Philosophy and its Effect on Society

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Plato and Aristotle

In life, everything is interconnected in some fashion. Sometimes the interconnections are obvious; sometimes they are obscure. Philosophy suffers the burden of being one of the more esoteric of human disciplines, at least as far as the typical man in the street is concerned, and thus its connections to everything else in the world are often more obscure. But the connections between philosophy and everyday life are very direct. Although philosophical ideas are the first in line of men’s ideas, they usually find their way into everyday life by being processed and displayed in more ostensible forms, such as art, music, architecture, cinema, literature, clichés or dialogues in bar rooms.

But as in every other discipline, there are only two kinds, Christian and non-Christian. This lecture is going to show us the beliefs and proposition of non-Christian philosophy and its effect on everyday life. We will show the problems and futility of non-Christian philosophy and why Christian philosophy is not only a better answer, it is the only answer for modern man.

According to most modern philosophers, Plato is the beginning of all philosophy. Among other things, Platonism contains the philosophical concept that the material world we experience on earth has, in the spiritual realm, an ideal image or abstraction of itself.

Picture yourself being bit by a mosquito. There is one thing important to know about this mosquito, however. It is the last mosquito alive on planet
earth. Nevertheless, because of the pain, you decide to smack the mosquito with your hand. Having been flattened like a pancake, the mosquito is virtually unrecognizable. But you need not lose hope that you have eliminated the mosquito entirely from existence, because according to Plato, in the spiritual realm there is an ideal image of a mosquito preserved for eternity, and thus the universe shall never lose the perfect picture and essence of a mosquito.

Hence, in Platonic philosophy, it was the “ideal image” in the spiritual realm that gave everything of the material world its real meaning and purpose. This ideal image would not be any one kind of mosquito, but a kind of abstract composite of all mosquitoes. In modern language, the millions of particular mosquitoes would have their one universal integration point in the ideal mosquito. According to Plato, we know of this ideal mosquito because we once existed there, but now we find ourselves on planet Earth with thousands of different kinds of material mosquitoes.

This is where the philosophical phrase “a priori” originates, for we, says Plato, had a “prior” life in another world. From the knowledge we gained in this “prior life,” we possess universal eternal truths which we obtained from the ideal images – truths that will never change, whether the are stated here, on Mars, Alpha Centauri, or wherever; or whether they are stated in the past, in the present, or in the future. How does a seven year old know that 2 +2 not only equals four, but will always equal four? Because these are “a priori” eternal truths that can never change. The search for the origin and nature of eternal truths is behind every philosophy known to man. This has always been the most significant philosophical question: “what do we know; and how do we know it?”

Whereas Plato answered the question of the origin of eternal truths by saying they came from “a priori” knowledge, Aristotle answered the
question a little differently. He held that eternal truths come from the process of abstraction. We see the mosquito on our arm. We smash it. We see a wing here, a proboscis there, and even though it is hardly recognizable as a mosquito, we reason with our “ancient intellect” that this mosquito, even if it were to be disintegrated into a speck on our arm, came from a long line of mosquitoes, and that which we see on our arm is only its accidents, its outward form, not the real substance of the mosquito. The real substance of the mosquito, or of being a mosquito, is hidden beneath the accidents, and each material object is composed of both accidents and substance. As we might expect, Aristotle’s “substance” corresponds to Plato’s “ideal image,” but Aristotle’s is in the realm of everyday existence on earth, whereas Plato’s is in some ethereal realm.

The contrast between the two schools is one of the main differences between the overall approaches of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, since after the discovery of the Aristotelian library by the Muslims in the Middle East at the turn of the first millennium, the works of Aristotle only then migrated to Europe, the home of Thomas Aquinas. As opposed to the Byzantine era before him which stressed the Platonic universals, Aquinas reintroduced the Aristotelian particulars. Aquinas, because of his belief in a supernatural God expressed in the Trinity, was able to keep a balance between universals and particulars, or between Grace and Nature, or between The One and The Many. The Trinity itself gave us the balance between the two positions, for we had One God in Three Persons. As we shall see later, problems crept in, when during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the Particulars began to emasculate the Universals, and Nature began to destroy Grace, so they became out of balance.

The emphasis on Aristotelian particulars is the same reason why almost twelve hundred years after the Last Supper only then did the Catholic Church dogmatically defined the nature of the Eucharist at the Fourth
Lateran Council, since by this time the philosophy of Aristotle gave us at least some mental concept of what occurs in transubstantiation, and thus the appearance of bread was understood as the accidens, but the presence of Christ was understood as the substance, which had miraculously replaced the substance of bread. Prior to this time, the Byzantine era in the first millennium had little interest in Particulars.

The truth is that we cannot grasp reality, at least adequately, unless we have a balance between the Platonic universals and the Aristotelian particulars. On the one hand, we cannot look at life as mere ideals without knowing its details and diversity; on the other hand, we cannot get fixated on the details without having universals to keep it all together. Where the twain meet no one has quite been able to figure out, and this is why, after Immanuel Kant, philosophy has more or less resigned itself to accepting that it will never find an answer, and thus we see the rise of pessimistic philosophies such as nihilism, existentialism, and the reason why modern art and architecture are so bizarre. Modern man has given up hope of finding a unified field of knowledge.

