

Contradictions of Modernist Thought

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Thus far we have looked at the issue of Islam's encounter with modernity as it has unfolded in the recent past. The fact that the historical development of modern Islamic thought has been profoundly influenced by modern secular thought has become obvious during the course of this discussion. The dynamics of Islam's encounter with modernity in the near future will depend as much upon the development of Islamic thought in the coming decades as the continued evolution of modernity itself. Just as the development of Islamic thought in the late 19th and 20th century cannot be appreciated without sufficient understanding of the development of modernity, the possibilities of future development of Islam will be directly impacted by the developments within modern Western thought. In other words, the trajectory of modernity itself will influence the nature of Islam's encounter with modernity. We have already mentioned that it has become fashionable to talk about the end of modernity and the advent of post-modernity. Even though it may be premature to suggest that such a paradigm shift has already taken place (because post-modern thought does not in any way challenge the modern concepts of secularism or capitalism and offers only a qualified critique of scientism), the fact that there is talk of such a shift itself evidences a state of ferment within modernity. This upheaval and its outcome will inevitably prove to be profoundly meaningful for the possibilities of Islamic thought in the coming decades.

In the following pages, we will look at some of the emerging trends in modern Western thought that directly impact the fundamental articles of faith of modernity, i.e., scientism, secularism, and capitalism. These trends may bear the seeds that will eventually grow into a mature and genuine post-modern paradigm. If we take either the Hegelian dialectics or the Marxist materialist interpretation of history at face value, then we can

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assume that modern Western thought contains contradictions within it that will eventually be responsible for it being superceded by a genuinely post-modern paradigm.

The History of Science and the Fate of Scientism

In the first chapter, we noted that the dogma of scientism is based upon the assumption that accurate and reliable knowledge can be gained only by the proper use of the human senses and human reason. Scientism does not accept the proposition that there are other valid ways of knowing besides the “scientific” way of knowing. Other ways of knowing are grouped under the categories of occult, mystical, and religious practices — all of which are considered illegitimate ways of gaining knowledge. These other ways of knowing either disregard the information provided by sense data (conversely, they take information into consideration that is not supplied by sense data) or they violate the rules of proper human reasoning. The proponents of scientism assert that the “scientific” way of knowing is based solely upon the proper use of the human senses and the human intellect. Consequently, in a tradition stretching all the way back to Gottfried Leibniz, George Boole, and Lewis Carrol, some of the brightest minds in modern times have dedicated themselves to discovering the rules of logic according to which the scientific enterprise progresses (or should progress). In more recent times, formalizing these rules of logic was the primary concern of Bertrand Russell and David Hilbert. The underlying assumption and often the declared position in these attempts was that the scientific enterprise is a strictly logical and objective undertaking in which collective or social, individual or subjective, and non-rational factors play no role. For the logical positivists (Russell’s group) and the formalists (Hilbert’s group) the fact that the scientific enterprise was free from social, subjective, and non-rational elements was what separated it from non-science — in other words the scientific enterprise is the only human activity “...thoroughly informed by reason.”¹

This view of science as being a strictly logical, objective, and rational progression of human knowledge “...commanded widespread popular and academic assent”² only a few decades ago. Calling this view of science “Legend,” Kitcher notes that even though proponents of Legend “...often disagreed, sometimes passionately, on details and methods...” they did agree on “some essential points.”³ (Kitcher’s “Legend” contains within it the fundamental propositions of scientism that were outlined in the first chapter.) Foremost among the points of agreement was that “...there are objective canons of evaluation of scientific claims” which can be used to distinguish science from non-science.⁴ Consequently the progress of science may not be necessarily unilinear but it is “...somehow cumulative in the way in which science and rational knowledge are cumulative.”⁵ Taking the existence of “objective criteria” and “the continuity of progress” as givens,

the proponents of Legend busied themselves with the task of uncovering the logic of confirmation of scientific theories, describing the logical structures of these theories and exploring the logic of confirmation of established scientific theories. But in recent decades the claims of Legend (i.e., scientism) and its definitions of science, rationality, and progress have been increasingly challenged and shown to be severely deficient. As the fields of the history of science and the philosophy of science have matured "...numerous intelligent critics now view Legend as smug, uninformed, and analytically shallow."⁶ The shallowness of this view, as well as the passionate disagreements within a generally agreed upon paradigm, can be illustrated by looking at the logical positivist versus critical rationalist debate that was still alive only a few decades ago.

The Demise of Scientism: Setting the Context

What are the limits that define the boundary of epistemological enquiry? How far can the human quests for knowledge go before it degenerates into an absurd, meaningless, and nonsensical triviality? Attempts to answer these and related questions have been the consuming passion of some of the most brilliant individuals in human history. Between 1910 and 1913, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead co-authored a three volume work titled *Principia Mathematica*. It is not a coincidence that the title bears striking similarity to the famous work authored by Isaac Newton some two centuries prior — the aim of the works of Russell and Whitehead was no less ambitious than that of the great classic. Newton's work had attempted to discover, describe, and outline the universal laws of motion that governed the functioning of the cosmos. The latter *Principia* attempted to discover, describe, and outline the universal laws of reasoning and logic that governed the human quest for knowledge. At the time that Russell and Whitehead published their work it was the latest attempt in Western intellectual circles to devise a formal mathematical system of inquiry capable of producing a comprehensive and accurate description of all Truth and Reality based on a few self-evident propositions.

The attempts to devise such a mathematical system dated back to the 17th century and the work of Gottfried Leibniz. George Boole and Lewis Carol took Leibniz's work a little further in the subsequent decades but truly revolutionary progress in this field had to wait until the 20th century. The biggest obstacle to genuine progress in this project was a set of statements that could neither be proven nor refuted using the tools of logic and science. Statements that could neither be proven nor falsified using the tools of science and logic came to be known as "undecidable propositions." Prior to the work of Russell and Whitehead, mathematicians and logicians were at a total loss to do something about these statements; with the publication of the *Principia Mathematica*, however, success seemed close at hand. In this work, the authors had seemingly developed an acceptable way

to deal with the undecidable propositions. The attraction of the mathematical system proposed in the *Principia* was rooted in the following proposition: If a statement cannot be proven or refuted using the tools of mathematical logic then that statement is meaningless. In formulating this proposition the *Principia* proposed a seemingly valid theory that was "...about, among other things, what it makes sense to say."⁷ The formulation of this theory was in no way a dry mathematical exercise that was divorced from the issue of formulating an acceptable and binding set of rules that govern human thought. Commenting on this issue, a scholar notes that "...it would appear that Russell and Whitehead were attempting to remove from mathematics the apparent reference to non-temporal, non-spatial, abstract objects."⁸ Put in less pedantic words, Russell and Whitehead were trying to furnish the mathematical proof that it is totally illogical and irrational to speak about metaphysical and spiritual entities because mathematical logic rules out the possibility that such entities exist.

While Russell and Whitehead went their separate ways philosophically after co-authoring the *Principia*, Russell went on to develop the philosophy of "Logical Positivism" based on the key ideas that were presented in this book. This philosophy posits that the boundary that defines the limits of the human quest for knowledge is articulating theses that can be either verified or refuted using the tools of logic and/or mathematics. If a question or thesis is proposed which is not capable of either verification or falsification by these tools, then the human quest for knowledge has entered the realm of absurd, meaningless, and nonsensical triviality. Even though the original work of the *Principia* was limited to mathematics, Russell could project the results onto science in general because mathematics is the language of science. Consequently any limitations that apply to the language of science apply to science itself. As a result, "science" came to mean only that which could either be proven or refuted using the tools of mathematics and logic.

A few decades after the *Principia* was published, Karl Popper made a significant modification to the theory of knowledge that it had given birth to. Logical Positivism posited that science could provide "certain," "true," and "verifiable" knowledge — this, in fact, was the distinguishing feature that set scientific knowledge apart from religious or philosophical knowledge. But Popper argued that "...what we call 'scientific knowledge' [is] hypothetical, and often not true, let alone certainly or probably true."⁹ He noted that scientific knowledge is based upon "metaphysical" conjectures and prejudicial assumptions that are not unlike religious and/or philosophical ruminations. In contrast to a religious or philosophical knowledge claim, a scientific knowledge claim is based on "metaphysical conjectures" that "...acquires scientific status only when it is presented in

falsifiable form: that is to say, only when it has become possible to decide empirically between it and some rival theory.”¹⁰

Some centuries prior to Popper, Bacon noted that scientific reasoning consisted of “anticipations, rash and premature” and of “prejudice.” For Popper all such “anticipations” are ultimately unjustified and unjustifiable. For him the scientific enterprise is in essence an attempt to disprove the validity of the very “anticipations” which the scientists themselves have put forth. Describing the process that takes place after some prejudicial “anticipations” has been proposed by a bold and imaginative scientist, Popper argues that the ultimate scientific aim is not to defend these prejudicial “anticipations.” He notes:

On the contrary, we try to overthrow them. Using all the weapons of our logical, mathematical, and technical armory, we try to prove that our anticipations were false — in order to put forward, in their stead, new unjustified and unjustifiable anticipations....”¹¹

Beginning with these insights, Popper goes on to develop a theory of knowledge known as “Critical Rationalism.” According to this theory, “scientific” knowledge refers to those knowledge statements for which an empirical test of falsifiability can be designed, and any statement that cannot be subjected to such an empirical test cannot attain the status of “scientific” knowledge. For the critical rationalist, once a statement is made which is not capable of being subjected to an empirical test of falsifiability then the human quest for knowledge has degenerated into an absurd, meaningless, and nonsensical triviality.

