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6. The West And The Damaging Consequences Of Extreme Scientism And Rationalism

To complement our discussion on the shortcomings of science and the intellect on the path to guidance, a brief account of the consequences of Western extreme scientism and materialistic rationalism is presented. Sheer dependence on the twain has adversely impressed modern societies and has called scholars to revise the materialistic thoughts prevalent in the West. Such revision has been conducive to a theoretical deadlock and a practical crisis. In theory, the modern world has experienced the deadlock of science and the solely materialistic intellect, and in practice it has confronted many a social problem deriving from this attitude. 1 A number of the adverse effects will follow.2

Nihilism, Anxiety, And Loneliness

Among the damaging effects of Western scientism are, nihilism and meaninglessness of life. A number of Western writers have disseminated nihilistic thoughts in the modern age. Writers like Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Jean Paul Sartre, and Eugene Unesco were nihilists who raised the issue in their dramas, novels, short stories, essays and articles.

A number of them intended to provide man's meaninglessness of life and destiny with intellectual support and some depicted man's meaningless life and adversity artistically devoid of any logical and dialectic support. The protagonists of their works are indifferent and cold-blooded concerning life and its values, irresponsible toward social customs, and careless about relations with others.3

Jean Forestier regards nihilism as springing from excessive scientism and states: "according to Sartre's or Kafka's thoughts, whose works may be considered to be the adverse consequences of experimental sciences, humiliating and disparaging traditional values, man is a meaningless creature who is abandoned in a meaningless world ... Such nihilistic thoughts have permeated modern Western literary classics."4

It is evident that by proclaiming the futility of life and the absurdity of the world, "Life on the earth [for many Westerners] has practically lost its meaning. Modern Western civilization has provided modern man with numerable material possibilities which could not be dreamed of by preceding generations. But, since the meaning of man is lost and it has become unknown in this civilization, his far–fetched expectations and aspirations are ignored and unknown and all these material possibilities cannot save him from getting entangled in adversity and despair."5

In spite of being at the apex of scientific and technological advancements, the West is experiencing circumstances which Alvin Toffler calls one of the most surprising social phenomena of all times.

He states: "One of the most wondrous social phenomena of modern age, i.e. the unprecedented prevalence of religious sects and books, may solely be comprehended if the three factors: loneliness; lack of structure; futility, absurdity, and meaninglessness; stemming from the decline of the Industrial civilization, be placed together."6

If science and the intellect were sufficient for man's happiness, we would not experience the present spiritual crisis in the modern world, its ever increasing intensity, and rise in the West. If material welfare brought about the Garden of Eden, no one would mention the shortcomings of the West, and the statement, "Indeed, there exist absurdity, material welfare, and a spiritual defect in the West, but Westerners intend to make their lives meaningful," would have no sense.

The martyred scholar, Murtada Motahhari states in this respect: "It has often been perceived nowadays that scientism (i.e. sheer tendency towards science) and teaching pure science are unable to make perfect man. Pure scientific education ... makes man one-dimensional, rather than multi-dimensional.

Nowadays, everybody knows that the age of pure science is over and an ideal emptiness threatens societies. ... Will Durant admits that the existing emptiness is an ideal one in the first place, one in respect of intentions, ends and ideals, one which is conducive to nihilism.8

According to Eric Fromm, technological advancements have not been able to provide man with peace of mind which, according to The World Health Organization (WHO), is the pivot of health and the first step in a happy life; au contraire, they have divested man of peace of mind. Predominance of sheer science and technology necessitates anxiety and nihilism. Modern man does not experience peace of mind and feels more humiliated ... and feels that his activities are absurd."9

More unfortunate is that, "psychologists have termed this age as *the age of anxiety*. According to the statistics in a world termed as postmodernist, the majority of hospital beds in the United States are used by mental patients." 10

The origin of the problem lies in the reality that "Today, our world suffers from the famine of interpreting the meaning of the world and existence." 11

According to Rudolf Christopher Eucken, when man becomes incapable of elevating himself through the assistance of an exalted power and making himself better and more perfect day by day, he feels increasingly that life loses meaning and value. 12

Mental Fatigue And The Feeling Of Spiritual And Moral Emptiness

Science, technology, and their material benefits are incapable of satisfying the innate and spiritual needs of man and his desire to find his self. They have caused many people to turn to religion, as Kat Stevens, the famous English singer who quit his profession and converted to Islam.

