

# The Glover Thesis on the Origins of Modernity

Willis B. Glover, *Biblical Origins of Modern Secular Culture: An Essay in the Interpretation of Western History* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984)

Glover examines the gradual development of Christian cultural standards through the medieval period, seen broadly as including the Renaissance. This includes a conflict with the pagan culture that permeated the early medieval kingdoms, and later the conflict with pagan intrusions. The most important of the latter was the struggle within scholasticism between those who sought to introduce the metaphysics of Greek cosmology and those who understood this to be in conflict with the implications of the biblical teaching on creation. This put in place the distinctive character of Western society, which however tries to go on with the Christian reasons for it. The result is a cultural crisis:

Throughout this study religion is understood to mean man's concern with the ultimate meaning of his existence. Modern man's claim to be irreligious is, in this meaning of the term religion, seen to be frivolous and unfounded. It would be hard to name a time when more people were so consciously concerned with the problem of meaning. The crisis of our time is basically religious, and it is hope that this essay in the interpretation of Western history may throw some light on that crisis. (p. 16)

## **The Middle Ages: The long emergence of a Christian society**

The first chapter after the introductory one is on "The Medieval Beginning." This is interesting as everyone else studying this topic wants to start with the Classical world, or with the Enlightenment or with an antecedent Renaissance revival of elements of the Classical world seen as the first Enlightenment. Their assumption is that the modern world is born of the return to the real issues of culture following a medieval interlude. But Glover insists that "The Middle Ages was not a 'middle', and it was not a separate and distinct civilization; it was the beginning of the civilization that still flourishes in Europe and has spread throughout the world." (p. 19)

Secondly, the middle ages were not a Christian period from which modern culture fell away or recovered. Rather, it began with a Christianity in place that was in many respects very superficial, and it was the effort of many centuries, and never completed, to create a Christian society. As examples he gives: 1) *Feudalism*, which "was a new product of the early medieval situation." "[I]f the society had been pervasively influenced by Christian thought ... one might expect new institutions to exhibit a distinctively Christian orientation. ... Actually, of course, the opposite was the case." (p. 23) 2) *Chivalry*, "The two basic virtues were loyalty and prowess or effectiveness in battle. The other feudal virtues were generosity, courtesy, and love of glory. All of these except courtesy had premedieval pagan origins, and courtesy was simple the development, especially in tournaments, of a kind of magnanimity toward other nobles. ... Generosity was much more like the largess giving of pagan German kings than like Christian charity and lived on into modern times as a kind of aristocratic contempt for financial responsibility." (p. 23) The church campaigned against these things but was never able to stop them. They only ended with the change in the nature of warfare. 3) the inability of the church until the later twelfth century to get nobles to practice life-long *monogamy* instead of simply repudiating wives and taking new ones. 3) *The Cathars*. "Actually they were not a variety of Christian belief but Manichaeian dualists and ought to be thought of as a non-Christian religion. The fact that such a religion could get so strong a foothold in a large section of the medieval West and flourish as it did until rooted out by military power in the thirteenth century is evidence against the conventional concept of the Christian Middle Ages. It is

doubtful if such a thing could have occurred in Europe from the fourteenth century through the seventeenth.” (p. 45) 4) *Courtly love*. “This essentially anti-Christian ethic of courtly love was hard for modern scholars to accept in what they took for granted was the classic case of a Christian culture. Yet anti-Christian it certainly was as we find it in the twelfth-century, and it was understood to be so by the troubadours who celebrated it.” (p. 27) “The most obvious contradiction between courtly love and Christianity was in the courtly idealization of adulterous love. Conflict was heightened and the issue clarified by the denial on the part of the exponents of courtesy that romantic love was possible in marriage. This was the issue that troubled and embarrassed a long succession of poets.” (p. 32)

This courtly love tradition has somehow persisted and eventually taken the form of a romanticized Christian ideal of honor and love. Glover himself notes that “C. S. Lewis in his remarkable study [*The Allegory of Love, A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London, 1939)] of the tradition has shown that, although at first irreconcilable with Christianity, courtly love was increasingly Christianized as poets struggled with the contradiction.” (p. 29) Lewis and his friends have helped push this forward into our time, especially so Charles Williams, who saw romantic love as a mediation between the created and the divine. In this he was following after medieval Platonists in “the Platonic naturalism of the School of Chartres, which performed a mediating function by softening the edges of both the courtly love tradition and Christian ethics and by offering Nature as a kind of *tertium quid* between them.” (p. 30) But Glover argues that the “fact that romantic love was in the process of becoming Christian until the time of Spenser (1590) and that in both literature and life the tradition from Spenser through the nineteenth century has been more Christian than it was from the time of the troubadours through the sixteenth century argues strongly for a revision of our conventional assumptions about the chronology of the cultural influence of the Christian faith.” (p. 34)

But the concept of a Christian Middle Ages “has included and perpetuated two related myths that continued scholarship has undermined. One of these is that Europeans and European culture were more Christian in the Middle Ages than in any subsequent period; the other is that the history of European culture since the legendary Christian age has grown progressively less religious.” (p. 29) In particular “Scholasticism, as it has been conventionally understood, was not only typically medieval and thoroughly Christian, but it is of sufficient importance to support the idea of a Christian Middle Ages almost without additional evidence.” “Perhaps so, if we could accept the conventional understanding of scholasticism, but the conventional, textbook account is no longer tenable.” (p. 34)

We have reached the critical part of Glover’s argument.

