

Lecture 5

The Enlightenment, Part 2

The brave new world we described in the last chapter, and the faith in science and nature, has another aspect to it, which is the religious view of this age. And in all these philosophers and writers we will examine, we see something which is already becoming, which is already familiar to us. Because many of the arguments they use we ourselves have heard. This is already, you can say, the wave-length or the universe of discourse in which we also talk. Their arguments were a little bit different, they were more naive than the enlightened scientist today; but still they're talking basically the same kind of language, trying to prove things by science or reason, and so forth.

This age of the Newtonian system is also the age of the religion of reason. One can say that in the age of Renaissance and Reformation, Christianity was either neglected or it was boiled down to its essentials -- simplified as the Protestants tried to do -- but they still, those who believed in Christianity were still keeping somehow onto the past. Already in Thomas Aquinas and Francis of Assisi we saw that the Christianity was becoming quite different, but still the basic content of the faith outwardly was quite similar to traditional Christianity, just that they were changing the whole approach to it, which would lead later on to a change in the content also.

But in this new age, the Age of Enlightenment, we see that the very content of the faith now is being changed, and quite new religious ideas appear. The reason for this is that religion is now subjected to the same standard which science is: the outward study of the outward world, that is, the standard of reason. And thus it continues the process which began with Scholasticism when reason was placed above faith and tradition. This was the time when men dreamed of a religion of reasonableness. We will quote a number of the writers of this time. They all have just a slightly different approach, but in the end have very similar philosophy.

For example, Diderot, the great encyclopedist, talks about the getting rid of prejudices in religion. In one of his works he has a speaker tell about the importance of keeping people in bondage to certain prejudices for public good. To this Diderot replies: "What prejudices? If a man once admits the existence of a God, the reality of moral good and evil, the immorality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, what need has he of prejudices? Supposing him initiated in all the mysteries of transubstantiation, consubstantiation, the Trinity, hypostatical union, predestination, incarnation and the rest, *will he be any the better citizen?*"

So obviously the new standard being applied, is a very outward standard. Reasonableness and all these things which seem complicated by Orthodox tradition, the basic doctrines of the faith, now come to seem very, too complicated. It doesn't help us to live any better, according to this view; and it's completely irrational. And notice that most of these people retain a few basic faiths, that is, articles of faith like the existence of good and evil, of God, and afterlife.

Enlightenment in England

In this period the leadership in the expressing the spirit of the age passes over to England. Because England was the place where after 1689 there was the Edict of Toleration where all religions and all the Christian sects are allowed to exist except for Catholicism and Unitarianism; that is, various kinds of Protestantism, Anglicanism became legal.

We see this combination of "broad-mindedness," so-called, with continued intolerance, because the Catholics had a very difficult time in England for a long time right up to the nineteenth century; and even today the broad-minded Anglican persuasion is

extremely narrow in some respects -- so much so that when there was an Englishman in our church who wanted to be baptized and become a priest, he had to go to France where Vladika John ordained him because it was not allowed in England for an Anglican cleric to become Orthodox.

And even today our English mission is very much restricted. The Anglicans very much are against any kind of converts coming to Orthodoxy and there are even laws about clergymen becoming Orthodox. So there's a combination of a narrow, bureaucratic mentality with freedom. You can believe whatever you want as long as you're either in the Anglican Church or just don't care about religion. But they're very much against any other kind of strong belief having freedom.

And most of the people we'll examine today are English writers who, although they of course are not profound philosophers, are in the English pragmatic school; but their ideas were very much in accord with the spirit of the times and they spread over to France and Germany, and especially in France they had even very radical followers. The English usually held back from the most radical consequences because they're very practical. You can keep the past and still be a free-thinker without going all the way.