Although Augustine was influenced by Platonism, he did not believe in Plato’s concept of a “prior life” before we came to live on earth. Plato needed the “prior life” because he had to have someway in which the universal eternal truths could be communicated to man. Being a Christian, Augustine believed we were created by God. He searched Scripture for a truth that corresponded to Plato’s “a priori” truths. Augustine found his answer in John 1:9 which, speaking of Christ, it says, “This was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” According to Augustine, it is Christ who gave each man the “a priori” knowledge, the eternal truths, that Plato had ascribed to “a prior life.”
Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Fredrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Thirteen hundred years later, **Immanuel Kant** tried to answer the same question. He held that man’s knowledge of eternal or universal truths were a product of what he called “the categories of the mind.” Our minds just worked in such a way that we were able to formulate and understand these truths. But this eventually led to the insurmountable obstacle of not being able to prove that what we knew in our mind corresponded to the reality of the “thing in itself” that we saw outside of our mind. As a result, our mental knowledge could not be called absolute knowledge, and thus eternal truths were limited to our mind. It was all in our head, so to speak.

Neither Kant nor Plato believed in an intimate and personal God who could give such “a priori” knowledge, and this is the basic difference between the Greeks, modern philosophy and Christianity: divine revelation and miraculous creation. After Kant, men weren’t sure of how to find truth any longer. What had been the common practice of man’s ability to reason between what was true and what was false, the Thesis-Antithesis approach to knowledge, began to deteriorate. After Kant wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he set the stage for an avalanche of pessimistic thought about man and his place in the universe. This pessimism would eventually filter down into every area of life. First it spread geographically, from Germany outward to America. Second, it
spread through society, from the elite intellectuals to the working classes. Thirdly, it spread from one discipline to another, first in philosophy, then in art, architecture, music, culture and theology.

After Kant came a philosopher named Fredrich Hegel (1770-1831) and with him the avalanche began. After Hegel, the whole secular world was below what I call the “Line of No Return.” Since Hegel, modern man has never found his way back to his former methodology. He is now below the Line of No Return and there is no rational relationship between what is below and what is above the Line.

**After Hegel**

Irrational, Faith, Optimism

---------------------------------Line of No Return---------------------------------

Rational, Mundane, Pessimism

What was Hegel’s atomic bomb that led man down this path? Based on the results of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel argued that man’s knowledge cannot be based on the Thesis-Antithesis [TA] approach, that
is, that something is true and its opposite is false. Hegel claimed that the TA methodology didn't get us anywhere, except in arguments, for we had no way to determine which one was right. [Note: Hegel is not a Christian, therefore he has no authority greater then himself].

The Hegelian Synthesis

From:

Thesis ↔ Antithesis → Monothesis

To:

Thesis + Antithesis → Synthesis

Hegel proposed a brand new methodology known as Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis [TAS] wherein nothing was really deemed as true but only as a proposition, countered by an opposite proposition, which then ended up as a synthesis or mixture between the two. In doing so, Hegel completely changed the rules of the game. His philosophy penetrated right to the heart of epistemology, that is, how we know what we know. This Hegelian synthesis is the very reason that parents don't understand their children today. Hegel’s philosophy has seemed far and wide into society, for our children rarely think in antithetical categories any longer, i.e., this is right and its opposite is wrong. The Both-And world view has taken over the Either-Or world view. We are bombarded with these thought forms in Western society on a daily basis, through television, cinema, magazines, billboards, university lectures and political speeches.
A good example of how this methodology affected other disciplines is noted in modern theology, much of which has seeped into Catholic thinking beginning in the 20th century. For example, we see this in the interpretation of the case of the apostles Peter and Paul and their conflict recorded in Galatians 2. Whereas the TA methodology would conclude that Peter was wrong in refusing to eat with Gentiles once the Jews came to the dinner table, and that Paul was correct in admonishing him, the new TAS methodology would say that Peter offered a thesis, Paul an antithesis, and a synthesis was consequently created between the two. Hence, the Hegelian interpreters would conclude that Paul, in Galatians 2:3, refused to circumcise Titus because he did not want to give any space to the Jews, but after his confrontation with Peter, he had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3 because of the inevitable synthesis coming from his confrontation with Peter. Conversely, the TA interpreters would say that Gal. 2:3 and Acts 16:3 are completely different (or antithetical) contexts, the former dealing with the nature of the Gospel, the latter dealing with how best to evangelize hostile people.

We see what we can call a Hegelian synthesis even today, as we watch, for example, many Catholic clerics forge ties with the Jews by giving validity to the Old Covenant, whereas previously the Church was clear that the Old Covenant was revoked and replaced by the New. We might also say that the Hegelian synthesis has invaded much of the ecumenical thinking of the Church today. Whereas, on the one hand, ruptures in the Church between East and West, had been sought for repair in the past by the TA approach (and had almost been successful), today there is more of a TAS approach. Pagans, from what were previously understood as false religions, are now invited to pray with Catholics for spiritual and physical blessings. We might also see the Hegelian synthesis in something like abortion. Whereas in previous times the TA approach, led strictly by theology, would have said the fetus in the womb is either a human life or
not a human life, today the TAS approach synthesizes the dogmas of theology with those of science and argues that only in certain stages can human life be attributed to the fetus. As we shall see, the Hegelian synthesis pervades almost every area of life. In most instances, people are using the Hegelian synthesis without ever realizing that they have become victimized by an anti-Christian secular philosophy that has seeped far and deep into the culture.

After Hegel, man was left in an unbearable tension. If everything is merely the product of a TAS wherein there is really no right or wrong but only relative notions competing against one another waiting for a synthetic victor to rise to the surface, how can man be sure of anything? How can he rise above being nothing more than a machine reacting to impulses? How does he explain the obvious differences between himself and the plant and animal world, seeing that man is a very personal being, who thinks and verbalizes, loves and hates, creates and destroys? Hegel tried to solve this dilemma by using religious language, arguing that a meaningful synthesis could be arrived at by reason, even though Kant had virtually destroyed the ability of man to conclude anything from reason alone. This is why many refer to Hegel as an idealist. But Hegel never succeeded in his quest.
After Hegel, another philosopher took up the mantle. His name was Søren Kierkegaard. Many say that Kierkegaard is the father of modern thinking. He saw Hegel’s dilemma and said that the only way out of it was, in essence, an epistemological leap. This was the beginning of Existentialism. In essence, it is the wish to have meaning and security in life but without basing it on reason and rationality, for they only make man into a machine, a product of time and chance, a synthesis according to Hegel.