Scholasticism was essentially a method rather than a finished body of doctrine. The inadequacies of the method were discovered by the Schoolmen themselves in their rigorous application of it. Scholasticism was a failure and had to be abandoned, but it may well have been the most fruitful, creative failure in the entire history of the human mind. It forced attention to fundamental issues in the Western tradition, and in the very process of self-destruction it laid the foundations of modern science, and raised the questions in philosophy, particularly in epistemology, that have been the central issues of Western philosophy to the present day. (p. 34)

What the scholastics had to work on was the legacy of the ancient world. The “church fathers” had taken what they had found useful in pagan philosophy to explain the nature of God and other Christian doctrines. They had to give some account of the ideas in these doctrines and pagan philosophy was what was available. “Stoicism and Platonism were particularly congenial to

Christian thinkers. Where conflict with the biblical tradition was recognized, the pagan views were, of course, repudiated, but not all the incompatibilities were recognized. ... Thus from the beginning there was a strong classical component in medieval thought and a more or less diffident, but positive, orientation toward classical philosophy.” (p. 35) An emphasis on logic gave scholastic philosophy a method. “The influence of his logic gave to Aristotle’s philosophy a prestige—indeed a predominance—in the intellectual life of the Middle Ages which it had not enjoyed in the ancient world.” “Medieval scholars were involved by their method in an effort to reconcile the two traditions.” (p. 36)

In the long run the two traditions proved irreconcilable at fundamental points. In that sense scholasticism failed. Its great achievement was that it explored the issues rigorously and with great integrity so that the failure of the method to achieve its original aim was a process by which fundamental elements of the Western consciousness were brought into clear focus as intellectual problems. Of particular importance was the definition of implications of the Christian faith which might never have been seen if the method had been less rigorously logical or if Christian scholars had not been challenged so compellingly by the alternate *Weltanschauung* of their pagan mentor. ... Commitment to Aristotelian logic as a method made it impossible to avoid the broader philosophical positions associated with his understanding of the physical world and shared to a considerable degree by later Hellenistic scientists. (p. 37)

The problem here was the Greek cosmology.

For Aristotle the world was eternal, and at the most fundamental level reality was unchanging. When one penetrated beyond ephemeral appearances to the underlying, unchanging truth, his knowledge was absolute. God could exist in this view only as the principle of order or rationality. ....

The biblical God transcended the world and was in no way ontologically continuous with it. In the language of twentieth-century theologians he was “utterly other” than the world, which had no ground of existence except God’s will operating in absolute freedom. The world thus remained even in the tiniest details dependent upon God’s will. The freedom of God and the contingency of the world were two sides of the same coin—whatever order exists in the world exists by his continuing will. ... The Christian doctrine of creation implied both the contingency and dynamism of the world. The order of the world is not eternally inherent in it but was imposed on it from outside by the transcendent God. Particular creatures of God were neither universal nor necessary; this led to the development of a nominalistic solution to the problem of universals. Human knowledge of the world had, therefore, to be knowledge of particular creatures in a contingent and dynamic world, could not be deduced from universal cosmic truths, and could never arrive at absolute certainty. (p. 38)

The famous medieval synthesis of Aquinas was, in Glover’s view, never achieved. It was an attempted solution that could not be carried through.

Thomas Aquinas was not the apex of medieval thought, but merely a very important figure in its history. His solution to the problem of relating the biblical and classical was not generally accepted by his contemporaries or by the generations immediately following him. Nor were the fourteenth-century theologians and philosophers degenerate scholastics. They were, or the best of them were, pursuing the matter to the end; and the end was not a post-

medieval emancipation from Christianity, but a Christian emancipation from Aristotle. (p. 39)

It was this emancipation that, in Glover's view, created the Western mind.

The late scholastics concentrated on the problem of our knowledge of the world and in so doing they defined and refined that cast of mind which allowed the West, and only the West, to break through the closed systems of cosmological thought to the development of modern science. They also gave to Western philosophy that dominant interest in epistemology that has characterized it ever since. (p. 39)

This is central to Glover's general thesis that "the intellectual history of the Middle Ages was a process by which European culture was being Christianized through the achieving of a better definition and understanding of the intellectual implications of Christian faith. It was not, as it has been so frequently depicted, a process in which a more purely Christian world-view of the early Middle Ages was eroded by the increase of learning." (pp. 39-40) From this point on the Western view of the certainty attainable by human knowledge were fundamentally conditioned by "nominalism, empiricism, and skepticism". "All these characteristics were derivatives from the Christian doctrine of creation." (p. 40) "What was breaking down was scholasticism as a fruitful method of investigation. Paradoxically, the breakdown itself was most fruitful. The glory of scholasticism was not the Thomist synthesis as a synthesis, but the rigorous pursuit by Thomas and others of the efforts to reconcile Aristotle and the Christian intellectual tradition. Scholasticism broke down as a method because the two proved irreconcilable." (p. 40)

Some scholars prefer to reserve the name "nominalism" for a much smaller group of philosophers, to whom Glover's nominalists, such as Ockham, stood opposed. For our present purposes we will let his broad use of some terms stand.

Nominalism was able to carry forward the essential creational idea of the biblical tradition. "The freedom of God and the contingency of the world and each creature in it as absolutely dependent on him must not be contradicted. The success of nominalism in the Middle Ages is due to the fact that the implications of the doctrine of creation are strongly nominalistic. Particular creatures are not necessary but contingent on God's will; therefore they cannot be known by reference to any eternal and universal cosmic order." (p. 41) This of course broke the cosmic unity of the Aristotelian view of the world, where God, universals, particulars, mind and man were all part of the same cosmic order. Of course, in that Aristotelian cosmos the universals had to exist, as there was nothing else from which particulars could derive their order, and the mind of man the knower was as much a participant in that order as everything else. Nominalism's biblical separation—both in being and in knowledge—of the Creator from the creature meant that the mind of man the knower was also distinct from that of the Creator, and absolute certainty *on the basis of philosophical investigation* was denied him.

