The biblical shape of modern culture

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The cliché that we are now in a 'post-Christian' age is superficial. It no doubt allows for the fact that church-going is no longer a matter of convention, and that it is no longer the fashion to cite the Bible as a public authority (which, insofar as it was only window-dressing, we are better off without). But the cliché misses the much more fundamental fact that contemporary ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour are in vital respects anchored in the biblical understanding of the world.

Even some of the most self-consciously non-Christian movements of the times are in important aspects dependent on, or congruent with, the biblical outlook. In the second century, the Greek philosopher Celsus denounced Christians (and Jews) as grossly exaggerating the importance of man in the universe. Renaissance 'humanism' revived this emphasis but its contemporary namesake has forgotten the biblical origin of the focus upon man. 'Environmentalism' may look like an attempt to re-identify man with nature, but it is anything but accepting of that fate, and its high sense of answerability reflects rather the biblical stewardship of creation. Even 'post-modernism', insofar as it seems to be

a reaction against attempts to explain everything in merely objective terms, leans towards the biblical way of understanding our being in personal and relational terms.[1]

Under the impact of Western dynamism the countries which are home to other major cultural traditions have sharpened their interest in the origins of Western culture, with particular attention to the biblical contribution. This can be seen not only in Japan and India, but also in contemporary China, where there are universities explicitly developing this interest. New Australians from non-Christian traditions also need this understanding, as a matter of public information. It is not only the province of 'Christian' education. Everyone stands to gain from identifying the broad historical influences that have made us all what we are.

This is not to claim a privilege for the West, or to justify imperialism or exploitation. Nor am I implying that the Western confusion of classical with biblical ideas or attitudes is somehow more Christian than what emerges with the christianisation of other cultures, in Africa, for example. Nor am I saying that the Western pattern marks progress towards the kingdom of God. On the contrary, it contradicts Christ's mission in many glaring ways. Nevertheless the historic fact remains that it is this particular set of tensions that has now taken over the world and permeates the minds of modern people. By identifying the (now taboo) biblical component of it we shall not only help explain things better, but also make it easier to put them right.

In what follows I outline in contrapuntal form a few of the major polarities of understanding in which we are all involved. In separating them sharply into classical and biblical categories I am dissolving the great fusion of attitudes which is supposed to have been effected in the fourth century. The

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1 There is of course a countervailing paradox. Church people have come to rely in many ways upon the classical world-view that is alien to the New Testament. That is why we prefer to leave passionate commitment to other people, and cultivate instead the carefully modulated life required by the ethics of reasonableness. The fact is that everyone in the West inherits the unresolved contradictions which create its distinctive dynamism, and which have rapidly overrun the rest of the world.

reigning historical judgement is that the biblical material was then absorbed into classical culture by such a many-sided accommodation that in the end nothing was much different. In particular, it is claimed that people did not behave better but, if anything, worse. I well know how the brutality of the fourth century seems to impose this conclusion. Yet christianisation was proclaimed at the time as a softening of manners, and in the long run, at any rate, so it has proved to be. What people believe does affect how they live in the end.[2]

The schematic treatment is intended only to clarify our patterns of understanding and approved behaviour. I am very conscious of the comment of A. Momigliano in his review of C. N. Cochrane: "He thinks in terms of abstract contrasts of ideas, when it has not unreasonably been suggested that history is made by men". P. O. Kristeller complained that Cochrane had fallen for "the temptation to exaggerate the contrast between Christianity and Classical thought and to play up the former against the latter".[3] The same might no doubt be said of the following schema. Of course the 'classical' position is far more varied than such a rhetorical summary makes it seem, and of course there are aspects of 'biblical' thought that may seem to harmonise more with the cultivated ideals of classical ethics. But my point is to highlight the contrasts of principle that are now built into our contradictory heritage and thus underlie our lived experience. In particular, this demonstrates that our culture is more strongly infused with biblical concepts than often it realises.

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2 E. A. Judge, *The Conversion of Rome: Ancient Sources of Modern Social Tensions*, Macquarie Ancient History Association, Sydney, 1980; Ramsay MacMullen, 'How complete was conversion?', *Christianizing the Roman Empire: AD 100-400*, ch. 9, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984, and 'What difference did Christianity make?', *Historia*, 1986, *35,* pp. 322-343.