Implied in this dilemma, of course, is the age-old problem between Plato and Aristotle. In the world that Kant and Hegel left to Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard had a lot of particulars but no universals, no eternal truths to hold all the particulars together and give them meaning. With no universals, Kierkegaard had no meaning to life, no answer to the uniqueness he saw in himself compared to the rest of the universe. This is why the philosophy is called “Existentialism,” for these men are trying to find the meaning to their existence. As the existentialist Jean Paul Sartre once said: “The basic philosophical question is that something exists as opposed to not existing.” But to merely exist is not enough. Man must find
meaning in life, and thus man needed to get above the Line of No Return. [Note: men need meaning in life because, whether they know it or not, they are driven by the fact that they are made in the image of God, and thus they cannot, based on their deepest psyche, merely exist like an animal or plant]. Kant and Hegel put Kierkegaard below the Line of No Return and he had no rational way of getting above it, for reason had proven itself to be inadequate for the task. [Note: we are using “reason” here in the secular understanding. In Catholic thought, reason can lead us to God].

From Kierkegaard, existential thought developed more extremes. There were three main schools. The Swiss, led by Karl Jaspers; the French, led by Jean Paul Sartre, and the German, led by Martin Heidegger.

In order to go above the Line of No Return, Karl Jaspers taught his students to search for “The Final Experience” as the way to find meaning in life. This was basically a hope that sometime in life one would have a great enough experience that he could say it provided meaning to his life. The problem with this, of course, is that the Final Experience would invariably be an emotional, unverifiable and uncommunicable event. Some of Jaspers’ students even contemplated suicide as the ultimate “Final Experience,” although Jaspers had discouraged them from doing so.
The Christian answer is, yes, we can have a “final experience,” but it is with a personal God who communicates verifiable truth to us as personal beings, truth that can be discussed and debated, and held accountable against all other systems of thought and practice.

Jean Paul Sartre tried to answer Kierkegaard’s dilemma by calling the area below the Line of No Return “absurd,” thereby compelling us to find meaning in life by escaping through a mere act of the will, an act that would authenticate and give purpose to one’s existence. But since this act was not tied to reason, rationality or morals, then in Sartre’s philosophy, if you are driving down the road and see an old lady in the pouring rain, you can stop to pick her up or you can run her over. There is no difference between the two, because it is only the act of the will that matters for one’s self-authentication.
Martin Heidegger tried to answer the dilemma not by an act of the will but by creating a realization of Angst, a feeling of dread of the unknown. This feeling of dread would give one significance to his existence. As one commentator put it: “Angst is one of the primary instruments through which the ontic character and context of everyday existence is made inescapably aware of, is rendered naked to, the pressures of the ontological. And further, Angst is a mark of authenticity, of the repudiation of the ‘theyness.’”¹

Each of these men (Jaspers, Sartre, Heidigger) take a leap into the irrational, hoping that they will find something meaningful above the Line of No Return, but they have no basis from their own system to substantiate the leap. Sartre, for example, had always chided his colleague, Albert Camus, for not being consistent to existential principles. But one day, Sartre signed the Algerian Manifesto, declaring it a “dirty war.” Once he did this, his followers became quite disillusioned, not because the Algerian war was a good war, but because Sartre made a moral decision within his philosophical system that was amoral.

The reality is, of course, that man is made in the image of God, and morality is built into his psyche. There is no way to escape it. He can try to suppress it (as Romans 1:18 says), but it will always seep to the surface.

¹Steiner, 1978.
because it cannot be extinguished. Man cannot escape the way his mind works. The only way he can affirm something as true is on the basis of knowing its opposite. If he says he loves his wife, he doesn’t do so without knowing what it means to not love her. If he says a tree is beautiful, he doesn’t do so without knowing what ugly is.

Bernard Berenson (d. 1959) professor at Harvard, was the world’s greatest expert on Renaissance art in his day. He was sought out for his ability to date and price any Renaissance piece of art. He loved the beauty of Renaissance art, so much so that when he compared it to the ugliness of modern art, in his own words, modern art was “bestial.” Berenson was also a Roman Catholic, at least by name. In one of his own ugly moments, he took a married woman, Mary Costelloe, away from her husband, living with her for years and then marrying her when her husband died (since as a Catholic, Mary could not divorce her husband). But when Berenson married her, they forged an agreement that each would be allowed to have extra-marital affairs, and they lived this way for 45 years. When Berenson was admonished for this, he would simply say: “You are forgetting the animal basis of our nature,” the same thing he said about modern art. Obviously, Berenson could not live within his own system of philosophy.
Another example of contradiction is Julian Huxley. Although Huxley did not have a religion, he said society functions better if people believe in religion. Huxley stated: “From the specifically religious point of view, the desirable direction of evolution might be defined as the divinization of existence, but for this to have operative significance we must frame a new definition of the divine, free from all connotations of external supernatural beings.”

There was also Aldous Huxley. Using the existential idea of a “final experience,” Huxley made his leap into the irrational by advocating the use of mind-altering drugs, such as LSD, in the book *The Humanist Frame*. This was followed by Timothy Leary of Harvard University. Almost the entire drug movement of the 1960s was based on the idea of having the existential “final experience” so as to find meaning in life.

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2 The Humanist Frame.
After philosophy, the Hegelian synthesis that so destroyed man’s foundation for epistemology, entered the arts. Here it was the Impressionists, especially Van Gogh and Gauguin, who took the leap into the irrational in hopes of finding meaning in life. This moved even further into the irrational with such painters as Picasso, Mondrian, Duchamp, and Salvador Dali.