On the surface it appears that Critical Rationalism is a radically different theory of knowledge than Logical Positivism. The latter asserts that possession of “scientific” knowledge means the possession of absolutely certain objective knowledge. In contrast, Critical Rationalism posits that claims of absolutely certain objective truths marks the death of “science” because “science” is not “...*possession* of knowledge, of irrefutable truth...but [the] persistent and recklessly critical *quest* for truth”¹² (emphasis in original). In spite of this apparent and very real difference between Logical Positivism and Critical Rationalism, they are very similar theories of knowledge on a very fundamental level. The ultimate criterion that determines the “certainty” of positivist knowledge and the “rashness” of rationalist knowledge is the same “empirical” criterion — the ultimate judge for both Logical Positivism and Critical Rationalism is the same mathematical *cum* scientific criterion. On a very fundamental level, it is only a matter of semantics to argue whether the same mathematical “empirical” criterion yields “certain” knowledge or “unjustified anticipations.” Furthermore, both Logical Positivism and Critical Rationalism are equally suspicious of and hostile to the role of aesthetics, spirituality, and other

such “subjective” elements in the scientific enterprise. Both of these theories put supreme faith in the capacity of detached human reason to produce “scientific” knowledge. Any and all projections of “subjective” factors into the human quest for knowledge have to be checked using strictly defined “empirical” criteria.

An overview of the most prominent theories of knowledge that have been produced by modern Western thought reveals that they lie somewhere between the claims of Logical Positivism and Critical Rationalism. The defining characteristic of these theories is the fact that all of them ultimately appeal to certain “empirical” criteria for the justification of knowledge statements. Most of the intellectual efforts in modern times have been expended on determining the exact nature of these “empirical” criteria and formulating the rules of logic that the quest for “empirical” data must follow. In confining the discussion mostly to this subject, the implicit agreement in the modern secular intellectual tradition is that ultimately only “empirical” criteria can separate valid knowledge from spurious knowledge. This implicit agreement has created a completely closed circle within which the modern human quest for knowledge has been journeying. The “empirical” criteria can only be provided by science and these very same criteria determine what is “science.” This closed circle precludes the possibility of any other way of knowing from becoming a “legitimate” way of knowing in the modern secular epistemology.

In spite of the most fanatical attempts to maintain the integrity of this closed circle, evidence has been steadily mounting from within the modern scientific enterprise itself that there are other “legitimate” ways of knowing beyond this circle — in other words, that the claims of scientism are flawed. This logically means that certain sources of knowledge which modern secular thought has considered “unscientific” are in reality “scientific.” Having set the context, we now begin explorations of that which lies beyond this closed circle.

Breaking the Circle: The Proof of Gödel’s Theorem

One of the individuals most impressed and excited by the work of Russell and Whitehead in the *Principia Mathematica* was David Hilbert. A leading mathematician of the pre-WWII era, he had been long convinced that a mathematical system would eventually be constructed that would allow for the deduction of all Truth from a few basic self-evident truths. With the publication of the *Principia* and the issue of undecidable propositions seemingly settled, success appeared to be very close at hand. In the mid 1920’s, Hilbert challenged all the mathematicians in the world to prove that the system proposed in the *Principia* was both consistent and complete.¹³ If the consistency and the completeness of the proposed system could be proven, then the centuries old dream of the mathematicians to

devise a formal mathematical system in which the deduction of all Truth from a few basic propositions would be much closer to realization.

In response to Hilbert's challenge, Kurt Gödel began his work in the late 20's and formally published his findings in 1931 under the title "On Formally Undecidable Propositions in *Principia Mathematica* and Related Systems." Roger Penrose has described this theorem as being the "...most important theorem in mathematical logic of all time."¹⁴ In non-technical terms Gödel proved that no theory of mathematics is finitely describable, consistent, and complete.¹⁵

The immediate implication of Gödel's work was that the hopes and the dreams of the formalist and positivistic mathematicians were reduced to a heap of ashes. This "Incompleteness Theorem," as it came to be known, posited that it is not possible for a mathematical theory that is based on a finite number of axioms to produce a comprehensive description of all mathematics. In other words, this theorem "...denies us the possibility of constructing a complete, consistent [i.e., scientific] description of reality."¹⁶

The implications of Gödel's work have a direct bearing on the validity of positivistic and formalist thought. This theorem by itself proves that both the logical positivistic and the critical rationalistic definitions of "science" are scientifically untenable. The theorem posits that there exist meaningful statements that can neither be verified nor falsified by any mathematical or empirical test. Referring to the implications of Gödel's work, Alfred Adler notes that Gödel's Theorem:

...proves that there exist meaningful mathematical statements that are neither provable nor disprovable, now or ever — neither provable nor disprovable, not simply because human thought or knowledge is insufficiently advanced but because the very nature of logic renders them incapable of resolution, no matter how long the human race survives or how wise it becomes. There is no way to escape this conundrum. It is not a question of sophistry of any kind...*The philosophical implications are devastating.*¹⁷
(emphasis added)

The philosophical implications are devastating indeed. Any theory of knowledge that does not take into account the fact that there exist meaningful statements whose meaningfulness cannot be empirically tested is sorely deficient. This essentially means that the theories of knowledge such as Logical Positivism, Critical Rationalism, and their offspring and close relatives are all seriously inadequate theories of knowledge; in other words, the very foundational propositions on which these theories are based are mathematically untenable. As Adler notes, the assertion that there exist meaningful mathematical statements that can neither be proven nor disproved is not "sophistry of any kind," rather "...the very nature of logic renders them incapable of resolution, no matter how long the human race

survives or how wise it becomes.” In the decades after Gödel proposed his theorem, actual examples of mathematical statements that could neither be verified nor falsified were discovered and the theorem attained the status of a Proof. The first example of a meaningful (i.e., true) mathematical statement that can neither be proven nor falsified is called the “Continuum Hypothesis.” We “know” that the Continuum Hypothesis is “true” even though we are not able to, nor will we ever be able to, design an empirical test to check its meaningfulness.

The question naturally emerges; how do we “know” that the Continuum Hypothesis is a meaningful statement? Which faculty within the human organism informs us that this is a meaningful statement? The faculties of sense perception and logical reasoning fail us in this regard because no empirical test can conceivably be designed to determine the validity of this statement. It is exceedingly difficult to identify a theory of knowledge from within the modernist secular tradition that can adequately deal with meaningful statements that cannot be empirically verified or falsified. Yet the fact of the matter is that we inhabit a universe in which such statements exist. In light of the devastating philosophical implications of Gödel’s work, it is not surprising that the modern secular intellectual tradition has chosen to virtually ignore the fact that Kurt Gödel ever existed. In the *World Treasury of Physics, Astronomy, and Mathematics* all references to Gödel and his work occupy only a few paragraphs in 835 pages. No article is dedicated to Gödel or his work even though some of the most accomplished mathematicians in the 20th century have described Gödel’s work in the following words:

...the most important theorem in mathematical logic of all time.
(Roger Penrose)

Kurt Gödel’s achievement in modern logic is singular and monumental — indeed it is more than a monument, it is a landmark, which will remain visible far in space and time.¹⁸ (John von Neuman)

No other example of human thought is as far-reaching as Gödel’s proof....¹⁹ (George Zebrowski)

For nearly two decades after Gödel published his work the leading French authors of mathematics textbooks did not even acknowledge the existence of his work. The attitude of the Frenchmen towards Gödel’s work is described in the following words by Mathias:

One might almost say that they ignored him, except that the tone of certain of their works suggests a conflict between an uneasy awareness that something has happened and a desire to pretend that it has not. It is as though they had discovered that they were on an island with a dragon and in response chose to

believe that if the dragon were given no name it would not exist.²⁰

This attitude of Boubaki towards Gödel's work is symptomatic of the reception that it has been accorded by the modern secular intellectuals in general. Even though the implications of the proof reach far beyond the field of mathematics, discussions regarding it are rarely found outside of pedantic, technical journals of mathematics. Philosophers and theoreticians have been quick to integrate the findings of Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Natural Selections etc. into their theories but they have been loathe to take the philosophical and epistemological implications of Gödel's work seriously. A contemporary author notes:

No other example of human thought is as far-reaching as Gödel's Proof, yet the consequences of it for our understanding of the universe and the human mind are rarely discussed outside of technical journals — and even there the *reach* of Gödel's Proof into law, economics, religion, the sciences, how we view history, and how we should judge schemes for improving our lot, is not explored.²¹

It is worth noting that Bertrand Russell himself was an accomplished mathematician and Karl Popper a keen student of physics. It is exceedingly unlikely that neither of the two ever came across Gödel's work, especially in light of the fact that more than fifty years separate the initial publication of Gödel's work and the death of Russell and Popper. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that either of the two modified their respective theories of knowledge even though there was empirical, scientific evidence that proved their theories to be untenable.

