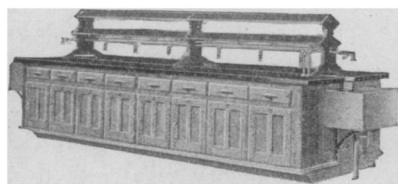


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The Values of Science

General Science

WILLIAM KAY WALLACE, in *The Scientific World View* (Macmillan):

As far as is now known only once before in recorded history do we find what we may term an age of science. In Greece from the fifth to the second century B. C. science flourished. It influenced and determined social precepts though it never manifested itself to any marked extent in practical affairs. To the Greeks science was in no way bound up with a desire for life as we find it today. Though a scientific approach to the problems of existence and to a good life led them to discover many profound empirical truths, no technique was ever devised to exploit these truths or to turn them to practical account.

Like primitive religion, which is unethical, primitive science in its Hellenic interpretation, though it was able to bridge the gap between ethics and science, was never able or inclined to cross it. The causes for this are not far to seek. If our hypothesis is correct, that a given cultural level and its attendant moral code rest upon the economic system in force, it will be seen that the economy of Greece during this first scientific period rested on the foundations of a relatively primitive slave economy. The routine of Hellenic life was restricted to the productive capacity of this economy.

It was thus possible for the Greeks to describe the stars in their courses with no little scientific insight, but they never bethought themselves that telescopes were needed to confirm their hypotheses. Hippocrates might outline scientific ideas about disease, but it never occurred to the Greeks to devise scientific methods of treatment, as the economy of the age did not offer the necessary technical facilities. Aristotle could teach a doctrine of evolution, but it was not until more than twenty-two centuries later that it first occurred to the scientists of our own times to establish the validity of the theory of evolution by recourse to a scientific observation of facts.

The science known to the Hellenic world was in its technical aspects primitive in the extreme, intimately related to the stage of development of economic life. But there prevailed that sense of intellectual freedom which is a first requisite of scientific speculation, and without which science cannot live. The most important and lasting contribution

of this first age of science was a group of theoretical moral sciences which, though destined to make way for the rise of religious morality, was never wholly lost sight of. The intellectual freedom which the Greeks enjoyed was displaced by the rigid mental discipline of Christianity which precluded any and every effort of the human spirit to find its way in the world of nature. Nevertheless, before the close of the Middle Ages we may see evidence of a reawakening of the faith in science to explain natural phenomena satisfactorily. . . .

Modern science is in a sense an outgrowth of the Hellenic scientific world view. Yet it is a mistake to seek to link it too closely with this past. Descartes at the beginning of the scientific age instinctively felt this. His effort to break with the past, not merely with the mediaeval, but also with the Aristotelian tradition, shows that modern science had a different purpose in view from that of the preceding scientific era.

Science in Modern Times, whatever its antecedents may be, whatever its limitations and inadequacy, is now recognized as the great impulsive agency in the development of the best life. When during the 19th century the doubts as to the validity of the scientific world view were being removed, the thoughts of men that had grown stereotyped and conventionalized were freed from the last vestiges of religious bondage and were in a position to investigate not only the material universe but mind itself.

Science is creating a new scale of values. We find in the first instance an intimate relationship between the application of scientific methods to the means of production and the ubiquitous spread of science during the past half century. In other words, the economy of the new age, which is grounded on a scientific hypothesis and makes it possible to bring accurate evidence to bear in proof of the claims of science, is in turn enriched by the fruits of scientific research in the realm of ascertainable facts. We have thus established a co-ordination of purpose that, while enhancing the value of science, in social life makes for continuous improvement in the methods and means of industry to satisfy, by the creation of an adequate technical equipment, the exacting demands of science. *Science News-Letter, February 16, 1929*