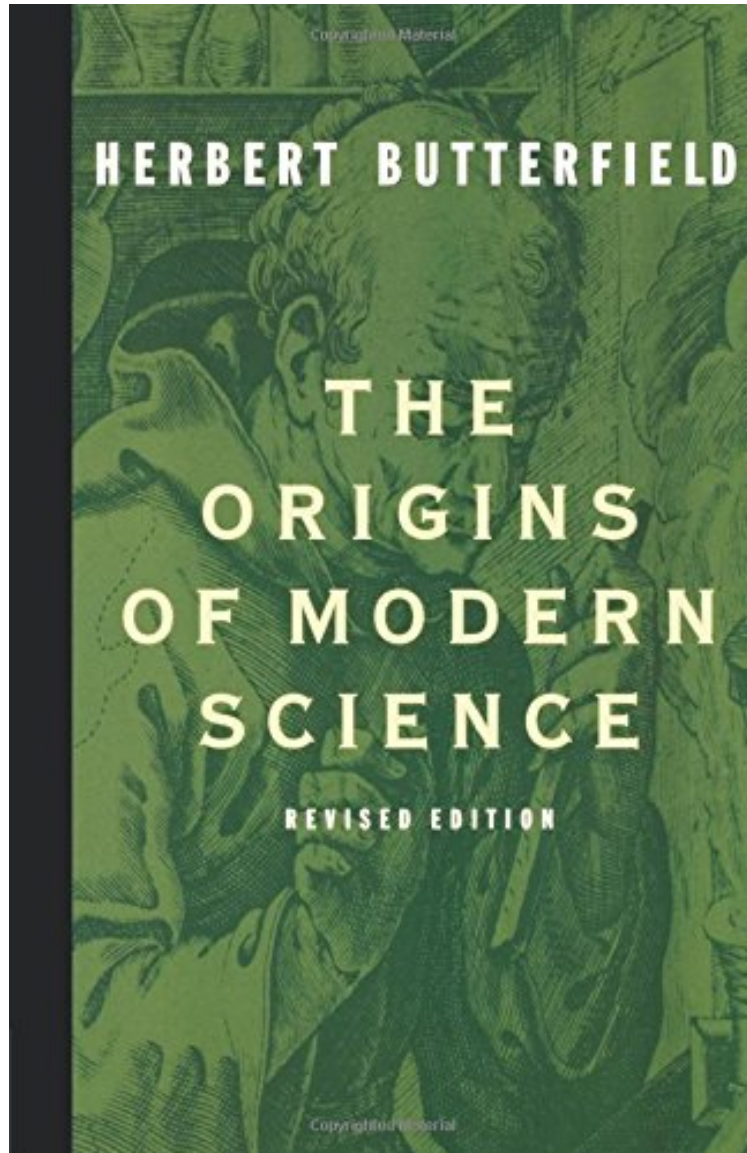


The Origins of Modern Science

Herbert Butterfield

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Herbert Butterfield : The Origins of Modern Science before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Origins of Modern Science:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "God was the guarantee that everything was not an illusion, the

senses not a complete hoax, and life not a mere nightmare."By Clay Garner"The people who say 'I believe in my body because I can see it clearly, but I cannot see God' were turning a popularized Descartes to the purpose exactly the reverse of what had been intended. In the system of Descartes God was another of those clear ideas that are clearer and more precise in the mind than anything seen by the actual eye." (124)This is the best explanation of Descartes I have found. Descartes thinking reversed! Butterfield continues . . ."Furthermore, everything hung on this existence of a perfect and righteous God. Without him a man could not trust in anything, could not believe in a geometrical proposition, for He was the guarantee that everything was not an illusion, the senses not a complete hoax, and life not a mere nightmare." (124)'He was the guarantee'. If God disappears - reason, even geometry, disappears. As good as any explanation of the modern antipathy to rationality!Butterfield is easy to apprehend, speaks with humility - without avoiding profound ideas. This work reads like a talk, because it was. It was delivered in Cambridge in 1948. He explains the lectures "were produced in the hope that they would stimulate in the historian a little interest in science, and in the scientist a little interest in history." (7)Why 'origin of science'?"Since that 'scientific revolution' overturned the authority in science not only of the Middle Ages but of the ancient world - since it ended not only in the eclipse of scholastic philosophy but in the destruction of Aristotelian physics - it outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and the Reformation to the rank of mere episodes." (7)Butterfield renowned for this striking conclusion. Most, if not all, have adopted this opinion since. Huge change in evaluating, understanding and explaining history. Why is this so significant, so important? . . ."Since it changed the character of men's habitual mental operations even in the conduct of the non-material sciences, while transforming the whole diagram of the physical universe and the very texture of human life itself, it looms so large as the real origin both of the modern world and of the modern mentality that our customary periodisation of European history has become an anachronism and an encumbrance." (8)Wow. This emphasis on the role of science and scientists places them in the drivers seat to modernity. Fascinating!1 The historical importance of a theory of Impetus2 The conservatism of Copernicus3 The study of the heart down to William Harvey4 The downfall of Aristotle and Ptolemy5 The experimental method in the seventeenth century6 Bacon and Descartes7 The effect of the scientific method on the non-mechanical sciences8 The history of the modern theory of gravitation9 The transition to the philosophe movement10 The place of the scientific revolution in the history of western civilization11 The postponed scientific revolution in chemistry12 Ideas of progress and ideas of evolutionButterfield also recognizes the role of religion in the beginnings of science. He explains . . ."One thing is clear: not only was there in some of the intellectual leaders a great aspiration to demonstrate that the universe ran like a piece of clockwork, but this was itself initially a religious aspiration." (131)Kepler was the exemplar of this motive."Kepler, inaugurating the scientist's quest for a mechanistic universe in the seventeenth century, is significant here - his mysticism, his music of the spheres, his rational deity, demand a system which has the beauty of a piece of mathematics." (131)Butterfield highlights the role of Fontenelle in introducing scientific/mathematical thinking into the broader culture, especially politics. Notes his essay - "The Utility of Mathematics". . ."The geometrical spirit is not so tied to geometry that it cannot be detached from it and transported to other branches of knowledge. A work of morals or politics or criticism, would be better if it were done in the style of a geometer. The order, clarity, precision and exactitude which have been apparent in good books for some time might well have their source in this geometric spirit." (185)This worship of mathematics leads to believing that only things measurable are important, or even real. Atoms, bodies, money, cars are measurable. Love, faith, hope, conscience are not.The last chapter analyzes the preconceived assumptions that prepared the way for Darwin. These preceded Darwin by centuries. The 'great chain of being', Buffon, Lamarck and even the key role of Malthus is explained.Butterfield and his insights changed the understanding of history. Anyone wanting a grasp of where modernity come from will be happy with this work.Includes suggestions for further reading and a detailed index. No photographs.(See also: "Modernity and the Holocaust" by Zygmunt Bauman. Adds depth and breadth to Butterfield. Great!)0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy FredexMust read for those who wish to understand the evolution of western science1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A truly enjoyable read!By Gerald MeikeA great overview of the interacting development of the different branches of early modern science. Efficiently presented. There were very few pages on which I didn't learn something new and significant.