

TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

BY

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Abstract

Today, unlike in the past, man is most attached to the scientific enterprise. There is a strong conviction that science is capable of solving most of humanity's problems. Some believe strongly too that with time science is going to find a solution to the most nagging problem such as death and life; that is, it is held among some scholars that with enough time and progress in research, the latter problem could be solved. Life could be restored in a person after he/she has died.

The origin of this view is from the fact that some philosophers have stated that the human being is all a product of material evolution. Life in this case, is interpreted as a higher evolution of matter. Frederick Engels (1975:100) has this to say: "life is the mode of existence of aluminous bodies, and this mode of existence essentially consists in the constant renewal of the chemical constituents of these bodies".¹ In this case, it is being suggested that "life processes and life itself exist in a close relationship with non-living nature and its chemical compounds..."²

Consequently, there is an empirical attitude towards the human person who is considered as not, in any way very different from the rest of the organic creatures in nature. Yurkovets states:

According to the latest scientific achievements, some of the elements required for the formation of chemical compounds and their transformation into protein, the basis of life, were already contained in the original dust of which the solar system was formed.³

He is arguing that science has incontestable evidence of "self-induced origin of life on this planet."⁴ As a matter of fact, natural scientists have thus accumulated data sufficient enough to establish that in the "near future science will be at a level where it will be capable of synthesizing protein and recreating all the processes of conversion of non-organic matter into organic matter." This argument is indicating that "live nature

originated in a natural manner as a result of development of matter.”⁵ Hence, it is clearly indicated here that “the supernatural creation of all things are refuted.”⁶ Human life as well as other forms of existing things are governed by natural laws which empirical science is searching for and hope to discover them one day. Humanity has its value reduced to this lowest level of matter.

The consequences of this conclusion are far reaching and catastrophic for humanity.

1. The Human person as a quantifiable entity

Since man is the product of natural laws, he could equally be studied as an entity by chemistry and physics. This has reduced the dignity of the human being to a level where he is regarded like any other living thing in the universe. One no longer wonders why the science of physiology and anatomy could study man like a machine with parts that could be dismantled and reassembled with no damage whatsoever being done to the personality, which has nothing to do with the constituent parts of the body. Quoting R.H. Coombs and Pauline S. Powers, Cockerham states “that physicians would intellectually dissect their patient into physical parts and concentrate upon treating only the pathological parts.”⁷ The doctor was to deal on with the parts and not with the whole (person).⁸ This theory of man or the patient is called the “old scientific fragmentalization method.”⁹ In this situation doctors were regarded like “mechanics who work on the human body.”¹⁰

Again, René Descartes, as quoted by Cockerham, defined “the body (human) as a physical machine whose operation was within the scope of human knowledge and therefore could be studied.”¹¹ “The implication on medicine was not pleasant; physicians did not bother to understand the person as a whole, but should concentrate exclusively upon the physical functioning of the body.”¹² As René Dubois has indicated

Descartes’ philosophy led scientists to neglect questions pertaining to the nature of the mind and the soul and encouraged them to focus their efforts on the much simpler, more concrete, problems of body structure and operation. They could apply knowledge of physics and chemistry, derived from the study of inanimate matter, to the body without the fear of debasing the more lofty manifestations of man’s nature those of the soul.

The self-imposed limitations and intellectual freedom that biologists derived from Cartesian dualism gave them a general tendency to study man as a non-thinking, non-feeling entity.¹³

Unfortunately, the church at his time, added her voice to the situation thereby sponsoring the idea “of the body as a machine, of disease as a breakdown of the machine and of the doctor’s task as a repair of the machine.”¹⁴ Even though this philosophy was later on discarded, it had and still to some extent, influenced the emphasis “that scientists understand...the physical and chemical processes of the human body.”¹⁵ In the Cartesian philosophy therefore, the mind or soul did not matter in the evaluation of human person and life.

The Newtonian mechanics further strengthen the Cartesian theories by pointing out that “the whole universe was viewed as a system set in a predetermined motion and has continued to run ever since, and the great machine (including man’s) was completely causal and determinate”.¹⁶ Like Descartes, Newton’s physics and of science strove towards the objective description of nature (human nature included) as the ideal standard of scientific methodology”.¹⁷ In this way, “God, man...constituted an unnecessary hypothesis in this ultimate theory that explained all natural phenomena”¹⁸ including man and his experiences. Facts, “illnesses, etc. that (did) not fit into this straight jacket methodology of science is (sic) rejected.”¹⁹

2. Science and Mental Poisoning

Other unpleasant consequences of this empirically based anthropology are observed in the mental attitude displayed whenever an idea has been accepted. The science world has given the idea that its findings are near-perfect as a result of its methodology. But H. Spencer Lewis in Mental Poisoning has observed that “if the human accepts an idea without questioning, without doubt, or without suspicion of any kind, it becomes not merely an accepted idea but a law, or a command, or a principle that will logically fulfill its purpose and its nature without any further support is actuality or in psychological process.”²⁰ Science and technology is tending to turn human beings into mechanical devices, including even the reasoning processes. Today there is an indication of mental

lethargy so much so that some very simple intellectual processes are handed over to machines.