3 Cochrane's work, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*, was published by Oxford University Press in 1940. In 1957 the *Encyclopedia Canadiana* said: "his contribution to the understanding of Graeco-Roman civilization is the most important yet made in Canada, if not on the American continent". Momigliano's review is in the *Journal of Roman Studies* 1941, *31*, pp. 193-4, Kristeller's in *Journal of Philosophy* 1944, *41*, pp. 576-81.

The shape of the whole

(a) The classical cosmos
The universe is a perfect whole, comprehending the gods; being cyclical and eternal, history repeats itself

(b) The biblical creation
God made the universe, and rules it; having an identified origin, it proceeds towards a clear end, as history changes things

In Greek, *cosmos* was the word for 'array', whether of an army or of a woman's adornment. It was the early philosophers, starting with Pythagoras (*c.* 530 BC), who applied this concept to the universe.[4] They expressed thereby their sense of its ordered beauty. The heavens could be seen to be rotating in a majestic procession, endlessly repeated—'the music of the spheres'. Such perfection was mathematically comprehensible. The gods might be close at hand or infinitely remote according to one's philosophy, but they belonged within the universe, sharing its immortality.

It was Heraclitus (*c.* 500 BC) who established this position: "The *cosmos* was not made by any god or man but was, is and will be everliving fire being kindled in measures and quenched in measures". One can see the logic of this. It is a rational deduction derived by speculating on the observed rhythm of hot and cold. It is rationality (*logos*) itself which is the eternal principle within the *cosmos*.[5]

The great debates amongst the pre-Socratic philosophers opened up rival theories which by the time of Aristotle (*c.* 330 BC) could be consolidated into a system that accounted for differences within the ultimate unity:

> We have already laid down that there is one physical element which makes up the system of the bodies that move in a circle, and besides this four bodies (fire, air, earth, water) owing their existence to the four principles (hot, cold, dry, moist)...

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4 Aëtius 2.1.1 (in Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*); Diogenes Laertius 8.48; M.R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995.
5 Heraclitus, frag. 30. G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments,* Cambridge University Press, London, corrected reprint 1962, frag. 1.

Fire, air, water, earth, we assert, originate from one another, and each of them exists potentially in each, as all things do that can be resolved into a common and ultimate substrate.[6]

The later Aristotelian tradition developed this:

Heaven is full of divine bodies, which we usually call stars, and moves with a continual motion in one orbit, and revolves in stately measure with all the heavenly bodies unceasingly for ever.

Thus then a single harmony orders the composition of the whole—heaven and earth and the whole universe—by the mingling of the most contrary principles [hot/cold, etc.]…a single power extending through all, which has created the whole universe out of separate and different elements—air, earth, fire, and water—embracing them all on one spherical surface and forcing the most contrasting natures to live in agreement with one another in the universe, and thus contriving the permanence of the whole.[7]

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6 Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, tr. E.W. Webster, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1923 (=W. D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 3), 339 a and b; G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts,* Cambridge University Press, London, 1957; Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Routledge, London and New York, 1979 (repr. 1993), a philosophical treatment.

7 Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo*, tr. E. S. Forster, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1914 (=W.D. Ross [ed.], *The Works of Aristotle,* vol. 3), 391 b and 396 b; for the logical problems involved in speculation at the opposite end of the scale see Andrew Pyle, *Atomism and its Critics: Problem Areas associated with the Development of the Atomic Theory of Matter from Democritus to Newton*, Thoemmes Press, Bristol, 1995; and for the rival view of an infinite universe (as distinct from the eternal *cosmos*) that results from starting with the smallest part rather than the whole, see David Furley, 'The cosmological crisis in Classical antiquity', in *Cosmic Problems: Essays on Greek and Roman Philosophy of Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 223-35.

The biblical view of the world is fundamentally different. God exists entirely outside it, he made it from nothing, he controls it, and will bring it to an end. In Aristotelian thought God's existence within the world may be necessary to ensure its eternity; if he is conceived as creator, he makes it out of pre-existing material. The differences are dramatised by Paul. The world is not in beautiful order. Error (*hamartia*) entered the *cosmos*, corrupting it with death (Rom 5:12). Far from sensing the perfect music of the spheres, Paul listens to the creation groaning under its bondage to decay (Rom 8:21-2), longing for the glory to be revealed (vv. 18-19).