Why has modern Western scholarship refused to explore the import of Gödel's work? Why has it at times even refused to acknowledge the existence of his work? Why are the epistemological implications of one of the most profound findings in human history not discussed, as these findings relate to the modernist faith in science? In short: Why has the attitude of Russell and Popper towards Gödel (i.e., willful ignorance) come to characterize the attitude of the modern West in general? The fundamental reason why Gödel's Proof has been consciously and deliberately relegated to obscurity in the West is the fact that it proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that one of modernity's fundamental articles of faith (i.e., scientism) is a delusion. The situation of Gödel's obscurity in the modern Western context can be better understood by looking at similar discoveries in the past that have shattered dearly held dogmatic beliefs. It was much easier for the believers to ignore the discovery that the Old Testament that was in their possession could not possibly be the same Book that was revealed to Prophet Musa (AS) on Mt. Sinai — a fact that was established by a critical analysis of the text itself, along with historical

studies. It was much easier to ignore this reality than grapple with the implications of a fact that had already been established. Modern secularist thought has displayed the same degree of courage and self-critical capabilities vis-à-vis Gödel's work as the "obscurantist" religious believers who continue to insist upon the inerrancy and Divine origin of the Bible (as it exists today) in spite of the findings of modern scholarship. The logical and honorable response to Gödel's work, on the part of modern secularist scholarship, should have been to accept it and come to terms with its implications. In reality, however, the collective response of modern scholarship has been more akin to that of an illogical and dogmatic "religious obscurantist." Like Russell and Popper, the modern Western scholarship as a whole has not exhibited the courage and integrity of offering the logical and honorable response. It would be asking far too much from modern secularist thought to even entertain the possibility that empirical science does not deserve the privileged status that has been granted to it. To further imply that other ways of knowing and describing Truth and Reality are just as valid, if not more valid, than the scientific method — now *that* is really asking too much.

The fact that Gödel's Proof shatters the very foundations upon which modern empirical epistemology is based greatly explains why its very existence has been practically ignored by modern secular scholarship. Gödel's Proof conclusively shows that meaningful and relevant scientific knowledge exists outside the closed circle that the proponents of scientism have constructed. The proponents have asserted that only that which can be proven or disproved empirically is scientific and science itself provides the criterion for what is empirical. However, the fact that the existence of meaningful mathematical statements that are not, and can never be, empirically justified shows the flaw in the modernist claims. Important as Gödel's work is, it is not the only avenue of modern scientific inquiry that shows the flaws in the modern secular theories of knowledge. Independent of Gödel's work, Gerald Holton's work shows that a dimension of scientific space which modern theories of knowledge consider outside the pale of science is actually an integral part of the scientific enterprise.

The Three Dimensions of Scientific Conceptual Space: The Work of Gerald Holton

Holton notes that modern definitions of science (as constructed by the proponents of scientism) limit the scientific enterprise to two dimensions. For them only those concepts and statements can be considered "scientific" which have either an empirical or an analytical aspect. The empirical aspect involves the "protocol of observation" and the analytical aspect involves the "protocol of calculation."²² The observable empirical facts "ultimately boil to meter readings" and the logical analytical statements "ultimately boil down to tautologies."²³ However various

modern theories of knowledge define “meaningless” statements, all of these theories are unanimous regarding the characteristics of “meaningful” statements. “Statements concerning empirical matters of ‘fact’...and statements concerning the calculus of logic and mathematics” are held to be the only “meaningful” scientific statements by the dominant theories of knowledge.²⁴ The only dispute among modern philosophers regarding these meaningful statements is whether they are objective and certain (the position of the Logical Positivists) or whether they are arbitrary and inescapably tentative (the position of the Critical Rationalists). Leaving aside the internal dispute within modern, secularist thought regarding the objectivity or arbitrariness of these statements, what is of concern to us is the definition of science that emerges from the modernist discourse. After placing the empirical and analytical aspects of modern science on the x-axis and y-axis of a two dimensional plane, Holton says the following: “...whether they are arbitrary or not, the x-y axes have, since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, more and more defined the total allowable content of science and even of sound scholarship.”²⁵ The x-y plane is therefore contingent because “...meanings of concepts and statements in it are contingent on their having both empirical and analytical relevance.”²⁶ Any statement that does not have either empirical or analytical relevance is therefore outside the pale of “science.”

Holton argues that this two dimensional description of scientific conceptual space is severely limited, especially in light of the dynamics that are at work during the intense “nascent moment” when a scientist is immersed in the process of making a revolutionary breakthrough. He notes the following:

...to a smaller or larger degree, the process of building up an actual scientific theory requires explicit or implicit decisions, such as the adoption of certain hypotheses and criteria of preselection that are not at all scientifically “valid.”²⁷

In other words, factors are involved in the scientific enterprise that are neither empirically observable nor analytically justifiable — factors that cannot be located on the two-dimensional x-y plane. Further exploration reveals that the scientists often rely on certain hypotheses that are neither verifiable (therefore unscientific according to the Logical Positivists) nor falsifiable (therefore unscientific according to the Critical Rationalists). These hypotheses are examples of the type of statements that Gödel’s Proof shows to be meaningful but not empirically verifiable or falsifiable. Prior to Holton no notable historian or philosopher of science seriously explored the role of these “un-scientific” yet meaningful statements in the scientific enterprise. The refusal to deal with the role of these statements has less to do with their relevance or irrelevance to the scientific enterprise and more to do with the inability of the modern theories of knowledge to

accommodate them. While the historians and philosophers can conveniently disregard the role of undecidable propositions in the scientific enterprise (because of their ideological biases), scientists themselves cannot ignore such propositions so easily. After describing how Newton dealt with hypotheses that were either verifiable or falsifiable in his quest for scientific knowledge, Holton goes on to note a third category of hypotheses that were an integral part of Newton's quest:

But the fact is that Newton also found one class of hypotheses to be impossible to avoid in his pursuit of natural philosophy [i.e., science] — a class that shared with Cartesian hypotheses the characteristic of neither being demonstrable from the phenomena nor following from them by an argument based on induction...The existence, nay, the necessity, at certain stages, of entertaining such unverifiable and unfalsifiable, and yet not quite arbitrary, hypotheses — that is an embarrassing conception which did not and does not fit into a purely positivistically oriented philosophy of science. For the decision whether to entertain such hypotheses is coupled neither to observable facts nor to logical argument.²⁸

All serious scientists like Newton have always known of the “...existence, nay, the necessity” of dealing with Gödelian type propositions that are neither verifiable nor falsifiable but which are at the same time “...not quite arbitrary.” It is obvious that no modern, secular, and empirical theory of knowledge can adequately account for such propositions.

In order to constructively deal with this class of non-verifiable and non-falsifiable category of hypotheses, Holton has to go beyond the modernist definition of scientific conceptual space as a two-dimensional x-y plane. The fact that this class of hypotheses plays a critical role in the scientific enterprise is obvious; the fact that modernist conceptions and definitions of science cannot deal adequately with this class is equally obvious. Consequently Holton proposes the existence of a third dimension of scientific conceptual space that has always existed but has remained unacknowledged. Holton notes:

In addition to the empirical or phenomenic (x) dimension and the heuristic-analytic (y) dimension, we can define a third, or z-axis. This third dimension is the dimension of fundamental presuppositions, notions, terms, methodological judgments and decisions — in short, of themata or themes — which are themselves neither directly evolved from, nor resolvable into, objective observation on the one hand, or logical, mathematical, and other formal analytical ratiocination on the other hand.²⁹

Holton himself does not identify the “themata” as being Gödelian types of hypotheses. But it is clear that those meaningful statements “...which are themselves neither directly from, nor resolvable into, objective

observation on the one hand, or logical, mathematical, and other formal analytical ratiocination on the other hand..." eloquently describe the Gödelian types of hypotheses. It is in the three-dimensional space that Holton has described where genuinely scientific thinking takes place. This three-dimensional space consists of sensory perception, logical reasoning, and the "thematic" human intuition. The "thematic" intuition plays a critical and foundational role in the quest for knowledge because it is related to that dimension which is "...the dimension of fundamental presuppositions, notions, terms, methodological judgments and decisions." Holton emphasizes that the third dimension is neither rooted in, nor resolvable into the other two dimensions, even though it is intimately connected with them. In other words, human intuition is neither the cause nor the product of human senses and human reasoning even though it is intimately related to both of them. In the final analysis it is human intuition that determines the "truth" value of Gödelian type statements — statements that cannot be proven to be true or false using the tools of logic and reasoning, but statements that we nevertheless know to be true.