The "particular creatures constitute a universe not because they are related to each other in some eternal cosmic reality, but because they are related to each other in the purpose of God. It is true, to be sure that God's purpose involves the establishment by him of an order in the world, but this order is in no way binding upon him." (p. 42) "Though Christian scholars continued to believe in the general regularity of nature, established by what they called the *potentia ordinata* of God, the empirical method by which that order was known required a piecemeal approach to science." (p. 43) "The mainstream of Greek philosophy was rationalistic, cosmological, speculative, and centered

in metaphysics; the mainstream of modern philosophy has been empirical, analytical, critical, and centered in epistemology.”

Glover briefly mentions that the Aristotelian tradition lived on in some contexts, “but post-Reformation scholasticism—both Protestant and Catholic—was a kind of intellectualistic obscurantism that transformed it from a rigorous method of inquiry into a dead weight of dogma.” (p. 40) Outside of Lutheranism the first generation of Reformers were educated in the *Via Antiqua*, that is the Aristotelian scholastic tradition, not the *Via Moderna* of Ockham and similar critics of Aristotle, and this had an impact on the direction of theology in contrast to the emerging scientific tradition.

### **Renaissance man**

Waldemar Januszczak, in his Art History Documentary series introduces his first Renaissance program (“Heaven & Hell in Art: The Birth of the Italian Renaissance”) by reading from an art textbook how “this period was marked by the revival of the spirit of Greece and Rome, and by an increasing preoccupation with secular life,” but he says “that’s only in some bits. Over the years I’ve been all round Italy and I’ve seen an awful lot of Renaissance art, and wonderful work, no argument there, but very few bits of it, very few indeed, are actually trying to do what it says in the books.” Glover, though not covering art history, would agree.

Glover begins his chapter on the Renaissance continuing to discuss the nominalist movement and noting its failure to continue a development to a “comprehensive, coherent, Christian philosophy”.

For the nominalist the contingency of the world had meant that the world had no purpose of its own; the purpose that operated in it was overwhelmingly God’s purpose and secondarily man’s. Thus was born the “dead” world that modern science explores unimpeded by any consideration of the inherent purposes in things. In this the nominalists did a thorough job. (p. 49)

He notes the revival of Platonism, as to some extent redirecting thinking from nominalism. But a new factor was the interest in man’s place in the world. What in nominalism “God and the contingent world implied about the existence of man had not received their full attention. That implication of the biblical tradition was to be the concern of Renaissance humanists, whose approach to it was very different from the rigorously logical methods of scholasticism.” (p. 49) Humanism had roots in medieval rhetoric, and had a distaste for the methods of the scholastics, but their doctrines often resembled those of the nominalists. The voluntarists had viewed man on analogy with God as “radically free, transcending any causal necessity in his relation to the created world. This view was parallel to the humanist emphasis on man as ordained ruler of the world” in both cases with “a serious threat of Pelagianism.” In spite of that both were influenced by Augustine more than any other ancient writer, and Glover suggests that it may have been this influence that most accounts for the similarity of views of nominalists and humanists. He sees the humanists as “developing the basically Christian doctrine of man more fully than had been done before ... a highly sophisticated development of one of the unique characteristics of the biblical tradition and is peculiar to the civilization of Western Europe.” (p. 51)

As with the view of the cosmos, Glover indicates a contrast between the received classical view and that which had to be developed from the contrasting biblical one. Man existed in the world under a transcendent God. “Transcendence here means that God was not in the world as a member of the cosmos, nor was he an aspect of the world, as, for example, Cicero’s God was the Rational Principle

of the cosmos. God was beyond the world ... and he was in absolute control of history and of nature.” (p. 52) But though the Schoolmen had worked out the relation of God to the world “they had not developed so well the understanding of man’s very peculiar relationship both to God and to the rest of creation. ... In the highest capacities of mind and spirit man transcended the orders of creation by virtue of his relationship to the transcendent God. This transcendence made man radically free. ... This was a very exalted conception of man as one who transcended the very cosmos itself and upon whose future development no limits could be set.”

“The classical view of man was quite different ... the final reality for the Greeks was not a transcendent God, but the world itself. The cosmos was not contingent; it was eternal, and basically it was unchanging. .... This sense of a fixed place in an unchanging cosmos was missing in the Renaissance philosophy of man.” (pp. 53-54)

Here there is a double distinction. Where in the late-medieval view of the world there was the distinction between the Creator and the world—the cosmos which the Creator transcended—in the view of man which the Renaissance now faced there was a distinction between God as Creator, and man as a contingent creature, but there was also a second distinction between that part of man which, though a creature like the cosmos, also transcended the cosmos as a free spirit created in the image of God, distinct from the material cosmos.

This move from divine voluntarism, a view derived from the doctrine of creation, to human voluntarism, a view of man as a personal creature conceived on analogy with the view of God, was not a logical derivation from one to the other, but seemed natural. There was no philosophical anthropology available at the time sufficient to build an alternative, so the view entered theology, and seems destined to stay there until demolished by science. It was threatened for a time by mechanistic philosophy, and now again by physiology and psychology.

Human nature in relation to God and the world was a problem that the theologians, with their *via antiqua* tradition never got hold of. They were fearful of the apparent Pelagian possibilities of this *via moderna* view of man, and the Protestant ones especially were anxious to avoid an implication that man as a free transcendent being could cooperate with grace and contribute to his own salvation from sin. There seem to be two obvious routes out of this problem. One is to say that the Fall destroyed or disabled this cosmos-transcending aspect of man, leaving him in bondage and helpless, the other route was to challenge the metaphysics itself of this view of man, with its ideas of immortal soul, spiritual versus physical substance, and so on. This second route the theologians could not take, as this meant giving up their whole philosophical apparatus taken from the *via antiqua*, and not being able to make use of *via moderna* concepts either. They would have had to start from the beginning to imagine and build a new metaphysics, and do so in the midst of their pressing ecclesiological battles.

