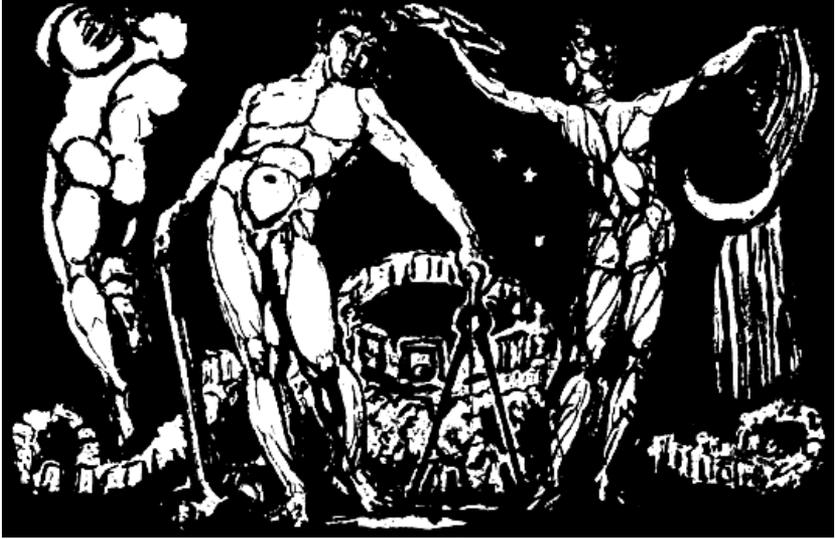


# How Ancient Cultures Viewed the World



## In Philosophy Religion and Science

By Dan Moore

In ancient times, the institutions and schools of thought that we know as philosophy, religion and science were one complete whole and not separate distinct entities as they now are. Imagine visiting the university of a large city in ancient Egypt. To our surprise, the complex of buildings, which is the campus, is also a group of temples of worship. Competent healers who practice the art of medicine share the place of religious sanctuary. Here also is the astronomical observatory where the movements of the sacred planets are recorded and the calendar is calculated. The arts are taught and performed here as well. In this place is the center of philosophical contemplation where the nature and origin of the universe is studied, codes of ethics are formulated and the structure and rules of government are discussed.

To better understand this worldview, we must engage in educated speculation concerning the origin of human self-awareness. We are forced to speculate because very little physical, recorded evidence has become available to us. On the African continent, evidence indicates that the first man-like beings appeared on the earth some four million years ago. We may assume that between that time and approximately one

million years ago, mankind became self-conscious. At that point, the human psyche was overwhelmed by sensory impressions from the natural environment. The world was filled with miraculous sights and spectacles. The land stretched out as far as the eye could see. Mountains towered above the head and oceans disappeared on the infinite horizon where the sky touched the earth. The land was populated with friendly strange and sometimes ferocious beasts and creatures. The sky was also populated with many lights; some great and magnificent like the sun, others dim, mysterious and changeable like the moon.

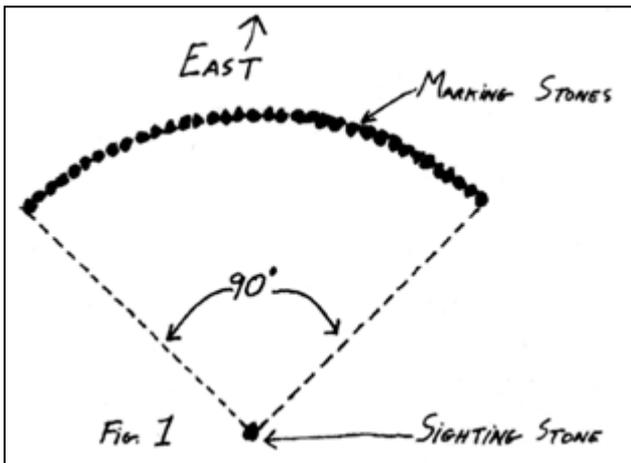
The overriding concern of prehistoric man was to survive, but with the coming of self-awareness and the ability to perceive the whole of nature, humanity began to wonder how nature came into being and to seek a reason for existence. Thus were born the first religious feelings and behaviors. The word "religion" has two meanings. First, it is thought that religion is taken from "religan" - to bind back or bind together. Secondly, it can mean "to observe or take note of". I would submit that in the case of ancient man, religion stood for the manner in which one lived and survived with nature. The first symbols of worship were natural ones: mountains, trees, any great bodies of water such as rivers, lakes or the ocean, ferocious or strange animals such as the cave bear, the lion, an elephant or the like. The sun and moon are also good examples of ancient religious symbols.