He stated that his conversion to Islam had been due to a heart- rending spiritual emptiness which had caused him to experience sensitive circumstances. In this respect, he states: "I grew up in London in the age of television, space travels, and instantaneous industrial developments, and lived in the advanced Western world.

For a good number of years, I had access to whatever anyone could wish for, but I had always been feeling emptiness in my life."13

Ms. Brigitte Jamila, the new European Muslim convert, mentions her "spiritual emptiness," prior to her conversion to Islam, saying: "I was not religious throughout the twenty-six years of my life, spending it, like other Europeans, on carnal joys, but I was always experiencing emptiness and deficiencies.

Despite all my efforts to dispel this emptiness from my life, my psychological state turned incessantly from bad to worse. Of course, I seemed to be happy."14

Despite modern man's availability of experimental science and the intellect, he finds it insufficient for moral and spiritual guidance and his innate needs. Consequently, many modern intellectuals in the West admit that, "We are misguided from the right path and seek institutions beyond us and ... our frail spirituality, to possess the capacity to provide us with morals and spirituality."15

Cries of severe, spiritual poverty are heard from the West and those who cry regard it as necessary that, despite their financial and economic circumstances, some spiritual revolution and development should occur. 16

Perceiving the necessity of returning to spiritual values in the West arises from the incapacity of science and the intellect in solving moral and spiritual problems. Nowadays, many inhabitants of Western countries have felt the destructive effects and overwhelming suffering of alienation from religion and spirituality.

They have come to the conclusion that: "They are supposed to attain the perception of the world and man, by which life may find meaning and purpose, and the moral and spiritual values find a reliable

support."17

The weariness resulting from materialism and moving toward spirituality in the West has been the subject of numerable studies, including those by Bill Maizer, the American journalist and researcher.

He presented the results of his studies in ten consecutive programs broadcast from television network, on which he stated that "People all over the world are tired of materialism and are immediately returning toward spirituality and the return began sometime ago." 18

He emphasized that "Religion and absolute adherence to its tenets have become the center of attention once more." 19

A number of Western thinkers, such as George Weigel, have regarded the realities which are the characteristics of modern times as the world tendency toward immaterial matters and state that, "The immateriality of the world [tendency toward religion] is one of the outstanding realities of life at the close of the 20th century."20

According to Dr. Bernie Signel, the Western writer, "People [in the West] are earnestly thirsty for spiritual discussions and pursue the meaning of life."21

Referring to the social developments occurring in Western countries, Christian Bono, the French researcher and the newly converted Muslim writes, "Western societies are tired of political and economic discussions and are thirsty for spirituality."22

Daniel Dreiserbuck, professor at the American University, believes that "Among the rich, industrial countries, Americans go more to the church.... People [in the West] are tired of materialism and their tendency toward spirituality results from the same weariness and ennui."23

The Washington Post, stating one instance among many instances of man tired of the pain of nihilism, purposelessness, and seeking spirituality, writes: "At the time being, twenty million people, thirsty for spirituality, are listening to religious radio stations." In presenting an analysis of the report, the reporter writes: "Because of the psychological perturbation and disillusionment resulting from daily preoccupations in the United States, the majority of the general public seeks refuge in listening to religious radio stations to calm themselves down and approach religious instructions which are never followed in the society."24

Many analysts of the Western social problems regard the unprecedented welcoming of spiritual instructions to be due to the thirst of the man who is tired of the industrial world's spiritual emptiness.

Referring to the widespread tendency toward Buddhist instructions in American society, Dr. Huan Poola, the president of the College of Buddhist Studies in Los Angeles, remarks: "Americans are tired of the pressures of life and the world of industry and technology and by taking refuge in the Buddhist instructions centers, liberate their souls from these problems.

Such tendency indicates the interest of the American society toward the new spiritual religion and path."25

Nowadays, interesting examples reveal the Western societies' tendency toward spirituality, and assist us in arriving at a deeper analysis of this issue.

William Chittick, professor at the Department of Religions and Mysticism at New York State University, raises the issue of the widespread wave of translating Rumi's poetry in the United States: "Last year, I read in a periodical that Rumi had broken the records among English classics in America and it is surprising!"

To find the roots of the phenomenon, he adds: "This wave is due to a number of factors, one of which is the Westerners' thirst for spirituality, and it is of great significance."26

Another interesting report reads that Otia, the modern Western music star and the actor of Hollywood neo-musical movies has recently released an album in the United States which has broken the record in the West in the first week of its release.