Current cosmology posits an explosive origin for the universe at that point in the finite past when everything was compressed to a state of infinite density, and prior to which it did not exist. In due course it will all implode again and cease to be. This represents the emancipation of science from the logical straitjacket of Hellenic speculation. It is the ultimate product of the methodological revolution which the biblical concept of the world has inspired. The philosophical significance of its outcome matching the biblical scenario has hardly been explored.[8]

The significance of the idea of creation for the understanding of history is much clearer. History as the Greeks fashioned it was an enquiry (*historia*) into human behaviour. Its purpose was to commemorate notable examples, and then to instruct those who might follow them. Its art was rhetorical and its method persuasion. Since political life was a microcosm of the universe, it repeated itself. The best way was already known. Although historians were concerned with the truth of what had happened, and with the quality of their information, it was not part of their practice to lay out de-

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8 W. L. Craig and Q. Smith, *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, presents a debate on the theme; theism itself remains a classic issue in philosophy: Richard Swinborne, *Is there a God?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996; the absence of God has led M. K. Munitz, *Cosmic Understanding: Philosophy and Science of the Universe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986, to postulate a necessary 'Boundless Existence' (of which we can know nothing) in order for us to be able to live at peace with what we do know.

tailed evidence. They did not have to prove anything. Too much argument would spoil the ethical value of their display.[9]

By contrast, modern historians are required to prove their points by critical documentation, and to demonstrate how one thing has given rise to another. This is because we presuppose that history is developmental. The origin and growth of some phenomenon is our focus, along with its influence and decline. Things will not be the same again. Though the public may want us to say that history repeats itself, we are looking for what is new. This is the imprint upon our culture of the shift from seeing the world as an essentially stable scene to recognising that everything is on the move from a purposeful beginning to a promised end.[10]

What difference does our understanding of the universe make to us? When we seek to work out the pattern of things, and to accept our place in it, we reflect our classical heritage. When we focus upon some goal that we see before us, and respond personally to its challenge, it is our biblically inspired understanding of the way the world works that we rely upon.

How do we know it all?

(a) Classical logic	(b) Biblical experience
Speculative philosophy supplies logical proofs in science and rhetorical models in history	Propositional theology requires empirical testing in science and documentation in history

9 G. A. Press, *The Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston and Montreal, 1982; C. W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1983; G. W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought from Antiquity to the Reformation*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979.

10 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1946; H. I. Marrou, *The Meaning of History*, Helicon Press, Baltimore, 1966; Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography,* Blackwell, Oxford, 1977; Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of History*, Eyre-Methuen, London, 1981.

Greek philosophy begins with observation, and proceeds to explain things by analogy. The Stoics, for example, conceived of the *cosmos* as an organism, while medical writers conversely transferred to the human body the Heraclitan understanding of the universe in terms of physical principles. A fifth-century treatise criticised this:

> I am utterly at a loss to know how those who prefer these hypothetical arguments and reduce the science to a simple matter of 'postulates' ever cure anyone on the basis of their assumptions. I do not think that they have ever discovered anything that is purely 'hot' or 'cold', 'dry' or 'wet', without it sharing some other qualities.[11]

But this objection does not go much beyond insisting that the four 'principles' are in practice mingled to varying degrees. It was much the same with the four 'humours':

> This lecture is not intended for those who are accustomed to hear discourses which inquire more deeply into the human constitution than is profitable for medical study. I am not going to assert that man is all air, or fire, or water, or earth…
>
> Each adds argument and proofs to support his contention, all of which mean nothing. Now, whenever people arguing on the same theory do not reach the same conclusion, you may be sure that they do not know what they are talking about…
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> But when we come to physicians, we find that some assert that man is composed of blood, others of bile and some of phlegm…
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> The human body contains blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. These are the things that make up its

11 'Tradition in Medicine', Section 1, tr. J. Chadwick and W. N. Mann, *Hippocratic Writings*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 70.