In fact, Duchamp and Dali were members of the “dada” group of philosophical painters. “Dada” was chosen to portray the idea of chance. The word “dada” was actually chosen by chance. One day at the Café Voltaire in Zurich, these artists opened a French dictionary and pointed to the first word on the page. It was “dada,” which means rocking horse in French. From then on they became known as the “dada” artists. They were really existentialists out to say that life was absurd and that the only
escape was a leap into the irrational, which they forthwith portrayed in their bizarre paintings.

By the time of the 1913 Amory Show in New York, this movement had crossed the Atlantic Ocean from Europe and it continued its slow but steady deterioration of society.

The American artist, Jackson Pollock (d. 1956), for example, laid his canvases on the floor and tied cans of paint from the ceiling so that they could swing back and forth and drip paint on the canvas. Pollock later committed suicide.

Similarly, Paul Klee (d. 1940) claims that his paintings are made in an Ouija board style. What he is really saying is that he is taking a leap into the irrational and hopes that something or someone from beyond will...
communicate by means of moving the paint brush for him. [Note: when men do this, we as Christians know that demons will take full advantage of this leap and answer the leap in ways that are very real, yet very demonic, indeed. One need only to think of the movie *The Exorcist* to know the consequences of dabbling with Ouija boards. See my essay on *Art Through the Ages* at:

[http://catholicintl.com/epologetics/articles/pastoral/art-ages.htm.]

After art, the next victim of modern man's dilemma was music. The breakup of traditional thinking caused by the Hegelian synthesis and the introduction of existentialism and its claims of the absurdity of life was first introduced in music by **Claude Debussy** (1862-1918).

Most people are familiar with Debussy's early work, such as *Clair de Lune* or *Afternoon of a Fawn*, which are beautiful melodies in their own right. But these are the exceptions to Debussy's music. Most of it is without melody and is disjointed, varying from the very loud to the very soft.

This kind of music was taken to an extreme by someone in our generation, **John Cage**, who developed *musique concrete*, first introduced by Pierre Schaeffer in Paris.
This music was at first created by jumping groves on a phonograph record but later by machines that could distort traditional music in any number of ways. Cage later developed a mechanical conductor which he placed before an orchestra. It would randomly swing the conductor's baton and the orchestra would play whatever it, by chance, would dictate. Often Cage was hissed by his own musicians because the music was so horrible. Cage, of course, was merely voicing the collective cry of modern man in which nothing is absolute, all is relative, all is by chance, all is in flux.

But like any other man, Cage could not live with his leap into the irrational. Cage was a world famous mycologist, a person who grows mushrooms. He had one of the most extensive libraries on mushrooms. But as anyone knows, some mushrooms are poisonous. Here is where Cage’s devotion to his philosophy was betrayed, for he himself admitted that he could not approach the consumption of mushrooms by chance, otherwise he would most likely die.

We see similar existential expressions in groups such as the Beatles. Although like Debussy their early music is catchy, innocent and very melodic, after they had been through the phases of philosophical thinking and felt a necessity to teach it to the world, their later music became mystical, openly advocating the use of drugs to make the leap into the irrational, for they found that the innocent world of the rational that they
had frolicked in previously, provided no real answers to life. Man was a
machine in the rational world.

This philosophy was expressed on a popular level in the famous album
*Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* in which LSD was openly
promoted as a religious answer to life. It has been ranked as the greatest
album of all time, by the Rolling Stone.³ On the front cover are all the
famous “Lonely Hearts” of the world who also could not find answers to
life with reason and rationality, resorting to the existential leap into the
dark (*e.g.*, Marlene Dietrich, Carl Jung, W.C. Fields, Bob Dylan, Marilyn
Monroe, Sigmund Freud, Aleister Crowley, Edgar Allan Poe, Karl Marx,
Oscar Wilde, Marlon Brando, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, Lenny Bruce).
They are all viewing the burial scene of the Beatles, which, in the
framework we are using here, represents the passing of idealistic
innocence and the failure to find a rational answer and meaning to life, an
answer to love, purpose, significance and morals. They instead were
leaping into the irrational, whether it was by drugs, the occult, suicide, or
the bizarre.

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³ In 1997 Sgt. Pepper was named the number 1 greatest album of all time in a 'Music of the
Millennium' poll conducted by HMV, Channel 4, The Guardian and Classic FM. In 1998 Q
magazine readers placed it at number 7, while in 2003 the TV network VH1 placed it at
number 10;[26] In 2003, the album was ranked number 1 on Rolling Stone magazine's list of
the 500 greatest albums of all time.
Another form of this same theme appeared in the *Theatre of the Absurd* developed by **Marshall McLuhan** (d. 1980).

It goes way beyond the expressions of absurdity in Sartre’s philosophy. It deliberately uses abnormal syntax and a devaluation of words to express all the more loudly that everything is absurd. It then tries to have the participant leap into a mystical world, just as the existentialists tried to do with their irrational “Final Experience.”

**Leonard Bernstein** was also part of this movement. His *Third Symphony* with the New York Philharmonic, sought the same leap into the irrational. Although like Debussy and the Beatles, Bernstein’s early works were somewhat entertaining (e.g., 1957 play *West Side Story* of which Bernstein wrote the musical score), others were very mystical in style,
such as his 1963 Kaddish Symphony. The kaddish was an ancient Jewish prayer for the hallowing of God’s name and the coming of his kingdom. Bernstein, who is Jewish, calls the music hall where he performed the concert “the sacred house,” and claims that it will “create you, Father, and you, me,” as if somehow God and our knowledge of him is created by his music.