The theme of this controversial album is nothing but the declamation of the English translation of Rumi's ghazals from his *Divan–e Kabir* ("The Great Complete Works").

The poems recited in this album have been artfully translated into English, whose themes include calling mankind to leave the inward darkness, open a window toward the world of light and illumination, and also call the soul to attend the Divine feast.

As reported by the American state-run radio station: "According to the cultural experts at American universities, translations of Shams' ghazals (composed by Rumi), particularly the pocket size ones, are surprisingly welcomed by the young generation in America."27

John Kane, the thinker of English descent, traveled to Turkey and, in an interview with one of the periodicals there, admitted the fact that, "The administration system in the West is confronting adversity and secularism and has not been able to quench the thirst of man's soul."

With a harsh critique of Nietzsche's views, he adds "When Nietzsche raised the issue of slaying God in the West, secularism had reached its zenith, but today we notice that religious revival is raised once more in the West and religion re-presents its application in the social sphere." 28

The growth of tendency towards religion in the world and particularly the fast paced growth of Islam today, despite the overwhelming scientific and materialistic investments against it, cannot be regarded as an insignificant event to be ignored.

This movement requires sophisticated analyses, since world experts have discussed it and they have learned that it originates from the shortcomings of extreme scientism and modern man's ennui.

Technology is capable of providing material facilities, but falls short of providing man with happiness and peace of mind. According to an Iranian physician who has been residing in Germany for forty years, "Those who enjoy a materially good life in the West have never been able to feel happiness fully. They seem to be happy.

Man cannot be made happy with Mercedes and beautiful houses. Spiritual emptiness is felt in America and Europe. In Hamburg, which accommodates millionaires more than any other European city, lack of spirituality has adversely affected all the aspects of human life. People in Western societies have reached the saturation point in terms of welfare, but they suffer from spiritual emptiness. It is a great message for those who seek happiness in Western countries."29

Another well-known Iranian physician residing in the West confirms the said statement: "It is obvious that technique, employed to provide for material needs, is moving with an extraordinary pace in the West. But what the Westerners lack is the technique to provide for psychological needs. We have it. If one is reasonable, capable of stabilizing spiritual matters, e.g. religion and culture, and has access to technique without importing Western culture, he will win the game."30

A number of writers acknowledge that, "Loss of faith in Europe and America has made people thirsty for oriental mysticism."31

Metamorphosis Of Man Into A Machine

Ernesto Sabato, the contemporary outstanding Argentine thinker, mentions the absolute predominance of science and advancements in the 19th and 20th centuries as degrading man's dignity and metamorphosing him into the screws and nuts of a colossal machine: "Capitalist and Marxist theorists have had equal shares in the widespread of this abnormal attitude, by which an individual melts down in the general public and the secret of the soul diminishes to the proportion of measurable radiations."32

Halim Herbert, the French thinker and researcher working in third world countries, protests against degrading man's formerly elevated state and humiliating his dignity due to the development of Western civilization and culture: "Apart from presenting degrading definitions of man, social sciences and humanities in the West fail to represent anything. At times, man's truth is reduced to the level of an instrument, at times to the level of economy, at times to the level of sexuality, at times to the level of speech, and at times to the level of imagination."33

Of course, the truth seeking men have reacted against the erroneous ideas humiliating man's state by returning to religious teachings to perceive existential truths. For instance, Dr. Erich Laroute, professor at Gregory University and the president of the Center for Research Coordination of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, critiques modern culture: "Modern culture attempts to reduce man into an economic factor and an economic agent and presents him as a production or consumption agent. Man's soul rebels in this vein in the postmodernist era and brings about a revolution against such

reduction and degradation of the human state and dignity, breaks this crust and departs it; as we noticed, Marxist materialism led to the 1989 disintegration."34

Increase In Criminal Acts

Experimental sciences provide man with utmost material welfare, but they fall short of creating a healthy and dynamic society. If they are not rightly directed, they end up committing criminal acts.