Holton offers evidence from the work of both Popper and Russell that indicates that both of these individuals were aware of the existence of this third dimension but that they could not appreciate, or chose not to appreciate, its significance.³⁰ Acknowledging the critical role that human intuition plays in the human quest for knowledge requires the total debunking of Logical Positivism, Critical Rationalism, and other related theories, for these theories do not even acknowledge the existence of human intuition as a genuine reality. After noting the inability of existing theories of knowledge to appreciate the significance of this third dimension, Holton argues for the need to seriously study the source, nature, and dynamics of this third dimension in the following words: "But it is exactly here that we should discern the existence of a door at the end of the corridor through which the philosophy of science has been recently traveling."³¹ Not opening this door and remaining stuck on the two-dimensional x-y plane

...has its costs. It overlooks or denies the existence of active mechanisms at work in the day-to-day experience of those who are actually engaged in the pursuit of science; and it is of little help in handling questions every historian of science has to face consciously, even if the working scientist, happily does not.³²

Gödel's work proved that there exist meaningful statements that can neither be proven nor refuted using the tools of empirical science. Holton's work has shown that such statements play an integral role in the enterprise of science.

“Unscientific” Science and the Demise of Scientism

The foregoing discussion leaves hardly any doubt that if one accepts the definition of science that has been articulated by the proponents of scientism, then one also has to acknowledge that “unscientific” elements are embedded in the very foundation of the scientific enterprise. As a way of knowing, the human being has access to resources besides sensory perception and logical reasoning — and it appears that our view of the universe is fundamentally shaped by the dynamics that take place in this supra-sensual, supra-logical realm of experience. In spite of the importance of this source of knowledge, modern Western thought is utterly incapable of accepting its existence, let alone exploring its dynamics. There can be hardly any doubt that further study and research will continue to produce tantalizing hints regarding the existence and importance of the z-axis (to use Holton’s terminology), and there can be even less doubt about the fact that the dominant modern, secularist paradigm will not be able to incorporate these findings into its conceptual framework. Consequently the modern, secular vision of Truth and Reality will become progressively deficient as the history of science and humanity progresses. On the other hand a more comprehensive and appealing vision of Truth and Reality will be developed by those who are cognizant and appreciative of the knowledge that has been accumulated in the post-Enlightenment period and who also utilize the resources that are present in the z-axis in their quest of knowledge. This brief survey of the history of science is enough to illustrate just how shallow and insipid the propositions of scientism really are. With the demise of scientism the epistemological foundations of modernity are shattered, and the possibility of a genuinely post-modern epistemological paradigm emerging from the rubble of modernist thought becomes more likely.

The Historical Experience of Secularism

In formulating our description of secularism we noted that secularism is not a denial of religion, *per se*, but it is the assertion that religion has no place in the public realm and should remain confined to the private sphere. We have noted the historical circumstances surrounding the emergence of this idea. The sociological setup of all advanced (and advancing) industrial societies over the past two centuries has been invariably underpinned by the principle of secularism. Evaluating this two century old modern project in light of the evidence that has been steadily accumulating over the past four decades or so, we can state with little hesitation that secularism is a failed project. The fact that secularism is a failed project can be easily illustrated by looking at three manifestations of this failure:

1. The complete divorce between private religiosity and public morality — in direct contradiction to the original intent of the

- founders of the first secular republic in human history, the United States of America.
2. The demise of traditional religion based on the Revealed Word and the emergence of an artificially engineered “civil religion.”
 3. The virtual assimilation of the most prominent religious minority in the West into secular Western society, i.e., Western Jewry, and the demise of traditional Jewish identity.

Good Intentions, Terrible Results: The Experience of Secularism in the United States of America

In evaluating the experience of secularism in the United States, we will first outline the views of the founders of the United States regarding the role of religion in society. This overview will make clear the intention and objectives of the founders in adopting secularism as a foundational principle in the construction of the new republic. Furthermore, these views of the founding fathers will provide us with a criterion with which to evaluate the evolution of the secularist ideal in America. Getting this perspective will provide some of the criterion necessary to judge the experiment of secularism as a whole.

Even though the early secularists wanted to confine religion to the private sphere, there was no doubt in their minds regarding the value of the religious ethos in human society. The reason being that religious ethos is the central nexus upon which all morality and ethics is based. It was difficult for them to imagine a healthy and prosperous society in the absence of a religious ethos and the resulting morality and ethics. They saw a direct link between private religiosity of the citizen and the health of the public and political spheres. George Washington had the following to say in his farewell address regarding this issue:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.... And let us with caution indulge to supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.³³

Thomas Jefferson, a staunch deist who frowned upon any formal commitment to religion, nevertheless was even more blunt than Washington in postulating a direct link between the religious ethos and the public and political well being of the nation. He asked rhetorically: “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed the only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?”³⁴ For Jefferson, the obvious answer to this question was a resounding “no.” This is best reflected in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence written by Jefferson, justifying America’s rebellion against the Crown in England. He argued that men have been

“...endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights” which include the rights of “...Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Since these rights are the endowment of God Himself, men have the right to rebel against any earthly authority that attempts to deprive them of these rights. Given the logic of Jefferson’s argument as it is presented in the Declaration of Independence, the importance of the religious ethos in maintaining and strengthening the integrity of the public and political spheres is clear. There was no doubt in the mind of the founders of the United States that there is a direct link between religiosity in the private sphere and the health and well being of the public sphere — they saw “...religion as a friend of civic life”³⁵.

For the founders of America, secularism meant that the State would not favor or prefer any one religion more than another and at the same time the State would not in any way hinder or obstruct religion from playing its rightful role in society. In making the State neutral in terms of favoring any one religion but at the same time confirming support for the religious ethos in unequivocal terms, the founders were hoping that society could benefit from the best of both worlds. On the one hand, society would be spared the horrors of religious sectarianism in which the State becomes an instrument of one religious sect lashing out at others, because the State was to act neutral regarding the preference of any specific religion (or sect). On the other hand, society could benefit from the moral and ethical teachings of religion because the State would not in way interfere (and in many cases openly encourage) the activities of religious groups and charities. These are the motives and ideals that underlay the founders’ commitment to secularism and the basic principles regarding the relationship between State, society, and religion.

But the experience of the past two hundred years has proven, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that confining religion to the private sphere will not only eventually divorce the religious ethos from the public sphere, but will almost certainly lead to the disappearance of this ethos from the private sphere as well. The secularist ideal of neat compartmentalization of the public and private spheres may have been suitable for a pre-industrialist agrarian society, but the viability of this construct in advanced industrial society is very dubious, to say the least. In advanced industrial society the space of the private sphere has gradually but irrevocably shrunk in the face the expanding space of the public sphere. In fact one is perfectly justified in asking whether it even makes sense to talk about a “private sphere” in the “age of information” — indeed, the concept of the “private sphere” and the “age of information” appear to be mutually exclusive constructs. At the same time that the private sphere has been irrevocably shrinking, the value and importance attached to the religious ethos has greatly diminished in the minds of the elite who determine public policy. Over the past two hundred years, the relationship between the public sphere (and the responsible elite)

and the religious ethos has gone from accommodation to indifference to outright hostility.

Nowhere is the hostility towards the religious ethos more pronounced than in the education system and the entertainment media — two of the most important socializing elements in modern society. The hostility of the entertainment media towards the religious ethos is obvious to even a casual observer and need not be detailed here; that of the education system is only slightly less pronounced. The following observation by William Bennett illustrates the hostility of the education system towards religion quite succinctly. Commenting on the legal rights of American students, he notes:

...a group of students can, [by] law, get together and say, “We must all advance the Marxist revolution.” A group of students can get together and say, “I don’t like reds, I like green drugs. What kind of drugs do you like?” A group of students can get together and talk about various methods of birth control. But they can’t get together and say, “Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.”³⁶

To mention the name of God in public schools, to hang a poster of the Ten Commandments in a classroom or to begin the school day with a silent prayer — all of these are sinful acts that are not to be tolerated in the public school system. Numerous studies have shown that from the earliest school years the textbooks go to extraordinary lengths to refrain from any positive reference to religion or God. When a student leaves school and enters college, where there are greater opportunities for independent reflection, one does not have so much an opportunity to study religion as to study the ways in which religion can be effectively deconstructed. The manner in which the young are exposed to religion is a reflection of the attitude of the policy-making elite in society towards religion. The views of the elite in the United States regarding religion have come a long way — could we say evolved? — from those of Washington, Jefferson, and Adams.