But the first route, down which the theologians were forced, was not really viable. If they really wanted to hold to the loss—real or practical—of the *imago dei*, it meant reducing man to an animal via the loss of his soul. So the idea of the loss or effacement of the *imago dei* in the Fall had to be discussed in moral or epistemic terms, while keeping the metaphysics as far out of sight as possible. Then there were other *loci* in theology where man’s status as a responsible being in relation with God had to be elevated considerably, again trying not to explain the metaphysics of the situation. Glover steers clear of this problem, commenting “How man’s sin in turn affects his freedom is a very abstruse question in Christian thought which we cannot in this study digress to explore.” (p. 11)

Returning to what Glover does have to say, he appeals especially to Charles Trinkaus (*In Our Image and Likeness*) as the culmination of new studies that overturned the received view of the Renaissance as “essentially pagan and secular and rationalistic.” (p. 55) While Platonism had a run of popularity in the Renaissance, it underwent modification under the pressure of the Christian ideas of creation and the incarnation. Pico della Mirandola, for example, “accepted the Neo-platonic idea of a hierarchy of being. But man, he thought, had no place in the hierarchy. He was free to move up and down it and take for himself whatever attributes he wills.” Yet, in “the *Heptaplus* Pico makes clear that sin has seriously distorted, if not destroyed, the image of God in us and, indeed, injured the whole creation.” (p. 58) This seems contradictory to what he says in philosophical writings, but theological considerations were breaking up the philosophy. Others, such as Ficino, kept falling short of Christian conceptions. (pp. 68-71)

Renaissance Platonism contributed to establishing a long-running damaging Platonic tradition:

This religious Platonism has been harmful in that it has obscured and blurred the radical and irreconcilable differences between the biblical-Christian understanding of God, man, and the world and that of the classical tradition. One result of this was that Christians for three hundred years had no idea of the contribution Christian theology had made to the origins of modern science; hence their efforts to relate the Christian tradition to science were largely superficial and misleading. The Cambridge Platonists were poor champions against mechanistic philosophy; what was needed was an epistemological criticism of it along the lines of Ockham or Hume. By the time of Hume, however, the relation of the doctrine of creation to the empirical tradition in philosophy had been so completely lost to sight that the apologetic value of Hume’s skepticism, though it produced a revival of fideism in a few theologians of the nineteenth century, had practically no impact on the question of how science relates to Christian faith before the twentieth century; and even then its influence has not been great. The most celebrated conflicts between “science and religion” have been spurious, pathetic, and a source of additional confusion. (p. 72)

With the Renaissance humanists (other than the Platonists) the view of man took the form of voluntarism, as it had before with the nominalists. Glover sees the influence of Augustine behind both cases. But in subordinating the intellect to the will “the interest of the scholastics was primarily epistemological, the thrust of the humanists was an anthropology of freedom and action.” (p. 60) With this came an interest in history and a historical consciousness. “The Renaissance vision of man has remained a most essential element in the structure of the modern mind. In the Enlightenment it became divorced from the Christian faith and later from any belief in God at all; but it remains in European culture a common ground between Christian and atheist and one of the principal integrating forces in Western civilization.” (p. 66)

Voluntarism also had its own long-term trajectory with unforeseen impacts on culture. Though Glover does not mention it, the Puritans William Perkins (1558-1602) and William Ames (1576-1633) introduced voluntarism into Reformed theology, with Ames taking this from England into the Netherlands. (The most significant difference from the humanists was that for these Puritans the will, though having the supremacy in human nature, was not free, but subject to the bondage of sin.) Both were also highly influential in America. The American Puritans developed the voluntarism around their idea of religious conversion, which in turn played a big role in their revivalism. This thinking entered into revivalism in general in the nineteenth century (and by then the obstacle was no longer a bondage to sin that could be overcome only by the intervening grace of God, but more a psychological issue), with the goal becoming that of finding a way to get people to make a decision

and so undergo the conversion process. In the twentieth century American missions took this conception around the world, and it is found wherever there are Evangelicals.

Again Glover makes his point that theology and university philosophy had gotten sidetracked. Aristotelianism continued into the seventeenth century and was an influence supporting the largely barren scholasticism of post-Reformation theology, both Catholic and Protestant. “In the late seventeenth century in his long and able polemic against Hobbes, Bishop Bramhall made continuous use of scholastic terms and concepts despite the contempt and ridicule to which Hobbes treated them.” (p. 67)

Glover thinks that the non-Platonist humanists also got sidetracked into aesthetics and ethics. (p. 73) But this preoccupation with ethics failed to bring out the important distinction between classical and biblical ethics. “The Greeks derived ethical principles out of human nature. Right conduct was conduct appropriate to the nature of man; that was good which fulfilled one’s true nature as a human being. Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans—all proceeded in this manner. In the Bible, on the other hand, practically nothing is said about self-fulfilment. Ethics is other oriented—it is oriented toward God and one’s neighbor ... it was a radically different ethical principle derived out of a unique understanding of who man is in relation to God and his fellows.” (p. 74)