An obvious implication is that the human mind is on the verge of being enslaved to the scientific and technological devices. Therefore, man is gradually but surely loosing some of the natural laws that relate to the human mind and consciousness as far as “the individual interpretation of ideas”²¹ and the environment are concerned.

The result is that the human mind is being fed with ideas that lack human touch and feeling; the lively link that ought to be between the human system through the natural functioning of the human person is destroyed and replaced by an artificial one. As Lewis has argued in the mind and consciousness without suspicion, without doubt, without challenge or without question becomes a law unto our bodies.”²² At that stage it (law) proceeds to carry out its nature, its purpose and its natural processes.”²³ That is, “whatever as idea is acceptable to us, it translates itself from a pure mental state into a dynamic power and force that carries on, unfolds, develops, and proceeds in accordance with principles beyond our control unless we use the same psychological processes to frustrate its activities...”²⁴ Science has created and fed the modern mind with ideas of violence, war, destruction, and so on. In line with H. Spencer Lewis’ philosophy, we can therefore understand why humanity is tending to self-destruction while thinking that he is preparing for peace through the proliferation of arms and other deadly. Today, humanity is moving towards the destruction of the human race and even the planet by his thinking that the amassing of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons could guarantee security and ensure human survival. Yesterday, Science and technology developed these ideas and gradually feed them into the human minds through several means or methods. Now they have developed their real nature, and humanity is unknowingly and unconsciously submitting itself to them.

Of course “ideas are things”. Yahweh’s ideas, words created the world.” And God said, let there be light and there was light.”²⁵

Unfortunately, for the human race, the different types of ideas that pollute the mind and can run and wreck human life do not have to be administered violently, nor

does the individual about to be poisoned have to become hypnotized and placed in an induced sleep nor physically and mentally drugged or overcome in order to have the mental poisoning enter the innermost recesses of the consciousness and begin its destructive work.”²⁶ It is a truism that what is destroying the human race today was introduced into humanity’s mind and consciousness in a more easy and acceptable manner to him. For example, the rest of the world accepted nuclear research and the production of the Hiroshima bombe of 1945. Ever since humanity has been awarding Nobel prizes for scientific findings which are helping to erode human freedom. The human race has been trapped in its own discoveries and inventions. All the efforts humanity is making seem to yield little fruits: they do not seem to bring the people to any lasting solutions. However, these efforts indicate humanity’s awareness now.

But, as Spencer Lewis has observed,

The one whose mind is weakened, or the one whose mind is broken down, who appears to be mentally stupid, unsound or insane, is keenly aware of every sound, every motion, every gesture, every suggestion, every thought.²⁷

The people of this world are so aware of the threat to global peace and security but it seems that man is helpless now. This writer is of the opinion that unless all human ideas are humanized, i.e. man must be at center of all human developmental efforts or else. Little can be done. The only formula is to have resort to the Divine law of human nature.

3. The Humanistic Inadequacy of Science.

Science, as noticed from the above discussion, cannot help man out of his present impasse. It has some major limitations which are either psychological or philosophical in nature.

First, science places very high psychological burden on its practitioners. As a creative effort, it “demands the total engagement of man the consuming concentration.”²⁸ This, consuming concentration is manifested in the isolation of the Scientist. Hence loneliness is an unavoidable consequence of the absorption required by scientific creation.”²⁹ Society does not accept the scientist readily. People do not feel

easy about his odd interest and so tend to ignore him. This sense of isolation seems to trail him throughout his life. Again, even when he “succeeded in his research, he must be ready to defend his results against the criticism of other experts and of the public.”³⁰ Galileo Galilei notes in some of his letters that “he was weak with age and psychologically embittered by his confinement.”³¹ Darwin seems to regret the fact that he was a Scientist. As he sadly put it: My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding laws out of large collections of facts...³² Instead of being a free person, the scientist is first enslaved by science before his results later on enslave humanity; and even destroy it! This is because science has in it elements of destruction. Quoting the view of Ostwald, Cantore states, “Ostwald sees destructiveness as an inherent feature of science.”³³ No wonder it present character!

