

Optimistic Dogmatism and Pessimistic Empiricism

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Abstract

This paper examines a wide range of intellectual materials that include Platonic philosophy, Islam, Descartes, Locke, Skinner, and artificial intelligence (AI). Furthermore, the paper discusses the various positions that different utopian traditions have taken with respect to the notion of a metaphysical realm beyond the world as we empirically know it. The results of the study ultimately point to the contrasting positions that science and religion take with respect to history, progress and hope.

Keywords: Science, Natural philosophy, Dogma, Utopia, Religion, Otherworldliness, Empiricism, Pragmatism

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In his book *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America*, Wilfred McClay (1994) quite poignantly observed, "A utopia is not only an imaginative projection of a radiant social ideal; it is also a way that, indirectly, a society confesses how and why it is unhappy with itself" (p. 75). There is always a tension between the status quo and the ideal. As a way of changing the disparities of the status quo, both religion and science offer the promise of a kind of otherworldliness, a utopian vision. Edward Bellamy, a 19th-century American utopian socialist, held that this utopian vision can be achieved through both faith and science, humans' cultivation of their gardens:

The Golden Age lies before us and not behind us and is not far away. Our children will surely see it, and we, too, who are already men and women, if we deserve it by our faith and by our works. (Bellamy, 1888, p.222)

If a utopian vision implies that societies are living happily in harmonious rhythm, then this is the earthly achievement of the religious paradise for which people strive. Humans should aspire towards that goal, and, through their collective cooperative work, they evolve towards that end. For both science and religion, the final goal for evolution is the golden future, "a paradise of order, equity, and felicity" (Bellamy, 1888, p.166). Therefore, although science and religion occupy two different paradigms and follow two different methods, they share the same goal: improving the human condition by realizing the perfect society. Religion's hope culminates in an Edenic vision of paradise, an actual point in the linear progression of time that marks the end of time and history. Science's paradise or ideal society is always in the making, a never-ending process.

Science (previously known as natural philosophy) began as subservient to religion. For example, as was the case with many other scientists, Robert Boyle, one of the fathers of modern chemistry, could not imagine how an intricate system such as humans could come into being without an intelligent designer. Principe (2000) noted in *The Aspiring Adept* that Boyle attempted to prove the existence of spiritual entities such as angels, demons, and ghosts; he thus collected witchcraft testimonies trying to find spiritual activities in the world. Boyle was interested in these studies because these mystical entities, if they could be verified, could demonstrate spiritual forces. He realized that he needed to find only one or a few credible accounts to argue his case that there is a *soul*. He also attempted to find the Philosopher's Stone, which was thought to have the power to transform base metal into gold. Beyond merely creating gold, Boyle also claimed that the Philosopher's Stone might be able to attract angelic apparitions and to make it possible to communicate with them. Boyle wanted to use these communications as proof of the existence of spiritual entities and of God's activities in the world.

However, the argument concerning the existence of spirits and the soul as an immaterial substance is problematic because, as Principe (2000) noted, it appeals to ignorance, specifically to the ignorance of the hidden causations in the nature of things. It appeals to our emotions, our feelings of awe and wonder, rather than to our reason. What such an argument creates, Principe explained, is a god of the gaps, which refers to an image of the deity that is unintentionally created by arguments that invoke God's direct intervention "to explain otherwise inexplicable phenomena or situations." In other words, as we do not currently have a way to explain what we see, we resort to God as an explanation. Such gaps tend to be manifestations of the

incompleteness of our knowledge at any given time. Thus, they tend to close with the advance of scientific knowledge, which puts religion in a state of continual withdrawal. In this case, the problem with the nature of the universe is solved by the scientific method. As such, if we invest in a god of the gaps, then that god risks being progressively squeezed out of the picture, with science's progressive garnering of more empirical evidence and valid possible alternative explanations for various phenomena.

Plato uses the term *psyche*, the soul¹, to mean reason, the function of the mind or consciousness. He proposed that there is a true being that is beneath, behind, within, or above the appearances of the world and that the true journey of man is the quest for that true being. He proposed two dichotomies in his metaphysics. The first is the world of appearances, of shadows, and of the many. The second is the world of forms, of the essence, and of the one. He gives the example of virtue. There are many manifestations of virtues, of virtuous acts, but there is only one form or essence of virtue. In contrast, the world of the many is in flux, always changing, and the world of forms is unchanging, and eternal (Grube & Melling).