Taking the developments of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance together, Glover concludes that by “the end of the Renaissance Christian Europe had achieved a distinctive mode of consciousness, a way of being aware of the world and of one’s own existence that was distinctively biblical and Christian and that was unique in human history. ... Better than others the nominalists at then end of the Middle Ages had expressed the implications of the transcendence of God, his absolute power and freedom, for the nature of the world and of our knowledge of it. God’s relation to his creatures supported nominalism. It was a meaningful world, but it was absolutely subordinated to the free, creative action of God; it was God’s purpose that gave it meaning, for the world had no purpose of its own. It was an ordered world because God had ordered it, but the order could not be deduced from any general principles because no such principles were binding on God. The world’s order could be known only by observing to see how God had chosen to order it.” “The adequate expression of the glory and dignity of man was the contribution of the humanists. Man transcended the rest of creation in his personal relationship to the transcendent God. The orders of the world applied to him, yet in his transcendence of them he could act with freedom. The creation had been given to him to control and to use. He was a sub-creator under God; in his freedom he brought novelty into the world. He was historical man, the creator of culture and history.” (p. 77-78)

### **The rise of science, mechanism, and the Kantian solution**

The wide ranging chapter called Science and Theology goes in many directions as it tries to cover developments from the Council of Paris in 1277 through post-Kantian philosophy. Glover begins with the “essential positive role of Christian theology in the early history of our science.” His case is the work on science in fourteenth century Paris and Oxford. But first the Council of Paris had taken action in 1277 to break the preceding Aristotelian science, by condemning several heretical propositions of that science that set limits on what God could do based on the implications of Aristotelian cosmology. One example was that God was unable to create a vacuum as Aristotle had shown there could be no vacuum. (p. 80)

Glover also engages in a discussion of the distinction between God’s *potentia absoluta*, what God can do in his complete freedom, and the *potentia ordinata* the order within which God has chosen to govern the world. As we hope to review the works of Francis Oakley on this topic in a later essay,



we will pass it by here. Glover's next issue is to discover when empirical science got underway, and why. This leads to a discussion of Italian schools of mechanics, of Galileo, of the rise of mathematics as an independent discipline (which he seeks to show was not due to the prominence of mathematics in Platonism), Oakley's research again, and finally the independence of empirical science as a discipline.

Science had been freed from consideration of final causes [purposes of things] by the transfer of purpose from the world itself to God; but since the purposes of God remained inscrutable and certainly not known by empirical observation of the world, science continued with its proximate attention to efficient causation and was not, as science, concerned with theological contexts and explanations.

This capacity of the order of nature ordained by God to be treated in independence of theology ironically led to its being absolutized into a new world order in which the mechanistic methods of science were converted into a mechanistic metaphysics. (p. 93)

This introduces the next big problem Glover has to consider and the pivotal one for this chapter, the rise of mechanism as a dominating concept in science and philosophy. First came mechanism combined with mathematics as an empirical investigation producing hypothetical knowledge and avoiding metaphysics, while "in theology it was fideistic, tending to accept the propositional teachings of the church as revealed truth." (p. 93) Nevertheless it gave "rise early in its history to a mechanistic metaphysics that negated its basically nonmetaphysical nature." (p. 94)

Glover speculates that the culprit was ambiguity in the concept of laws of nature. If we define these laws as regularities, and say they are "of nature" because nature is the subject being investigated, that is one thing. The regularities, theologically speaking, are imposed on nature by God, but scientifically speaking only the regularities are under investigation. But the expression leads to the habit of thinking of these as laws inherent in nature. Then this inherent nature becomes the object of science, and that is metaphysics. Another suggestion is that it was Descartes and his "passion for speculative system building" that was responsible, though this is more a matter of influences than steps that Descartes himself took. (p. 95) Besides this there was the appearance of atomistic materialism. Atoms at that time were not the assemblies of weird forces and even weirder quantum particles that we think of today, but those hard particles thought up by the atheists of the ancient world, and which in the seventeenth century appealed to deists. The mechanistic perspective was accelerated after the introduction of Newton's unified science in physics.

With the growth of the metaphysical mechanistic understanding of science Glover sees a falling away of the ability of Christian intellectuals to deal with the problem. He says: "Theological rationalism was a serious retrogression and it put Christian theology in a very poor position to deal with the developing situation." (p. 97) But he does not explain this, only noting that "at the end of the seventeenth century...empirical science seemed wedded to a rationalistic and dogmatic mechanism from which it took the critical power of Hume to divorce it," and noting that a "fundamental change was occurring in the European consciousness. It was the beginning of the Enlightenment, and the new non-Christian humanistic faith of Europe was associated in its long formative stage with the mechanistic world-view that seemed implied in Newtonian science.

Though we will not explore the details here, another book came out about the same time as Glover's that explores the development of materialist thought in this period. John W. Yolton (*Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, University of Minnesota Press, 1983) explores the transformation of the concept of physical substance. At the beginning of this period there were

held to be two kinds of substance, physical substance and spiritual substance. They had some things in common, substance could only act where it was, and there was no action at a distance. But physical substance could not share the space where it was with other physical substance; spiritual substance could coexist in a place with physical substance and other spiritual substance. From the time of Newton on to the end of the eighteenth century the concept of physical substance underwent a continual transformation and came to be seen as tiny compared to the space it affected (perhaps all the hard matter in the world could fit in a teacup) and interacting with other bodies through forces, which were effective at a distance. So in addition to the change from a mechanistic science to a mechanistic metaphysics which Glover describes, there was also a transformation in the concept of matter from a simple passive substance to one that was dynamic and mysterious. Where Glover is vague about how changes in mechanistic views came about Yolton provides a much more specific account. Meanwhile the theologians did nothing to adjust their concept of spiritual substance, which no longer was a concept paired with physical substance in a common metaphysical account, but one that remained in a different archaic world of ideas.