There was already in the seventeenth century a Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who died in 1648, who was one of the leading "theologians," so-called, of this new naturalistic religion. And he also, like many people in the Renaissance, had heard a supernatural voice which sanctioned his natural religion. According to him there are five articles of faith which all Christians can agree upon regardless of their sect or their theological differences. So you see he's going to make out of reason -- sort of synthesize -- the essence of Christianity. And these five articles of faith which everyone agrees on are, namely, that God exists, that He is to be worshipped, that He is worshipped chiefly by piety and virtue, that men are called to repentance, and that there is an after-life of rewards and punishments. He thought that these were reasonable, of course, not on the basis of reason but because the people he knew and the ordinary thinking people of that time still believed, they still kept this much of Christianity. But after him there would be much more radical views.

There is another thinker, John Toland, an Anglican clergyman -- I believe he was clergyman -- who died in 1722, who wrote a book called, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, wherein he wanted to explain how Christianity is really very reasonable; you don't have to have any superstition to believe in Christianity. And he said that: "There is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it: and that no Christian doctrine can properly be called a mystery." So everything is perfectly understandable. A good man of common sense will understand what Christianity is all about.

Another one of the same period, Matthew Tindal who died in 1733, wrote another book on the same kind of topic called *Christianity as Old as the Creation*. And according to him, the Gospel is simply the law of nature. And any revelation above this is really quite useless. Christianity is reduced simply to what is natural.

There were at this time two schools of thought in England, that is, the conservatists who were called the "supernaturalists" and the radicals who became the deists. But they all had in common this faith that religion is nothing but what is natural. The supernaturalists thought that revelation *did* add something to natural religion, although not very much. It was thought it was used as a kind of stamp of genuineness like saying "24-carat gold." Derive your belief from reason and nature and then revelation comes along and says, "This is true." That's about as much as it did. And these were the conservatives.

For example, we have as an example of a conservative, John

Locke, the philosopher, who said: "In all things of this kind," religion, "there is little need or use of revelation, God having furnished us with natural and surer means to arrive at a knowledge of them. For whatsoever truth we come to a clearer discovery of from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas, will always be more certain to us than those which are conveyed to us by traditional revelation." It's obviously the idea here that revelation comes from without as though it is forced on you, whereas the thing which comes from inside you, which really persuades you, are rational arguments.

In the New Testament this John Locke found that there are only really two conditions set down for salvation. "These two, faith and repentance, that is, believing Jesus to be the Messiah, and a good life, are the indispensable conditions of the new covenant to be performed by all those who would obtain to eternal life." So all we have to do is believe and lead a righteous life. Already Orthodoxy is quite reduced, quite blotted out. All that is left is a very narrow Protestantism. He wrote a book typically called, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.

So Christianity became, even with the conservatives, really just a rational philosophical system which appealed to common sense. And those who didn't like this, they didn't have any rational arguments apparently; and so the main rebellions against this rationalism were the lower-class movements of Pietism, Methodism and so forth which based religion on feeling.

And among the intellectuals, it seems that only Paschal saw through all this and was very profound in his observations about this religion of reason. He said, if you want to prove religion by reason, you had better not take Christianity, because it's too full of mysteries. You can more easily prove the truth of Islam because it has fewer mysteries.

But the movement of reason, once they got started, you can't stop it wherever you please. The Scholastics thought that they would accept the whole content of Christianity and simply make it logical. Those after them rejected many of the small points which they were arguing about and said there was a certain essence you could be retain. Then the essence grew smaller and smaller and finally they wanted to do away with mysteries altogether. And now we shall see that the idea of religion *at all* begins to be attacked.

Deism

First of all, there was a movement of Deism which is perhaps the most typical one of this whole eighteenth century. The idea of Deism is that God exists, but He's quite irrelevant. That is, He creates the world and steps back. And from that time on it has nothing to do with God. Newton himself believed that He couldn't calculate quite everything correctly, as, for instance, the paths of comets and so forth. And he had an idea that the universe was like a great watch which God made, stepped back and once in a while He has to step in and correct it, kind of wind it up again. But later astronomers said no, this is not true. And there actually is a unified theory you can have which explains everything including comets and all irregular kinds of movements. And so God is simply necessary only at the beginning. God creates and that's all. And God becomes extremely vague. Thus miracles and prophecy are beginning to be called into question; and many writers already begin to say they're just superstition. In this the French became more radical than the English.