Plato calls the form the idea, with the true forms being ideas. For him, ideas do not exist in the physical world; therefore, they are not seen with the physical eye. They are located above us and can be seen only by the mind's eye. The mind is the only means by which we catch a glimpse of the realm of forms and connect to the eternal truth. For the Platonists, the things one sees with the physical eyes are not as real as the forms; they are transient, not eternal. They are mere shadows and imitations of the real things. Thus, one should train oneself to look deeper than what one sees on the surface. Plato uses the allegory of the cave to explain his metaphysics. He says that people in a dark cave are tied up so that their heads cannot turn, and they look straight at the wall ahead of them. There is a fire, the sun, behind them, and the shadows of things behind them are cast by the light on the wall in front of them, but they are only looking at the shadows of the real things. They look at the shadows long enough to think that the shadows are the real things.

However, in order to see the sun and the real things behind the shadows, they need to break free of the chains around them and turn around. It is a process of conversion, of turning away from darkness to the light. Afterwards, they must climb to ascend out of the cave towards the sun. Plato provides this image of the ascension of the soul from the world of illusion to that of true being, to the light, and it is an image of otherworldliness. People rise up out of the world of becoming to the world of Being. It is a difficult process, since, because they have been in the dark for so long, they are blinded by the light once they look at it; it is too bright. Taking a glimpse of the true Being, the mind gets dazzled. People have to practice to become educated. Eventually, they will be able to see the true forms and understand them, and only then will they be able to look at the sun, the ultimate good, the Divine (Grube, Melling). The world of becoming is sensible; it can be perceived by the senses. Truth in the world of becoming is nothing more than opinion, but the world of Being is intelligible, seen and understood by the mind². For Plato, the Mind possesses

¹ In this paper, I am using the concept of *soul* to mean the *mind*, the epiphenomenon of the brain processes.

² Intelligible comes from *intellect* or *intelligence*, a Greek word for *understanding*

understanding, which opens the door to the transcendent realm of knowledge. Understanding is the activity by which the mind, the soul, can transcend beyond mere appearances to the Real, beyond the world of becoming to the world of Being.³

Plato draws a dualistic vision of the universe: this world and the other. He invented the notion of the dualism of the human self: soul and body. The soul is immortal and, as such, is akin to the forms; it is deathless and eternal. The soul has a destiny outside of the physical world; it is not at home in the body but desires to go back to where it belongs. (Plato places the soul in the mind, in the intellectual faculty by which we philosophize.) The soul always desires the world of Being, and this desire culminates in philosophy. Plato believes that philosophy is the act (or ritual) of contemplating the world of the forms (what later Platonists refer to as the Divine realm). To this end, philosophy is a ritual of practicing to die, a preparation for the soul's separation from the body. The process of philosophizing is similar to a ritual: It is the way by which the soul purifies itself from its attachment to the body and returns to its natural place among the forms.

Plato argues that the soul, just as the mind (in our modern understanding), has a memory (Grube, Melling). It comes into the body with knowledge of the forms. Therefore, seeing the forms with the mind is a form of recollection. Understanding an idea is seeing it with the mind's eye. Rather than having that idea in one's mind, understanding is remembering what the soul saw when it was in the world of Being and recognizing it. Hence, it is a process of recognition.

Plato pictures the soul as a charioteer whose horses are difficult to manage, so he gets tired and falls. Later, Plotinus understood Plato's concept of the soul as being up in heaven contemplating things beyond the heavens; the soul receives its harmony, unity and blessedness by contemplating the Divine mind (Ennead IV, "The Souls Descent into Body"). The heavens are beyond the physical world, beyond the visible world

³ Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, argues that the senses provide the mind with valid data about the material world, the phenomenon, but that the mind is not a passive recipient of sensations; it contains certain categories that impose order on the data collected by the senses. He adds that there is another realm of knowledge that is available to the mind that does allow us to see into the nature of things-in-themselves, the nominal realm. In the nominal realm, understanding of the thing in itself—of God, of moral right and wrong—exists. Reason operates in the phenomenal realm only and cannot be transcendent. Just as the mind possesses categories that are beyond reason, the mind possesses understanding, which is beyond mere reason. Understanding, by intuition, opens the access to the nominal, transcendent realm of knowledge (Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*). Richardson explains that Ralph Waldo Emerson was influenced by Kant. For Emerson, in the world of the phenomenal, there could be no trace of the transcendental. In a letter to a friend in May 31, 1834, Emerson wrote:

Reason is the highest faculty of the soul—what we mean often by the soul itself; it never reasons, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision. The Understanding toils all the time, compares, contrives adds, argues, near sighted but strong-sighted, dwelling in the present the expedient the customary. (133)

Everywhere in nature, the phenomenal (what appears) is dictated by the nominal (what is), the beauty of which derives from, as Emerson (1834) wrote in "The Poet," "the instant dependence of form upon soul" (221). Nature is Emerson's testament to his belief that the spirit, by which Emerson meant ideas, is more important than nature, the physical world; and that the spirit or mind precedes and produces nature.

