite double loi de la vie* Paris, 1957; E. Shute *Flaws in the Theory of Evolution* Craig Press, New Jersey, 1961; P. Moorehead & M. Kaplan (eds) *Mathematical Challenges to the neo-Darwinian Interpretation of Evolution* Wistar Institute Press, Philadelphia, 1967; G. Fremondi & R. Fondi *Dopo Darwin* Rusconi, Milan, 1980. For an academic lawyer's critique of evolutionism see Phillip E. Johnson *Darwin on Trial* Intervarsity Press, 1993. See also Michael Denton *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* Adler & Adler, 1996.

³⁴ Karl Stern quoted in E.F. Schumacher: *op.cit.*; pp127-128.

³⁵ M. Lings: "Signs of the Times" in *JN SG* p113.

³⁶ J. Rostand *Le Figaro Littéraire* quoted in T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" p143.

³⁷ E. Shute quoted in M.Lings *op.cit.*; p113.

³⁸ See S.H. Nasr *Man and Nature* pp125ff and SHN *K&S* pp238ff.

³⁹ See M. Lings *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions* Allen & Unwin, London, 1980; pp77-78; and T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" pp146-147; and S.H. Nasr *Man and Nature* p126.

- ⁴⁰ See S.H. Nasr *Man and the Order of Nature* Oxford University Press, 1966, p146.
- ⁴¹ M. Lings *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions* pp78-80.
- ⁴² See T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" pp144-146.
- ⁴³ E.A. Hooton quoted in M. Lings: "Signs of the Times" p113fn7.
- ⁴⁴ F.R.S. Thompson *Science and Common Sense* London, 1937; p229, quoted in S.H. Nasr *Man and Nature* p139fn20. See also SHN *K&S* pp234-235.
- ⁴⁵ M. Eden: "Inadequacies of neo-Darwinian Evolution as Scientific Theory" in P. Moorehead and M. Kaplan: *op.cit.*; p109. See also SHN *K&S* p237.
- ⁴⁶ W. Perry in a review of R.C. Zaehner *Evolution in Religion* in *SCR* V, iii, 1971; p192. This book is an example of the lengths to which some thinkers have gone in their attempts to reconcile religious faith and evolutionism. Zaehner is quite oblivious to the possibility that the evolutionary hypothesis is wrong.
- ⁴⁷ F. Schuon: "Consequences Flowing from the Mystery of Subjectivity" *SCR* XI, iv, 1977; pp197-198. See also SHN *K&S* p235.
- ⁴⁸ For an explanation of the lines along which the apparent antinomies between traditional doctrines on this issues - semitic creationism and Hindu or Platonic emanationism for instance - can be metaphysically resolved see FS *L&T* pp85ff. See also RG *RQ* p213 & pp331-333.
- ⁴⁹ T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" p141. See also M. Pallis *A Buddhist Spectrum* Allen & Unwin, London, 1980; p150.
- ⁵⁰ T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" p141. See also S.H. Nasr *Man and Nature* p124.
- ⁵¹ T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" pp143-144. One might add that the evolutionary hypothesis also depends on a linear and one-dimensional view of time. Nasr has remarked the effects of the neglect of the doctrine of cosmic cycles. See SHN *K&S* pp209ff.
- ⁵² T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" pp149-150.
- ⁵³ S.H. Nasr *Ideals and Realities of Islam* Allen & Unwin, London, 1975; p23.
- ⁵⁴ See T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" p150.
- ⁵⁵ G. Himmelfarb *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* Chatto & Windus, London, 1959; p340.
- ⁵⁶ Several important works in this field are: J.W. Burrow *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* Cambridge Uni Press, 1966; T.K. Penniman *A Hundred Years of Anthropology* Duckworth, London, 1952; R. Hofstadter *Social Darwinism in American Thought* Uni Philadelphia Press, 1945; W.H. Simon: "Herbert Spencer and the 'Social Organism'" *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXI, 1960; J.H. Randall: "The Changing Impact of Darwin on Philosophy" *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXII, 1961. I have anatomized the pernicious effects of both biological and social Darwinism on attitudes to the Australian Aborigines in an unpublished work *The Science of Man*:

Scientific Opinion on the Australian Aborigines in the Late Nineteenth Century BA Honours Thesis, Australian National University, 1968. See also my article "The Religion of the Australian Aborigines" in A. Sharma: *op.cit.*.

⁵⁷ E. F. Schumacher *op.cit.*; pp129-130.

⁵⁸ I.C. Jarvie *The Revolution in Anthropology* Henry Regnary, Chicago, 1969; p14.

⁵⁹ F. Schuon: "No Activity Without Truth" in JN SG pp38-39.

⁶⁰ *King Henry IV* Pt II, Act IV, Sc 5.

⁶¹ T. Roszak: *op.cit.*; pix. As Gai Eaton observes, "A superstitious faith in progress endures even when the dogma of progress has been exposed as an illusion." *King of the Castle* p10.

⁶² Utopianism: "impossible ideal schemes for the perfection of social conditions." OED.

⁶³ Metropolitan Anthony of Sourzah *God and Man* Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1974; p68.

⁶⁴ K. Almqvist: "Aspects of Teilhardian Idolatry" *SCR* XII, iii&iv, 1978; p195. For traditionalist commenatry on Teilhard see also SHN *K&S* pp240-244; T. Burckhardt: "Cosmology and Modern Science" pp150-153; P. Sherrard: "Teilhard and Christian Vision" *SCR* IV, iii, 1970; pp150-175; W. Smith *Teilhardism and the New Religion* Tan, Rockford, 1988. On the plight of the Roman Church since Vatican II see Rama P. Coomaraswamy *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition* Perennial Books, 1980; M. Pallis: "The Catholic Church in Crisis" in JN SG pp57-80. See also FS *EPW* pp201-204.