The example of Diderot who says, -- although he did not publish it, he said in a private letter; it was still not early enough to publishing such a thing -- "The Christian religion is to my mind the most absurd and atrocious in its dogmas; the most unintelligible, the most metaphysical," metaphysical now becomes a bad word, "the most intertwined and obscure, and consequently the most subject to divisions, sects, schisms and heresies; the most mischievous for the public tranquility, the

most dangerous to sovereigns by its hierarchic order, its persecutions, its disciplines; the most flat, the most dreary, the most Gothic," which is also a bad word -- Middle Ages, "and the most gloomy in its ceremonies; the most puerile and unsociable in its morality, considered not in what is common to it with universal morality, but in what is peculiarly its own, and constitutes it evangelical, apostolic and Christian morality, which is the most intolerant of all. Lutheranism, freed from some absurdities, is preferable to Catholicism; Protestantism (Calvinism) to Lutheranism, Socinianism to Protestantism, Deism, with temples and ceremonies, to Socinianism." But he still keeps some religion, as you notice; he wants Deism with temples and ceremonies because it's good for the people.

Voltaire has the same kind of spirit and even said, "*Ecrasez l'infame*" -- blot out the infamous thing, Christianity. "Every man of sense, every good man, ought to hold the Christian sect in horror. The great name of Deist, which is not sufficiently revered, is the only name one ought to take. The only gospel one ought to read is the great book of Nature, written by the hand of God and sealed with His seal. The only religion that ought to be professed is the religion of worshipping God and being a good man. It is as impossible that this pure and eternal religion should produce evil as it is that the Christian fanaticism should not produce it."

Against Miracles

The last defense of people who were defending supernatural religion on anything except a purely emotional basis, was the existence of miracles. And there was one writer in England who took upon himself to finally demolish the whole idea of miracles. And that's David Hume, a Scotsman, whom we will discuss later on as very important to our contemporary whole philosophy. And it's interesting, this textbook on modern thought, which was written in the '20's by a typical enlightened man [Randall], who's very precise about his quotes, analyzing the ideas, but he himself is very much a product of all these ideas. And so for him, Hume is very much the standard. He says, "In his famous *Essay on Miracles*, in 1748, he proved so conclusively that intelligent men have rarely questioned it since, that a miracle, in the sense of a supernatural event as a sign of the divinity of its worker, cannot possibly be established. Even could it be shown that the events recorded did actually take place, that they were supernatural, and that they sufficed to establish a religion, it is still impossible to demonstrate."

And he quotes Hume on this who says: "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish.... A miracle can never be proved so as to be the foundation of a system of religion.... Suppose all the historians who treated England should agree [that Queen Elizabeth died and after being buried a month returned to her throne and governed England again] {brackets are Randall's}. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it: I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real.... I would still reply, that the knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature. But should this miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion; men, in all ages, have been so much imposed upon by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient, with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination.... As the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact;... this must make us form a general resolution, never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretense it may be covered."

And according to this man, this is already conclusive proof that miracles do not exist or at least cannot be proved. But, of

course, it's evident that this man had a very strong faith not to believe in miracles. And we'll have to examine later on what, where he gets his faith and how it is that this seems so evident to him.

This is the kind of thinking which *everyone* was doing in those days, all the people who were writing books. Some were defending a little more religion, some a little less; but they were all tending in this direction towards the getting rid of everything supernatural. And this whole mentality so took hold of men that they could not help but think in these terms. We'll see later on that Hume also applied this same standard to science with results which were absolutely devastating.

Attacking and Defending Religion

But soon this very religion of reasonableness in which the only thing left is that there's a God and men should be good -- even this began to be attacked, because reason is not content as long as it has something more to attack. And now the attack begins, not against just the supernatural, but against religion altogether. And here, perhaps to our surprise, we find that two of the great defenders of religion are precisely the Voltaire and Diderot, that is, the new idea of religion.