> constitution and cause its pains and health. Health is primarily that state in which these constituent substances are in the correct proportion to each other, both in strength and quantity, and are well mixed.[12]

G. E. R. Lloyd related the argumentativeness of Greek science to the premium on debate developed in the small civil communities of the Greeks, citing Aristotle that "we are all in the habit of relating an inquiry not to the subject matter, but to our opponent in argument".[13] This resulted in a desire "to support, rather than to test, theories" and "a certain failure in self-criticism" due to "the quest for certainty in an axiomatic system".[14]

The sense of achievement amongst the very narrow élite within which this debate was conducted led early to the assumption by Aristotle that "nearly all possible discoveries and knowledge had been secured already". But the philosophical schools had no sure way of discriminating between the large amounts of "formalised common knowledge" and of "fantastic speculation" that they set out.[15] They were classifying everything, but not testing their axioms. Mathematical order fascinated them, but not measurement. There was no lack of inventiveness (the steam engine, for example), but little application of it. As the theories were refined across a millennium, the speculative competition became ever more remote from the general interest.[16]

By the second century AD there had been established the vast compendia of observable knowledge that in some fields (Ptolemy on astronomy and geography, Galen on medicine) passed to the Arabs and remained in use until

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12 'The Nature of Man', Sections 1-4, *ibid.*, pp. 260-2.

13 Aristotle, *De Caelo* 294b. 7ff.

14 G. E. R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience: Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 266-7.

15 G. E. R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1987, pp. 330 (n. 147) and 335.

16 S. Sambursky, 'The limits of Greek science', *The Physical World of the Greeks*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1956, pp. 222-244.

modern times. Galen is the earliest extant scholar to treat the biblical theology as a serious challenge to the traditional philosophical schools. He recognised both the significance of its accepting God as the free initiator of things (contradicting the fixity of natural law) and its implied rejection of logical demonstration or proof in favour of experimental testing as the way of discovering how things worked. Galen likened this to the method of an unidentified medical school who called themselves 'purists':

> (a) They compare those who practise medicine without scientific knowledge to Moses, who framed laws for the tribe of the Jews, since it is his method in his books to write without offering proofs, saying, "God commanded, God spoke".
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> (b) Is not this Moses' way of treating nature, and is it not superior to that of Epicurus? The best way, of course, is to follow neither of these but to maintain like Moses the principle of the demiurge as the origin of every created thing, while adding the material principle to it…For Moses it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order…We however do not hold this; we say that certain things are impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all but that he chooses the best out of the possibilities of becoming.
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> (c) For Archigenes talks about what is spoken of, not among all, but only among the purists, and again I do not know who they are, although I wanted to know this to consider whether they may be believed without a proof or not. For I learned from Aristotle that probable statements are those approved by all people, or by the majority, or by the wise. Yet I do not know if we should consider the purists as being tantamount to the wise. I should have thought it much more proper to add some adequate reason, if not a cogent reason, to the argument about the eight qualities (*sc.*

> of the pulse). Thus one would not, at the very start, as if one had come into the school of Moses or Christ, hear about laws that have not been demonstrated…He [Archigenes] did not consider it necessary to guide us by any logical method but adopted an empirical fashion of teaching, saying that eight qualities are spoken of by the purists.[17]

In spite of Galen's perceptiveness, the school of Moses and Christ did not quickly press home the methodological implication of their radically new starting point.[18] Many of their best thinkers in later antiquity were as much concerned to come to terms with the principles of Greek rationality.[19] It soon fell to the churches themselves to maintain the old culture (essential as it seemed to education).[20] A thousand years after Galen, the Aristotelian corpus was resuscitated in the West, thanks to the brilliant use of it made by the Arabs, and imposed on Catholicism as the correct philosophical partner for theology.

The consequences for scientific method of distinguishing the world from God were not decisively applied until the seventeenth century, in the wake of the Renaissance and Reformation, though the implications of the doctrine of

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17 R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians,* Oxford University Press, London, 1949; (a) cited from the Arabic translation of Galen's *On Hippocrates' Anatomy* (Walzer, p. 11); (b) from *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* xi 14 (Walzer, p. 12); (c) from *On the Differences between the Pulses* ii 4; the Greek texts, with Walzer's translations, are also reproduced in M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2, *From Tacitus to Simplicius*, Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 1980, pp. 306-15.

18 R. M. Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought,* North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1952.