From the very early years, the public sphere teaches individuals to adopt an indifferent, negative, and even hostile attitude towards religion. Different parts of the public sphere mutually reinforce this agnostic attitude. It is no wonder that by the time an individual becomes an educated adult, he or she views serious religious commitment as being a type of “psychological idiosyncrasy” that is bedeviling individuals who have problems coming to terms with the “real world.” In light of the experience of the past two centuries, we can confidently make the following assertion: The irreligiosity of the public sphere has been far more effective in eroding the religiosity of the private sphere than the religiosity of the private sphere has been in shaping the character of the public sphere. In essence, the secularist ideal of limiting religion strictly to the private sphere and still

hoping that the public sphere would derive the benefits of the religious ethos has proven to be an unattainable mirage.

The Abrahamic Tradition vs. Civil Religion: An Ancient Confrontation in a Modern Setting

Even a cursory glance at the history of the United States reveals that there has been a profound commitment to certain religious ideals on the collective, public level. Religious values and religious symbolism have played a key role in helping American society cope with convulsions during the periods of intense internal crisis. Religious values and symbolism played a prominent role in healing the gaping wounds caused by the Revolutionary War and the break with the mother country. Similarly the birth, evolution, and the goals of the Civil Rights movements and the facing-up to unfinished business left over from the Civil War cannot be understood apart from the roots of these phenomena in the religious tradition. The following observation offers a glimpse into the significant impact that religious values have had in the public/political sphere:

Time and again in our history, spiritually motivated individuals and groups have felt called to show forth in their lives the faith that was in them by taking a stand on the great ethical and political issues of the day. During the Revolution, the parish clergy gave ideological support and moral encouragement to the republican cause. Christian clergy and laity were among the most fervent supporters of the antislavery cause, just as Christians involved in the Social Gospel movement and its many ramifications did much to ameliorate the worst excesses of early industrial capitalism. ...without the intervention of the churches, many significant issues would have been ignored and needed changes would have come about much more slowly.³⁷

Furthermore, it has been noted that references to God, the blessings of God, and being faithful to carrying out the Will of God have been an integral part of the inauguration speeches of all American presidents. Even though references to these themes have been sometimes scant and cryptic, the placement of these references at strategic places in the speeches evidences their profound significance in the collective mythology of America. Referring to these references and their placement at key points in the inaugural speech of President Kennedy, Robert Bellah notes:

The whole address can be understood as only the most recent statement of a theme that lies very deep in the American tradition, namely the obligation, both collective and individual, to carry out God's will on earth. This was the motivating spirit of those who founded America, and it has been present in every generation since. Just below the surface throughout Kennedy's

inaugural address, it becomes explicit in the closing statement that God's work must be our own.³⁸

This appraisal of the positive and significant intrusion of religion into the public/political sphere seems to directly contradict the basic argument that has been presented in the previous subsection. But this difficulty can easily be resolved by looking at the definition of "religion" more closely.

In the discussion regarding the opinions of the founders on the place of religion in American society, and by extension of the religion that "lies very deep in the American tradition," the term "religion" does not refer to either Abrahamic religion or traditional Scripture-based religion. It is a well-known fact that the manifestation of religion can take on a variety of forms, all of which are not mutually reconcilable. The "religion" for which the founders had such high regard and which is an integral part of the American tradition has been described by later scholars as being "civil religion." Even though the basic fundamentals of civil religion are conspicuously derived from the Abrahamic tradition, the phenomenon of civil religion is a radical departure from the Abrahamic tradition — in fact a strong argument could be made that civil religion is the anti-thesis of the Abrahamic tradition.

The concept of civil religion can be traced back to Rousseau, who outlined the fundamentals of this concept in his book *The Social Contract*. The four pillars (or dogmatics) of civil religion and its implication for the religious consciousness of the individual citizen are:

...the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. All other religious opinions are outside the cognizance of the state and may be freely held by the citizen.³⁹

The specific theology (or logic) that one uses to arrive at the aforementioned dogmatics really does not matter, as long as one gets there. The Biblical roots of much of the symbolism and vocabulary of American civil religion should not be taken as being an expression of loyalty to or belief in Biblical religion. Similarly, civil religion appropriates some of the characteristics of God formulated by the proponents of deism, but civil religion should also not be confused with deism. Commenting on the hybrid origins of civil religion and its close, yet aloof, relationship with Biblical Christianity and deism, Bellah notes:

The words and the acts of the founding father, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of civil religion as it has been maintained ever since. Though much is selectively derived from Christianity, this religion is clearly not itself Christianity. ...The God of civil religion is not only rather

“unitarian,” he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law and right than to salvation and love. Even though he is somewhat deist in cast, he is by no means simply a watchmaker God. He is actively interested and involved in history, with special concern for America.⁴⁰

The fact that the God of civil religion is exclusively concerned with matters of “...order, law and right” reflects the purely materialist and utilitarian function of religion in modern secular society. Civil religion’s ultimate concern is not the construction and maintenance of an environment that will facilitate an individual’s salvation in the Hereafter or strengthen his/her ties with God; instead, its ultimate concern is to produce and sustain an environment that facilitates the governance of the citizenry. This point is starkly illustrated in President Eisenhower’s comment that: “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith — and I don’t care what it is.”⁴¹ This comment reflects the recognition that religious faith is indispensable for a healthy and vibrant social order, but for all practical purposes it does not matter where this faith comes from. As far as civil religion is concerned, the ultimate goal of the individual citizen should be to attain and maintain certain degree of religiosity. Thus, all the paths that lead towards this goal are to be considered equally valid. In the final analysis, civil religion is ultimately concerned not so much with God as it is with religiosity. Appropriating the observation of Miller into his analysis, Herberg describes civil religion in these words:

The object of devotion of this kind of religion...is “not God but ‘religion’...The faith is not in God but in faith; we worship not God but our own worshiping.” When Americans think of themselves as a profoundly religious people, whose “first allegiance” is “reserved...to the kingdom of the spirit,” this is, by and large, what they mean, and not any commitment to the doctrines or traditions of historic faiths.⁴²

The emphasis placed on “religiosity” by civil religion at the expense of a deep-rooted “faith in God” is a clear indication that civil religion is a radical departure from the Abrahamic tradition. As with all other social phenomena, civil religion gives births to a unique set of sociological dynamics that simultaneously influence and are influenced by other social phenomena in the environment. Consequently, it is no surprise to find that the content and character of the Scripture-based historic religions is profoundly impacted by the sociological dynamics of civil religion — the very same civil religion that has appropriated a great deal of imagery and vocabulary from Scripture-based historic religion. As a result of the impact of civil religion, variant interpretations of the historic faiths begin to emerge that bear the unmistakable imprint of the modern secularist ethos. The two most prominent such interpretations are “radically individualistic religion”

and “conservative or fundamentalist religion.” Bellah notes that “...these are the two poles that organize much of American religious life. To the first, God is simply the self magnified; to the second, God confronts man from outside the universe.”⁴³ In spite of their obvious and significant differences, radical individualism and fundamentalist conservatism share profoundly similar values and the two phenomena are themselves “...deeply interrelated.” Speaking of this similarity, in spite of apparent differences, Bellah describes the defining characteristics of radically individualistic religion and fundamentalist or conservative religion in these words:

...the first involves a kind of radical individualism that tends to elevate the self to a cosmic principle, whereas the second emphasizes external authorities and injunctions. But the first sees the true self as benevolent and harmonious with nature and other human beings and so as incompatible with narrow self-seeking. And the second finds in external authority and regulation something profoundly freeing: a protection against the chaos of internal and external demands, and the basis for a genuine personal autonomy. Thus, though they mean somewhat different things by freedom and individuality, both hold these as central values.⁴⁴

The very core of these two seemingly disparate manifestations of religion is actually profoundly similar. Consequently, it is no surprise that the type of religious personality that individualistic religion and fundamentalist religion give birth to is also very similar. Individuals who ascribe to either of these two variants of religion

...are deprived of a language genuinely able to mediate among self, society, the natural world, and ultimate reality. Frequently, they fall back on abstractions when talking about the most important things. They stress “communication” as essential to relationships without adequately considering what is to be communicated. They talk about “relationships” but cannot point to the personal virtues and cultural norms that give relationships meaning and value. It is true that religious conservatives go further in specifying content than the others we have discussed, they too, not infrequently revert to the popular language of therapy, and even when they are specific, there are often little more than the idealized norms of “traditional morality,” accepted unreflectively, to fall back on.⁴⁵