Another area affected was literature. Examples such as Henry Miller (d. 1980), using pornography to make a philosophic statement of the absurdity of life. Most of the porn writers like Miller trace their origin to the Marquis de Sade (d. 1814) who, if one was caught reading his books in the 18th century would be put in jail, but today in the 20th century de Sade is considered an important voice of modern culture and philosophy.

De Sade’s philosophy was determinism, or, “whatever is, is right.” Hence, because nature made man stronger than a woman, he can do what he
pleases to her. This is why de Sade was put in prison for beating prostitutes senseless. It is from this kind of philosophic commentary on sexuality that we get the words *sadism* or *sadistic*. The reason de Sade did this is because he viewed himself merely as a machine.

Other writers of this mold were Terry Southern, the author of *Candy* and *The Magic Christian* and *Writers in Revolt*. In the latter book, Southern admits that “any previously operative philosophy or cultural structure prior to this century is shattering, for its ultimate meaning is that there is no such thing as crime: it destroys the idea of crime.” This, of course, was Sartre’s dilemma with the old lady caught in the rain, since there was no difference between giving her an umbrella or running her over. Man is a machine and pornography becomes their leap into irrational freedom, giving themselves a power and influence over people, and thus authenticating their own existence.

A book written in 1965 by **Michel Foucault** titled *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* reflects this despair very well. The *New York Review of Books* had this to say about it: “Foucault represents an important tendency in advanced contemporary thought. In his despair of the transcendent powers of rational intellect he embodies one abiding truth of our time – the failure of the nineteenth century to make good its promises.” Translation: the Enlightenment promised that it would provide answers to mankind on the basis of
rational thought, but it miserably failed. The reviewer continues: “This is why he [Foucault] turns at the end to the mad and half-mad artists and thinkers of the modern age.” This is precisely what we are saying. Modern man finds that using his own reason and rationality, assuming he can gather enough particulars to make his own universals, discovers to his dismay that he cannot, and he thus becomes only a fact-gathering machine. He finds himself below the Line of No Return. In order to escape this, he leaps into the irrational, as Foucault leaped into the madness of the artists and thinkers of the modern age.

This machine-like thinking filtered down into modern times in the sciences. Crick and Watson, discoverers of DNA, stated frequently in their literature that man was chemically determined. Crick's book, Of Molecules and Men spells this out quite clearly (although Crick, like every modern man who chooses determinism, shows hints that he can’t live with his system, so Crick refers to nature as “her,” or in The Origin of the Genetic Code spells nature with a capital N).
Sigmund Freud used fancy medical terms but his psychological determinism of the sexual psyche was of the same breed as de Sade. What Freud said was repressed, de Sade expressed.

Likewise, Carl Sagan believed in cosmological determinism, stating that we are stardust, born from the stars: “Our ancestors worshipped the Sun, and they were not that foolish. It makes sense to revere the Sun and the stars, for we are their children.”

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At Woodstock 1969, pop singer Joni Mitchell said the same:

“I came upon a child of God / He was walking along the road /
And I asked him, where are you going / And this he told me... /
We are stardust, billion year old carbon. / We are golden. / And
we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.”

The fact is, when you tell people over and over again that they are
machines and the product of machines, they begin to act like machines.
Their only escape, so they think, is a leap into the irrational, for they can’t
live in the world of machines, for they, whether they realize it or not, are
made in the image of God and have the imago Deo impulses surging
through their veins every day.

Others such as John Osborne (d. 1980) and his plays, or the poetry of
Dylan Thomas, followed the same paradigm. Truman Capote’s In Cold
Blood, is a novel about a murder but with no moral judgment. Facts are
merely reported without comment. Of course, this is what you end up
with when you reject reason and rationality and take a leap into the
irrational, especially when nothing is present in the irrational. There is
now no difference between good and evil. There are only acts of the will
to authenticate oneself. In Eastern mysticism (which many Western
people were flocking to, including the Beatles), once one gets down to the
essence of its philosophical tenets, there is no difference between love
and cruelty. All acts are one, with no individual distinction. This goes
hand-in-hand with Eastern mysticism’s emphasis on unity at the expense of individuality. There are no individuals in Eastern mysticism. All become part of the pantheistic entity. Christianity is the only religion that holds the individual in high significance, and this is why it is the only answer for mankind, not simply the best answer. This is why St. Paul bothers to mention 42 names of individuals in his closing remarks in the epistle to the Romans. He is showing us that God and Christianity care about the individual.

Cinema was also affected. Ingmar Bergman’s film, The Silence, is a statement of extreme existentialism and nihilism. Bergman said that all his films had the purpose of teaching existentialism. In the film, Bergman takes a series of unrelated snapshots of immoral and pornographic themes, portraying, of course, that life has no meaning and no morals. It is called The Silence because Bergman knew there was really nothing there above the Line of No Return for him to jump to. There is silence, thus he became a nihilist.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the world’s greatest linguists and who wrote the famous work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, also knew the “silence” Bergman was speaking of. At the end of his book he says: “All of that which many are babbling I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it.” Bertrand Russell, a philosophical historian, says Wittgenstein was a mystic, so we are not surprised to see Wittgenstein also say:

“My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless.”\(^5\) As Wikipedia comments on this: “These commentators believe that the book is deeply ironic, and that it demonstrates the ultimate nonsensicality of any sentence attempting to say something metaphysical, something about those fixations of metaphysical philosophers, about those things that must be passed over in silence, and about logic. He attempts to define the limits of logic in understanding the world.”

