

Editorial

In the late eighteenth century, the philosopher-theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote a tract for his friends and colleagues of the cultural elite in Frederick the Great's capital city, Berlin. In that tract, Schleiermacher coined the now-famous phrase, "the cultured despisers of religion." He applied the term to the very persons he was writing for. These despisers were in the avant-garde of their day, educated in literature, music, philosophy, and the other learned disciplines, but they seriously misunderstood what religion was about—at least that was Schleiermacher's charge. Today we may speak of a new group of cultured despisers, one that is well educated in many respects but which nevertheless turns its attack on the sciences and technologies. These despisers are found mainly in the humanities, and their misunderstanding of science takes form in a sharp critique.

In the critique which these despisers level, science is equated with what they call "instrumental reason," reason which aims primarily at technical control or subjugation. The results of this subjugation are various manipulations of nature and persons. Instrumental reason reduces the world to a collection of "things" or "objects." The critique holds that science seeks this control rather than genuine understanding, and because it does, the cultured despisers of science scarcely look upon their colleagues in the scientific fields as partners in the quest for meaning and personal value.

At root, I believe, there is one fundamental concern that underlies this critique, and even though the despisers who raise it have frequently misunderstood science and technology, often confusing science with technology, for example, nevertheless it is a concern which, if properly stated, the readers of *Zygon* and the scientific community also share. The despisers are chiefly disturbed that our *ideas* of the nature of the world are dangerously out of touch with the *reality* of nature. Since they believe that science is more disposed to subjugate the world than to understand it, they often point to science as the culprit for this dangerous gulf between ideas about nature and nature itself.

The roots of this cleavage can be traced back in the history of the modern world, and several historians have located them. Immanuel Kant, ironically, gave impetus to the widening gap between human thinking and the objective order. Even though he was himself a scientist of some repute and he predicated his philosophy upon the Newtonian science of his day, his major accomplishment was to persuade his contemporaries that the human mind, not nature, is the source of nature's laws. In a perverse manner, Kant's insight became the excuse for taking human ideas about the world more seriously than the world itself. Some would argue that this is consistent with an American technological approach (we popularly, but erroneously, call it "pragmatism") that in effect defines nature only in terms of what we can do with nature.

The cultured despisers, whether they are exponents of the counterculture, like Theodore Roszak, or serious social reformers, like Ivan Illich, devote

much of their efforts to calling our attention to the destructive consequences of losing touch with the real world of nature and persons.

Recognizing this fundamental concern, we would challenge the cultured despisers at two points. First, the "science" which they attack is not representative of what many scientists are doing today. *Zygon* has considered it to be part of its task to bring to light the work of scientists who themselves speak for a renewed vision of the meanings and values that are necessary for authentic human existence in these times of fragmentation and isolation. From his social science perspective, Victor Ferkiss articulates this view in his article in this issue when he writes: "Political philosophy must take into account and be in conformity with the objective nature of the universe, insofar as science can ascertain that nature." The "objective nature of the universe" is an ambiguous term, and it is not a simple thing to puzzle it out. But that there is an objective nature, to which we must conform, not only in our political philosophy, but also in our physics, biology, psychology, and religion, is a proposition of which *Zygon's* editors are thoroughly persuaded. To be sure, such a proposition is a double-edged sword, calling into question the opinion of many scientists and also calling to task the position of many in the humanities and religion. In this respect, the scientists are at one with their cultured despisers, since both aim to keep in touch with the requirements of "objective reality," so that human beings and the total ecosystem in which we live can be served in the long-range interests of us all.

Second, we would challenge the alternative that the cultured despisers offer in place of science-as-instrumental-reason. For many of them, there is no alternative, and they are sad prophets of doom without recourse to hope. For others, there is implied a strange kind of return to pre-science or primitivism. This romantic call for return to a previous condition overlooks not only the fact that science and technology are part of mankind's evolutionary development and hence intrinsic to man but also the resources of scientific study and technological effectiveness for the enhancement of human values that will enable man to live in the real world. Rejection of science or a call for a return to a pre-scientific world would seem to be a poor alternative for correcting the alienation that marks man's relationship to the objective world.

Effective communication to the cultured despisers must be placed on our agenda. *Zygon's* purview ought not to overlook their sensibilities and wherever possible bring them into the circle of those who recognize that humane values can be served and illuminated by scientific understanding, and that religious vision can be reinforced and renewed by that scientific understanding.

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