"On the basis of the researches conducted in twenty industrial countries, it has been obvious that the increase in criminal acts is not due to poverty and backwardness, but the consequences of welfare in industrial societies and Western democratic systems."35

Gill Keppel, the famous French sociologist states: "Irreligious, educated individuals maintain that the irreligious culture has driven us to confront a deadlock whose consequences are noticeable in the intensity of criminal acts, divorce, AIDS, narcotics and so on. They disapprove of the industrial contrast between science and faith."36

Inability To Solve The Complications Of Modern Man

Today, many thinkers, focusing on the spheres of science and the intellect, have noticed the unfavorable consequences of infatuation with science in the West, and have voiced the failure of experimental sciences and the intellect in solving the complications involved in modern man's social life.

In his speech, delivered at the International Seminar for Islamic Civilization and Culture, William Chittick regarded the impartiality and justification of modern science and its consequent technology as one of the deadly mistakes of the modern world.37

Fritiov Capra, professor of nuclear physics at European and American Universities and the writer of the best–seller *Tao of Physics*, translated into tens of languages, wrote another book entitled *Point of no Return*, which appeared in 1982. Critics considered the book as one of the classics of the 80s.

In this work, he expounds the development of prevailing ideas regarding the efficiency of experimental sciences in finding an all-out solution to the complications of the world society: "In the United States, the White House tradition has always been to seek consultation from outstanding university professors as the US president's academic advisors.

However, based on existing realities, it may be concluded that in the status quo, these academic brains may not be effective in solving complicated problems any further. The academicians' intellectual basis lies in a scientific viewpoint."38

In expressing the cause of the issue, he states: "In a recent detailed report, *The Washington Post*, depicted the shortcomings of the academic brains and the academic advisors of the White House. One

of the scholars addressed by this newspaper was Henry Look, professor at New York University.

Failing to answer the questions raised by a reporter regarding the role played by experimental scientists in solving complications, he said: "I resign my position, since I have nothing to say. If you ask for my opinion, [I should say that] nobody has anything to say."

Capra continues: "Because of their belief in the prevalent scientific viewpoint, academicians are restricted to an incomplete perception of truth which fails to confront modern problems."39

In the last decades, many Western thinkers have regarded the definitions, presented by experimental sciences as the only solution to unknown issues, as inaccurate and unreal. For instance, according to Richard H. Bobb, professor of construction material and electrical engineer in Stanford: "One of the most pernicious lies, so far almost accepted worldwide, is that the scientific method is the only secure way in pursuit of the truth."40

Herbert Armstrong, an outstanding American authority, states in this respect: "Modern sciences are absolutely incapable of indicating the purpose of man's life and the path toward humanity, nor are they able to present an accurate and valuable meaning for human life, nor do they recognize the modern values of life. Modern science fails to indicate accurately the path toward peace, wholeness, and peace of mind.

It has failed to liberate the world from adversity, hunger, sickness, anxiety, hatred and misfortune. ... It lacks the capacity to stop breaking up of families, committing criminal acts, corruption and immorality, nor has it succeeded in diminishing the application of inhumane methods and attitudes, insanity and misguidance."41

As stated by Emrich Kurt: "The simplistic view regarding scientific and technical advancements leading to happiness is on the decline. Therefore, there exists no other alternative but to perceive the reality that mere material advancement fails in solving problems."42

One of the telling examples of the shortcomings of extreme scientism and rationalism for human guidance is the increasing religiosity, particularly the tendency toward Islam in the West and the outset of the decline of sheer materialism.

Today the general public as well as the scientists in the West, following a long period of anti-religious sentiment, have entertained doubts concerning their past and have started a new movement.43

- 1. A number of the theoretical deadlocks shall be mentioned in the chapter "The deadlock of excessive scientism."
- 2. It is to be noted that some material and the references incorporated in the chapter "The West and the damaging effects of excessive reliance on science and the intellect" and the first appendix have been excerpted from Mir Ahmad Hajati's book entitled Imam Khomeini's Age.
- 3. 'Abd Allah Nasri, Falsafe-ye Khelqat-e Ensan ("The Philosophy of the Creation of Man"), p. 16.
- 4. Jean Forestier, Bohran-e daneshgah ("University Crisis"), tr. 'Ali Akbar Kasma'i, p. 105.
- 5. Roger du Pasquier, Sargozasht-e Eslam, Sarnevesht-e Ensan ("The Destiny of Islam, the Destiny of Man"), tr. 'Ali

Akbar Kasma'i, p. 19.

