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THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

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ABSTRACT

The history of the idea that mankind has made progress is traced from earliest times. The idea of progress only became accepted by the Christian west in the mid-seventeen hundreds, found mutual support in Darwinism a century later but today is in serious doubt by many historians. At the same time, the concept of “primitive society” among the anthropologists has been abandoned leaving nothing in its place even though the discipline is still dominated by the belief in evolution. Meanwhile, psychology still cannot offer a rational evolutionary explanation for the genius and the idiot-savant. However, the situation in all three disciplines can be resolved once the creation account of the fall of man given in the book of Genesis is accepted.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of progress – the belief that mankind has advanced in the past, is now advancing, and will inevitably advance in the foreseeable future – is a peculiarly Western faith with a short history and, it turns out, a doubtful future. We will take a brief look at the history of the idea of progress over the past 2,800 years and then turn to a couple of appropriate disciplines from the sciences to see if the facts support the progression or regression of mankind.

HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

Historians, like everyone else, are biased by their educational background. For example, in the past the interpretation given to historical events was influenced by Catholic or Protestant bias. Today, that bias is more commonly the doctrine of evolution and this not only goes hand in glove with the idea of progress but cuts across most sectarian lines. While any kind of scholarly work demands absolute objectivity, it may be seen by going back to referenced sources that some historians are more objective than others. Selecting the data to fit their particular bias is far more common among those with a humanist bias. Twentieth century historians Ludwig Edelstein, M. I. Findley, W. K. C. Guthrie, Eric Dodds and Robert Nisbet all claim that the idea of progress goes back to the early Greeks and has existed throughout most of recorded history. On the other hand, historians, Hannah Arendt (1954), John Baillie (1950), R. G. Collingwood (1946), F. M. Cornford (1935), W. R. Inge (1920), and especially J. B. Bury (1920) all claim that the idea of progress is relatively modern. Only Baillie and Inge wrote from a Christian perspective, Arendt was Jewish and J. B. Bury, although a great scholar, was quite biased against Christianity. When all the historical facts are considered (such as the common belief of a noble beginning in a Golden Age, the fall of man and his inherently evil nature and an intervening God of history) then it becomes evident that these beliefs had to be thoroughly placed in doubt before the belief in progress could be established. Thus, while passages can always be found in ancient literature suggestive of the idea of progress, this does not mean that the idea was common among men. One of the more objective historians, J. B. Bury, concludes that such passages in the Greek literature were mere seeds of thought that could only blossom and grow in the fertile ground prepared by humanist idealists of the mid-17th century. Today, the belief in progress is as unquestioned by the common man as is the belief in evolution.

Claims for the antiquity of the idea of progress usually begin with the Greek farmer/philosopher, Hesiod, living in the 8th century B.C. Of course, the biblical record goes back at least another thousand years and says nothing of progress; quite the contrary, the fall of man seems to imply regression. In his Works and Days, Hesiod [1] spoke of a Golden race followed by a Silver race then a Bronze race, next a race of Heroes and finally an Iron race. We learn that the Golden race existed in the beginning when the world was ruled by Kronos. In Roman mythology Kronos becomes Saturn. Here men lived together in innocent happiness without strife or labor or injustice while the earth yielded its fruits in abundance of its own accord. They knew little of the practical arts and excelled in moral probity. While Hesiod spoke of a

“Golden race” this has become more popularly referred to as the “Golden Age” theme. This theme is part of a world-wide tradition found, for example, in the Eclogue (IV) of Virgil, the Epode (XVI) of Horace, the Aetas Prima of Chaucer, the Hymn of the Nativity of Milton and in the ancient Quiché Maya’s, Popol Vuh. As time passed from one metallic race to the next there was a greater and greater inclination to war and injustice. Those of bronze destroyed those of silver and those of iron destroyed those of bronze. Hesiod’s sequence of metallic races from a noble metal (gold) to the base metal (iron) is certainly one of regression but in 1836 the Danish archaeologist, C. J. Thomsen, reversed this order claiming that mankind has progressed from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Finally, Hesiod related the story of Prometheus. Prometheus in Greek legend was a Titan who, in defiance of Zeus the tyrant son of Kronos, stole fire from Mount Olympus and enabled man to move from his fall to primordial deprivation and fear to eventual civilization. The overall theme of *Works and Days* is that of regression from a Golden race while he speaks of the innovation provided by Prometheus as “some good things mixed with the evils.” Nevertheless, his chief theme was the need for justice in a tyrannical age and the need for work. As we shall see, this dual character of good and evil hinted at by Hesiod is indeed the pattern throughout history.