and beyond vision; they can only be seen by the mind. The soul starts outside of the cave, up in the world of light. Through its embodiment, the soul is dragged and chained inside the cave, which is birth. Those individual souls that fall into bodies are those who have tired of contemplating the Divine. They turned their faces away from the divine out toward the external world, and so they fell into physical bodies. Thus, to be reunited with the One, the Divine mind, they must undergo a process of purification and rehabilitation.⁴

II

Within *The Republic*, one can see that Plato's philosophy seeks to lead people to the state of transcendent forms. By forms, as Annas (1991) noted, Plato meant quintessential models or ideals that transcend our current earthly existence and that, somehow through this model, set an example for us to move towards. It is important to note that what Plato is referring to is not a physical ascending or descending. Rather, it is the philosopher's intellectual ascending to learn the truth and then descending to the student's level so as to guide the student upward.

Through education, Plato wants the creation of a just state, Annas (1991) further noted. Consequently, his *arete* is a quality of the mind, referring to an excellence within the individual that defines that particular person. It is what makes each individual unique, expressed in what a person does best. The purpose of education is thus to elicit that quality of mind and to reinforce it. Plato wants the state to act as an agent of virtue, serving as an educational tool to nurture, nourish, and develop individuals' attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors towards justice. The state shapes and produces a quality of mind.

In this sense, the allegory of the cave can be seen quite differently. In the cave, we find darkness because it is without light or enlightenment. People in the cave think that the shadows on its wall are real. Plato makes the point that, although this is profound ignorance, the inhabitants of the cave are unaware of it. If a person were able to turn around, see the light, and follow the tunnel out into the open, he or she could understand through the light that the reality outside of the cave is the true reality and that what is inside the cave is mere illusion. In terms of the example of Socrates, if the person who exits the cave, the person who is seeking the light, the person who has knowledge of the ultimate reality, comes back to the cave, he will be murdered. Plato wants a state that puts people such as Socrates in power, an end which can be achieved through educating the population so that when people such as Socrates come back, having been out of the cave, they will be welcomed as rulers (Annas, 1981).

Therefore, when the majority of people can see the truth, they will be in it. It is a matter of ascending intellectually to the world of forms, as well as bringing it down to us by implementing it. Up is the Idea, and, when the Idea is understood, it will be actualized. The idea is the utopian Republic of Plato. Today, we are in a bad condition in this world. When we aim for the ideal and work towards it, we can create it, and the mind of the Republic, the soul of the Republic is the philosopher king. The philosopher king is a guardian who must not lust for power but rather receive power

⁴ The act of philosophizing or intelligizing the Divine.

as an obligation (specifically, a religious obligation), as a responsibility to the whole state.

If the philosophers rule, society will be able to achieve harmony, obtain freedom from discord, and experience true liberation because those individuals will set a model for all to follow. Plato wants to prepare those leaders of the Republic by freeing them from any attachment that could infect their reason. Thus, he abolishes property, which means abolishing greed, lust (especially lust for power), and possessiveness (later, this idea will be developed as asceticism, a religious detachment from the material world). In addition, the nuclear family is abolished to create an extended common family of those who will rule. These ideal individuals, who are freed from concerns about family and property, will be able to shape policy in the Republic. In that way, reason will rule.

III

Later Christian Platonists such as Origen of Alexandria took Plato's system and integrated it within their religious philosophy. The hierarchy between God at the top and humans at the bottom emerging from Plato's metaphysics gives a sense of vertical direction: Up is the direction of God and down is the place of darkness. The dark is far away from the Divine light, which makes it bad. Hence, there is the religious notion that people do not really belong in this world in which they find themselves; rather, they are on a pilgrimage through this life, and the end of this pilgrimage, this journey, is in heaven, the higher realm.

The understanding of Plato's parable of the cave—that individuals can break free of the chains and ascend out of the cave, to see the Truth, and then descend back into the cave to help people in the cave to likewise see the real world—can be compared to the genesis of religious authority in that those individuals, the carriers of the light, can be considered the prophets who call for actualizing the Kingdom of God.