Voltaire argues at a time when he was still holding onto his Deism and many French thinkers already had become materialists and atheists. And he said: "When I see a watch whose hands mark the hours, I conclude that an intelligent being has arranged the springs of this machine so that its hands will mark the hours. Thus, when I see the springs of the human body, I conclude that an intelligent being has arranged these organs to receive and nourished for nine months in the womb; that the eyes are given to see, the hands to grasp, etc." So this is called the "argument from design," a proof of the existence of God.

And a second argument is that there must be a final cause of everything. Voltaire says: "I exist, hence something exists. If something exists, then something must have existed from all eternity; for whatever is, either exists through itself or has received its being from something else." Already sounds like Thomas Aquinas. "If through itself, it exists of necessity, it has always existed of necessity, it is God; if it has received its being from something else, and that something from a third, that from which the last has received its being must of necessity be God.... Intelligence is not essential to matter, for a rock or grain do not think. Whence then have the particles of matter which think and feel receive sensation and thought? it cannot be from themselves, since they think in spite of themselves; it cannot be from matter in general, since thought and sensation do not belong to the essence of matter: hence they must have received these gifts from the hands of a Supreme Being, intelligent, infinite and the original cause of all beings."

You see he's quite clinging on to the old fashioned way of things. And he says finally, "In the opinion that there is a God, there are difficulties; but in the contrary opinion there are absurdities." And later on good thinking men with common sense will begin to say that, no, there's no absurdity in thinking that the world evolved itself and so forth. We'll see this in a later lecture on the whole idea of evolution.

And Voltaire even believed in the immortality of the soul. On the immortality of the soul Voltaire says, "Without wanting to deceive men, it can be said we have as much reason to believe in as to deny the immortality of the being that thinks." And of course, here he is not depending upon science; he's speaking on the old beliefs, which the more radical thinkers were already disproving, getting rid of.

But already with the materialists and the atheists in this period just before the French Revolution, we begin to come to some of the reasons why the whole Enlightenment world-view was destroyed. But the basic outlook of Enlightenment was

optimism, that it's possible to understand what the world was all about. There are no mysteries left. Even Christianity is reasonable.

Art and Music

Now one note on the art and music of this period.

In reading the philosophers and theologians of this period, one finds that they are very much dated, that is, out of date. You read them and you see that: how can people think like that? They're so naive. By reason alone you're going to prove the existence of the soul, or the existence of the afterlife. It's obvious they are believing this on some other basis and not understanding that they believe this out of faith, because on reason alone, what can you believe, if you're left to reason alone?

But the music of this period and the art is still very much alive. And you can hear a concert of this music, Baroque music, and it feels, you are very much attuned to it. In fact, it is just as fresh now as it was then. And interestingly enough, this music is quite profound. And it is not, as music later became, more and more subject to romantic feelings and sentimentality; it's quite sober and has very much feeling in it, very fresh, very alive, also of course very regular. Both the art, the painting was subject to certain classical rules of painting, and the music also after polyphony had developed out of the Middle Ages, out of the later Middle Ages. Certain rules of counterpoint were adopted which later composers would think were too restrictive. But out of these -- this sort of a definite -- this classical system of musical laws and artistic laws, a very living art came.

One man even said this was one of the pinnacles of human achievement. Whether one thinks of Handel or Bach, or Rameau, David, the English composers Purcell, Burke, or the Italians Corelli, Vivaldi -- they're all on a extremely high level. Of course, in Germany also there are others -- Schütz also. They wrote both religious music: the Passions, various kinds of Passions, and cantatas and secular music.

This music of course is not spiritual music. Even in the religious music you can see that it is not the same as the Orthodox church services which arouses one to contrition, which has a definite function in one's spiritual life. This is what the Russians call *duchevni* -- that is, music of the soul, the lower part of the soul not the higher part, which is called the spirit. Thus, this does not have the supreme worth that true Christian art does, whether the icon or the church music, which leads the soul to heaven. This is more, you sit back and you contemplate, relax and enjoy, but kind of thinking about it -- although there's some extremely pious music. Bach wrote one piece called "I Rejoice on My Death" about a person ready to die. And it's obvious he had deep religious feelings. But this music also is not something which should be just thrown out because it is very, *extremely refined*.