The story of Prometheus told very briefly by Hesiod was made the subject of the tragic play Prometheus Bound by the Greek dramatist, Aeschylus, living in the 5th century B.C. Prometheus was one of the favorite gods of the Greeks and in the play the immortal Titan is condemned by the tyrant, Zeus, to be chained to a desolate rock for all eternity. He was condemned for having given man knowledge, setting him free from fear and ignorance and bringing him into full use of his intelligence. This theme, perhaps more than any other, gave the Greeks a hint of the god-given progress of man. Hesiod saw the regression of man from a noble beginning but had hoped that the good life was attainable through man’s own efforts and hard work. Aeschylus completely ignored the noble beginning and emphasized man’s state of primitive squalor [2].

It would not do to leave the Greeks without mention of Plato. Writing in the 3rd century B.C. he is best known for his Republic and the Dialogues. It is not surprising that Plato’s ideas present in these works have had such an effect on Western thinking because Plato’s Academy taught his ideas for over 900 years! The Republic is still required reading in most places of higher learning today but it is in the Dialogues and the sub-section, Protagoras, that Plato records the conversation between Socrates and fellow philosopher Protagoras.

Historians generally agree that Plato has recorded an actual dialogue between two historical characters and Protagoras provides the reader with the creation account where first the animals then men were made from a mixture of earth and fire. By some oversight man was left uncared for and, upon inspection, the demi-god, Prometheus, saw that “man alone was naked and shoeless and had neither bed nor arms of defense” [3]. Being compassionate he stole the mechanical arts of Hephaestus and Athene together with the fire that was necessary and gave them to man. Man thus had the knowledge necessary to support life. Protagoras then provided a detailed account of the progress made in culture, arts and sciences. However, as man’s lot improved he was at first attacked by the animals and then by warfare among themselves. Zeus looked down and saw that the entire race could be exterminated so he sent Hermes to distribute to all mankind justice and a sense of respect for others. The account is short but Plato develops it in his The Laws and The Statesman. Here, again, we find the out-working of that mixture of good and evil spoken of by Hesiod and brought about by Prometheus. Progressionists generally fail to see the evil, focus upon the technological advances as the good things and claim this as the beginning of a universal belief in progress. It is expressed in the humanist credo “Man is the measure of all things,” meaning that by his own efforts man has improved his lot immeasurably from the time when he was “naked and shoeless ... ” This then is the Greek background where from the 8th century to the 3rd century B. C., a few writers, particularly Plato, have turned the early belief in the regression of man on its head. However, according to J. B. Bury these ideas suggesting progress were merely seeds planted among the general belief in regression. We will now look briefly at the thinking of the early Christians.

The first Christians were, of course, converted Jews and, together with their Greek and later Roman background, introduced the Hebrew thinking of the Old Testament and the fulfillment of those ideas in the New. The sainted Augustine [4] writing in the 4th century A.D. was probably the most influential of the early Christian writers and progressionists claim that he promoted the idea of progress in his The City of God. Among his proposals was the necessity of history. By this he meant that God was an ever-present reality completely in charge of history, nothing happened by chance, fate or the merely fortuitous. Moreover, God’s overall plan had been offered to man in the Scriptures. Augustine then divided past