Science is defined as "state of knowing, knowledge or a systemized knowledge of nature acquired through experience". It is evolved by mankind's highly developed reasoning and problem-solving ability. Science has been so effective a tool in the fight for survival that it has allowed mankind to develop many great cultures and civilizations.

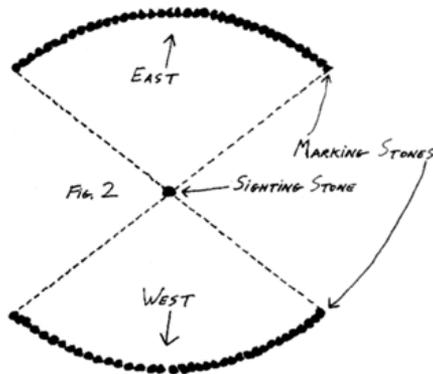
Anciently, religion and science were one and the same. In fact, one could argue that science grew out of ancient man's religious feelings to observe or become aware of one's surroundings. The wonderment and terror of nature prompted man to find out how other forms of life survived in this curious world.

Stone is a very abundant resource in nature, and ancient man made great use of this durable substance. We have found a great number of prehistoric stone tools and weapons. Stones were also the first religious objects. They were seen as symbolic monuments to the miracle of existence and the expression of being. They were used as markers of sacred places.

Many examples of such pre-historic shrines and temples still stand scattered across the British Isles and the European continent. They are in the form of great stone monoliths weighing many tons. These ancient temples are marvels of pre-historic engineering. Most of them are arranged in long straight rows or in circles. The most spectacular demonstration of pre-historic mechanical skill is to be found in the remaining rocking or Logan stones. Logan stones consist of a massive boulder or monolith poised upon one or two small points in such a way that the slightest pressure would cause them to sway. Yet these stones are so finely balanced that the weight of many men could not upset the stone off its rocking points. Manly P. Hall has made the observation that the lack of any carving, or inscriptions upon these stone blocks indicates that they were set up at a time before the use of tools or the art of writing. Man also turned his attention to time. In his observations of the rising and setting of the sun, pre-historic man endeavored to record the passage of days and the changing of the seasons. It is probable that this was accomplished by setting up two stones in a straight line marking the point by line of sight, where the sun rose above the horizon. By watching the changing rising point of the sun on the horizon and marking that change over the period of a year the shape of a quadrant would be formed by the marking stones. A quadrant is an arc of 90 degrees or the quarter part of a circle. From above the pattern of the marking stones and the sighting stone would have looked something like this:



By using the same sighting stone to observe and record both the rising and setting of the sun an hourglass pattern like this would have emerged:



From this pattern, the first geometry and geometric symbol comes into being. As you can see, it is a cross: X. It isn't much longer before the other two quadrants are filled in with stones to form a circle. Now we have the composite symbol of a cross inscribed within a circle O . This symbol represents the Earth in both astrology and modern astronomy.

By learning to observe and record the movement of the sun and the changing weather patterns brought about by the rotation of the seasons, pre-historic man is given a great advantage in crop cultivation. He is also able to predict the occurrence and duration of adverse climatic conditions. In time, the ancient stone circle becomes a sacred and holy temple because it reveals the structure and harmony of nature and gives purpose to the world. This is why, in ancient times, the temples of worship were also astronomical observatories. The priests of the temple were not only religious leaders, but also the scientists and researchers of their day.

