**Philosophy in the 16th-18th Centuries**

Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo were scientists in the 16th century. They were important pioneers of the helio-centric (sun centered) as opposed to geo-centric (Earth-centered) view of the universe. This scientific paradigm shift became symbolic a general intellectual revolution. The new philosophical viewpoints that arose, attacked religion and brought a general decline in faith.

Isaac Newton (1642-1727) discovered the law of gravity which also became symbolic of the new 18th century concept of the cosmos. Newton’s “Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy” reduced the movements of heavenly bodies to mathematical formulas. Newton was a believer in God, but to him God was the Great Mechanic. God made the machine and tinkered with it to keep it in order.

Descartes (1596-1650) was a French Catholic philosopher and the founder of “Rationalism”. It was not necessarily the use of reason that was new, but the reverence given to reason and its ability to explain all human experience.

John Locke (1632-1704) was an English theologian and philosopher who founded “Empiricism”, the idea that all knowledge comes through experience. The mind begins as a “blank tablet”. All knowledge is dependent on what comes through the senses and the reasoning based on those sensory experiences. Every proposition was put in one of three categories: contrary to reason (cannot be accepted), according to reason (accepted by being established), and above reason (outside of experience but accepted by reliable testimony). Locke’s “The Reasonableness of Christianity” offers a logical defense of Christianity and a plea for non-denominational unity in essential matters, without divisive creeds. Alexander Campbell would later use this work as a source in making his Restoration plea.

Religious Implications The 18th century has been called “The Age of Reason”. In the aftermath of wars and oppression based on religion many people were weary of religious creedism and dogmatism. They turned to reason as the hope of salvation. Some used reason to renounce Christianity. Others created their own rational sort of religion drawn from elements of Christian traditions. Some used reason to defend Christianity. Those who rejected reason altogether retreated and entrenched themselves in the old Christian creeds, or went into “the temple of the heart”, defining spirituality by their emotional experiences.

In France with Voltaire, for example, Rationalism and Naturalism were quite openly anti-religious. In Germany, philosophical and scientific shifts produced “the Enlightenment”. The movement was anti-supernatural and was mostly indifferent to Christianity, but those who espoused it put emphasis on reason and morality. In England, Deism appeared. A religion which acknowledges God, but sees Him as a distant creator, relatively uninvolved in modern humanity. It focused on the moral obligations of man and a future state of rewards and punishment. Miraculous and providential activity is denied. The natural world confirms the existence of God and his benevolence toward man. Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were Deists.

The Protestant position of this age was called “Supernatural Rationalism”. It used reason as a defense for traditional Christianity. It agrees with Deism concerning the revelation of God in nature, but gives a special supernatural revelation to the Bible which supplements the natural revelation. Their apologetic arguments were effective against Deists. Therefore, what was effective in one age becomes an article of faith in the next. Unbelievers today do not necessarily accept the basic premises on which these arguments were built (the existence of God, natural revelation, a moral standard, etc.), and so these arguments are not as effective as they once were.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was German. The next philosophical reconstruction began with him. He made a sharp separation between what he called the “phenomenal world” (actual, literal) and the world of ideas. “Pure reason” does not know the “thing itself”. Reason “lays down the categories” by which we understand the things. Kant was impressed by two things: “the starry heaven above” and “the moral law within”. Every man has a sense of duty and “oughtness” which can be the basis of moral law. Reason dictates the categories of morality. Each person should act in the way that becomes the universal standard of conduct. Kant argued for the existence of God as a necessary for the moral nature of man, but he made a sharp separation between faith and knowledge. Unitarianism is one religious movement that emerged as the embodiment of the Age of Reason. It teaches that everyone is saved. Man is more or less good and moral at his core, so each person knows God and knows what is right within himself.