But there is another way to look at this change. In the nominalist perspective, the world was radically contingent and its order depended on God as an external source. But if God is removed from the explanation of the world, the source of order must inhere in the world. If the order is understood mechanistically, then there must be a mechanistic metaphysics for there to be a mechanistic science. If the order inheres in the world, God is not the present source of that order. Removing God from the explanation and the creation of a metaphysical science go together. So which came first, and which was the motivating factor? Was God eased out of the picture by the rise of mechanism, or was the mechanism made into an inherent property of matter in order to open up a distance between man and God or eliminate him entirely?

Some people came to see the mechanistic world more and more as a closed system. Every state of things was the predictable consequence of a previous state of things if only one would could know all the information. Man was part of this system, so how could he transcend it and control his own future? "This has been a source of contradiction and confusion over wide areas of modern culture from various areas of philosophy to psychology and criminal law. Though individuals may lean one way or the other, in general modern man had not been able to deny either his awareness of himself as transcendentally free or his conception of the world, which includes him, as a closed system order." (p. 98) In spite of saying this, in the next paragraph Glover says that "David Hume's criticism was devastating." Glover says that Hume's skepticism would have been a valuable apologetic for theology, as Hume himself noticed. "In his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, he has one of the characters, Philo, say:"

A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity: While the haughty dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of theology by the mere help of philosophy, disdains any further aid and rejects this adventitious instructor. To be a philosophical skeptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian. (p. 99)

But it was Kant, not Hume, that Protestant theology adopted. Kant "made a basic epistemological distinction between our knowledge of phenomena and our understanding of noumenal realities which include God, freedom, and duty." The structure of things in the world, and their mechanistic order, did not have to be inferred somehow from experience, as they were the precondition of experience and came from the nature of the mind. Also, in this way, man is the author of the mechanistic order, not its subject. Then Glover makes an important observation about Kant's theory:

Kant's philosophy is not a true ontological dualism. There is a kind of epistemological dualism between the way we know phenomena and the more direct way we are aware of some noumenal realities. In some of Kant's followers, however, the epistemological distinction he had made was transformed into an ontological dualism. In other words, whereas Kant had said we are aware of one reality in more than one way, some Kantians came to conceive of a phenomenal reality as distinct from a noumenal, or spiritual, reality. It is this perversion of Kant that became the dominant basis of Protestant theology. (p. 100)

Glover must mean German liberal theology; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's "ugly broad ditch" and everything that came after. Lessing had said that "accidental truths of history can never become the proof for necessary truths of reason." For a lucid account of how this played out through a succession of thinkers read Karl Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Glover's take on this is that "the thrust of neo-Kantian apologetics has been an attempt to reconcile Christian faith with mechanism rather than to explore the irreconcilable contradictions between them."

We should notice that in the twentieth century Cornelius Van Til, at Westminster Theological Seminary, also accepted the German Protestant distorted interpretation of Kant, and made it fundamental to his criticisms of countless philosophers and theologians, in the end confusing himself as well. Also this dualist interpretation of Kant runs through Francis Schaeffer's upper story vs lower story criticism of contemporary thought and culture. In fact Glover uses this image of the upper and lower stories to explain the view: "The ontologizing of Kant produced a kind of two-storied world in which a mechanistic determinism operated in history and nature in so far as they were observable; above this mechanistic world was the spiritual world in which the meaning of the observed events was known. The obvious problem with this is the lack of any adequate explanation of how the two stories relate." (p. 100) To the degree that these successors to Kant accepted the dualist version of Kantianism, it would be an accurate criticism of *their* views.

Glover goes on for several pages on the conflicts between Christianity and science, and his solution is to consider conflicting Biblical passages to be something other than historical narratives, and to suggest exploring a variety of newer philosophies of science.

## **The Enlightenment**

Glover subtitles this chapter "The Beginning of the Modern World" in keeping with his thesis that the Renaissance had been the most Christian era. As for how the Enlightenment did this he says: "The clarity that characterized the self-consciousness of the period was superficial. The Enlightened could believe that truth is simple and the world rational only at the expense of not recognizing the contradictions that abounded in their own intellectual culture. As the various aspects of the period's grasp of reality were probed more deeply, the Enlightenment with its clarity disappeared amid the babble of contradictory voices that have since contended in the post-Enlightenment West." (p. 107)

He cites Paul Hazard (*La crise de la conscience européenne (1680-1715)*, Paris, c. 1935) to show that this new era appeared suddenly in a single generation and "for the first time in the history of Europe any significant number of the leaders of culture openly repudiated the Christian faith." (p. 108) But as biblical ideas had created foundational assumptions of European culture, with man in some way transcending the world which itself had no inherent purpose, the subtracting of God from this picture by the Enlightenment and leaving only man did not bring back the classical cosmos in which man was wholly contained and had an inevitable place. "Without the limitations imposed by awareness of the transcendent God man lost his sense of sin and found his freedom inflated to the

point of self-deification.” In this way the new religion of humanism was born. It was not the humanism of the Renaissance, which designated certain literary pursuits.

“Transition to the new faith was both obscured and facilitated by the phenomenon of deism. Deism was not a genuine religious faith but a set of ideas congenial to the mind of the eighteenth century under the shelter of which the new humanistic faith developed.” (p. 109)

Here we need to challenge Glover. He has a tendency, which pops up from time to time, to think of the deists as believers in something like Leibnitz’s clockmaker God, who made the mechanism of the world and then let it run. But S. G. Hefelbower (*The Relation of John Locke to English Deism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918) did a survey of the writings of all major deists and found that none of them held such a view. They bore similarities to Socinianism, and denied divine revelation in Scripture, blood atonement and the place of the Church and its rites in true worship, but believed in prayer, providence and salvation through good works. It is much like the view of religion one finds in old Hollywood movies. The clockmaker idea, however, was attributed to the deists by their contemporary opponents. The similarities to Socinianism need to be stressed because that movement was already a hundred years old by the period that Paul Hazard indicates. Further, it had resurfaced among the Arminians, some of whom revealed their real views after their Arminian cover lost out in the churches. Also, to look at another context besides the Dutch, in New England Arminianism emerged in the eighteenth century, and then it turned into Unitarianism, which is broadly like deism. Something like this may have happened in English Presbyterianism. Perhaps a receptive population for deism and the Enlightenment had been there all along, only held down by state repression. Deists often saw themselves as continuing the Reformation by dumping more of the inherited rubbish. In this attitude they also resembles Socinians. Part of the confusion around deism is that the critics of deism suspected the deists of holding secret doctrines, perhaps even atheism, and often attacked these suspected “real” deist doctrines.

