

The Copernican Compromise
Origin of the Materialistic Bias in Science
(Excerpted from *War in Heaven**)

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The materialistic bias in science seems to have originated no earlier than the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, simultaneously with the Protestant Reformation in Christianity, the beginning of the Age of Discovery, the rise of the modern nation-states, etc. All these changes in western civilization mark the transition between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, and can be attributed directly or indirectly to a sudden increase in the general level of technology.

Most of these technological innovations were small in themselves, and many were made by ordinary people – farmers, sailors, artisans, etc. - rather than by intellectuals. They were things with immediate practical use, like better plows, harness, wagons, water mills, spinning and weaving devices, sails and rigging-plans for ships, etc. They included gunpowder, the eyeglass lenses that led to the telescope and microscope, better methods of preserving food, and many other things. Taken together, they produced profound demographic, economic, and political changes in European society.

A full description of the sudden progress of European society at that time is beyond the scope of this book. The change that interests us here is the shift in the balance of power from the Catholic Church to secular institutions of all types. When the northern half of Europe became Protestant, organized religion in that region lost direct control over government, the economy, education, science, and most other important social institutions. The Protestant churches still exerted major influence over society in Northern Europe, but they didn't control the crowning of kings, the running of schools and universities, the certification of doctors and lawyers, the writing and circulation of books, etc., to nearly the extent that the Catholic Church had dominated them in the Middle Ages.

In the southern part of Europe, which remained Catholic, the beginning of the Modern Era also weakened the control of the Church over secular institutions, but the process was more gradual. The efforts of the Church to retain its control over social and political institutions in Catholic countries are plainly described in history books, but the actual motivations of the Popes and other Catholic leaders are not so obvious.

The series of events that I call the Copernican Compromise, which created the materialistic bias in Western science, is an example: it is easy enough to see what happened, but harder to figure out why. Until the first half of the Seventeenth century, when Galileo was prosecuted by Pope Urban VIII for supporting the Copernican

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astronomical theory, European scientists had not yet been put in a category separate from other intellectuals doing research into the nature of the universe. They were all called simply "philosophers," and one person might do research in many different fields: botany, medicine, astronomy, astrology, theology, and even ceremonial magic.

Individual philosophers were sometimes persecuted, even put to death, for publishing or teaching ideas that displeased the Church authorities, but there was no generalized prohibition of research into what is now called occultism. Philosophers could study the "natural" and "supernatural" aspects of the universe with equal freedom as long as they remained good Catholics and didn't challenge the doctrines, customs, or political structure of the Church.

Most astronomers were also astrologers. Physicians dispensed as many healing prayers as they did pills, and practiced "laying on of hands" as freely as they set broken bones or bandaged wounds. One writer might produce bestiaries, herbals, and catalogs of the different types of demons and angels. The books written by the medieval alchemists show they experimented with sex magic and psychedelic drugs to develop their psychic powers as well as doing primitive experiments in chemistry. Much of this research did not involve scientific experimental techniques in the modern sense; but when such methods were employed, they were just as commonly applied to studying spiritual and psychic phenomena as to studying purely physical phenomena.

The Copernican Compromise changed all this. In 1600, the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno was burned for heresy. It's widely believed that the reason for his immolation was his support of the Copernican theory, but this was not mentioned in the charges against him. It is true he was a Copernican; but what the Church executed him for was not his scientific views, but applying empirical methods of research to occult and religious subjects. He wrote treatises on Hermetic Magic and general philosophical works that challenged both the infallibility of the Pope and the omnipotence of God.

The persecution of Galileo a couple of decades later is widely regarded today as a victory for science, not for the Church, and this same attitude was expressed by many intellectuals at the time. The Pope made Galileo recant formally; but that actually helped popularize his ideas, not suppress them. However, one of the first steps in making my personal breakthrough was to realize that Galileo's victory was a hollow one. Galileo was not only one of the founders of modern science because of his contributions to physics and astronomy, he was also one of the instigators of the materialistic bias that has plagued science ever since.