history according to Scripture into ages in which could be seen the progression to Christ. He was more cautious about projecting ages into the future. The end-time plan, given in the book of Revelation, describes a future in which Christ will reign on earth together with His saints for a thousand years. This millennial period was perceived to be an era of restored perfection with superabundant crops and harmony among men and even among the animals. Progressionists point out that clearly, going from any point in known history to this Utopia must be progress while the essential terms of nearly all imagined utopias since include: affluence, security, freedom, peace and justice and can be traced back to Augustine. However, Scripture also foretells a time of severe persecution for Christians just prior to the glorious millennium thus giving a mixed “good and evil” message for Christians. History shows that there have been those who, fully aware of a necessary period of suffering, torment, fire and destruction before the promise of Utopia, have used this God-given prophecy to justify political revolution. In opposition to the progressionist historians, J. B. Bury, writing from virtually an anti-Christian view point, makes two incisive observations on the supposed influence of Augustine on the idea of progress: Firstly, “... so long as the doctrine of Providence was undisputedly in the ascendant, a doctrine of progress could not arise. And the doctrine of Providence, as it was developed in Augustine’s City of God, controlled the thought of the Middle Ages.” Secondly, from the doctrine of original sin where every child will be born naturally evil and worthy of punishment “a moral advance of humanity to perfection was plainly impossible.” [5].

By the beginning of the 13th century, came the technologists, the inventors and by the 15th century, the explorers. There was still no general recognition of progress but we can begin to discern more clearly what is meant by “good things mixed with the evils.” The early printing press is a perfect example. Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the moveable metal type printing press, about 1447, allowed hundreds of bibles to be printed and thus more readily available to the common man. Surely, no Christian would deny that this was progress? However, although hundreds of bibles were indeed printed, so were copies of the Greek works, especially Plato’s, and the less than pure works such as, Boccaccio’s Decameron. Historian Robert Nisbet [6] has pointed out that the Christian Puritans of the 17th century added another dimension to reinforce the idea of progress towards a glorious Utopia in the distant future. With the proliferation of inventions, the Puritans in England emphasized the need to establish the scientific principles involved. The motivation was two-fold: to glorify God by studying His handiwork and to hasten the glorious Utopia by advancing knowledge. While this was indeed a step towards the idea of progress there was a more important step that had to take place first. While certainly not Puritans, Francis Bacon in England and René Descartes working in Holland introduced that vital step by promoting the scientific method for the advancement of knowledge.

In the grand scheme of history it is perhaps no coincidence that Bacon and Descartes introduced their ideas at almost the same time, in Descartes’ case, November 10, 1619. Bacon gave us his scientific method, upheld by modern science as the “method of induction.” The pre-requisite for this method is that the researcher begins by dismissing from his mind all pre-conceived ideas relevant to the investigation. Bacon’s declared purpose of the scientific method was to increase knowledge and, by mastery over nature, thus establish comfort and happiness for all mankind. Descartes provided a new and rigorous analytical method and two positive axioms or assumptions: the first was the supremacy of reason and the second the invariability of the laws of nature. At first sight, these proposals by Bacon and Descartes appear brilliant but they had their dark side not immediately obvious. Members of the scientific establishment, who often were the influential members of the established Church, embraced these ideas enthusiastically. This caused an intellectual rift between the “ancients” who looked back with admiration to the Greeks, Romans and the bible and the “moderns” who looked forward to a new world founded upon Baconian and Cartesian science. The dark side of Bacon’s method of induction is that, firstly, it is an impossible ideal to clear the human mind of preconceptions or bias. Secondly, while unspoken, preconceptions would also include biblical principles, thus, the bible itself was eliminated as a possible tool in all scientific inquiry. The dark side of Descartes’ propositions was firstly that by claiming the supremacy of reason this was tantamount to a declaration of the independence of man from God. Secondly, declaring that the laws of nature were immutable or unchanging not only removed Providence from history and from nature but completely dismissed the possibility of all biblical miracles. In a very subtle way God was thus made redundant and it was this final step that permitted those seeds of the idea of progress to finally germinate and grow. It was during this period that Handel was inspired to write The Messiah beginning with Psalm 2, “Why do the heathen rage?” The date was 1742.

