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Disappearance of Cosmology in Modern Civilization, and its Effects on Religious Life

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Abstract

This article examines the profound effects of secularization on modern civilization, particularly focusing on the disappearance of sacred cosmology from the Western worldview. As secularization has advanced, traditional cosmological frameworks which once provided a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of the microcosm (human life) and macrocosm (the universe) have been replaced by a mechanistic and materialistic perspective. This shift has not only altered humanity's relationship with nature but has also led to a spiritual and existential disenchantment. The study conducts a comparative analysis between the modern Western worldview, which prioritizes empirical and reductionist approaches, and traditional cosmological systems, which emphasize sacred symbolism, divine order, and the unity of all existence. Furthermore, the article explores the consequences of this cosmological loss on religious life, arguing that the absence of a sacred framework has contributed to the decline of spiritual meaning, ritual significance, and moral coherence in contemporary society. Additionally, the erosion of sacred cosmology has impacted various forms of knowledge, including philosophy, science, and art, leading to a fragmented understanding of reality. By analyzing these transformations, the article highlights the need for reintegrating cosmological consciousness to address the existential and ecological crises of modernity. Ultimately, this research calls for a re-examination of traditional wisdom to restore a more harmonious and meaningful engagement with the cosmos.

Keywords: *Secularization, Sacred Cosmology, Modern Worldview, Traditional Cosmology, Disenchantment, Religious Life, Knowledge Systems.*

Introduction

With the modernization of society, all traditional orders of society were challenged. Secularization of society became a reality in modern times. Charles Taylor called this era "secular age".¹ Among some serious challenges and problems of this age, is the challenge of de-spiritualization of man and his environment. Our topic is related to this challenge. Disappearance of cosmology in west specially and in rest of world generally, as the challenges

¹ Charles Taylor - A Secular Age-Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2007)

of secularism are through out the world, is a serious challenge and is the result of secularization of world.

By Disappearance of cosmology we mean, emptying of natural sciences or the study of nature, from its scared character. With the help of modern sciences and technology, modern man has only target to conquer the nature. By different transformation of within society, knowledge especially natural sciences became secularized. Due to de-metaphysicalization of knowledge, and destruction of spiritual order, nature is facing extreme challenges. As the modern man loses his transcendence and spiritual essence, he is now working as a machine, working without any higher aim. In this way he is no more in the position of searching for “why?” Aim and reality is no more his target.

For traditional societies, the universe and all natural phenomena held profound sacred significance, embodying divine meaning and cosmic purpose. Every aspect of creation—from celestial movements to seasonal changes—was understood as part of a spiritually charged, meaningful reality. In contrast, modern civilization has achieved material progress by stripping nature of its sacred character, reducing the cosmos to mere mechanistic processes devoid of transcendent value. This loss of sacred cosmology has deeply impacted religious life, diminishing humanity's sense of connection to the divine and eroding the spiritual frameworks that once gave existence purpose. Without this sacred worldview, religious practices lose their cosmic dimension, rituals become hollow, and the sense of participating in a meaningful universe fades. This article explores these consequences, examining how the disappearance of sacred cosmology has altered humanity's relationship with the divine, weakened spiritual consciousness, and contributed to the existential disorientation characteristic of modern life. The discussion highlights the need to reconcile scientific understanding with the timeless human yearning for sacred meaning.

The problem:

With secularization of knowledge the problem did not remain limited to natural sciences, but concerns all intellectual domains of modern man. The cosmos was containing spiritual massage for traditional man. The universe around the human being was a creation of God in which they believe. As for them revelation and nature was from same source.

The study of cosmology includes all formal ordering of reality, of which the material order is but one fact. It is a sacred science that must be tied to revelation and metaphysical doctrine

since it can only be relevant and effective in certain contexts. Modern cosmology does not exist today; hence the use of the phrase is basically an appropriation whose original meaning has been lost. A cosmology that is only based on the physical, physical level of existence, no matter how far into the cosmos it may reach, and that is also based on occasional, daily suppositions, is not real cosmology.