According to the traditional monotheistic religions, the Divine exists outside of or beyond our fallen physical realm. God does not really descend into our material nature or world, and, as a result, in terms of the history of those religious traditions, we need intercessors; we need texts, we need rituals, we need priests, and we need the figure of Jesus or the figure of the Prophet to act as an intermediary between us and God.⁵

For example, in the Islamic faith, the Prophet literally went into a cave to contemplate the Divine when he perceived the Light. He metaphorically ascended out of the cave up to the realm of being, where God's wisdom was revealed to him. In chapter 24, the Quran tells of the light of the One, the sun, in the platonic parable of the cave:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, [and] the glass is

⁵ Judaism and Islam may claim that God does not descend into the material, but Christianity claims that this is precisely what God did by becoming incarnate in the Jesus of Nazareth. For Christians, Jesus is more than a mediator between God and humanity: Jesus is God incarnate.

as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not – light upon light – Allah guides to His light whom He pleases, and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is Cognizant of all things. (24:35)

The Prophet who saw this light had the obligation to guide people to it. In chapter 16, the Quran sets forth the teaching method for the Prophet and those who saw the Light to help others to ascend by themselves:

Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from His path, and He knows best those who follow the right way. (16:125)

As with Plato's philosophizing, the Islamic process of purification involves contemplative rituals. All acts of ritual revolve around the contemplation of the Quran and training the soul to let go of its attachment to the body and its desires. As did Plato, they considered extravagances to be the decadence of the soul. Hasan al-Basri, a Muslim theologian, said:

The lower material world is a house whose inmates labor for loss; only ostentation from it makes one happy in it. He who befriends it in desire and love for it will be made wretched by it. And his portion with God will be laid waste for this world has neither worth nor weight with God. (Esposito, Fasching, & Lewis, 2007, p.224)

Rabi'a al 'Adawiyya demonstrated the selfless love and devotion that the soul has for The Divine, which reflects the soul's desire to reunite with the Platonic world of forms. She said:

O God! If I adore You out of fear of Hell, burn me in Hell! If I adore You out of desire for Paradise, Lock me out of Paradise. However, if I adore You for Yourself alone, Do not deny to me Your eternal beauty. (qtd in Woodward, 2000, p.211)

Rituals are immediate paths to experiencing the Divine in this world. Through rituals, Muslims emphasize attachment to the spiritual realm over attachment to the material world, and one such ritual is prayer. Muslims pray or worship five times throughout the day: at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. At the time of every prayer, the reminders to pray, the calls to prayer, echo out across the rooftops. It is considered preferable and more meritorious to pray with others to demonstrate brotherhood, equality, and solidarity.

This ritual practice impacts Islamic society through its emphasis on the essential unity of all true believers. Considering the way people perform this practice, one can see that the whole group follows one person, the Imam, in its prayers. That person recites from the Quran, and the others listen. Whoever has the best knowledge of the Quran is the leader. Having knowledge of the Quran means that this person has the authority from God to lead. On a larger scale, at the level of the nation, the Imam (the leader)

obtains his absolute authority from God. What he says or does is claimed to be a manifestation of God's Will, with which no one should argue. In fact, argument is a sin: It is a direct confrontation with and refutation of God's will. Argument is always interpreted as a way of breaking the group's solidarity. Therefore, the rule of thumb is that people are answerable to the leader and the leader is answerable only to God. As such, the Islamic tradition is a religious sociopolitical (and sociocultural) system that is empowered by the culture's central religious and spiritual text.

As with the Platonic image of the psyche as the mind or the soul, Islam stresses that the mind either is the location of the soul or actually is the soul. Consequently, not all rituals are required of children, whose intellects have not yet developed, or of the insane. Second, Islam follows the behaviorist model of the mind. As did Plato, Islam teaches that every soul is born in the body with an innate idea of the forms or of God, but the individual's upbringing directs it either toward or away from the right path. The Prophet says, "Each child is born in a state of *Fitrah* [a human's natural disposition to worship Allah alone], then his parents make him a Jew, Christian or a Zoroastrian." The Quran also gives many examples which cannot be understood by anyone except for those who can think and intellectualize:

- 35:27. Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the cloud, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colors; and in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black? 35:28. And of men and beasts and cattle are various species of it likewise; those (of His servants only) who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah.
- 3:190. Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for men who understand.
- 29:43. And (as for) these examples, We set them forth for men, and none understand them but the learned.
- 3:191. Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord! Thou hast not created this in vain! Glory be to Thee; save us then from the chastisement of the fire.
- 59:21. Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down, splitting asunder because of the fear of Allah, and We set forth these parables to men that they may reflect.
- 45:20. These are clear proofs for men, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who are sure.
- 36:79. Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognizant of all creation.
- 27:62. Or, Who answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and He will make you successors in the earth. Is there a god with Allah? Little is it that you mind!
- 27:63. Or, Who guides you in utter darkness of the land and the sea, and Who sends the winds as good news before His mercy. Is there a god with Allah? Exalted by Allah above what they associate [with Him].