Glover, though, repeats an explanation he had brought up in the Renaissance chapter: lay interest in religion which led to a lot of amateur theological speculation and publication. He thinks they made use of the Renaissance Platonists with their interest in ancient esoteric authors, which tended to put a wide range of religious views on the same footing. Man would then rely on his reason to evaluate this religious smorgasboard. The Christian apologists made an appeal to natural reason to validate Christianity, so effectively they approved the method that brought on deism.

Also not mentioned by Glover is the influence of Richard Hooker (1554-1600) who set up Anglicanism to hold back Puritanism and protect the moral freedom the elites. He noted that the Roman church based itself on tradition and church authority, while the Puritans appealed to Scripture. The Church of England needed a third way so as not to be vulnerable to the arguments of either, and for his alternative authority Hooker chose reason, effectively putting the Church in what became the deist playing field.

Another doubtful claim by Glover is that because deism was a “vapid, optimistic creed ... it had no power to deal with the real human situation... It disappeared without causing any traumas because it was not really anybody’s living faith, and the new humanism no longer needed it as a crutch.” (p. 112) But deism was never really the faith of many intellectuals (as opposed to lesser minds), and it lived on in English speaking countries in the Unitarian churches, and afterwards in freemasonry, which swept in so many members in the nineteenth century. As it became more popular it changed its labels, and became a sort of hobby religion one could practice along side membership in a Protestant denomination for more public events.

A prominent conflict area between the Enlightenment and Christianity was the concept of sin, which Glover said was especially prominent in France. The Christian idea of sin was complicated involving a complex relationship to God, an altered moral disposition on the part of man, and the inherited guilt of original sin. The Enlightenment idea was more like good guys and bad guys, and did not admit of much sophistication. To explain this Glover goes into a discussion of Augustine, Pascal, Pelagianism, and Molinism, but we assume that our readers already understand the Christian theology.

Glover then takes issue with Peter Gay's interpretation of the Enlightenment as an attempt to revive classical paganism. (*The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Rise of Modern Paganism*, New York, 1967) "In this interpretation Gay's own anti-Christian zeal carries him to seriously misleading positions. There was a repudiation of Christianity by an influential minority that was destined to be far more powerful in the future; but the anti-Christian movement was part of a more complex whole; Christian and non-Christian shared most of the characteristic ideas of the Enlightenment." (p. 116) The Enlightenment made incidental use of classical ideas, perhaps especially historical precedents, but did not advance scholarship into ancient thought, and above all did not want to put man back into the ancient cosmos, but elevate him to lord of the world both as knower and controller. Our own attitude to the Enlightenment makes clear its disconnection from the classical world:

From the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century the appeal of classical antiquity was a constant in the thought of Western Europe. Only in our own time have classical studies been restricted to a small group of specialists. ... [T]he appeal of the Enlightenment has not been seriously diminished by the recent eclipse of classical culture as a common ingredient of intellectual life. Those in this day who still find in the Enlightenment their spiritual home and birthplace do not do so because they are returning to classicism but because they recognize in it that faith in man to which they are committed. (p. 117)

Removing God and his purposes left a secularized history. It left man unrestricted, so he could optimistically interpret this as a potential for indefinite perfectibility. Combine the two and there is an idea of history as a progress with Enlightenment man as the latest and best achievement. But the world in which his history is staged is determined by natural law. "The contradiction of free men in a determined world took an interesting form in the environmentalism that originated in the Enlightenment and continues unabated in our age. This tradition, particularly when it is concerned with the direction of the whole society, does not manage to avoid dividing humanity into the controlled and the controllers." (p. 121)

### **The Romantic Age**

After considering several proposed definitions of Romanticism, which fail as descriptions of the time because of the many prominent exceptions, Glover concludes that no "one essential principle explains romanticism because the romantic age was the recovery of contradictory elements of an immensely complex civilization," and goes on to speak of "a romantic protest against the limitations of the Enlightenment." (p. 143) I would suggest that it might be better to call it a rebellion against those limitations, in which reason, the ideal of the Enlightenment, is supplemented by imagination and will. It was not an attempt to roll back the Enlightenment but to go on with a wider participation and no breaks.

The first example Glover gives of this protest against the limitations is the Evangelical movement, beginning with the Wesleys and Whitefield and growing in influence through the first decades of

the nineteenth century when it began also to energize various reform movements. Germany and Scandinavia had something with similarities, but weaker. Glover sees as a weakness that it did not generate a new theology, but relied mainly on a modified Calvinism. The criticism is odd in that by demanding novelty Glover seems himself to be adopting a Romantic criterion.

Set against the Christian movements was a romantic humanism, as exemplified by the poet Shelley, whose theme it was to throw off the tyranny of God, whose power over man was based in the belief that man extended to him.