After the success of enlightenment project in modern west, the religious interpretation of world, reality and hierarchy on knowledge was challenged. So new form of knowledge established on the ground of human rationality. As said by Seyyed Hussein Nasr:

“The disappearance of a real cosmology in the West is due in general to the neglect of metaphysics, and more particularly to a failure to remember the hierarchies of being and of knowledge.”²

But it was not so simple process and its results was complex in their nature. Religious and traditional order of society faces complexities. Human intellectual faculties as well as spiritual faculties also reduced to rational limits. It appears as though the third dimension were suddenly removed from our perception of a landscape as we are reduced from numerous levels of reality to a single psychophysical realm.

“The multiple levels of reality are reduced to a single psychophysical domain, as if the third dimension were suddenly to be taken out of our vision of a landscape. As a result, not only has cosmology become reduced to the particular sciences of material substances, but in a more general sense the tendency of reducing the higher to the lower, and conversely trying to make the greater come into being out of the lesser, has become widely prevalent.”³

The problem here is not the loss or absence of spiritual-religious experiences in or with nature on a personal level, but rather the loss of religious (spiritual) knowledge and understandings of nature as an intervention in the connection between humans and environment and as a regulatory mechanism on a cultural level and on a global scale. Most fundamentally, this means losing the perspective that the Divine created and sustains the universe and all of life.

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr - Man and Nature_ The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man-HarperCollins (1991): p:22

³ Ibid, P:22

“With the destruction of all notion of hierarchy in reality, the rapport between degrees of knowledge and the correspondence between various levels of reality upon which the ancient and medieval sciences were based have disappeared, causing these sciences to appear as superstition (in the etymological sense of this word) and as something whose principle or basis has been destroyed or forgotten.”⁴

Important role in secularization of nature and natural resources is played by worldview of modern natural sciences. Natural universe that was a symbol for traditional man, loses its position, and became an object in the hand of modern man. A man that has ambition to conquer the nature.

“The symbols in nature became facts, entities in themselves that are totally divorced from other orders of reality. The cosmos which had been transparent thus became opaque and spiritually meaningless—at least to those who were totally immersed in the scientific view of nature—even if individual scientists believed otherwise.”⁵

Because of the widespread tendency to reduce all quality to quantity and everything that is significant in a metaphysical sense to the material and substantial, modern science's quantitative nature must be highlighted in particular. The suffocating material atmosphere that industrialization and mechanization have produced, which is felt by everyone living in modern huge urban centers, is a result of the sciences' exclusively material and quantitative foundations.

In actuality, the only recognized and acceptable natural sciences are the quantitative ones, despite the fact that they are also theoretically conceivable and lawful under certain conditions. These modern sciences set their hierarchy on every kind of knowledge. This character of modern science has effect on other forms of knowledge.

According to Seyyed Hussein Nasr:

“All other knowledge of the natural and cosmic orders is deprived of the status of science and relegated to the rank of sentimentality or superstition. It seems as if modern science has made

⁴ Ibid, P;22,23

⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr - Man and Nature_ The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man-HarperCollins (1991): p:23

a condition of its acceptance the rejection of knowledge about the root of existence itself, although again many scientists as individuals may not share this view.”⁶

With setting the hierarchy on knowledge, modern sciences effected the mentality of man along with the effect on cosmic order. So the overall image of reality seems to be disappeared.

“The total impact of modern science on the mentality of men has been to provide them with a knowledge of the accidents of things, provided they are willing to forgo a knowledge of the substance that underlies all things. And it is this limitation which threatens the most dire circumstances for man as an integral being.”⁷

Effects:

1. The harmony between man and nature has been destroyed.⁸
2. This disequilibrium is due to destruction of harmony between man and God.
3. Destruction of environment occurs.
4. Loss of perspective: Metaphysical inquiries can provide a broader perspective on scientific discoveries and their implications for human comprehension and experience. Without metaphysics, science may become overly focused on empirical data, losing sight of the bigger picture and its implications for humanity and society.
5. Limitations on human curiosity: Human curiosity and imagination have long been fueled by metaphysical questions, inspiring us to seek knowledge beyond what can be observed and measured. If the metaphysical aspect of scientific knowledge disappears, it may limit our ability to ask and investigate the big questions that drive scientific inquiry.
6. Disregard for alternative worldviews: Metaphysical issues frequently involve the investigation of various worldviews, including religious and spiritual traditions. Without the metaphysical component in scientific knowledge, there is a risk of

⁶ Ibid, P:22

⁷ Ibid, P:22

⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr - Man and Nature_ The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man-HarperCollins (1991): p: 20

dismissing or ignoring these worldviews, which can lead to cultural and social insensitivity.