A form of religion that is not “genuinely able to mediate among self, society, the natural world, and ultimate reality” can only be called irreligious religion or religion without a soul — and it is this very spiritless religion that flourishes in contemporary secular society. The phenomena of “new age” religion and fundamentalist revival are too well known to be detailed here, suffice it to say that both of them are mature manifestations

of what Bellah has called individualistic religion and fundamentalist religion. In the final analysis, the benefit of this spiritless religions is the fact that they bestow an illusion of “religiosity” upon the practitioners without demanding significant modifications of thought and/or behavior. As these spiritless religions flourish in the contemporary secular environment, Scripture-based historic religions find themselves perpetually on the defensive. The primary reason for the success of spiritless religion and the defensiveness of the historic faiths in the modern secular society is rooted in the fact that spiritless religion is much more amenable to the type of self-idolatry that civil religion seeks to inspire in the citizenry than the Scripture-based historic faiths. The “religiosity” of civil religion celebrates the works, heroes, institutions and achievements of the modern nation state. From the point of view of civil religion there is no doubting the fact that “God is on our side.” The religiosity of civil religion, individualistic self-centered religion, and fundamentalist conservative religion instill the feeling in the “believer” that their own being and the Will of God are practically inseparable. This type of self-idolatry, *ipso facto*, precludes the possibility that the Judgment of God will fall on *us*, for this Judgment can only fall on those who are *other than us* because we are *the true believers* who are partners with God in implementing His will on this earth. This psychological state is the reflection of a sense of security and self-sufficiency on the part of the “believer” that does not demand a critical self-evaluation; as a matter of fact, such critical self-evaluation would be the very negation of “faith” in this self-idolatrous religion. In stark contrast, the God of Scripture-based religion

...makes His unconditional demand upon men, calls them to total love and obedience, and therewith also judges them in their self-interest and self-aggrandizing pretensions. [In the historic faiths] the word of redeeming grace comes only after the word of judgment has shattered all human claims to security and self-sufficiency.⁴⁶

The ultimate benefit of Scripture-based religion (e.g., the Grace of God) can only be attained when all idols have been smashed and rejected by the seeker. The identification and rejection of the material idols that are “outside” is relatively easy as compared to identifying and rejecting the immaterial idols that are “inside.” The immaterial idols that are “inside” include ones own hopes, wishes, fears, likes/dislikes, and so on. The worship of these immaterial idols can express itself in overtly religious symbols and terms. Therefore it is no surprise that while the call to religion is profound and pronounced in the Revealed Scriptures, the warnings to be on constant guard against human elements in religion and human religion are equally profound and pronounced.⁴⁷ It is this dimension of self-conscious criticism that is totally absent from self-idolatrous, modern religion. This crucial difference between self-idolatrous religion and genuine

historic religion causes a tension between the two that is fundamentally irreconcilable. Herberg describes this tension in these words:

...civic religion has always meant the sanctification of the society and culture of which it is the reflection, and that is one of the reasons why [Scripture-based] faith has always regarded such religion as incurably idolatrous. Civic religion is a religion which validates culture and society, without in any sense bringing them under judgment. It lends an ultimate sanction to culture and society by assuring them that they constitute an unequivocal expression of “spiritual ideals” and “religious values.” Religion becomes, in effect, the cult of culture and society, in which the “right” social order and the received cultural values are divinized by being identified with the divine purpose.⁴⁸

The clash between Scripture-based historic religion and civil religion is as old a human society itself. The confrontation between Prophet Abraham (AS) and Nimrod, as well as the confrontation between Prophet Musa (AS) and Pharaoh are examples of this age-old clash. The religion practiced by Nimrod and Pharaoh was a “sanctification” of their respective societies and, more specifically, of the civil and religious authority wielded by the rulers of those societies, represented by Nimrod and Pharaoh themselves. In this setting, different groups and segments in society (like tribes and clans) were allowed to worship a multitude of different deities, practice a myriad of different religious rituals and hold a wide variety of (sometimes conflicting) religious beliefs — as long as they recognized and accepted the ultimate civil and religious authority in the land. Both Nimrod and Pharaoh were not at all averse to promote “religiosity” in their domains as long as they had the ultimate authority to determine the contents of the “religiosity” practiced by their subjects. The demand on the part of Nimrod and Pharaoh to be the final arbiter of the nature of “religiosity” practiced by their subjects and the tension that this caused with the teachings of the Abrahamic tradition is graphically illustrated in the showdown between Prophet Musa (AS) and the magicians of Pharaoh’s court. The background of this clash is that Pharaoh refused to acknowledge the fact that Prophet Musa (AS) is indeed a messenger of Allah (SWT), in spite of the miracles that Musa (AS) showed Pharaoh to support his claim. Pharaoh dismissed the significance of these miracles by asserting that they were nothing more than magic tricks. Upon the counsel of his advisers, Pharaoh had the most expert magicians in his kingdom assemble in order to engage Prophet Musa (AS) in a contest that (from Pharaoh’s point of view) would prove the falsehood of Prophet Musa’s (AS) claim. The Qur’an describes the setting and outcome of this contest in these words:

And Musa said to them [the magicians]: “Throw whatever you are going to throw!” Thereupon they threw their ropes and staffs, and said: “By Pharaoh’s might, behold it is indeed we who will prevail!” [But] then Musa threw his staff and lo, it swallowed up all their deceptions. And the magicians fell down prostrating themselves in adoration, [and] exclaimed: “We have come to believe in the Lord of all the worlds, the Lord of Musa and Harun!” (Al-Shu‘ara 26:43-48)

The outcome of the contest made it plainly obvious to the magicians that Prophet Musa (AS) was not a magician but a messenger of Allah (SWT), and they immediately announced their acceptance of the religion of the prophets. When Pharaoh saw that the magicians had abandoned Pharaoh’s religion (the civil religion of the day) and accepted the religion of the prophets, his immediate wrath did not direct itself towards Prophets Musa (AS) and Harun (AS) who had now begun to “corrupt” his subjects, nor towards his subjects because they made a decision to follow another religion. What roiled Pharaoh’s anger was the fact that his subjects had dared to accept a religious creed without his permission. The Qur’an records his reaction upon seeing the conversion of the magicians in these words:

[Pharaoh] said: “Have you come to believe in him [i.e., Prophet Musa] before I have given you permission? Verily, he must be your master who has taught you magic! But in time you shall come to know [of my revenge]: I will definitely cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and will definitely crucify you, all together!” (Al-Shu‘ara 26:49)

The basic reason why Pharaoh (in this particular case) and civil religion in general cannot tolerate the existence of a genuine religiosity rooted in the Abrahamic tradition is the fact that such a religiosity furnishes the believer with a perspective and language that can be used to pass judgment on the existing socio-political reality. While the ultimate concern of civil religion is to sanctify the existent socio-political reality, prophetic religion must continuously and consciously keep its critical faculties focused in order to identify and eliminate any manifestations of self-aggrandizing idolatry. In pre-modern times, civil religion often expressed itself in the worship of the individual ruler (sometimes considered divine and almost

always semi-divine) because at this stage in human history the concept of “state” or “society” as distinct from “government” or “ruler” had not yet developed. With the evolution of modern political theory and institutions, a clear distinction was drawn between “state” on the one hand and the “ruler” or “government” on the other. In the modern secular setting, it is the “state” that demands the ultimate allegiance from the citizen, not any particular “ruler” or “government.” Whereas yesterday individual rulers determined the permissible content and expressions of “religiosity,” today the “state” acts as the final arbiter of permissible religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, no state is more jealous of its right to be the final arbiter in matters of “religiosity” than the modern secular state.

In the context of our discussion regarding the relationship between civil religion and the Scripture-based historic faiths in the modern secular setting, the implications of the foregoing discussion are inescapable. The Abrahamic tradition seeks to provide not just the individual believer but also the community of believers with an “ultimate concern” that should become the “center” of their intellectual, spiritual, and conceptual universe. The modern secular “state,” for its part, cannot tolerate the existence of any rival that seeks to be an “ultimate concern” of its citizens; instead, the modern secular “state” itself seeks to be the center of the citizens’ intellectual and conceptual universe. Consequently, it is no surprise at all to find that the modern secular state has produced a legal and political culture that deliberately strives to shape the religious dimension of modern society in a way that denigrates and deprecates all manifestations of religion that would challenge the state’s aspirations to be the “ultimate concern” of its citizenry. A group of individuals discovering an object of “ultimate concern” necessarily means that the “...discovered ultimate meaning becomes the *center* of the group’s conceptual universe,” and this in turn means that the discovered “ultimate meaning “...will necessarily displace the competing claims for ultimate meaning that are made by that powerful agglomeration of individuals known as the state.”⁴⁹ It is a basic given that the birth and growth of the modern state has required the individual to relinquish more and more autonomy to the governing apparatus of the state. Carter notes: “As the apparatus of government grows, and its control over the lives of citizens increases, the situation in which meanings are imposed becomes of necessity far more numerous...”⁵⁰ In other words, the sphere of influence of Scripture-based historic faiths, of necessity, continues to shrink. Even though its methods of control and manipulation are far more sophisticated and nuanced, today’s secular state is not any more tolerant of the Abrahamic tradition than the Pharaoh of yesterday.

Judaism in the West: the Canary in the Coal Mine

Another way to illustrate the fundamental intolerance of the modern secular state towards Scripture-based historic religions is to look at

the fate of one such religion in the modern secular setting, Judaism is the best candidate for such an analysis. The fact that the Jewish religio-cultural identity has survived over three millennia in numerous and extremely varied socio-historical settings cannot be denied. The survival of the religious and cultural identity of the Jews in predominantly adverse conditions, sometimes under conditions specifically engineered to destroy this identity, is evidence of the great “staying power” of Judaism. The fate of this identity in the “tolerant” secular setting makes it an excellent indicator of the extent and limitations of modern secularism’s “tolerance” of historic faiths. Another reason to choose Judaism for this purpose is the fact that Judaism is the “other” that has been closest to the secular “self” for the longest period of time. The birth of modern secularism is often located in the upheaval surrounding the Protestant Reformation, therefore proverbially speaking Judaism has been in close contact with secularism since its very birth. Furthermore, Jewish thinkers have also played a prominent role in formulating the theoretical and institutional bases of modern secularism.