What is really being said here is that Wittgenstein discovered that his linguistic analysis, that is, the ability to describe and communicate philosophical concepts in words, which every major university across Europe and America was teaching because of his influence, was severely

\(^5\) *Tractatus*, Proposition 6:54.
limited and did not provide real or adequate answers. Hence he must be “silent,” as Bergman must be silent. These men are caught below the Line of No Return. When they look above the Line, they see nothing, they hear nothing. There is only silence.

Meanwhile, in the area below the Line, secular reason and rationality only produce absurdity. Michelangelo Antonioni’s movie Blow-Up in the 1960s was of the same genre. The posters advertising it in London stated: “Murder without guilt; Love without meaning.”

Lastly, theology was greatly affected by the Hegelian synthesis. Kierkegaard was the door to it. He had opened the door to both secular existentialism and theological existentialism. He displayed it in theology when he interpreted the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, recorded in Genesis 22. Kierkegaard interpreted Abraham’s decision to sacrifice Isaac as an existential leap of faith into the irrational, with nothing of substance upon which to base his decision. The proper Christian interpretation tells quite a different story than Kierkegaard’s. Abraham had communicated with God for 42 years prior to this incident. He knew God, and God knew him. Hebrews 11:19 reveals that Abraham based his decision on reason and rationality, for he concluded that if Isaac were to die, then God would simply raise him from the dead! Abraham’s decision was not an irrational leap, but a decision arrived at by calculated reason and deep undying faith in a God who is really there and who communicates with man. There
was real love and trust between God and Abraham. Abraham based his decision on verifiable, propositional truth. All he needed to do within himself was believe in God’s propositional truth.

After Kierkegaard, **Karl Barth**, the German Protestant, opened wider the door to religious existentialism.

Karl Barth was greatly admired by Catholic theologian **Hans Kung**, so much so that Kung employed a Hegelian synthesis on Barth’s theology with historic Catholic theology, concluding there was little difference between the two.

The main problem with modern liberal or existential theology is that it does not believe in a real space and time fall of man. Man is as he always was. There is no original sin. Barth had received this from Kierkegaard.
The French existentialists, Charles Baudelaire and Albert Camus developed it further.

Baudelaire, the famous art historian and poet, once said: “If there is a God, he is the Devil.” This is the logical conclusion of his system. If man is as he always was, then God must have made man evil. But to do evil is to be the devil, therefore God is the devil to Baudelaire.

Albert Camus argued in a similar vein. He said if there is a God, we cannot fight social evils because we would be fighting against the God who already made the world evil. Barth, because he had rejected Original sin, had no argument against these propositions, so he made a leap into the irrational by using spiritual connotation words, hoping that there would be an answer. But there was no escape. Without Original sin, God is the Devil.
The greater danger of this Neo-Orthodox theology is, where do you stop? If the basic issues of life are based on determinism, what does that do to the rest of your life, your relationships, your work, your politics, your interests? What’s more frightening is that, if man is as he always was, there is no way he can change. He is trapped with his present nature, for generation upon generation, and thus humanity is doomed to futility, like Sisyphus rolling the huge stone up the high mountain, only to have it slip and roll all the way down every time he almost reaches the top. Further, without Original sin it makes man’s evil a metaphysical or ontological problem, for to be evil is to be man. The German existential philosopher, Heidegger, saw this, but could do nothing about it. The Christian answer, of course, is that man was created good by a good God, and man, not God, chose to be evil. Man’s evil, then, is a moral problem, not a metaphysical one; and since there is a good God in heaven, He can work to eradicate the evil from man and return him to his normal state, the good state in which he was created.

The quest to eliminate Original sin was no better developed in Catholic circles than by the controversial Teilhard de Chardin. Notice that Teilhard says this new way of thinking about Original sin started with Galileo’s push for taking the Earth out of the center of the universe:
It is not only, in fact, a few palaeontological discoveries which are forcing the Church to lose no time in modifying her ideas about the historical evidence of human origins. The whole new physiognomy of the universe, as disclosed to us for some centuries now, is introducing an intrinsic imbalance into the very core of the dogma; and we cannot escape from this except through an extensive metamorphosis of the notion of original sin.... In earlier times, until Galileo, there was perfect compatibility between historical representations of the Fall and dogma of universal redemption – and all the more easily, too, in that each was modeled on the other. So long as people believed as St. Paul himself did, in one week of creation and a past of 4000 years – so long as people thought the stars were satellites of the earth, and that animals were there to serve man – there was no difficulty in believing that a single man could have ruined everything, and that another man had saved everything. Today we know, with absolute physical certainty, that the stellar universe is not centered on the earth, and that terrestrial life is not centered on mankind.... With the end of geocentrism, what was emerging was the evolutionist point of view. All that Galileo’s judges could distinctly see as menaced was the miracle of Joshua. The fact was that in consequence the seeds of decomposition had been introduced into the whole of the Genesis theory of the fall: and we are only today beginning to appreciate the depth of the changes which at that time were already potentially completed [in Galileo’s day].

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De Chardin believed that man is evolving to the Omega point and his progress was helped along by all the learning of previous men encompassed in what he called “the Noosphere,” a somewhat ethereal consciousness that somehow penetrated man’s psyche and spurred him on to his evolutionary goal. But this was nothing but a leap into the irrational, for the Noosphere could not be verified nor was it communicable. It is no wonder why de Chardin allowed atheist yet evolutionist, Julian Huxley, to write the Foreword to his most famous book, *The Phenomenon of Man*. Many years earlier, Julian Huxley had predicted that Christian theologians would one day reject the historical value of Genesis and make room for evolution, as de Chardin did. Carl Jung, the psychoanalyst colleague of Sigmund Freud, had a similar concept to de Chardin’s, in what he called the “collective unconscious.” Jung also dabbled in the occult, and became so deep into it that Freud broke his friendship with Jung over it.