7. Dehumanization of scientific inquiry: Metaphysical questions can serve as a reminder that science is more than just a collection of data and theories; it is a human institution tightly connected to our values, beliefs, and aspirations. Without metaphysics, scientific inquiry risks dehumanization and losing touch with its humanistic roots.

Conclusion

The gradual disappearance of sacred cosmology from modern knowledge systems has precipitated a profound epistemological and existential crisis in contemporary civilization. By reducing the universe to mere measurable phenomena devoid of transcendent meaning, secularized modernity has imposed severe limitations on human understanding - truncating our capacity to perceive existence as an interconnected whole while stifling the innate human drive to seek ultimate purpose. This mechanistic worldview not only disregards alternative cosmological frameworks that have guided human civilizations for millennia but also enforces a dangerous epistemological monopoly wherein only empirical, quantitative approaches are deemed valid. The consequences manifest in multiple dimensions: science becomes dehumanized when divorced from ethical and metaphysical considerations; philosophy loses its capacity to address life's deepest questions when confined to materialist assumptions; and art degenerates into superficial aesthetics when stripped of its sacred symbolic function. Most critically, this shift has eroded humanity's ability to engage in truly critical and reflective thinking - the kind that traditionally emerged from contemplating humanity's place within a meaningful cosmic order. When the universe is framed as merely accidental and purposeless, the very foundations for wisdom traditions collapse, leaving modern society adrift in what philosopher Charles Taylor aptly termed "a buffered self" - isolated from cosmic meaning and communal sacred narratives that once provided existential orientation.

For religious traditions across cultures, the universe has always served as the ultimate symbolic revelation of divine presence - a living testament to sacred order that simultaneously evokes humility and elevates human consciousness. Unlike the reductionist modern view that renders the cosmos as indifferent matter, religious cosmologies perceive celestial patterns, natural phenomena and earthly life as bearing the imprint of the sacred. In Hinduism, the Rig Veda's Nasadiya Sukta contemplates the cosmic sacrifice that brought forth creation; in Christianity,

the Gospel of John proclaims the Logos as the organizing principle of all reality; while Indigenous traditions worldwide maintain intricate cosmologies where land, sky and all creatures participate in sacred stories. This symbolic perception fulfills crucial anthropological functions: it situates human life within a meaningful narrative larger than oneself, cultivates reverence before creation's mysteries, and establishes ethical frameworks rooted in cosmic harmony. The loss of such cosmological consciousness in modernity helps explain contemporary society's spiritual malaise - what sociologist Max Weber called "the disenchantment of the world." Without this sacred lens, even scientific discoveries about the universe's fine-tuning or nature's complexity become stripped of their potential to inspire awe or ethical responsibility, reduced to mere data points in a purposeless void.

Restoring cosmological consciousness to modern thought requires neither rejecting scientific progress nor retreating to pre-modern naivete, but rather developing an integrative vision that reconciles empirical knowledge with metaphysical wisdom. Historical precedents exist in figures like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who synthesized Aristotelian physics with Islamic cosmology, or Johannes Kepler who pursued astronomical studies as "thinking God's thoughts after Him." Contemporary initiatives in "sacred science" and "participatory cosmology" are attempting similar syntheses - recognizing that cutting-edge physics' non-local phenomena, fine-tuning arguments and holographic principles resonate remarkably with traditional cosmological insights. This restoration holds transformative potential: for education, by cultivating wonder alongside analysis; for ecology, by renewing the sacred dimension of environmental stewardship; and for human psychology, by addressing our profound need for meaning. As religious traditions have persistently affirmed, the cosmos is ultimately a theophany - a manifestation of divine creativity that invites human participation rather than domination. Recovering this sacred cosmological imagination may prove essential for overcoming modernity's existential voids while addressing urgent global crises that stem from seeing the universe and Earth as mere resources to exploit. In this light, the rehabilitation of sacred cosmology emerges not as nostalgic traditionalism, but as an evolutionary imperative for our planetary future.

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