Verse 35:28, "Those [of His servants only] who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah" refers, also, to the learned ones, i.e., those who understand and see the eternal truth with their mind's eye. As did Plato's philosophers, these intellectuals developed the Law based on their understanding and interpretation of God's guidance, the Quran

and the Prophet's teachings to delineate a comprehensive blueprint of the idealized community of God to help Muslims live a virtuous life. The virtuous life is the life lived according to the law, *Shariah*, which is the submission to and realization of God's will.

According to the Islamic tradition, humanity's time on this Earth is in a state of decline after having reached its peak. In a sense, Islamic teachings contend that people were happiest in the beginning. The golden age passed with the death of the Prophet, and his death marked the beginning of the decline of human activity (Al-Lehaibi, 2012). The Prophet said, "The best people are those living in my generation, and then those who will follow them, and then those who will follow the latter" (Hadith of Bukhari 523). People have drifted away from the straight, righteous path that God has drawn for them; consequently, a sense of dissatisfaction with the world permeates everything: society is in a state of illness, and the goal is to cure it (Al-Lehaibi, 2012). To heal society, to return to the golden age, people must set the world on the right path again. By studying and understanding all aspects of Islamic society in the time of the Prophet, Muslims can emulate them and put the Prophet's life into social practice. The Prophet advised the generations that followed him to "Follow [his] teachings and the teachings of the rightly guided, upright successors after [him]. Hold on to it firmly, bite upon it with your very jaws!"

IV

Science, on the other hand, aspires towards an ideal world in which humanity can thrive. It is not otherworldly in the religious sense (in which heaven is the hope of restoring one's stolen humanity and justice, denied on earth, is achieved); rather, it is otherworldly in its emphasis on a potentiality that is yet to be realized. According to Erickson (1999), scientists regard this metaphysical journey to heaven as a metaphorical notion and hold that there is no other world we can actually attain. That is, the notion of our belonging elsewhere is only important as far as it refers to a transformation we perform in which we alter the world to create a place that recognizes and supports our humanity. According to the scientific scheme of things, we must change this world to make it a world in which we can fully experience our belonging in it rather than pinning our hopes on an otherworldly justice and redemption.

One of the consequences of the 18th-century European Enlightenment, Erickson (1999) added, was the submerging of otherworldliness. The world began to become increasingly understood scientifically; thus, ideas that we could transcend the world, that we could find the beyond, decreased because of scientific progress. Science brought a worldview of human history as potentially progressive, such that the problems we face can be addressed using reason and technology, and we can rationally and progressively reach desirable goals that result in transforming this world. In other words, Heaven is achievable on earth via scientific methods that alter our relationship with nature and capture the reality of the things of this world. Scientists understand that their knowledge will never advance if they remain mired in the genius of the past and condemn anything that departs from its authority. With the new instrument of knowledge, scientists see themselves as the youth of mankind. They understand that the antique world is being seen in the rearview mirror and that progress is ahead of them.

V

Descartes, using the rational method, argued that the essence of the *soul*, consciousness or mind, is thought (Cottingham et al., 1985). He emphasized doubt and skepticism, accepting nothing as true except what presents itself with clarity and vividness, so much so that the denial of the truth is virtually a contradiction. He placed the very highest standard of correctness on everything that could qualify as an item of knowledge. He saw a problem with the senses in that they present us with such varying and inconsistent information, e.g., a twig looks straight when it is in the air but bent when it is partially submerged in water. He posited that he was perhaps dreaming that he was walking rather than really walking. He doubted everything, including his body, as though all was an illusion except his existence. As soon as the mind sees it, it knows that it must be true and cannot be doubted. He said:

[That] if I am wrong, I must exist to be wrong. If I am right, I must exist to be right. If I doubt, I must exist to doubt just as if I am certain, I must exist to be certain. If I think I exist, my very posing the question in thought proves my existence; *cogito ergo sum*—I think; therefore, I am. From my thinking, from my awareness of myself as a being who thinks—whether or not I have a body, whether or not anything else exists—that is indubitable. I think; therefore, I am. I think therefore, thought exists. Thinking is the attribute of consciousness, and it is inseparable from me. So, I am a thinking thing. I am a mind . . . that “I am a mind” is the only thing that I can know certainly. (Descartes, 2013, p.19)

Contrary to the rational innatism of Descartes, the empiricists adopted the Baconian principle that “whatever deserves to exist deserves to be known” (qtd. in Bendix, 1989, p.328). This kind of knowledge cannot be attained by purely rational means. One must become an empiricist to study the mechanisms of the natural order. The empiricist tradition, championed by John Locke, holds that everything we know comes about as a result of the activity of the sense organs; according to one of the Ockhamistic Scholastic axioms, “Nothing is in the mind which was not first in the senses” (qtd. in Sternberg, 1999, p.89). The most elementary contents of the mind are sensations; they constitute the content of human understanding. For John Locke, there are two kinds of experience: First, ideas of the world are imprinted on our minds by the senses; second, through reflection and the mind’s experience of its own operations, comparing and making judgments, the mind forms complex ideas from the simple ideas acquired by sensory experiences. That is, this associative process produces complex ideas, and these ideas furnish understanding. The mind is an active agency that chooses, compares, and judges. For Locke, the human mind comes to know nature through direct sensory experiences. The mind, for Locke, is a blank slate that becomes aware of itself via reflecting on those sensory experiences.