- 6. Alvin Toffler, Mowj-e Sevvom ("The Third Wave"), tr. Shahindokht Kharazmi, p. 517.
- 7. Roy Dome, President of the Third World Research Center, Belgium, in an interview with Hozur Quarterly, no. 18, Winter 1375/1996.
- 8. Mortada Motahhari, Moqaddame-i bar Jahan-bini-ye Eslami ("An Introduction to the Islamic Worldview"), p. 24-25.
- 9. Eric Fromm, Ensan bara-ye Khishtan ("Man for himself"), tr. Akbar Tabrizi, p. 14.
- 10. Mohamamd Reza Sharafi, Roshd (periodical), vol. 4, Autumn and Winter 1374/1995.
- 11. Ibid.
- 12. Nasri, Falsafe-ye Khelqat-e Ensan ("The Philosophy of the Creation of Man"), p. 22.
- 13. Neda-ye Jam'i-ye Zanan-e Enqelab-e Eslami [periodical] ("The Collective voice of the Islamic Revolution Women"), nos. 17–18.
- 14. Susan Safaverdi, Rastakhizi dar Tariki ("Resurrection in Darkness"), p. 69.
- 15. Neil Postman, Tekno-puli (Techno-money), tr. Sadeq Tabataba'i, p. 211.
- 16. Antonio Medrano, in an interview with the Islamic Republic of Iran's Spanish Radio, Radio Ma'aref,
- 28-11-1378/17-2-1999.
- 17. Ibid.
- 18. Hamshahri [periodical], 29-7-1375/21-10-1996, as quoted from the Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency (IRNA).
- 19. Ibid.
- <u>20.</u> Barkhord–e Tamaddon–ha, Hantington va Mntaqed–an–ash "Clash of Civilizations, Huntington and his critics"), The Political and International studies Bureau, p. 51.
- 21. "In pursuit of the sacred" in Mashreq [periodical], nos. 2 and 3.
- 22. In an interview with Jomhuri-ye Eslami [periodical], 5-9-1375/26-11-1996.
- 23. Sobh [monthly], no. 70, Khordad 1376/May-June 1997, p. 81, as quoted from the Reuters.
- 24. Jomhuri-ye Eslami [periodical], 8-3-1376/29-5-1997.
- <u>25.</u> Buletan-e Farhangi-ye Vezarat-e Ershad-e Eslami ("The Cultural Bulletin of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance"), no. 57, 1373/1994, p.9.
- 26. Keyhan [Newspaper], 18-6-1378/8-9-1999.
- 27. Jebhe [periodical], 4-2-1378/24-4-1999.
- 28. Yeni Yuzil [periodical], published in Turkey, 18 May 1997.
- 29. Dr. Sayyed Muhammad 'Aqili, Keyhan-e Hava'i [periodical], 13-8-1371/4- 12-1992.
- <u>30.</u> Prof. Khodadust, the famous Iranian ophthalmologist, discussing the issue at a session with the Iranian physicians residing abroad, Resalat [newspaper], 29–2–1370/19–5–1991.
- 31. Khabar-e Ruz, supplement dated Thursday 8-8-1382/30-10-2003, quoted from Faride Mahdavi Damghani, the translator of Dante's Divine Comedy.
- 32. Payam-e Yuneko ("The Message of UNESCO") [periodical], no. 243.
- 33. Halim Herbert, lecture delivered at al-Rahman Mosque, Lyon, France in 1983, Name-ye Farhang [periodical], Summer 1375/1996, p. 62.
- <u>34.</u> Lecture delivered at the Research Bureau of the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kalame-ye Daneshju ("Students' Words") [periodical], no. 15, 17–3–1373/7–6–191994.
- 35. Ettela'at [periodical], supplement, 2511–1371/14–2–1992, The Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency (IRNA), quoted from the German Weekly, Focus.
- 36. Sorush [periodical], no. 551, Farvardin 1370/March-April 1991.
- 37. Sobh [monthly], no. 68, p. 24.
- 38. Name-ye Farhang [periodical], no. 13, pp. 65-66.
- 30 Ihid
- 40. Hosayn Mehri, Seda-ye Pa-ye Degar-guni ("The Footsteps of Change"), p. 71.
- 41. 'Ali Akbar Kasma'i, Jahan-e Emruz va Farda ("The Worlds of Today and Tomorrow"), p. 211.
- 42. Emrich Kurt, Name-ye Farhang, Vol. 3, no. 1, Spring 1372/1993.

<u>43.</u> For further information regarding this issue on the basis of the acknowledgements found in Western sources, please read the first appendix.

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