And those who are in the world, since they are going to be subjected to art and music of some kind, can't help it. You go into a supermarket and you're subjected to music. You go out in the street and you're subjected to the art -- the buildings, the billboards, everything in the streets is the art of our times. And therefore since one has to be subjected to that, it's better to be subjected to good, refined art than the barbarism which exists today.

Later on we'll discuss something about the falling away from this classical age of art, and how you can detect a definite progress the same way that reason was to destroy this faith in the deistic god and the universe that makes sense. The same way the new currents that came in were to destroy the whole classical idea of art and music.

But one might also ask a very interesting question of where does the spirit behind this art come from. Because if one reads

these philosophers and theologians one sees that their thought is extremely superficial; that is, some kind of deeper dimension seems to be missing. They're lost, and the further one goes on and the more logical they get, the more one feels they've lost the whole point of what religion is. And obviously this music does not express the philosophy of Deism.

And the reason why the music can be so profound is obviously because it lived on the basis of the capital of the past, that is, the Christian capital of the past which is still not exhausted completely. And even these, even Voltaire who still believes in God and the afterlife is still living on the basis of the past. There was still left some kind of belief, some kind of traditional values. And music and art still have contact with this, these sources, although of course they've come far away from the traditional Orthodox art.

Later we'll discuss how this modern art fell away from this classic age the same way as modern philosophy did. And now before beginning the last series of lectures on the modern world which we know, forces which shaped it, we should ask a few questions on how is it that this world-view of the Enlightenment collapsed -- because it collapsed very soon. Its philosophy and its theology seems now incredibly naive and narrow. And its art is a kind of golden age which is impossible to go back to. You can play over again these great masterpieces but you can't, there's no one composing now like that.

And there are several reasons and they all perhaps overlap each other. One is the very thing which Kireyevsky talked about: that reason, once it is exalted above faith and tradition, continues and produces its own destruction. The reason which first produced Scholasticism then produced the Reformation because you were criticizing the religion itself; and finally -- first it's the Reformation is a criticism of the Medieval Catholicism and then the criticism of Protestantism produces the atheist agnostic philosophers of the nineteenth century. And after Kireyevsky we'll see that it produced the actual suicide of reason.

Once one accepts reason as the standard of truth, you have to follow it all the way. And that is why, as we are examining these religious thinkers, we see that one generation holds on to more of the past and thinks that is rational. The next generation subjects that to criticism and holds on to less, but thinks there's still something left. The next generation destroys all that, and thinks there's very little left. And that generation resembles [overturms?] the next one. As long as you believe that reason is capable of giving you truth, you have no argument against it. And that's why there was no one; even the ones who were defending Christianity were arguing on the same rationalistic terms.

It's the same thing that Dr. [Alexander] Kalimiros talks about: that between Orthodoxy and the West there is this gulf because in the West they are all talking in the same language, the Protestants, Catholics, sectarians, atheists; it's all the same language. They're all used to taking reason as the standard, even when they do not take it all the way, because they're scared to go too far, most people; still, they have this rationalistic atmosphere in common. And in that atmosphere you cannot escape. You have to admit that reason is capable of truth; and, therefore, when your enemy has a very good argument, you have to grant that that's true. If it's true, he explains away your faith. But in Orthodoxy, reason has an entirely different function which we'll talk about later.

And so we'll see also in one of the next lectures that the history of our world in the last 200 years is a continuation of a kind of dialectical process whereby reason overthrows everything in the past and finally destroys itself. That is, reason must destroy itself once it is given the license to be the standard of truth. That's why this Enlightenment Age seems now so naive.

Another reason which acted for the overthrowing of this world-view is that the loss of the whole spiritual tradition and

spiritual experience which we can see by the very fact that reason is made the standard -- which means they lost the spiritual tradition -- this loss made men actually hopeless, helpless before the negative criticism of reason, which you see in Voltaire, being very pathetic in his defense of some small part of the old tradition. And also made them unaware of non-rational influences which actually act upon the rationalists themselves. Later on people will become more aware of this, and that's when reason actually destroys itself, in our own time.

And also they did not see when demonic powers intervened because they don't believe anymore in demons. There's no -- these people weren't even arguing for the existence of demons anymore.