19 Henry Chadwick, *Augustine*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of St Augustine*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1986, and *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism,* Yale University Press, New Haven 1993; J. M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

20 R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.

creation for the direct testing of all phenomena had been seen by the nominalists in the fourteenth century.[21] The immediate trigger for the success of the experimental method has been detected in various quarters: the Portuguese navigators who proved Ptolemy wrong, the Protestant ethic, or the Puritans and the Royal Society. But there is no serious disagreement over the intellectual changes that resulted. As Hooykaas writes (p.455), one may identify in the seventeenth century that critical empiricism triumphed over rationalism (self-sufficiency of theoretical reason); that nature was not merely observed but mastered by experimental art; the universe was no longer explained as an organism, but in mechanical terms; and a new emphasis on the quantification of data (measurement, statistics). Thus the huge upswing in knowledge and understanding that mark out modern times is linked to the liberating effect of the biblical view of the world over the rational system of the Greeks.[22]

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21 A. E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987.

22 R. Hooykaas, 'The rise of modern science: when and why?', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 1987, *20*, pp. 453-73 and 'Science and reformation', *Journal of World History*, 1956, *3,* pp. 109-139; see also M. B. Foster, 'The Christian doctrine of creation and the rise of modern natural science', *Mind*, 1934, *43,* pp. 446-68, repr. in C. A. Russell (ed.), *Science and Religious Belief: A Selection of Recent Historical Studies*, Open University Press, London, 1973, pp. 294-315; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1904; R. K. Merton, 'Science, technology and society in seventeenth century England', *Osiris*, 1938, *4,* pp. 360-632, repr. with 'Preface: 1970' under its own title, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1970, and *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1973; I. B. Cohen (ed.), *Puritanism and the Rise of Modern Science: The Merton Thesis,* Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick and London, 1990; J. H. Brooke, 'Science and religion', in R. C. Olby *et al.* (eds), *Companion to the History of Modern Science*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, pp. 763-82; A. Kleinman, 'What is specific to Western medicine?', in W. F. Bynum and R . Porter (eds), *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine,* Routledge, New York, 1993, vol. 1, pp. 15-23; A.C. Crombie, *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition: The History of Argument and Explanation Especially in the Mathematical and Biomedical Sciences and Arts*, Duckworth, London, 1994, 3 vols.

A clear-cut marker of the seventeenth-century turning point may be seen in Harvey's demonstration of the circulation of the blood.[23] For nearly two thousand years the study of the pulses had been dominated by the doctrines of Herophilus, the great Alexandrian physician who had used the openness of Egypt in the handling of the dead (in contrast with Greek taboos) actually to dissect the human cadaver. The standard doctrine was that veins carried blood while breath was pumped along the arteries.[24] The blood that rushed out when you cut one was only trying to seal the leakage in the air-passage. (Herophilus discovered the nervous system, which he conjectured also worked as a series of air-ducts.) The rhythm of the pulses was interpreted by Herophilus in terms of the metrical patterns of Greek music. He devised a water-clock to measure them. The prudent Galen protested at the imprecision.[25] Yet the issue had to lie another 1500 years for solution by controversialists working from different intellectual premises.

In the field of history there was also a long-delayed reaction to the implications of the biblical world-view. At the level of how the course of world affairs was understood, W. B. Glover writes:

> The transcendence of God and man means that history is free from the limitations of a determined natural order and that the future is open to novelty. Cyclical explanations of the ultimate reality man confronts are, therefore, no longer adequate. As awareness of this historical reality permeated the Western consciousness, modern man achieved a radically new mode of self-consciousness and of being aware of the world. He experienced a new sense of responsibility

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23 R. French, *William Harvey's Natural Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

24 H. von Staden, *Herophilus: The Art of Medicine in Early Alexandria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989. See also Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* xi 89.219: *spiritus semitae*, 'passages for the breath'.

25 See von Staden *ibid.* nos 182 and 174; also D. J. Furley and J. S. Wilkie, *Galen on Respiration and the Arteries,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984 (not seen by me).

for his own future and for the future of the world.[26]

There was also a methodological transformation. The documents and footnotes that mark the modern professional writing of history are signals of our concern for authentic evidence as distinct from the historian's well-informed judgement of probability, with the actual words of those we write about as distinct from our interpretation of them, with data as distinct from display. We have to prove our points, rather than present them. In antiquity such a concern for authenticity belongs to the tradition of the philosophical schools, where adherence to the master's authority led to the digesting of his lectures, while documentary proof belongs in the law-courts, where one had to produce written evidence or witnesses to establish one's claim. It was not a part of the writing of history; for classical historians to have included such raw material would have been inelegant, and it had to be processed into a more rhetorically persuasive form.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, however, incorporated into his history the documents guaranteeing the freedom of Jewish communities in Greek and Roman states. His history has acquired an objective of legally valid proof that is remote from the didactic purpose of history. Eusebius, the first Christian historian, called his work *ekklesiastike historia*, perhaps on the analogy of the lost *philosophos historia* and *philologos historia* of his contemporary (and severe critic of the churches), Porphyry. We possess still the earlier *philosophos historia* of Galen. As with Eusebius, a 'philosophical history' is not one that interprets general history from a particular philosophical perspective, but one that establishes the succession of authorities within the school across the centuries, and details their main doctrines. In the case of Eusebius, it is precisely because he means to set out the orthodox succession to the major episcopal sees that he

