



The Scientific Revolution: Its Classical and Christian History with Dr. Ted Davis

Lecture 22.2: The New World View: Of Clockworks and God

Outline:

The New World View: Of Clockworks and God

- Robert Boyle was the person who did more than anyone else to advance the notion of a clockwork universe and a clockwork God.
 - You should think of nature as an “it”, nature did not have a mind of its own.
 - Joseph Write of Derby, *Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery* (c. 1776)
 - The notion of a clockwork God was popular during the Scientific Revolution: a clockwork universe, with God as the clockmaker. The idea long predates Robert Boyle, but he most famously promoted it.
 - Boyle was absolutely not a deist, but he was one of the most vocal advocates of the clock metaphor for nature. He believed the clock metaphor helped focus our attention on the mechanisms created by God, but no less on the Creator who has made them: they were far too complex to have been created by blind chance.
 - “And when I have seen, as sometimes I have with pleasure, a great Engine, wherein the Works of I know not how many Trades, and a great many other Motions were performed by little Puppets, that manag’d the Tools of Artificers;...and all these were set a work by one Spring, which communicated Motions that were regulated and determined by the particular structure of the little Statues and other Bodies: when, I say, I consider such things as these, I cannot think it impossible that the Divine and Great DEMIURGOS as both Philosophers and Divines have sytl’d the Worlds Creator; should be able by the Motions and Structures of Matter to set a work very man Partial and Subordinate Engines.” – *A Free Enquiry Into the Vulgarly Reviev’d Notion of Nature* (1686).
 - The Divine and Great DEMIURGOS is both a biblical word (Hebrews) and a secular Greek word.
 - Robert Boyle: The universe is not a puppet on a string. Rather, “it is like a rare clock, such as may be that at Strasburg, things are so skillfully contrived, that the engine being once set a-moving, all things



proceed according to the artificer's first design." – *A Free Enquiry Into the Vulgarly Reviev'd Notion of Nature*

- Boyle never thought that God walked away and left the clock alone.
- God as clockmaker!
 - Boyle believed that our knowledge of how the world really works, based on mechanical philosophy, would help us identify genuine miracles (such as those in the Bible): if nature cannot do it, then it's a genuine miracle – providing evidence of the truth of Christianity.
- The basic idea of the mechanical philosophy is still very influential in modern science. For example, molecular biologists view part of the body as very complex machines.
 - Behe thinks that the design of the cell cries out for a designer.
- William Paley's famous book *Natural Theology*.
- Watson and Crick explaining their model of the molecular structure of DNA.