From the 15th to the 19th centuries numerous voyages of discovery had made the white European Christians aware of the colored peoples of Africa and America. When first discovered these people were often completely naked even in very cold climates such as Canada and Tasmania. At first, the common

perception, based upon the regression of man, was that these were degenerate savages. By the time we reach the 19th century and Charles Darwin, the common perception had changed. Darwin always chose the word “savages” to describe the colored people and it was assumed without question that they were less evolved than the Europeans [7]. In other words, upward progress was part of the grand assumption inherent in the doctrine of evolution and this assumption, spoken of as fact, gave scientific support to the idea of progress in history. The words “progress” and “evolution” rapidly became virtual cognates.

Before leaving the 19th century, another, less than obvious example of evil coming together with good by innovation is the metric system. This was a direct result of the French Revolution in 1789 and formally introduced in 1801. Prior to this time each country, indeed often each city, had its own system of weights and measures that made trade, especially international trade, particularly difficult. Following its introduction, the metric system has been adopted, although often less than willingly, by virtually every country since, except the USA. The result is that international trade, and particularly today computer-linked commerce, is greatly facilitated while at the same time is taking control. Further, as individual governments become the handmaids to multinational corporations, there is a trend to less competition, more control, and less freedom for the smaller countries and the individual. This is the evil side of the equation and certainly has all the earmarks of the final world tyranny foretold in the book of Revelation.

We began this brief overview of the history of the idea of progress by pointing out that some historians see only the material advances made by mankind while others recognize a moral decline. We also saw from the earliest records that material advances by inventions often bring about a mixture of good and evil consequences. It is true that the same inventions that have set man free from the drudgery of manual labor have often permitted man to exercise to an even greater extent his inherently evil nature. Guns can be just as effectively used for defense against wild animals as for murder. Further, man is still just as capable of murder as those of less civilized times with the difference that today it can be carried out on a far greater scale. Moreover, where the victims are very young or very old, it can all be perfectly justified and given legal blessing. Today, after more than three centuries of scientific discovery, historians are having second thoughts about progress through science. An interesting example is the discovery of antibiotics. When these were developed more than fifty years ago thousands of lives were, and still are, being saved. During the development of antibiotics when it was found that, say, 99.99% of the bacteria were destroyed by a particular formula, this was considered to be a commercially viable product. However, natural selection does work and the 0.01% of resistant bacteria has now become predominant. The result is that many of the former antibiotics are no longer effective and there is a continuing necessity for ever-stronger antibiotics. This is a typical good news/bad news situation in science. Recognition of this has caused the more perceptive historians to question if we really are making progress or has the acquisition of knowledge through science backed us into a corner from which the only possible movement is regression?

It was said earlier that the bible records history at least another thousand years before the time of Hesiod. In an early passage there is a perfect description of the duality of good and evil that historians have noted and that have been outlined briefly above. The scene is set in the Garden of Eden, a paradise made for mankind where he could spend his days in peace and in perfect harmony with God and nature. God had created Adam, and later Eve, in the image of Himself, that is, as two perfect specimens of humanity not only perfect in physique but, with perfect memories and without evil thought. God was there to instruct them. The rules were extremely simple and there was only one negative. Adam was told, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Genesis 2:16-17). Eve and Adam disobeyed this one rule and when confronted showed no sign of remorse. Humanity has since been living with the consequences. We are not given any further details about the tree while the passage is often misread as: “the tree of the knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil.” It does not say this but tells us that the good and the evil come together as a package exactly as we have seen in the examples above. We might well ask if the Golden race and the times of moral probity and so on spoken of by Hesiod were not a memory of this original condition of man? And is the story of Prometheus little more than a memory of the business at the tree? Certainly, almost every advance made through knowledge in history has brought with it both good and evil consequences. The Greek playwright, Sophocles, made this very point in his tragedy Antigone by what he called a “law:” that “nothing vast enters the life of mortals without a curse” [8]. But, it may be asked, is there any evidence from science that man has fallen from pristine perfection?