26 W. B. Glover, *Biblical Origins of the Modern Secular Culture: An Essay in the Interpretation of Western History*, Mercer University Press, Macon, 1984, pp. 9-10.

has incorporated into his work *in extenso* a huge range of material excerpted from earlier writers. The 'ecclesiastical history' is an historical source-book. The implications of this concern for proving authenticity were not, however, at the time carried over into general historical practice.

It was not until early modern times—the sixteenth century—with massive disputes over the legitimacy of States, and above all the counter-claims of Catholics and Protestants over which was the true heir to the practice of the first churches, that the principle of proof from documentary evidence was established as the foundation for the scholarly study of history.[27] As in the field of natural science, it is the conflict over fundamental claims which produces the revolution in method.

How then shall we live?

(a) Classical order	(b) Biblical community
People have their proper places determined by natural aptitudes; the republican state ensures harmony through selective participation	Everyone has a personal mission, being endowed with gifts to make responsible choices; an open society helps each support the good of others

If speculative philosophy was the first great distinctive of Greek culture, the second was the republican state. Both were premised on the axiom of a natural order. The sophists had debated whether one should live according to nature (*physis*) or to law (*nomos*). Aristotle resolved the dilemma by asserting that to live under law (or convention) was itself man's nature: "man is by nature a political animal".[28] To be without

27 J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Origins of the Study of the Past', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1961-2, *4*, pp. 209-46.

28 Politics 1253 a. Citations are from S. Everson (ed.), *Aristotle: The Politics*, Cambridge, 1988, the translation being the revision by Jonathan Barnes of that of Benjamin Jowett; in addition to studies listed in its 'Bibliographical note', there is a collection edited by D. Kent and F. D. Miller, *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, and F. D. Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995.

a state (*polis*) was to be either sub-human or super-human:

> Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part…The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing…But he who…has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state.

By similar lines of reasoning Aristotle also concluded (1254 b):

> Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind.
>
> It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.

These strenuous doctrines are part of a far-reaching argument, in which of course many other considerations arise, yet they remain lasting landmarks of the basic character of Greek political thought, much of which persists to our own day. It is essentially a rationalising defence of the established order. Both constitutional debate and utopian dreams formed part of that tradition. But what was fundamentally absent was any belief that the existing order should be reformed or overthrown.[29]

Athenian democracy became the ideal of government throughout the rest of antiquity and into modern times. In important ways it was more drastically egalitarian than anything we might call 'democracy'—above all in the use of the lot to fill all the executive and judicial functions of government (except for military commands): this survives with us

29 For a range of extracts see P. J. Rhodes, *The Greek City States: A Source Book*, Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1986; Ernest Barker, *From Alexander to Constantine: Passages and Documents Illustrating the History of Social and Political Ideas, 336 BC-AD 337*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956.

only in the (much criticised) jury system. The practice of election was thought to be aristocratic, since obviously one elects only the best![30] Yet the principle of direct participation applied only to the minority who enjoyed citizenship in small, local states. Increasingly, this implicitly timocratic principle ('rule of honour/wealth') was accentuated by Roman patronage. Status was supreme. By AD 212, when the whole free population of the Mediterranean was granted Roman citizen rank *en bloc,* the ideas of the world-state and of law incarnate in the sovereign went hand in hand.

