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The Evolution of Spirituality and Society in the Wake of the Black Plague

Introduction

In this article, we will explore the transformative period following the Black Plague, which devastated Europe and led to significant changes in spirituality and society. We will examine the impact of influential figures such as Meister Eckhart and William of Ockham, and how their ideas shaped the evolving worldview during this time. Additionally, we will discuss the rise of commercialism and the emergence of corporate capitalism, highlighting the profound societal shifts that occurred.

The Changing Normative Order

Augustine's synthesis of various philosophical and theological ideas created a comprehensive framework for understanding the axes of meaning. However, as the technology of reading shifted towards a more consumptive model, the unity of knowledge and transformative conformity to the world started to be undermined. Aquinas addressed this challenge by separating the world into natural and supernatural realms, emphasizing the transformative

power of love and the will. This division, while initially resolving the problem, posed a threat to the continuity of the axial revolution's heritage.

The Rhineland Mystics and the Transformation of Spirituality

Meister Eckhart, a prominent figure among the Rhineland Mystics, played a pivotal role in redefining human spirituality. Influenced by Neoplatonism and the Gnostic revival, Eckhart and his contemporaries introduced a new understanding of the normative order. Instead of focusing on self-transcendence and ascent, they emphasized the descent of God's will into individuals. Love, as expressed through self-negation, became the key to spiritual growth and making space for God within oneself. This shift placed inner conflict and self-negation at the center of spirituality, leading to a profound change in the perception of the self and its relationship with the divine.

William of Ockham and Nominalism

William of Ockham, another influential thinker of the time, developed the philosophy of nominalism. Rejecting the idea of universal essences, Ockham argued that order and patterns were imposed on reality through language and human conceptualization. According to his viewpoint, the world consisted only of raw individuals, and any semblance of order was a product of human linguistic constructs. This perspective challenged the notion of an inherently intelligible world and shifted the focus from reason to arbitrary power, making God's will the primary source of existence.

The Black Plague and Societal Transformations

The devastating impact of the Black Plague exacerbated the existing social and spiritual unrest. With a significant decline in population and the breakdown of institutions, people began to experience a crisis of confidence in their worldview. The emergence of a labor shortage and increased mobility allowed individuals to sell their labor, change their social status, and pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Commercialism gained prominence as people recognized the power of trade and economic opportunity.

The Rise of Corporate Capitalism and the Challenge to Aristocracy

The social experimentation and economic changes brought about by the Black Plague led to the rise of a middle class that challenged the traditional aristocracy. To facilitate trade and mitigate risks, new institutions such as banks, insurance companies, and corporations emerged. These entities allowed individuals to pool resources, share risks, and collectively generate profits. The influence of the emerging middle class grew, leading to demands for the state to protect contracts and enforce regulations. This gave rise to the corporate state and the consolidation of corporate capitalism.

Conclusion

The aftermath of the Black Plague brought forth significant shifts in spirituality and society. The Rhineland Mystics, with their emphasis on self-negation and the descent of God's will, redefined the normative order of spirituality. Concurrently, William of Ockham's

nominalism challenged the notion of an inherently ordered world, placing arbitrary power at the forefront. The Black Plague's socio-economic impact fostered social experimentation, commercialism, and the rise of a middle class that challenged traditional power structures. These transformations laid the groundwork for the emergence of corporate capitalism and the corporate state, altering the social and economic landscape of Europe.

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The Dissolution of Norms: The Impact of Galileo and the Scientific Revolution

Introduction

In this article, we will delve into the profound changes brought about by Galileo and the Scientific Revolution, which led to the dissolution of traditional norms and the fragmentation of meaning. We will explore the consequences of Galileo's discoveries and the emergence of a mechanistic worldview that challenged deeply rooted beliefs about the nature of reality. Additionally, we will discuss the traumatic implications of this worldview on individuals and the subsequent attempts to reconfigure spirituality and religious beliefs in the face of these challenges.

The Rise of a Scientific Worldview

Galileo Galilei, through his observations and mathematical reasoning, revolutionized our understanding of the universe. He presented a scientific method that aimed to overcome human biases and illusions, emphasizing the objective nature of mathematical properties. Galileo's approach separated the mathematical properties of objects from their subjective qualities, relegating the latter to the realm of individual experience and perception. This shift had far-reaching implications for our perception of reality and our place within it.

Matter and Inertial Motion

Galileo's observations led to a fundamental shift in how matter was understood. He recognized that objects moved not due to an inherent drive or purpose, but rather as a result of external forces acting upon them. The universe, according to Galileo, was devoid of inner life and purpose, rendering matter inert and resistant. This new perspective positioned human beings as isolated islands of purpose in a purposeless and indifferent universe.

The Disconnection from the World

The emerging scientific worldview severed the deep connection between human beings and the world around them. With the emphasis on objective mathematical properties and the rejection of subjective experiences, individuals found themselves increasingly disconnected from the meaningfulness and beauty they had previously found in the world. The universe was now perceived as a chaotic, inert, and purposeless machine, devoid of inherent value or purpose.

The Battle of Wills and the Loss of Participatory Knowing

As the new scientific paradigm gained prominence, the focus shifted to individual wills and the conflicts that arose from them. The world became a battleground of isolated wills, each pursuing its own objectives and generating illusions through subjective interpretations. The loss of participatory knowing, the sense of being in touch with the world and conforming to it, further exacerbated the sense of disconnection and isolation.

The Trauma of Fragmentation

The dissolution of norms and the disconnection from the world had profound psychological and existential implications. Individuals faced the trauma of realizing that their perception of reality was deeply flawed and that their understanding of the world was based on illusions. The terror of being disconnected from a meaningful and purposeful reality, coupled with the loss of a coherent framework for understanding evil, created a profound sense of existential crisis.

Attempts at Reconfiguration: The Protestant Reformation

In response to the crisis brought about by the Scientific Revolution, the Protestant Reformation emerged as an attempt to reconfigure Christianity and address the dissolution of the normative order. Influenced by the secularization of the state and the rise of commercial and corporate revolutions, reformers such as Martin Luther sought to reconcile the changing worldview with religious

beliefs. However, these efforts further fragmented the axioms of meaning and strained the existing social, normative, and narrative orders.

Conclusion

The impact of Galileo and the Scientific Revolution on spirituality and society was profound. The disconnection from the world, the loss of participatory knowing, and the fragmentation of meaning led to a crisis of identity and purpose. Individuals grappled with the existential implications of a mechanistic worldview, while attempts at reconfiguration, such as the Protestant Reformation, struggled to reconcile the shifting paradigms of understanding. The dissolution of norms continued, as the foundations of meaning and belief systems underwent further stress and transformation.

(Transcript has been modified for readability)