THE CONTRIBUTION FROM ANTHROPOLOGY

There are believed to be several evidences for mankind's pristine perfection from disciplines beyond the purview of history including anthropology and psychology. However, first a brief word about the various schools of belief among anthropologists and their internecine struggles; these have had a devastating and retarding influence upon elucidating the truth about early mankind. The majority school represented by C. Darwin, H. Spencer, E. B. Tylor, Robertson Smith, and J. G. Frazer, subscribed to the Uniformity Theory. They argued that mankind first appeared at a number of different locations throughout the world and self-progressed by developing language, skills and inventions. Eventually, each group independently formulated ideas about God, the afterlife, retribution and the resurrection. The minority school represented by F. Ratzel in Germany and W. H. R. Rivers, Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry in England developed their Diffusion Theory. They argued that mankind began as a high civilization with language, inventions and knowledge of an afterlife. They believed that this civilization was located in what is now Egypt but preceded Egyptian history as we know it. Groups radiated out from this one location and settled in the rest of the world taking with them their skills and knowledge. In most cases the knowledge and skills became lost or corrupted and, as a culture, they regressed. The Diffusionists claim that their theory explains the many similarities found in custom, invention, language and beliefs held by unassociated cultures throughout the world. The Uniformity school explains away these similarities by claiming that the biological similarity of the human brain in each case means that it has developed in a similar manner thus similar customs, traditions, inventions and abstract ideas about God have also developed in the same way (!). Both schools subscribe to evolution as an unquestioned fact and neither give credence to the biblical account of Creation. As may be expected, both sides conveniently ignored any data that did not support their cause while the progressionist among the historians have almost always given their approval to the Uniformity School [9].

Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941) of the Uniformity school, is probably best known for his work The Golden Bough first published in 1890 then expanded to a massive 12-volume edition by 1915. Frazer and his friend Robertson Smith probably had greater influence than any other men upon speculations regarding the emergence of religious ideas. Frazer's work, laid an apparent scholarly foundation for the idea of progress arguing that magic preceded religion and that religion is now in process of being succeeded by science. This too was eagerly adopted by the progressionist historians. It should be added however, that another great scholar, anthropologist and fellow Scotsman, Andrew Lang, totally vilified Frazer's Golden Bough and his theory of progression with his book Magic and Religion [10]. Lang's careful analysis has been nicely paraphrased by Ackerman: "Frazer's entire argument ... is a concatenation of unsupported conjectures, self-contradictory statements, and confused and naïve thinking. Frazer has engaged in tendentious reporting and suppression of evidence unfavorable to his views." [11]

With this background, it is gratifying to see that in recent years sanity is beginning to emerge among the anthropological fraternity. Firstly, Lord Raglan in his presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1957 [12] made a detailed case to show that new ideas do not originate in savage societies or even in those more advanced and long-established cultures. All that has ever been observed is that customs are often considered as sacred and upheld rigorously; innovation of any sort is discouraged. Historically, invention has always occurred in large cosmopolitan communities under the influence of cross-cultural contact. Lord Raglan pointed out that the cities of China were progressive as long as they were in contact with the outside world but as soon as they shut themselves off they stagnated. Professor Adam Kuper is the leading spokesman for anthropology in Britain today and his statement made in 1988 regarding the so-called "primitive" societies is worth repeating: "The rapid establishment and the endurance of a theory is not particularly remarkable if the theory is substantially correct. But hardly any anthropologist today would accept that this classic account [Stone Age -- Bronze Age -- Iron Age] of primitive society can be sustained. On the contrary, the orthodox modern view is that there never was such a thing as "primitive" society. Certainly, no such thing can be reconstructed now. There is not even a sensible way in which one can specify what a 'primitive society' is." [13]. Naturally, it will be years if not decades before a confession of this kind will ever be found in popular magazines or the school textbooks. Nevertheless, as the old guardians of orthodoxy have passed from their sphere of influence the healthy winds of change have permitted a greater degree of honesty to prevail. We further observe that the modern paradigm does not offer much support to the progressionist historians. Writing in 1980 well-respected historian, Robert Nisbet, could claim that "the dogma of progress is waning rapidly at all levels and spheres in this final part of the twentieth century" [14].