The implication of this idea is that character or personal identity is not fixed and essential but rather something that is developed by experience. The self, one’s personal identity, is the constellation of memories that are present in consciousness. To illustrate, Locke gives an example in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Suppose there are a peasant and a prince who go to sleep. The peasant

is in the field and the prince in his castle. Suppose that, magically, all of the memories of the peasant's consciousness are transferred to the prince's, and vice versa. The next morning, both the peasant and the prince are the same men, but the person is not the same. Therefore, by changing the content of the mind, you change the person. The person's true identity depends on the arrangement of experiences that constitutes the reservoir of memories by which we know, and others come to know, who we are.

The empiricist tradition gave birth to the behaviorist psychology.⁶ Plato's psychology is the study of the soul, the thing connected to metaphysics, but behaviorist psychology is a behavior of the mind manifested in purely physical phenomena. B. F. Skinner holds that all mental states can be explained in terms of the stimulus provided to the whole organism. Thought, in other words, is simply another form of response. Alter the stimulus and the response will also alter. Skinner's idea is that by controlling the stimulus, one can control the behavior, and, by controlling the behavior, one can control a person's identity and character, chiefly through conditioning and positive reinforcement. The idea behind this method is that people always do what they are conditioned to do. The conditioning to which people are subjected makes them act and respond the way it is predicted they will because they think that they want to without realizing that they have been conditioned to it.

In his *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Skinner (2002) makes the bold argument that human society should move beyond the idea of individual freedom or individual dignity because these are romantic and sentimental notions that falsely focus on the individual's ability to determine his or her own self or destiny. Such determinism requires a level of freedom from social constraints and accepting responsibility for individual actions. Moral autonomy for Skinner is a false notion that mitigates any real social progress. For him, social progress follows the efficient scientific plan he referred to as "a technology of behavior" (Skinner, 2002, p.7). To that effect, as Robinson (n.d.) explained in *An Intellectual History of Psychology*, in the human society, when people believe in individualistic notions of freedom and dignity, it is assumed that the individual living in society is capable of making his or her own individual choices. Skinner argues against the notions of both individual responsibility and individual blame and contends that they are the sole result of this illusion of freedom and dignity. Therefore, punishment is not a real solution to problems, and it will not help deter or change certain behaviors because it misdiagnoses their original cause.

Skinner argues, Robinson continues, that the social behaviors of the entire culture dictate the behaviors of its new members; therefore, either consciously or subconsciously, the individual's behavior is but a reflection of social behavior. As such, society as a whole bears responsibility for an individual's actions; in other words, "it takes a village to raise a child." Social reinforcement, either direct or indirect, constitutes the building block of an individual's character. Even ethical training is managed by cultural conditioning, what Skinner (2002) referred to as cultural engineering. Ultimately, Skinner offered a deterministic world view. That is, there are no moral grounds for blame, and it is not the behavior conductor's fault. Similarly, when one stands to applaud or praise a behavior, a performance, or an

⁶ The word 'psychology' comes from the Greek *psyche*, which means soul.

achievement, one should understand that what one is looking at is the result of a lifetime of reinforcement history that has inclined that person's behavior in the direction that gained the approval and support.

Finally, Darwinians introduced the view that the mind is simply a claw used in the struggle for survival. In his *The Origin of Species*, Darwin suggested that some organisms acquire certain lucky variations that give them an edge in their struggles with others. This blind, capricious variation better enables those individuals to survive and produce offspring with their accidentally superior variations while their unvaried competitors fall behind in the struggle against extinction. The mind is an evolutionary tool that has evolved in human beings as their great advantage in the struggle for survival. That is to say, organisms develop and respond to the changes in the environment; with the moving force behind evolution being natural selection, there is no need for God or design. Darwin asserted that God's direct intervention in nature is not needed. In other words, the natural theologian's God of the gaps was being further squeezed out.