In France, where there was no Evangelicalism, there was instead the deification of the state. The Enlightenment hopes for the perfectibility of man and society were now placed on the state as the agent. This divine state had no Christ to redeem those who rebelled against it, but instead resorted to unrestricted power to force change and crush opposition. "The enemies of the Revolution were not permitted to repent or offered forgiveness." This was "a moral response of outrage at the failure of people to respond with appropriate enthusiasm to the possibility of an ideal state." (p. 153)

Another form statism could take was nationalism, united with some ideology. In these cases "the religion is a form of humanism in which the human community as a transcendent historical reality is deified."

The third form of romantic humanism (besides Shelley's Promethean rebellion, and statistism/nationalism) is scientific humanism. Here he describes Saint-Simon, August Comte, H. G. Wells and Julian Huxley, who each attempted to launch a religion based on science. Wells is perhaps an especially odd figure, as from this he went on to front for elite Anglo-american banking interests around the turn of the century, and in his dotage did the same for Stalin as one of supposedly objective progressive intellectuals, but actually under the thumb of the Soviet government on which he depended for money and women. One could object that scientific humanism as represented by these figures is not science by kookery. This objection is itself illuminating as it connects the scientific humanism to similar but updated movements going on today, as represented by New Age science with its energies and frequencies, by Space Aliens guiding human development, and by the occult practices of members of the financial, entertainment and political elites.

Glover has an extended discussion of existentialism, but it does not really go anywhere. These people were not thinking about the nominalists, and it takes him away from his thesis.

### **The Western Sense of History**

In his seventh chapter Glover expounds more extensively themes that came up before. He begins with the "Hebrew" concept of history:

The cosmos, far from being ultimate and sacred, had come into being by a free act of God's will and was sustained in its existence by his continuing to will it. As a continuing historical act of God nature was subsumed under history (the goodness of the creation is a major theme throughout the Bible), but the world was not in any way sacred in itself.... Man was not understood as merely one among other creatures but as that creature made in the image of God and transcending the rest of creation in his peculiar relationship to God. In this transcendence he exercised a creative freedom with regard to nature not conceived of in cosmological religions. This freedom and the creative possibilities that went with it constituted his historical experience. (p. 181)

The problems with beginning with the Hebrews are, first, that these ideas were just what they could not get their minds around and they kept falling into nature worship paganism. Also some aspects were not clearly worked out until much later. Second, this concept of history is lacking the idea of the Incarnation and its centrality to history, which as Glover discusses, received attention during the Renaissance, and so Hebrew concept is incomplete as a description of the Western sense of history.

Glover contrasts the Greek sense of time and history. They were aware of an extended past, as they had Homer ever before them, and in that extended time there was progress of knowledge, but they did not look forward to a changing future, except perhaps as repeating cycles as the limited possibilities contained in the cosmos were replayed. Explaining how the Christian alternative differed leads him, of course, into an extended discussion of Augustine, and then of the vicissitudes of the Augustinian outlook over subsequent centuries.

He discusses the improvement in historical methods in the Renaissance, the secularizing of history by removing the idea of providence, and the impact of science on modifying the historical scale. He then has various things to say about various proposed philosophies of history.

### **Prospects for Humanism**

The last two chapters deal with the prospects for humanism in the current situation, and what resources exist in the culture that it might make use of. He talks of the impact of eschatological thinking, existentialism, gnosticism, science, etc. and brings up many interesting things that various writers have said on these and other topics.

This discussion does not advance his thesis about the origins of modern secular culture, but mainly brings us up to date on his reading.

### **Prospects for Christianity**

We can get a clearer view of the implications of Glover's thesis by examining the twentieth century's most popular attempt to revive a Christian cultural worldview.

Religious Platonism is the category in which Glover puts C. S. Lewis and associated writers. They come up several times in his book, which is remarkable in a book covering the sweep of Western cultural development and its significance. "It has certainly enriched the experience and thought of many people, but on the whole, its influence has inhibited the development of the biblical-Christian tradition." (p. 71) The Renaissance Platonists found a parallel tradition to the biblical one in esoteric writers such as Mercurius Trismegistus or Zoroaster. "This compromised the uniqueness of the Christian revelation and led to considering Christianity as one member, albeit the superior member, of the genus religion." (p. 70) There is a similar tendency in C. S. Lewis, especially in his *The Abolition of Man*, which might be called *Mere Paganism*. He finds a universal level of religion due to natural law which he calls the Tao. "It is the sole source of all value judgments. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained." (*Abolition*, p. 21) The sufficient basis for civilization, then, is not a Christian society, but a Tao society. In *Reflections on the Psalms*, Lewis takes issue with the morality of some of them. "In some of the Psalms the spirit of hatred which strikes us in the face is like the heat from a furnace mouth. In others the same spirit ceases to be frightful only by becoming (to the modern mind) almost comic in its naïveté." (*Psalms*, p. 20) He goes on to call these Psalms "devilish" and "contemptible". The Bible, for Lewis, must be passed

though our ethical filter, and the good separated from the bad. This ethical filter, the moral sense, or the Tao, is more fundamental for Lewis.

In the Narnia books we can see emerge the Greek idea of the cosmos. When the Narnia world is created, a length of iron pipe brought into the world grows into a lamp post. The cosmic potentials, the universals, make the pipe develop its intrinsic nature. At the moment of creation, when contact with the transcendent should be most evident, what is imminent in the cosmos takes over instead.

Charles Williams, as we have already noted, made heavy use of romantic love as a bridge between the world and the transcendent. He also practiced magic rituals, and performed rituals on children for this purpose.

In fantasy literature, as a projection of a Christian vision, what we are likely to actually find is Greek cosmology combined with Christian plot elements. This is a reintroduction into Christian thinking of those elements with medieval thinkers cleared out with so much effort. Still, these writers have not attempted to combine their Platonism with science. The move back to Greek thought has not provided an integrated cultural outlook that could support Western culture.