Ironically, his writings about himself show him not as an atheist, but as a reasonably devout Catholic who kept his religious life and his scientific life completely separate. He confined his scientific research to studies of physical phenomena, and his writings recognize Papal Infallibility in matters of religious doctrine and practice. The only reason why Galileo refused to back down when Pope Urban objected to his acceptance of the Copernican model of the solar system was that he felt the Pope was overstepping the bounds of his spiritual authority by getting involved in matters that were

purely physical. Galileo never tried to challenge the Pope's right to interpret the Bible on spiritual matters, but felt that he, as a natural philosopher, shouldn't be overruled from the Papal Throne on enquiries into phenomena that are physical rather than spiritual.

The whole debate over the the Copernican Theory hinges on the interpretation of a single Biblical passage, Joshua 10:13, which describes a miracle by Jehovah in the middle of a battle: "And the Sun stood still." Since the time of Saint Augustine, this had been interpreted by the Catholic Church as proof that the Sun moves around the Earth. Augustine himself had been a bishop in Egypt not long after Ptolemy, another Egyptian, had published his astronomy texts endorsing a geocentric model of the Solar System.

However, it was obvious to Galileo that the original passage in the Bible could just as easily refer to a subjective description of the Sun as to an objective one. In other words, observers saw the sun appear to stop moving in the sky and simply said, "The Sun stood still." This effect could just as easily happen because a spinning Earth stopped as because a moving Sun stopped. Above all, he never argued that the passage was false because it involved a miracle. Miracles were part of the supernatural, and not the business of a natural philosopher.

All Galileo asserted was that careful observations of the apparent motions of the planets among the fixed stars provide evidence that the Sun, not the Earth, is the point around which they revolve. On the surface, Pope Urban won the debate by forcing Galileo to recant publicly, sentencing him to perpetual house arrest, and forbidding him to publish any more scientific books.

In reality, Galileo, who was an old man at the time and died a few years later, simply went home to his comfortable suburban estate and continued his research and writing. His next book was smuggled out of Italy by French diplomats and published in Holland, and the opinion of intellectuals allover Europe was in his favor. Colin Wilson's *STAR SEEKERS* (1980) states that Pope Urban was afraid to execute Galileo, as his predecessor had Bruno, because he knew that such an outrage would seriously damage his reputation and undermine his power.

I think Wilson missed a more important point here. Pope Urban could probably have had Galileo closely watched and prevented him from publishing any more books without suffering serious political harm. He'd already withstood the opposition raised by passing the sentence, and the public outcry over enforcing it would probably have been weaker, provided that Galileo was not harmed physically. The fact that the Pope didn't carry through and effectively silence Galileo is evidence he didn't consider the debate over the Copernican theory important in itself. He was punishing Galileo for openly challenging his political and spiritual authority, not for doing scientific research.

The Pope was sending a very clear message to all of the early scientists without saying it in so many words: "If you confine your scientific research to the physical world, the Church will leave you alone." The earlier immolation of Bruno had already sent the

negative half of this message: "Scientists who do research into the nature of psychic phenomena or publish theories that challenge the official position of the the Church on cosmological matters will be severely punished."

I call this unspoken, unwritten agreement "The Copernican Compromise," and believe it's the origin of the whole materialistic bias in western science. The Copernican Compromise was never openly discussed by either the scientists or the Catholic hierarchy, and it is likely that both sides simply drifted into it without being consciously aware that the Church was still actively persecuting scientific occultists while becoming increasingly tolerant towards scientists who avoided research into psychic and spiritual phenomena, especially those who claimed such research was impossible. Even though their motivations were mostly subconscious, more and more scientists adopted a materialistic bias during the 16th and 17th centuries; and if they also were involved in occultism or other spiritual research, they hid their activities in secret societies.

If there were only this one example of the Copernican Compromise, the anomalies might be explained by personality differences involving the two Popes and the two scientists, but I'm talking in more general terms here. The Copernican Compromise came about because of an unspoken attitude on the part of many Catholic leaders over a long period of time, interacting with hundreds of different scientists and philosophers.