THE CONTRIBUTION FROM PSYCHOLOGY

To return now to our question regarding possible evidence for mankind's fallen state from pristine perfection. There is an increasing body of evidence from psychology that not only suggests that mankind had a greater potential for memory capacity in the past but that information can enter the human mind from an external source. First, we will look at the strange problem of the genius. Genius comes in several forms and history is complete with dozens of famous examples. Usually recognized as the child prodigy the scientists, Ampere and Gauss for example, were both evident at three years of age. The musicians are well represented: Mozart had published four sonatas by the age of seven while Liszt, Chopin and Yehudi Menuhin were all public concert performers before they were eleven. One of the chief attributes of the genius is a capacious and very accurate memory. Although Mozart was taught by his father, he not only had an innate musical talent but a prodigious memory for music from an early age. When he was 14 years old his father took him to the Sistine Chapel, Rome, to hear the famous Miserere of Gregorio Allegri. This very complex piece of choral music was considered so sacred that it was only played twice a year during Holy Week and it was forbidden to make a copy of the music. Aware of this, the young Mozart memorized the entire piece note for note then, upon leaving the Chapel, wrote it all down. A few days later he sang the Miserere precisely as given at the concert and accompanied himself on the harpsichord. His performance caused such a sensation that he was presented to the Pope [15].

If it is acknowledged that man was created in the image and likeness of God, then some sense can be made of the genius whatever the talent. We can reasonably assume, for example, that the Creator of heaven and earth would have a perfect memory with the ability to recall every detail from every day from the very first moment in eternity past. Recognizing man's limitation in time and space, there are records of individuals in the past who have had prodigious memories. Roman scholar, Pliny the Elder, brings together a little anthology of memory stories in his Natural History: Cyrus knew the names of all the men in his army; Lucius Scipio, the names of all the people of Rome; Mithridates of Pontus knew the languages of all the twenty-two peoples in his domains; the Greek Charmadas knew the contents of all the volumes of a library etc. etc. Francis Yates in her book The Art of Memory, points out that hundreds of years before the invention of the movable type when books were generally non-existent, people committed to memory vast stores of information without the help of the printed page [16]). Just as the Jews memorized their Scriptures so too did the early Christians and it was not unusual for an individual to memorize the entire bible. After his conversion experience Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, memorized the entire bible in just three months; shortly after this he was burned at the stake! The Babylonian Talmud consists of twelve large folio volumes comprising thousands of pages. Each page in each edition printed begins and ends with exactly the same words so that any statement can be specified precisely by book, page and line number. Writing in the Psychological Review, Stratton [17] describes the phenomenal Shass Polaks. These Jewish men, usually Polish, have committed the entire Talmud to memory, not only the words but their places by page and line number! A common game to test their skill was to stick a pin in the text at random, say, fourth book, fifth page, sixth line and ask what words the pin has pierced having passed through, say, five pages? This is surely an incredible feat of memory, yet it demonstrates the capability of the human mind. At the same time, it is a confirmation that, indeed, ancient people could transmit information orally and very accurately. Two more recent examples will be offered:

The Oxford Companion to Chess [18] records the incredible feat of Belgium-born chess master, George Koltanowski (1903-2000) who, in December 1960, played fifty-six chess opponents simultaneously. He won fifty games and drew six while throughout the entire nine-hour match he was blindfolded! This is a remarkable feat of memory yet from time to time throughout history there have always been such people. The lightning calculator is another form of genius and, as an example, in 1962 Hunter [19] tested professor Alexander Aitken (1895-1967), head of the mathematics department University of Edinburgh, for his well known mathematical abilities. He was given a list of three figure digits and asked to produce their squares; he did so accurately almost instantaneously. He was asked to take the roots of a series of four-figure numbers and did so taking a maximum time of three seconds for each correct answer. He could generate logarithms from quite large numbers taking only a few seconds and when he described how he did these calculations his method was one of such complexity that it makes his achievement all the more remarkable. Professor Aitken was 77 years old at the time.