Two facts are undeniable regarding Judaism’s encounter with modern secularism. The first is that modern secularism has been far more tolerant of Judaism than the pre-modern medieval theocratic order. And the second is that this tolerance has not been accorded unconditionally — the religio-cultural identity of Western Judaism has been profoundly modified by the dominant secular environment. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to ascertain whether this tradeoff has been “worth it” or not; this is an issue that the Jewish community itself (and ultimately history) has to resolve. The object of the following discussion is only to get a sense of the extent and manner in which the Jewish religio-cultural identity has changed in the modern secular setting. For Scripture-based faith traditions other than Judaism (i.e., Islam), this discussion will be useful because it will provide a glimpse of the minimum modifications that the faith tradition is required to undergo in order to become compatible with (or “tolerated” by) modern secularism.

The following observation by Jacob Neusner describes the transformation of identity that the American Jewish community has undergone after an extended period of living in a “tolerant” secular environment, and the accompanying problems that this transformation has brought with it:

The holy people, “Israel,” of times past has become “the American Jewish community,” uncertain what is Jewish about itself, still more unsure of what “Jewish” ought to mean at all. Surely the lingering crisis of self-definition, characteristic of modern men in many situations, marks the Jew as utterly modern and secular. Add to that the second component of the holy people’s self-understanding: concern for what the Gentiles think of Jews, readiness to admit that negative opinion into the

Jewish assessment of the Jews. This submission to universal opinions and values hardly characterizes a holy people, set apart from all others. Frail and uncomfortable, hating those “Jewish traits” in oneself that set Jews apart from everyone else, and wanting to be Jewish but not too much, not so much that they cannot also be undifferentiated Americans — is this the holy people that traversed 35 centuries of human history, proud, tenacious, alone? Can such men as these, unable to agree on anything, be called a people? Can they claim their collectivity to be holy, separate and apart?

Surely in the passage from the sacred to the secular, the holy people has disintegrated, become a random group of discrete, scarcely similar individuals. Yet while they may seem to be so, the one point Jews affirm is that they shall be Jews. This they have in common.⁵¹

This observation by Neusner contains two important points of fact which cannot be contested: a) the identity of the American Jew has been radically changed by the dominant secular environment, and b) the impact of the dominant secular environment has been so profound that it has shaped the Jew’s own self-definition. The final outcome of these two factors is that the community of “the holy people” that withstood the trials and travails of “...35 centuries of human history” with its collective identity intact has today degenerated into a “...random group of discrete, scarcely similar individuals.” The very fact that the sense of community and collectivity has disintegrated raises the question of the existence of the individual Jew — can an individual person lay claim to the Jewish identity apart from the collectivity that is “the holy people”? Historically speaking, the very notion of a Jew existing apart from the community is absurd, let alone its possibility. But the very same dynamics of secularism that have given rise to the problem of identity have also created possibilities that make the formerly absurd not only quite possible but virtually inevitable.

The disintegration of the Jewish collectivity, and the subsequent degeneration of the Jewish identity, can be more fully appreciated by looking at the processes that have led to the divorce between “Judaism” and “Jewishness” that modern secular theory has made possible. Pre-modern thought demonstrates an awareness of the existence of the sacred-secular, private-public and individual-collective dyads. But it views the relationship between the two elements of each dyad to be an organic relationship in which the existence of the one element is, *a priori*, necessary for the viability of the other element. This holistic approach of pre-modern thought demonstrates the awareness that the existence, health, and viability of one element in the dyad requires the existence, health, and viability of the other. In stark contrast, modern secular thought has a sharply dichotomous view of the relationship between the sacred-secular, public-private, and individual-collective realms. Consequently in modern secular thought it is

possible (and normal) to read a discussion about “secular” matters and not come across even a passing reference to the “sacred.” Similarly, matters of “individual” rights are often debated, legislated, and implemented without seriously taking into consideration their impact on the “collective” well being of society.

The possibility and often necessity of dichotomous distinctions between traditionally related concepts in modern secular thought have direct and significant implications for religious identity. “Jewishness” simultaneously refers to a religious and a cultural identity, and, traditionally speaking, the religious and cultural dimensions have been viewed as being distinct but organically linked aspects. In the modern secular setting, however, it has become possible to view religious Jewishness as being totally separate from cultural Jewishness. In other words, it has become possible for a person to think of him/herself as “Jewish” even though he/she has severed all relationships with “Judaism.” On a very elementary and fundamental level, Judaism requires that the Jew observe the Sabbath, keep Kosher, and give charity. For an individual to disregard even these fundamentals and still claim to be “Jewish” is to witness the emergence of a contradiction that only the modern secular minds can comprehend and/or accept. Traditionally speaking, one had to observe the teachings of “Judaism” in order to lay claim to the identity of “Jewishness.” But in the modern secular setting it has become possible, and fashionable, to dispense with “Judaism” (e.g., its religious teachings) and still claim to be “Jewish.” Speaking of the emergence of this tendency among American Jewry, Feingold notes:

In 1942, a rudimentary “state of the faith” survey of New York Jewry found that over 40 percent checked none of the items customarily associated with practicing Judaism, such as the lighting of the Sabbath candles, the observance of *kasbrus*, or the giving to charity. When the puzzled interviewers asked what then made them Jewish, the response was inevitably that they felt “Jewish in their heart.” They were promptly dubbed “cardiac Jews.” It was apparent that it was not a heart that beat very strongly.⁵²

The dichotomous separation between the religious and the cultural aspects of the Jewish identity that modern secular thought has made possible is the first (and probably the most destructive) inroad into the transformation of Jewish identity. Neusner speaks of the transformation of the former “holy people” of Israel into the “American Jewish community,” a community that is “...uncertain what is Jewish about itself, still more unsure of what ‘Jewish’ ought to mean at all.” This is a transformation that has to be viewed from the perspective of the separation between the religious and cultural identity.

It could be argued that Jews in modern secular settings have become increasingly troubled by religious practices and theological teachings that do not make sense to them and they have therefore abandoned Judaism as a religion but have maintained a sense of Jewishness. Leaving the merits of this argument aside, it highlights another pernicious aspect of secular modernity that has led to the gradual dismemberment of the Jewish religio-cultural identity. In pre-modern traditional settings, there were undoubtedly individuals who were troubled by the demands of Judaism's religious practices and theological teachings. In contrast to the modern secular setting, a distinctly Jewish culture/community existed in these pre-modern settings which helped to "break the fall" of the individual who had become troubled by Jewish ritual and/or theology. The Yiddish sub-culture of late medieval Eastern Europe or the Ladino sub-culture of an even more remote time and place are examples of the "cushions" that served to "break the fall" of the individuals "falling away" from Judaism. In the modern secular setting, however, the very same factors that have made the split between Judaism the religion and Jewishness the identity possible, have made it impossible for the emergence of a genuinely Jewish sub-culture similar to the Yiddish and Ladino phenomena. The emergence and survival of these sub-cultures required a feeling of "foreignness" or "otherness" on the part of the Jewish community and a degree of acknowledgement *cum* tolerance of this "otherness" on the part of the host community. The sociological dynamics of modern secularism impel the immigrant community to lose all manifestations of "foreignness" and "otherness" as soon as possible while at the same time impelling the host majority community to abhor all manifestations of separateness. The following observation by Herberg points towards these very dynamics that preclude the possibility of Yiddish- or Ladino-like healthy sub-culture emerging:

Equally dubious from the standpoint of Jewish-Christian faith is that aspect of the present religious situation which makes religion in America so thoroughly American. On the one side this means no taint of foreignness any longer adheres to the three great American "faiths." Catholics, Jews, Lutherans and others, who remember how formidable an obstacle to the preservation and communication of their faith the taint of foreignness once was, will not be altogether ungrateful for this development... But on the other side, the "Americanization" of religion has meant a distinct loss of the sense of religious uniqueness and universality: each of the three "faiths," insofar as the mass of its adherents are concerned, tends to regard itself as merely an alternative and variant form of being religious in the American way.⁵³

Herberg goes on to note that the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish communities undoubtedly share a common ground, which should be taken note of:

...yet the very existence of this common ground makes the unique and distinctive witness of each communion, even the advocacy of universal claims where such are felt to be justified, all the more necessary for the life of the faith. Insofar as the "Americanness" of religion in America blunts this sense of uniqueness and universality, and converts the three religious communions into variant expressions of American spirituality...the authentic character of Jewish-Christian faith is falsified, and the faith itself reduced to the status of an American culture-religion.⁵⁴

Modern secular culture has on the one hand caused an unprecedented dichotomous split between Judaism and Jewishness while at the same time precluding the possibility of the emergence of a definable Jewish sub-culture. The emergence of a genuine sub-culture is forestalled by blunting "...the sense of uniqueness and universality" that is crucial to the authentic character of Judaism (as well as other faiths). In continued assertion of "religiosity" outside the context of this religious sub-culture "...the authentic character of Jewish-Christian faith is falsified."