So this is why we discussed earlier some of the undercurrents of chiasm and the mystical view of science. It's obvious that there are many forces under the surface, irrational forces which dominate one's behavior. And a person who thinks he's very rational, very reasonable, who believes only in reason, obviously has a kind of mystical faith in this reason. And most of them at this time were totally unaware of that.

Again, this view of theirs was so one-sided. Once you start reasoning, you do away with all kinds of things which you used to believe in, or would wish to believe in. And you go a lot farther than you would *feel* like going. And after a while, it's natural that people will say, "Wait, wasn't there something then, too?" And so this very one-sided rationalism led to a revolt against it, which is on the religious level. There was this underground, this Pietism and Methodism, and now -- beginning also at the end of the period -- occultism and the so-called Romantic revolt in which everything Medieval all of a sudden becomes very attractive because it seems much richer than this narrow Enlightenment philosophy.

The experimental ideal in science also had a function similar to that of reason because it is never satisfied. It always wants to test its conclusions and come to new conclusions. So scientific ideals, these theories are constantly changing and this helped overthrow this scientific synthesis of the time of Newton.

Progress

Again, the idea of progress which we saw in this period in the earlier part of the period, the idea of the ancient was kept very much alive because of the Renaissance, that the ancients were the ones who were for us the true standard. If we can only get back to them and away from the Middle Ages and superstition, we will be fine. But then is when the sciences begin to become the dominant form of thought, the scientific world-view. People begin to see that anyone living today has more scientific knowledge than someone living in antiquity. Now science for the first time is being pursued systematically, experiments and everything else.

And so the people defending the ancients finally have to say that only in literature do the ancients hold the supremacy. And then with the outpouring of great classical literature of this period, and music and art, even there they say that, no, the moderns are also superior to the ancients because now we have a superior philosophy; and art also is superior. And out of this battle between the ancient and the moderns came the development for the first time of the idea of progress which is actually quite a religious idea which we'll examine later.

But the very idea of progress -- that the present is building upon the past, the past and improving it and future generations will improve upon us, that there will be an unlimited progress and man will constantly go ahead -- this obviously destroys the idea that there's one standard, the classical standard from the past whether Christian or pagan or what. Therefore everything becomes a [living seed?] at first, but everything becomes quite relevant. And one exists actually just for the sake of the future people who are going to improve upon one. And where, after a

while when a person begins to realize that this is a movement of, philosophy of constant change, constant movement, then the soul begins to be upset. It's a sign that there's no peace, no security. In the nineteenth century this leads to the evolutionary world-view; it's a quite distinct world-view, in fact, quite as powerful as the Newtonian world-view, but quite different.

Finally when these rationalistic ideas, people sitting in their cabinets and thinking out logically what is true, what is false, what can be retained from the past, and what has to be rejected -- it is one thing for a philosopher in his cabinet, but when you go outside and say now let's change society on the basis of these ideas, something quite different occurs. And you can see that actually a great disaster occurs.

And that brings us to the subject of the next lecture which will be the Revolution. The French Revolution and the whole revolutionary movement of our times, which is the application of rationalistic ideas to the changing of society, the changing of the whole outward order of life. And here we will begin also to examine more the source of some of these rationalistic ideas, where they came from, why people came to believe that reason is the one standard of truth.

This whole ideal of the Enlightenment Age, the idea of Deism was, of course, the atmosphere from which modern Masonry arose. The idea of the Grand Architect God, God Who is somewhere remote in the heavens and doesn't touch us. But the whole subject of Masonry will come up next lecture on Revolution because it was the power which was very responsible for producing the Revolution, that is, the deistic idea. And there's very important reasons why Deism -- although it seems quite outmoded and disproved -- lasted on in the Masonic lodges.

Because the whole of the modern world-view is not atheistic, and is not agnostic; it believes in God. It's only a temporary period where agnosticism and atheism are replacing Christianity for a certain purpose -- so as to come back and worship the true God according to the revolutionary philosophy, which the Masons still believe today: the Grand Architect is new God.