⁶⁵ Quoted in a review by W. Perry in *SCR* XII, iii & iv, 1978; p247.

⁶⁶ Letter to Paul Furfey, August 1935, AKC *SL* p315.

⁶⁷ FS *DI* pp153-154.

⁶⁸ Quoted in W. Perry in "Drug-Induced Mysticism" *TOMORROW* XII, iii, 1964; p196. (Coomaraswamy was paraphrasing Guénon.)

⁶⁹ F. Schuon: "The Psychological Imposture" *TOMORROW* XIV, ii, 1966; p98.

⁷⁰ On this issue see P. Novak; "C.J. Jung in the Light of Asian Philosophy" *Religious Traditions* XIV, 1991, and J.M. Reynolds *Self-Liberation through seeing with naked awareness* Station Hill Press, Barrymore, 1989; Appendix 1.

⁷¹ F. Schuon: "The Psychological Imposture", p98.

⁷² T. Burckhardt *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* Thorsons, Northamptonshire, 1976; p37. See also S.H. Nasr *Sufi Essays* pp46ff, and A.K. Coomaraswamy "On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology" in AKC *SPII* pp333-378. Coomaraswamy: "The health envisaged by the empirical psychotherapy is a freedom from particular pathological conditions; that envisaged by the other is a freedom from all conditions and predicaments, a freedom from the infection of mortality... Furthermore, the pursuit of the greater freedom necessarily entails the attainment of the lesser..." p335.

- ⁷³ RG *RQ* p286. See Chapters XXXIV-XXXV, "The Misdeeds of Psychoanalysis" and "The Confusion of the Psychic and the Spiritual", pp273-290.
- ⁷⁴ F. Schuon: "The Psychological Imposture" p99.
- ⁷⁵ FS *DI* pp154-155.
- ⁷⁶ FS *LAW* pp32-33.
- ⁷⁷ FS *L&T* p7.
- ⁷⁸ See for example M. Daley *Gyn-ecology* The Women's Press, London, 1979, esp pp73-107. For an even more reckless reductionism see P. Chessler *About Men* The Women's Press, London, 1978; pp3-33. For a counter-view see FS *EPW* pp129-146. See also J. Cutsinger: "Femininity, Hierarchy and God" in *RH* pp110-131.
- ⁷⁹ F. Schuon: "The Psychological Imposture" p101.
- ⁸⁰ F. Schuon: "No Activity Without Truth" p37. See also FS *SW* p38 and FS *LAW* pp34ff.
- ⁸¹ T. Merton *New Seeds of Contemplation* New Directions, New York, 1972; pp6-7.
- ⁸² A. Govinda *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness* Quest, Illinois, 1976; p70.
- ⁸³ M. Eliade *No Souvenirs* Harper & Row, New York, 1977; p269.
- ⁸⁴ For some traditionalist literature in this field see, as well as the sources cited, D.M. Matheson: "Psychoanalysis and Spirituality" *TOMORROW* XIII, ii, 1965; and W. Perry: "The Revolt against Moses: A New Look at Psycho-analysis" *TOMORROW* XIV, i, 1966.
- ⁸⁵ WP *TTW* p437. What Coomarswamy said of the individual subconscious can be applied to the psychic realm as a whole: it is "a sink of psychic residues, a sort of garbage pit or compost heap, fitted only for the roots of 'plants', and far removed from the light that erects them." Cited by Perry, p437.
- ⁸⁶ FS *L&T* p1. See also R. Guénon: "Explanation of Spiritist Phenomena" *TOMORROW* XIV, i, 1966; RG *RQ passim*; S.H. Nasr *Sufi Essays* pp40-41.
- ⁸⁷ For a sample of humanist writings see J. Huxley (ed) *The Humanist Frame* Allen & Unwin, London, 1961. See especially Huxley's own introductory essay; pp13-48.
- ⁸⁸ Quoted by S. Radhakrishnan in P.A. Schilpp (ed) *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan* Tudor, New York, 1952; p50.
- ⁸⁹ FS *SW* p47.
- ⁹⁰ FS *PM* p16.
- ⁹¹ A reviewer (name not given) in H. Smith: "Excluded Knowledge: A Critique of the Western Mind Set" *Teachers College Record* LXXX, iii, 1981; p432, fn17.
- ⁹² FS *SW* p36. Also see pp19-20.
- ⁹³ FS *LAW* p100.
- ⁹⁴ FS *SW* pp19-20.
- ⁹⁵ FS *LAW* p112.
- ⁹⁶ E.F. Schumacher: *op.cit.*; p31.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ See P. Sherrard: "Modern Science and the Dehumanisation of Man" p79.

⁹⁹ FS *SW* p109. "If Rousseau and other 'idealists' had foreseen all the outcomes of their inane philanthropy they would have become Carthusian monks." *ibid.* p111 fn1. See also FS *EPW* pp104, 154 & 162, and FS *DI* p131.

¹⁰⁰ See Lord Northbourne *Religion in the Modern World* p16 and Gai Eaton *King of the Castle* pp16ff.

¹⁰¹ S.H. Nasr *Ideals and Realities of Islam* pp24-25. See also FS *EPW* p34.