In the same period the classical world heard for the first time the principle now embedded in civilised standards, that in the last resort each person must take the responsibility for deciding where truth lay. There was an ultimate law, higher than Caesar, said the Christian writer Origen:

> Celsus' first main point in his desire to attack Christianity is that the Christians secretly make associations with one another contrary to the laws, because "societies which are public are allowed by the laws, but secret societies are illegal"…As he makes much of "the common law" saying that "the associations of the Christians violate this", I have to make this reply…it is not wrong to form associations against the laws for the sake of truth.[31]

This extraordinary claim arose from the civil novelty of a quasi-nation forming itself in contradiction of its inherited national culture. The Jews could be understood (though alternately protected and suppressed) because they lived, though in exile, according to a well documented and respected national tradition of their own. The Christians, from the earliest stages alienated from Judaism, nevertheless assumed its heritage and insisted on abandoning their own. To the Romans this constituted an act of political sedition

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30 R. K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
31 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.1 (tr. Chadwick); E. A. Judge 'The Beginning of Religious History', *Journal of Religious History*, 1989, *15*, pp. 394-412.

(as the very formation of the name 'Christianus' signifies).[32]

When the Roman emperor Galerius finally abandoned the attempt to impose cultural conformity, he stated in his 'edict of toleration':

> ...through some strange reasoning such wilfulness had seized the said Christians and such folly possessed them that, instead of following those institutions of the ancients which their own ancestors no doubt had first established, they were making themselves laws for their own observance, merely according to their own judgement, and as their pleasure was, and were forming deviant communities on alternative principles (*per diversa varios populos congregarent*)...[33]

Thus was born 'the alternative society' as well as 'multiculturalism'. The idea of inner withdrawal had had a long history in philosophy.[34] At the communal level it ran its course in dreams or small-group retreats. Monasticism found similar solutions, in reaction against the official establishment of Christianity by Constantine in the years immediately following the death of Galerius. But the New Testament demand that the principles of the kingdom of God be practised on earth by the citizens of heaven generated social action on a community-wide scale.

Julian, Constantine's last heir, who hoped to reverse the tide, was outraged that the 'Galileans' were actually providing for the needs of the poor amongst the 'Hellenes'. Augustine, half a century later, reports in a newly found letter how action groups from his church rescued hundreds of victims

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32 E. A. Judge, 'Judaism and the rise of Christianity: a Roman perspective', *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies,* 1993, *7,* pp. 80-98, reproduced in *Tyndale Bulletin* 1994, *45*, pp. 355-368.

33 Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 34 (citing the edict of 30 April 311), tr. adapted from that of J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, revised W. H. C. Frend, SPCK, London, 1987, p. 280.

34 P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1995.

of the press-gangs (which were ostensibly acting within the law), seizing them in the docks before they could be shipped abroad, and billeting them until their relatives could come for them.[35]

When we insist upon national values, and stress the importance of everyone playing their part in the lawful public order for the sake of social harmony, we are echoing our classical culture. But when we insist upon our personal commitments, challenge reigning conventions, and accept it as our mission to persuade others to our cause and to live differently from the majority, we are picking up the freedom that was won on the biblical understanding of how we are to live as a new community in this world. Today everyone admires the integrity of the latter stance, while most of us settle for the comforts of the former.[36]

What is wrong with us?

(a) Classical ethics	(b) Biblical morality
Our problem comes from a tragic lack of foresight and moderation; education will ensure we do our duty with equanimity, while suffering is accepted as the just recompense for deficiencies.	Our problem is not so much cosmic as psychic—there is an enemy within; we refuse to do what we know we should; conscience condemns us, yet we insist on its demands, while meeting suffering in others with compassion despite their sins.

35 E. A. Judge, 'Ancient beginnings of the modern world', *Ancient History: Resources for Teachers,* 1993, *23*, pp. 125-48.

36 The Augustinian approach to being at once a citizen of this world and of the city of God has been recently applied in philosophy, by Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Duckworth, London, 1988; in government, by Graham Walker, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990; and in sociology, by John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991; on the resulting pluralism, see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992; James Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: the Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994; David Archard (ed.), *Philosophy and Pluralism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

The tragic view of life saw man as the victim of his own success. To step beyond one's settled place in the scheme of things, for however good an intention, only provoked the nemesis that cut everything down to size. A simple error of judgement might set one on the fatal course. An ethical education would train one in moderation, and above all in keeping one's balance in the shocks of encounter with others.