Second Science engenders some cognitive frustration in the Scientists in that there is “the possibility that it may leave them inclined toward skepticism.”³⁴ The sense of skepticism could stem from the fact that with time the scientist may realize that the more he does science the more he realizes that science alone will never be able to satisfy his thirst for knowledge.”³⁵ This is due to the fact that humanly satisfactory knowledge must, in principle, encompass the whole of reality. For man can never feel at rest in his longing for cognition unless he is able to somehow to grasp the whole of reality with his mind.”³⁶

Finally, two principal grounds demonstrate the inadequacy of Science to humanize the human life. The more science develops, the more it uncovers new problems. This endless development tends to engender frustration. Again, “the more man strives after knowledge by doing science the more he has the impression that knowledge itself recedes...”³⁷ In the words of some scholars science generates the feeling of “despair”³⁸. Today, this seems to be the case, each time a country develops an instrument another country will develop another: the nuclear race is on. Quoting Rostand, Cantore observes that “all that science can give to man (is) a message of desperation.”³⁹ Paradoxically, science threatens the human race with destruction. The simple reason for this is that “empiricism dehumanizes science.”⁴⁰ And above all

science has generated the problem of scientism which states that “science is the universal and uniquely acceptable form of knowledge.”⁴¹

4. The Scientific Understanding of Man

The picture we have of human situation is not pleasant. It indicates that science has not fully understood man. If the sciences have a view of man, it is that “man is indeed a completely determined machine.”⁴² This view of man is “widely accepted as the consequence of science.”⁴³ Some scholars are of the opinion that science is not “able to explain man by itself.”⁴⁴ And if it tries to do that explanation, the sciences tend to explain man away. “In fact, if science is supposed to explain man entirely, it merely succeeds in explaining him away.”⁴⁵

One other reason why science is not able to explain man is because of its empirical foundation. As pointed out above, empiricism tends to dehumanize man. Empiricism depends on the senses for its sources of facts. It depends on quantifiable facts; yet not all facts can be quantified. In regards to empiricism, those facts are not facts at all, that cannot be quantified. Science will hardly, on its empirical basis, see man as a triad-soul, spirit and body. All it can observe is the bodily part of man and the manifestations of this part. Hence, we find sociology, psychology, etc. trying to understand man. Unfortunately, these sciences are equally based on empiricism, so they cannot fully understand man. Man cannot be studied by senses only.

It should be noted that this problem is not only with the empirical sciences; it is equally a problem for the philosophical sciences. The materialistic philosophies see man as an outcome of matter. Sometimes, man is understood in parts as in physiology, anatomy, medicine, economics, chemistry etc. In economics, man is understood in terms of his economic needs which can be explained by the laws of economics. In some way, Marx shared this view when he tries to explain human behaviour, in economic terms. All these empirical explanation seem to be grossly inadequate.

One simple reason can be given for this inadequacy; man cannot adequately understand himself because much of what man is like beyond him; if he can understand

his body, he can scarcely understand his spiritual nature. The secrets of the spiritual nature are with his creator – Yahweh, who has not yet given them to man. It could be for this reason that He warns man not to depend on himself. He even threatens man with punishment if he did so. Prophet Jeremiah notes: “Thus saith the Lord; cursed be the man that trusteth on man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.”⁴⁶ Yahweh has greater wisdom than man. Hence, He notes, “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord and whose hope is the Lord.”⁴⁷ In spite of this, man through his philosophy, science and will continuously seek his own way by himself. Man cannot make it because the route that lies ahead of him is not known; and he does not have the means to know it perfectly. But his creator has told in very clear language that he has already laid out the route, plan for man to follow to an already determined end. Isaiah observes, “For the Lord has proposed, and who shall disannul it?”⁴⁸ “As I have proposed, so shall it stand.”⁴⁹ This indicates that Yahweh is in total command and control: “Declaring the end from the beginning and from the ancient times the things that are not yet done saying My counsel shall stand and I shall do all my pleasure.”⁵⁰

In summary, it should be noted that science, a human creation cannot understand man; it cannot solve human problems adequately; it can not tell man what he needs in order to move ahead confidently. And if today, humanity is facing this precarious state it could be inferred that that is the fulfillment of the prophetic words of Yahweh. He that shall trust on himself or flesh “shall be like the heath in the desert; and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness in a salt land and not inhabited.”⁵¹ Today, the scientific world like in the past is threatening human beings; there is a no peace and security, in spite of “Mass education that had been devised to eliminate ignorance and intolerance.”⁵² Thereby hoping to prevent the systematic persecution and killing of human beings. Again, trying every means to be truly free, man turned to technology with the hope “to liberate humans from their burdens;”⁵³ instead technology and “even science revealed their menacing – indeed nightmarish possibilities.”⁵⁴ In fact, human dignity is at its lowest ebb so much so that in some place life is not worth it. Hunt, Lynn et al has noted that even though that the ending of the World War II instead of guaranteeing peace and security

for humanity, “ushered in an age of anxiety about the real possibility of nuclear annihilation”⁵⁵ of the human race. Unfortunately, science and technology which humanity thought would bring relief, peace, security and improvement in human life and value have turned out to be that which could erase the human race – the possibility is there. That is science and human dignity.

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