The idiot-savant is a complete enigma for which there is, as yet, no naturalistic explanation. Howowitz [20] reports an extreme case in which the subjects were identical twins and certified idiots who could neither read nor write nor even count beyond thirty but had a unique talent for calendar calculations. Given any date in the past or the future, they could tell instantly the day of the week on which that date

fell; one of the twins had a range of at least 6,000 years. They could even tell, for example, what years April 21st would fall on a Sunday, and instantly and correctly answered 1946, 1957, 1963 etc. This unnatural ability of the idiot-savant is often explained away as “eidetic memory,” more commonly known as photographic memory. However, this explanation has been completely refuted by the work done with blind subjects [21] and is in any case inadequate for the illiterate. It also begs the question where would the idiot-savants have obtained the ancient calendars? The idiot-savants themselves have no idea how they obtain the information and only say, “its in my head.” So far then the only honest conclusion that can be drawn is that the information obtained by the calendar calculators comes from a source beyond themselves.

Well known artists, poets and writers have more liberty and usually talent to write articulately about their moments of inspiration when words or images come flooding into their mind. William Blake said of his poem Milton, “I have written this poem from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will.” Shelley said, “Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say: ‘I will write poetry.’ The greatest poet even cannot say it.” One after another the great writers, poets and artists confirm that their work comes to them from beyond the threshold of consciousness [22]. The scientists are usually more reluctant to talk about the source of their creative ideas. Nevertheless, we find examples of inspirations for both good and bad. René Descartes’ inspiration for what is now known as the “Cartesian Method” came to him in a vivid three-part daydream that affected him for the remainder of his life. We have his written record of this experience and know that it led to rationalism as the European method of scientific inquiry [23]. Alfred Russel Wallace has left us his famous description of the moment he received his revelation of natural selection as the mechanism for Darwinian evolution. Brackman observes that Wallace was suffering from a “malarial high” at the time [24]. A fine example of a good inspiration is that of Lord Kelvin who was a brilliant inventor but at times had to devise explanations for that which had come to him in a flash of intuition [25]. Another was German physiologist Otto Loewi, who received the Nobel Prize in 1936 for his discovery of the chemical transmission of nerve impulses. He described how the experiment came to him in a dream the night before Easter Sunday, 1920. The next night the dream returned, and he immediately got up at 3 a.m. and successfully did the experiment using frog hearts. The classic experiment is still used in physiology classes today [26].

Examples of prodigious memory, calculating ability and inspiration could be multiplied but all remain as major difficulties for the theory of evolution and ultimately the idea of Progress in history. Those moments of inspired and genuinely original ideas received by composers, poets, scientists etc., have sometimes been investigated by science but so far have defied any satisfactory explanation. For this reason, the general public is usually not aware that these psychological phenomena present a problem for orthodox science. Acknowledging that there is seldom proof for anything much less the source of inspiration, the calendar calculators are particularly good evidence that knowledge has been received from a source external to the individual. The left arm of academia is currently making an appeal to the old Greek earth goddess, Gaia, as the source of wisdom but to be true to the Judeo-Christian record it would be the Creator God of the universe who is the actual source of true wisdom and inspiration. Arguments have sometimes been offered to suggest that the unusual abilities of the genius are the “survival of the fittest” principal in action. However, none of these abilities, the musical talents, rapid calculators and calendar calculators, have any survival value. At other times, we hear the naturalistic argument that normal human beings use only 10% of their brain capacity whereas the genius uses nearly 100% of their capacity. In the first place, this is known to be an urban myth and secondly no one is sure how the brain works, so as a quantitative statement, this is certainly not true. No one is even sure if it is true qualitatively. The entire argument is really saying that for some unaccountable reason the chance process of evolution has provided all of humanity with a potential brain capacity vastly greater than our need of it for survival. A far more reasonable explanation for genius would seem to be that it results from an unusual retention of ancestral brain capacity. God created man in His own image and the genius is living evidence of man’s continued regression from a once noble origin.

Conclusion

We have seen how among historians the idea that mankind has progressed is now in serious question. We further saw that among anthropologists the idea of primitive society has been discarded with nothing viable to replace it. We have also noted the absence of a satisfactory explanation for the genius and the idiot-savant from the discipline of psychology. It is hoped that this paper may encourage fellow creationists to explore what is believed to be an otherwise virgin field for evidences of creation. At this time particularly we have the advantage that creation can provide an interdisciplinary and coherent explanation whereas the opposition seemingly has nothing of a comparable nature to offer.

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