Darwin moved away from the idea of God and the soul as what is exceptional about the human. For Darwinists, the physical world is all we have: there is no metaphysics. In a sense, this position reflects Ludwig Feuerbach's projection theory of religion: that the concept of God is really an imaginary projection of the human essence into heaven. Religion is based on humanity's projection into the sky of an imaginary being (God) who is supposed to be perfect in love, power, righteousness, and justice. All of these qualities are indeed humanity's best qualities, and we took what we would hope for in a perfect human being and projected it into the sky to console ourselves. That is, while we may not really have justice on this earth, in heaven, we will have justice. Therefore, we take something that could be a real human attribute and project it upon this imaginary being in the sky. According to this world view, there are no transcendent truths; truths are only instruments or tools for adapting ourselves in the environment, and, as we develop better tools, we dispense with our old ones. According to the scientific paradigm, things are true if they work. The object of knowledge is a tool, an instrument that helps us resolve some particular problem or fulfill some purpose in our lives. We can improve ourselves and embrace new and better tools. There are no fixed moral ends; our ends arise from our cultures, customs, and habits. Our values arise from life, from experience, and they change as circumstances change.

Subsequently, the Social Darwinists insisted that the natural rule of society should copy the natural rule of selection to eliminate the unfit, clear the world of them, and make room for the better (Hofstadter, 1992). The sole function of the state, according to Herbert Spencer, is not to interfere with the inherent trajectory of the individual. Spencer's (1892) social Darwinism held that "nothing should come between people and suffering because suffering is the greatest teacher." Therefore, both public and private charity is nothing but "the artificial preservation of those least able to take care of themselves" (Hofstadter, 1992, pp.43-44). Darwinian ideas were applied to the realm of the economy, and thus those who were deemed unable to compete successfully in the realm of business were best left to their natural extinction. Businessmen such as William H. Vanderbilt claimed that, just as in nature, the strongest defeat the weakest and the survival of the fittest prevails, so in economics the strongest inherent victors will defeat the weakest, who are owed no sympathy.

Thus, in the Darwinian world, competition is the norm. Competition demands that each businessman invest in the latest technologies, and moreover, that he or she invest in the research and development of future technologies and labor-saving devices to gain an advantage in the struggle with his or her competitors.

VI

As Principe (2000) explained in his *The Aspiring Adept*, miracles are defined as special events outside of the laws of nature that are caused by God's direct intervention. The most fundamental human aspiration is the search for understanding. Our understanding of what constitutes the common course of nature is built up incrementally from our collective experiences. Therefore, when we are confronted with very rare phenomena for the first time, they can initially appear to be miraculous. Principe further noted that miracles are scientific phenomena whose explanations are unknown. Because miracles are entirely natural and rely on the knowledge of natural causes and powers, a very learned human being can perform miracles. Hence, knowledge of the natural world gives human beings the power to produce miracles via technology. Metaphorically speaking, if Plato saw the material world as an imitation of the real realm of forms and if the soul is the only pure form trapped in the material world, it has no imitation or copy. The miracle of science is the duplication of the soul; hence, because the soul is actually the mind or consciousness, the real triumph of science is to create a mind).

In his *A Homily on a Simile*, Robinson (n.d.) asked whether we could, by studying how the brain works, build an artificial brain, a program that could have a cognitive state exactly the same as our own. This is the underlying premise of artificial intelligence (AI), the idea that the human brain is comparable to computer hardware, and the mind is comparable to a program. According to Robinson, if we could create a device that is conscious of itself, aware of its existence, and able to host abstract concepts, and it could attain the creative use of language; if we could make a device that demonstrates the ultimate degree of thought in which it can contemplate its own existence, and the world in which it found itself; if we could actually put together a device that can learn from experience and, through reflection, reach generalizations and test and correct those generalizations by further experiences, we would have created a mind, or soul.

The way to know the humanity of that device is by its passing the Turing Test, Robinson (n.d.) and Minsky (2006) argued. In "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," Alan Turing (1950) said that if we are going to design programs to simulate human intelligence, we need a test. If we put a human being in one room, a machine in another, and an expert in the middle passing questions to each room and receiving answers, and if the answers coming from one room are found to match the answers coming from the other well enough, and if the expert cannot tell the difference between the answers, we infer that the machine is as intelligent as the human being. Therefore, if the behaviors, inferences, and judgments of the device we have created are as good as a human's, then we can say that the device literally understands. Robinson (n.d.) and Minsky (2006) further continued, if the device behaves in the same way a human being behaves when he or she feels pain, then we can infer that the device is in pain. Finally, we can say that this device is human if it

convinces us of its humanity by being a social entity in its political and civic life and in its interpersonal relationships.

