

The Medieval World

Even up to the last quarter of the 16th century, the medieval scholastic philosophy and world view still held sway. The chief features of this medieval world-view may be summarised as follows:

- (a) The universe was still conceived according to the old Ptolemaic astronomy, as a vast system of concentric spheres with the earth at the centre. The spheres carried the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars, the substance of these celestial bodies increased in refinement and purity in proportion to their distance from the earth and beyond the outermost sphere lay empty vast heaven, the abode of God. The whole system was bound together in a divinely appointed order, always thought of as hierarchical.
- (b) From mere matter up to God there stretched a continuous "chain of being" in which man formed

the vital central link below him was animal, vegetable and inanimate matter, above him celestial intelligences and the various orders of angels.

(c) A complicated harmony was manifest in constant correspondences between different planes of existence, the order of the cosmos was paralleled in the order of the state, the state, or "body politic", was an organic unity analogous to man himself and man was the "microcosm", a little world reflected in miniature the organisation of the whole universe.

(d) As the whole universe was composed of different combinations of the four elements - fire, air, water and earth - so human temperament was the result of varying blends of the four corresponding bodily fluids or humours cholera, blood, ~~phlegm~~ phlegm and melancholy.

(e) In such a concept of the world and man's place in it, physics,

Physiology, psychology, philosophy and religion seemed to the modern mind to be hopelessly intermingled, they had not yet been recognised as completely separate studies with distinct ~~disciplines~~ disciplines. yet, at the beginning of this period, these ideas were still receiving serious and eloquent expression by, for example Raleigh and Shakespeare, and they were to remain for many years a commonly accepted background to thought.

(f) Knowledge was still based to a considerable extent on the authority of earlier writers, on deduction from traditional theology, or on the ingenious working out of analogies, rather than on observation and experiment. The road to learning was still the traditional one of grammar, rhetoric and logic, and university education was still largely medieval in concept and method.

(g) Above all, Faith and Reason

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were not commonly set in opposition to each other, and their spheres were not sharply distinguished.

The end.

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