Greek ethics, although treating the duties each owes another by virtue of his position in the public order, is essentially concerned with self-management. Friendship is a reflection of one's self-interest.[37] Emotional involvement with others, whether through pity or cruelty, fear or love, will threaten the harmony of the soul. Commitments will have to be paid for.[38]

The ideal is not action, but being. Work was done in order to win leisure:

> Nature herself…requires that we should be able, not only to work well, but use leisure well; for…the first principle of all action is leisure. Both are required, but leisure is better than occupation, and is its end.[39]

The term 'morals' comes from the Latin for 'ethics'. Both words refer basically to custom, but we habitually use them for rather different types of behaviour in relation to each other. Most people would find it hard to define the difference, yet they are not exactly interchangeable. Nonetheless, ever since Nietzsche wrote *Die Genealogie der Moral*, explaining morality as a biblical imposition on our culture,[40]

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37 J. Benson, 'Making friends: Aristotle's doctrine of the friend as another self', in A. Loizou and H. Lesser (eds), *Polis and Politics: Essays in Greek Moral and Political Philosophy*, Avebury, Aldershot, 1990, pp. 50-68.

38 The famous distillations of Greek wisdom into gnomic form give a clear picture of how ethical values were inculcated over the ages in Greek popular education: W. T. Wilson, *The Mysteries of Righteousness: The Literary Composition and Genre of the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides,* J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1994; J. C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1995.

39 Aristotle, *Politics* 1337b (n. 28 above).

40 F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.), Cambridge University Press, New York, 1994, p. 19; see also B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Fontana, London, 1985, p. 198.

there has been no doubt as to its historical origin.

Contemporary philosophers are engrossed with the phenomenon.[41] In spite of the displacement of God from the intellectual agenda, and from the public one in Australia (though not in the US), everyone in the community has a powerful moral sense shaped by the biblical tradition. The problem is how to justify it if the source has been discarded.[42]

Whereas ethics can be rationally defined in terms of effective patterns of behaviour, and thus are self-regulating, morals require there to be someone else who places the obligation upon you. By 'morality' we mean now, not well balanced behaviour, but answerability to an external source of authority (God, or some less defined substitute for him). When we campaign for our causes we are often applying to other people the moral constraint we feel ourselves. If we cannot refer to its source in the divine commands, we are left with a mysterious pressure that we cannot rationally justify.

If morality turns ethics inside out by causing us to feel obligations to others often to our own disadvantage, it also causes us to look far more deeply inside ourselves for the source of our problems. Classical psychology had no developed treatment of either the will or the conscience, nor did it seek the heart of the human dilemma in the inner man. There was no autobiography in classical antiquity, in the sense of a retrospective disclosure of motives and emotions. That began with Paul, and was carried to an extreme by Augustine. It is thanks to them that everyone is now engrossed with the personal life. There were no psychological novels in antiquity.

Paradoxically, our inward-looking preoccupations go hand-in-hand with an activist approach to personal relations. Far from guarding our serenity against the shocks of

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41 M. Smiley, *Moral Responsibility and the Boundaries of Community: Power and Accountability from a Pragmatic Point of View*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1992; J. E. J. Altham and R. Harrison, *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1995; D. Copp, *Morality, Normativity and Society,* Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1995.

42 R. G. Poole, *Morality and Modernity,* Routledge, London, 1991.

contact, we value involvement. We believe we should always do something, and not just be. This highly personal, as opposed to naturalistic, sense of our relations with each other stems from our understanding of the world as the domain of the personal God. In particular, when we listen to him speaking in his Son, and are open to the gifts of his Spirit, we are drawn into personal relationship not with some 'boundless existence' but with the source of all reality revealed as personal being.[43]

Whenever modern people speak of their commitments, when they feel an obligation, when they look for the opportunity to make their contribution to the community, and in many other behavioural patterns, they express the imprint upon them of the biblical morality and its author.

The Bible, unfashionable as it may be today, has shaped the development of many basic patterns of our culture. There remains the question of how to activate this heritage into useful consciousness. The appeal to the Bible itself is felt to be oppressive.[44] Through cultural criticism perhaps we shall find an avenue to re-open the Bible as a public good.[45] At least we should be able to remind our contemporaries of the debt they owe to biblical thinking in the development of the norms they cherish.

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43 A. D. Momigliano, 'The disadvantages of monotheism for a universal state', *Classical Philology*,1986, *81*, pp. 285-297, reprinted in *Ottavo Contributo* …, Rome, 1987, pp. 313-328.
44 Paradoxically it was the development of biblical criticism by the English deists that triggered the Enlightenment humanism whose pseudo-objectivity we are at last discounting; Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, SCM, London, 1984.
45 Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991.