VII

Natural science is founded on the idea that everything can be explained in terms of matter and motion. This leaves no room for the spiritual entity/entities at the center of religion. The scientific method challenges the basic assumption that there is a metaphysical contrast between natural and machine processes. To date, human beings have managed to adapt to changes in environmental circumstances for their own survival. Through studying the processes of nature, they have learned how to better control it. The scientific method and technology mean the triumph of humanity over Darwinian random natural selection.

The security and hope that science offers may have replaced the hope and security that the ancients found in religion. The scientific method is charitable; it can make possible the expansion of the human empire over the phenomena upon which our suffering and well-being depend in this world. It enhances the human place in the world. Hence, in some world views, science is becoming more and more revered and respected in the public eye, while theology becomes less and less so.⁷

Both Plato's philosophy and monotheistic religious traditions offer a vision of an otherworldly ideal community. They both offer teachings and principles that the community should collectively follow, with the belief that the more principles the community adapts and implements, the better the community is going to be. Once the community succeeds in applying all of the principles, it is the end of time, the end of the struggle for pursuing this world of happiness. Consequently, the community is in the other world. It is this change that occurs within individuals collectively, the change in their view of the world that improves their circumstances and the conditions that ensue. Similarly, science follows the same vision, but it rejects metaphysical superstitions and myths and follows practical reasoning. The end that science offers may be—just as the end that theology offers—a world in which people will be transformed from selfish, self-interested individuals to a cooperative unit. On the other hand, it may be an endless horizon where individuals are free to re-create themselves and achieve their individual potentials.

The mystery of the soul and spiritual entities gave birth to the beliefs in the supernatural powers of spirits, witchcraft, and spells. Once humankind understood more of the world and the nature of the mind, such belief in supernatural powers was rejected by most as mere childish fantasies. The widespread belief in the soul and the spiritual world has been shattered by science, along with the belief in magic and witchcraft. Science would lead the assault on those superstitions: a crop failure is not from a charm or a curse or a prayer; illness and health are not from spells and witchcraft; comets are not omens of things of which we should be afraid. Science has gradually replaced religion throughout human history because it explains more and more of what we used to think of as supernatural by its increasing knowledge of

⁷ Indeed, it should be noted that some argue that science is becoming the new religion for many. Just as with God, some see its aims as inherently good, always progressive, and the panacea for any problem.

natural laws. The more we know about science, the less we believe in miracles; the more we know about natural causes, the fewer reasons we need to believe in supernatural causes. Science disproved miracles because they contradict natural laws, and natural laws are the most certain things we know. However, people die. This perfect vision of human existence is not everlasting. Even if science finds ways to expand the human life span, death will be the conclusion of every breathing organism. What then? When people are separated from their loved ones, is it the end? Or is there a hope that eventually they will be reunited with them? This is a question that troubles the minds of many people who still believe in the mysterious concept of the soul and in the metaphysical promise of salvation and restoration, that there is a world beyond this world.

William James (1992) divided philosophical natures into two sorts: the tender minded and the tough minded. The tender-minded, the rationalists, Gail Hamner (2002) explained, are influenced by principles. They tend to be optimistic and religious and to stress the importance of free will and metaphysical monism. They are dogmatic, attempting to unify the universe under one overarching principle. The tough-minded, on the other hand, the empiricists, Hamner (2002) continued, use inductive reasoning and base their arguments on verifiable facts. Therefore, they use sensory experience as the basis for their knowledge of the world. As a result, the world they build tends to be materialistic, and, consequently, pessimistic, irreligious, fatalistic, pluralistic, and skeptical. The tender-minded offer a system of cosmological promise at the expense of scientific conscience. They believe in principles that violate scientific understanding. The tough-minded keep the scientific conscience at the expense of the hope and psychological well-being that religion offers. Within all of the beauty and the promise of the scientific method, there is a seed of destruction. Science teaches us that, ultimately, our sun will expand, bloating to 100 times its current size, and engulfing the whole earth, destroying any life left on it. Ultimately, our universe will collapse in on itself, and, with it, all of our aspirations and projects will have meant nothing and will be permanently obliterated.

As a result, science prospectively means cutting off ultimate hope, whereas theology is the affirmation of hope, that nothing is lost and ultimately there is a restoration of everything. Belief in religion means holding tight to this glimpse of hope. However, this belief entails accepting religion's eschatological view of a universe that negates all of humanity's efforts in this world and nullifies the benign human hope of constant progress, humanity's cultivation of its garden here on Earth. This view suggests that all of humanity's work throughout history and its scientific progress in all aspects of knowledge does not matter at the end; everything will ultimately culminate in apocalyptic catastrophe. In this sense, unlike science, religion's hope or restoration is anchored in the belief in metaphysical otherworldliness.

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