De Chardin tried to do something that other modern men had failed to do. In modern philosophy, whether it is expressed by Hegel, Sartre, Heidigger, Darwin, Freud, Bergman, Cage or Sagan, the universe is a product of the impersonal, plus time plus chance. De Chardin, although he believed in time and chance, tried to inject the personal into the mix. The evolutionary process would somehow take the personality of man and evolve it over time until it reached the Omega point at which time it would become divine. This, of course, is as nonsensical as saying that the universe, which began with the impersonal, somehow evolved into the personal.

Man is a personal being, as opposed to animals, plants and matter, which have no real personality. Man loves, he hates, he feels, he fears, he aspires, he creates, he verbalizes. He does all these things because he is made in the image of God, a God who is personal. Thus, Christianity has the
answer of the origin of personality. No other philosophy has shown how personality can come from the impersonal.

If man starts from himself and believes that by gathering enough particulars he can form a universal, he will be sadly disappointed. Plato had the same problem. His Greek gods were personal to be sure, but they weren’t big enough to hold the needed universals. The Greeks thought that by having many gods, each one could represent a needed universal, but all they ended up with were gods with particulars, not universals. Their gods fought with one another because philosophically, particulars will always compete against other particulars, unless there is a unique and single universal tying them all together.

Man is finite and personal. The one and only integration point for man’s finite particulars is the Christian God, who is both infinite and personal. Both infinity and personality are needed to be a sufficient universal for man. Sartre saw this. He stated that without an infinite reference point everything in the realm of particulars is absurd, for there is nothing tying them all together and making sense out of them. Or as Zen-Buddhism says: “Man enters the water and causes no ripple.”

The new theology, much of which has seeped far and wide into Catholicism’s seminaries and universities, believes that history is not verifiable and therefore the Bible has many historical mistakes. Karl Barth, the father of this Neo-Orthodoxy, said that even though the Bible contains mistakes, we are to listen to it anyway, for the “religious word,” he says, still comes through. This is similar to Julian Huxley’s resolve that even though religion isn’t true, we need it anyway for a stable society, because people function better believing in God. This is the same reason why Protestant theologians in Barth’s genre, such as Paul Tillich, Rienhold Neibhur, Emil Bruner, Deitrich Bonnhoffer, Albert Schweitzer, Rudolph Bultmann and many others, could use Christian words, such as
“cross” “prayer” “redemption,” etc., but they would not have the same content as they were traditionally understood. They were mere connotation words, words that carried a certain feeling of religiosity, but did not describe a real event. Hence, liberal theology is really “faith in faith,” not faith in verifiable historic realities of redemptive meaning.

Paul Tillich, for example, spoke of the “God behind God,” meaning that what we know as Christianity today is a façade, and we must then take an irrational leap and hope that there is a God behind it all that gives it meaning. This in itself is a leap into the irrational, for there is no way to verify the content of Tillich’s second God or Barth’s “religious word.” Tillich was once asked if he prayed. He said: “No, but I meditate.” This didn’t help much, because Tillich’s life was immoral.

In Catholicism, Barth’s new theology penetrated deeply, especially after Catholic liberals believed that Pius XII, in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, had given them a license to use Barth’s theology to their own liking. But since Catholic dogma constrained them whereas Barth, a Protestant, was not constrained, there was a great struggle over the issue of biblical inerrancy at Vatican II. The document, *Dei Verbum 11*, finally concluded: “we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of
our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.”7 But immediately after Vatican II, the Barthian Catholic liberals made it appear that the phrase “for the sake of our salvation” meant that Scripture was only error-free when it spoke about salvation, not history. Even today, 40 years later, we see this unfortunate interpretation permeate the intellectual climate. The working document publicly approved by the Vatican Synod’s Secretariat and published as a supplement in *L’Osservatore Romano*, “Instrumentum Laboris,” contains a heresy in section 15(c), where it proclaims that Scripture contains errors on matters that are not written "for the sake of our salvation." This proposition, of course, is erroneous. Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum 11* had stated quite clearly, as did the rest of Catholic tradition before it, that “the books of Scripture” were “without error,” for in being without error they are able to teach us all of God’s truths “for the sake of our salvation.”

Be that as it may, if one says that the history is in error, yet the salvation message is true, the theory immediately breaks down when historical facts are used in Scripture to substantiate the salvation message (*e.g.*, the Incarnation, Resurrection). In other words, one cannot deny the history and keep the salvation. He must accept both, or there will be no salvation. Hence, most Protestant liberals concluded there was no real redemption offered in Scripture. They proposed that the apostles and others following Jesus just made it appear as if Jesus came to save the world, and Christianity was thus born and grew on nothing more than a myth. Conversely, the Catholic liberals, tied to the dogma of the Catholic Church and fearing excommunication for too radical a view, weren’t so free to make such earth-shattering conclusions. So instead of outrightly rejecting the history as the liberal Protestants did, the Catholic liberals would merely raise doubt about the history in the form of interrogatives, a methodology that was frequently used by one of the leading Catholic

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7 Flannery edition.
liberals, Raymond Brown. For example, Brown says in his book *The Birth of the Messiah* that after Vatican II, “A faithful Catholic would have to ask: ‘Should one rank the biological manner of Jesus conception as a truth God wanted put into the Sacred Writings for the sake of our salvation?’” Brown, a Catholic priest, taught at one of the most liberal Protestant seminaries in the United States, Union Theological Seminary in New York. Union Theological led American schools in teaching the liberalism and Neo-Orthodoxy originating from Europe. In the end, of course, once you are selective about what is inerrant in Scripture, it becomes an arbitrary system dependent on the whim of the reader, and it falls by its own weight.