When Neusner refers to "...the holy people's self-understanding" in modern secular setting being profoundly shaped by "...concern for what the Gentiles think of Jews" and the Jews' "...readiness to admit that negative opinion into the Jewish assessment of the Jews," it is clear that this tendency cannot be understood and appreciated without taking into account the sociological dynamics of modern secularism. Modern secular societies demand that every religious community, not just the Jewish community, shape its self-definition in light of the assessment that it (i.e., secularism) has made of the subject community. In fact, the secular tendency to forestall the emergence of an authentic religious sub-culture (Jewish or otherwise) is itself the most telling evidence that secularism cannot tolerate the existence of any identity (Jewish or otherwise) that secularism itself has not ultimately defined. Modern secular values immediately rush into the vacuum created by the separation between the religious and cultural dimensions of "Jewishness," since these secular values are the only alternatives that are left when Judaism has been abandoned as a source of self-definition. Feingold articulates this point in these words:

...the decline in religious observance and synagogue attendance [the decline of religious culture] occurred in tandem with the weakening of Jewishness, the ethnic culture. ...That falling away could take various forms. Some became involved in Jewish organizational life or the Zionist movement, which could delay the assimilation process for a generation or two. Sometime it

seemed as if the familiar Jewish zeal for faith and *mitzvot* (good deeds) was transmuted to political idealism embodied in the doctrines of socialism, often in only one generation.⁵⁵

Without a nurturing environment in which to grow and flourish, the historical Scripture-based ideals and teachings of Judaism are perversely transmuted into their secular counterparts and, in the process, the secular culture, *de facto*, comes to be the final arbiter of Jewish identity. This means “[e]xile becomes priestly mission. Exodus, a search for freedom. Prophetic exhortation, a quest for social justice.”⁵⁶ There is no doubt that these secularized definitions of exile, exodus, and prophetic mission are partially correct, but only partially. Removed from their religious roots, the secularized definitions are desiccated versions of far richer, far more meaningful, and far more profound concepts that have been forcibly mutilated by the dominant secular environment. This uprooting is violence enough on the religious body, but as it turns out this is only the beginning of secularism’s assault. Once these concepts have been removed from their religious moorings and significantly modified, the re-defined concepts return to the religious body and do even greater violence. The end result of this vicious circle is that “[t]he religious garment is retailored to fit [the dominant secular culture].”⁵⁷ One can get a glimpse into the brutality of the violence that is done by looking at the final results that emerge after the assault. Commenting on the difference between traditional (pre-modern) Judaism and modern (secularized) Judaism, Mordecai Kaplan notes:

The conceptions of God, Israel, Torah, human nature, sin, repentance, messianic redemption and the world to come in pre-modern or Traditional Judaism belong to a radically different universe of thought or world outlook, from that of the average westernized Jew. This means that every one of the modern trends in Judaism, insofar as Jews who have come under the influence of modern thought articulate it, cannot possibly be the original Judaism of tradition. It can only be an adaptation of it to the spirit of the times, whether that fact is recognized or not.⁵⁸

While the “original Judaism of tradition” was more often than not also “...an adaptation...to the spirit of the times,” the spirit of modern secular times is so radically hostile to “...the Judaism of tradition” that the fundamental theological conceptions of most modern Jews are an entire universe removed from the letter and spirit of traditional Judaism. It cannot be otherwise because these modern theological conceptions are born and reside in a modern conceptual universe that is openly hostile to the traditional universe.

In summary, it can be stated without hesitation that the proud and durable Jewish religio-cultural identity that survived a multitude of assaults aimed at destroying it during three and a half millennia, has succumbed to

the “tolerance” of modern secularism. The present crisis facing Jewish religio-cultural identity reflects the best that any of the traditional, Scripture-based religions can hope for in the modern secular environment. The continued survival of even the semblance of a Jewish identity in the closing decades of the 20th century in a secular environment can be attributed to the strength of the “collective historical memory” of the Jewish community. This collective memory has kept the feeling of “Jewishness” alive among Jews who abandoned all links to Judaism long ago. The possibility of the religio-cultural identity to survive the severance of linkage to religion by the adherents of other faiths is far less likely than is the case with the adherents of Judaism. This is because other religions do not have anything quite like the collective historical memory of the Jews to serve “as the tie that binds.” By extension it means that the ability of other religious traditions to withstand the assaults of secularism is less pronounced than the ability of Judaism. Neusner notes that the modern Jew is “...more Jewish in action than in thought...,”⁵⁹ if the current trends continue it is only a matter of time before the modern Jew ceases to be Jewish even in action. By extension, it is only a matter of time that adherents of other faiths who have ceased to be “religious” in thought will also soon cease to be “religious” in action, if the current trends continue. Quoting W. C. Smith, Bellah defines a genuine religious symbol in the following words:

A religious symbol is successful if men can express in terms of it the highest and deepest vision of which they are capable, and if in terms of it that vision can be nourished and can be conveyed to others within one’s group.⁶⁰

It goes without saying that not only does the modern Jewish community not possess any such symbol, there is no other Scripture-based religious community that possesses any such symbol in the modern secular setting.

Whereas the foregoing discussion regarding the viability of Scripture-based religion in a secular setting is quite bleak, the possibilities of genuine religion to flourish in the coming century are not nearly as bleak. The reason for this is the simple fact that the most pressing concerns facing humanity cannot be solved (or even properly diagnosed) without the aid of the Scripture-based tradition unfettered by the restrictions and demands of the modern secular paradigm. The modern secular state itself needs “religiosity” if it is to remain healthy and functional — a “religiosity” that it itself is incapable of producing. The modern secular state and the modern capitalist economy have survived thus far because they have been effective parasites that have taken full advantage of the accumulated “moral capital” of a bygone era. Now that this moral capital is virtually depleted, the continued viability of the modern secular paradigm is itself problematic. The survival of Scripture-based religion in the coming century depends not so much on the “tolerance” of modern secularism to nurture and promote

such religion because, by its very nature, modern secularism is incapable of such nurturing. Instead, Scripture-based traditions will survive into the future because human beings will inevitably realize that these traditions contain resources that can cure them of the ills that no modern widget or pill, or vaccine will ever be able to cure.

C. G. Jung spent a lifetime treating individuals suffering from psychological disorders that are to be found exclusively in modern secular society — disorders that do not manifest themselves as physical deformities but rather as psychic and emotional deformities. Ruminating over a career spanning almost six decades, dedicated to making shattered psyches and emotions whole again, Jung noted the following:

Among all my patients in the second half of life... every one of them fell ill because he had lost what the living religions of every age have given their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.⁶¹

It is worth quoting Jung at some length in order to gain a deeper understanding of the fore-cited assertion:

When you study the mental history of the world, you see that people since times immemorial had a general teaching or doctrine about the wholeness of the world. Originally and down to our days, they were considered to be holy traditions taught to the young people as a preparation for their future life.

...As these views deal with the world as a whole, they create also a wholeness of the individual, so much so, that for instance a primitive tribe loses its vitality when it is deprived of its specific religious outlook. People are no more rooted in their world and lose their orientation. They just drift. That is very much our condition, too. The need for a meaning of their lives remains unanswered, because the rational, biological goals are unable to express the wholeness of human life. Thus life loses meaning.⁶²

Once life loses its meaning, the onset of psychic fractures sets in, and jobs for individuals in Jung's profession become aplenty. Looking at these insights by Jung and going back to the discussion on the Jewish experience in modern secular society; it becomes obvious that the disintegration of Jewish identity is a communal manifestation of the psychic disintegration that Jung is referring to. It could be argued that secularism has provided numerous benefits in modern times — a highly dubious argument given the orgy of killing, destruction, and havoc that the secular states have engaged in during the course of the 20th century amongst themselves, to say nothing of the deliberate and calculated destruction of traditional, pre-modern societies by modern secular regimes. But looking beyond the modern period, the very psychological and emotional well being of human individuals requires that the limitations inherent in secularism be

overcome and an organic and intimate relationship be established with the well spring of authentic religiosity — the Scripture-based religious traditions.

Endnotes

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59. Neusner, *American Judaism*, op. cit., p. 74.
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61. This comment was originally published in a Chicago newspaper. It was reprinted in a paragraph introducing a letter that Jung had written in reply to an inquiry asking him to explain his concept of "religious outlook." This previously unpublished letter dated November. 12, 1959, appears in "The New York Times" on Friday November 19, 1993, in the Op-Ed section under the title "Crazy Times."
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