In addition to the abundant stones, prehistoric man learned to use one more very important tool: fire. Fire was seen as being a living entity whose warmth and light was akin to that of the great sun. Because of this, fire was to have a religious significance, which far surpassed that of the stones. In the beginning, man probably stole fire from nature by gathering burning branches and debris, which had been ignited by lightning or volcanic activity. At about the same time, it is discovered that by striking certain kinds of stones together man could cause sparks to fly off the stones and these sparks could then be used to start a fire. From the cold and dense stone, came forth the living warm fire and from that time forward, fire supplanted stone as the major religious object of worship. The simple stone block in the center of the temple was modified

into an altar with an ever-burning fire upon it. To the ancients, this altar symbolized the material forms of nature with their in-dwelling spiritual essence.

Up to this point, our discussion has been limited to the Stone Age. The transition from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age is a very important historical one, but it is also significant in that it indicates the development of philosophy.

It is said that the ancient Greek master, Pythagoras, coined the word "philosopher", which he interpreted as meaning "one who is attempting to find out". Until that time, wise men had called themselves "sages" which meant "one who knows". Pythagoras, being of a more modest and realistic character, gave us the word "philosophy". The literal meaning of "philosophy" is "the love of wisdom". Wisdom is defined as "the faculty of making the best use of knowledge, experience and understanding". Philosophy is evolved from mankind's religious feelings, his wonderment of nature, and science or the attempt to solve the problems of survival.

With the development of philosophy, classical culture as we know it, is born. This gives rise to the arts, music, theater, painting, sculpture, architecture, etc. It is then realized that any part of science or religion could be raised to the level of an art. Part of the curriculum of the ancient temple involved the study of the seven liberal arts and sciences: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. By the time of the Iron Age, mankind's world-view had become a holistic one in which philosophy, religion and science were cemented together in absolute unity. To study the wonder of nature was also to worship its origin. Discovery of the secrets of nature was considered to be revelation from the Divine. In history, this is known as the Golden Age, and it is during this time that the Earth saw the rise of many great civilizations.

The vast accumulation of knowledge which man had acquired by the beginning of the Golden Age caused him to change the focus of his research into the mysteries of nature. Rather than focus on the natural world at large, man began to investigate the nature of the human constitution. By virtue of their holistic views, the ancients saw every part and aspect of nature as being profoundly woven together into a vast, living entity. The universe was considered to be the body of a Grand Man. The philosopher/scientists of the ancient temple realized that they

had neither the ability nor the instrumentality to study the universe in the detail they wished. They could, however, study the constitution of man in great detail. The ancients considered man to be a miniature universe, which contained an analogue to everything in the great universe. It is possible that the early priests had the statue of a man placed in the sanctuary of the temple. This figure symbolized the Divine Power in all its intricate manifestations. After ages of research, this figure became covered with intricate hieroglyphs and symbols, which were either carved or painted on. The statue may have opened, thus showing the relative positions of the organs, bones, muscles, nerves and other parts of the body. Every part had its own secret meaning. Manly P. Hall has observed that the key to these analogies between the organs and functions of the microcosmic (small universe) man and those of the macrocosmic (great universe) Man constituted the most prized possession of the early initiates.

Then came the age of idolatry. The Mysteries taught at the ancient temple decayed from within. The secrets were lost and none knew the identity of the mysterious man who stood over the altar. It was remembered only that the figure was a sacred and glorious symbol of the Universal Power, and it finally came to be looked upon as a god - the One in whose image man was made.

Religion lost philosophy and science. Along with these it also lost its purpose and effectiveness to bind man together with nature. Philosophy divested of religion and science gives rise to pessimism and cynicism and causes one to doubt the very existence of his own being. Science without philosophy or religion attempts to explain the universe in cold, mechanical terms devoid of any wonderment or awe of the miracles of nature. Such unbalanced science blindly probes into any field of research without giving any consideration to ethical questions or the potential for danger to the environment and mankind. The fragmentation of philosophy, religion and science into separate parts causes a sort of schizophrenia to take place in the human psyche. This gives rise to all sorts of cultural and sociological problems which were not prevalent in ancient civilizations. Today, we are endeavoring to reunite philosophy, religion and science into the Golden Triangle it once was. We can only benefit from the attempt.