As for the Barthians, and those Catholics who thought they could live in a dichotomy between Catholic dogma and the New Theology, once you make the decision that Scripture contains historical mistakes, then everything is up for grabs. Suddenly, because the first eleven chapters of Genesis are understood as more myth and outmoded cultural expressions of the day than historical fact, this left room for people such as Bultmann, Barth, Kung, Rahner and de Chardin to reject or modify the story of Adam and Eve. But if you reject Adam and Eve, you reject Original sin. If you reject Original sin, you must claim that man is as he always was. This is a Hindu concept. So it is no surprise to see some Catholic theologians forge a synthesis between Hinduism and Catholicism, such as Raymond Panikkar, Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.C. and Anthony de Mello, S.J. Prior to this titanic shift, a traditional Roman Catholic, using the pre-Hegelian Thesis-Antithesis apologetic, would totally reject Hinduism, and hold that its adherents were eternally damned unless they became saved. But now we have the Hegelian synthesis, a philosophy that has slowly but surely seeped down into the very heart of modern man’s psyche, to the very doorstep of his theological beliefs and affirmations. So you see how just
one philosophical concept can have such a penetrating effect on the masses.

As I noted previously, Aquinas, because of his belief in a supernatural God expressed in the Trinity, was able to keep a balance between universals and particulars, or between Grace and Nature. The Trinity gives us the balance between the two positions, for we have the One God but we also have the Three Persons. Problems crept in, however, when during the Renaissance, Catholic humanism (e.g., Erasmus), the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, we see that Nature began to emasculate Grace.

By the time of Rousseau (d. 1778) the category of Grace had been totally destroyed. It was replaced by Freedom, which then led to the French Revolution in 1789. The ideal was to be free of religious constraints, which usually happens when men forget they have a sin-tainted nature, which in this case was replaced by Rousseau’s *tabula rasa* or blank slate.
The same thing happened in the 1960s counter-culture revolution, whether it was in religion or secular society. Liberal theology had weakened the concept of Original sin; psychology and psychoanalysis had replaced religion as the state-of-the-art therapeutic device for modern man. This shift was based on the idea that a sin-tainted nature was not the cause of man’s personal problems, rather it was Freud’s undeveloped superego that needed to learn to control the basal id, or through B. F. Skinner’s behavioral psychology that modified man’s behavior as if he were a dog being trained. Skinner put his own two-year old daughter in one of his “Skinner boxes,” forcing her to do certain behaviors by a reward and punishment system of candy and electrical shocks, respectively.

But what happens in these skewed paradigms is that Nature, because it no longer has Grace to control it, becomes autonomous, and with autonomy comes determinism, and with determinism man becomes a machine, without any meaning or significance, something his image-of-God psyche will not let him accept. In order to escape the inevitable insignificance of an autonomous Nature, Rousseau took a leap into Freedom as the ideal, thus fomenting revolution because society had restrained man’s freedom. Rousseau could not live under the Line of No Return, for it made him into a robot. He sought an escape in revolution, hoping that it would somehow relieve the tension and the futility. But
alas, like everyone else who tried to make the leap into the irrational, there was nothing really there, and Rousseau would die in despair.

**Conclusion:**

There are only a few possible answers to the philosophical problems we have outlined. Man must answer three basic philosophical questions if he is to find any meaning to life.

**First,** he must answer the origin of his personality, for no one has shown how personality can come from the impersonal.

**Second,** man must answer the contrast between his nobility and his cruelty. Man is noble because he does great things, but he is also cruel because he destroys both other men and the things he creates. What is it that determines whether he helps the old lady across the street or runs her down with his car?

**Third,** man must answer is his epistemology, how he knows what he knows.

Concerning these three basic questions, there are two classes of answers.

The **first class** is that there is no answer, an answer which many modern people take, from the bumper sticker that says “Life is a bitch, and then you die” or “Whoever dies with the most toys, wins,” to Sartre’s “everything is absurd,” to John Cage’s *musique concrète,* to Aldous Huxley’s leap into the irrational comfort of mind-altering drugs. We, as Catholics who are commanded to evangelize the world, must point out to these modern people that they simply cannot live in their system, just as John Cage found out that he could not eat mushrooms randomly, else he would die of poison. The fact is, the universe shouts with order and complexity. It works like a well-oiled clock. It is not a mass of confusion.
Hence, man must conform to the universe. He must use logic and order. They are not absurd.

The second class of answers, of course, is that there is a genuine answer that is logical, rational, complete and can be communicated. Of this second class, there are three possibilities.

The first answer is that everything came from nothing. This, of course, is only a theoretical answer, because we know that something cannot come from nothing. Yet often when a scientist or secular philosopher uses this argument, he will try to make nothing into a little something so he can at least start from somewhere. Various words are chosen to arrive at this position as, for example, when Stephen Hawking, the world famous physicist, refers to the universe as beginning from “an infinitesimal point so small that we cannot conceive of it” or he may refer to it with the more convenient scientific term, “the singularity.” We cannot let them get away with this, because it is a lie. If they are going to argue that the universe came from nothing, then it must be an absolute nothing. No singularities, no infinitesimal matter, no energy, no nothing.

The second answer is to maintain that all we see now in the universe had an impersonal beginning, such as raw energy or mass. As we already saw, however, if you start with the impersonal, you end up with the impersonal, unless you can show how the personal can come from the impersonal, which no one has ever done. Modern science’s answer to personality is merely to say that it is a product of the impersonal (neurons) plus complexity (billions of neurons), resulting in a what appears like personality.

Further, an impersonal beginning can never produce genuine morals. Morals become the product of mere metaphysics, or even worse, a product of statistics (as in Alfred Kinsey’s Sexual Behavior of the Human
Male), or the majority vote (as in various forms of democracy, or even in Plato's Republic wherein the concept of the τούλος [the city] is replaced by the Philosopher Kings). Modern man's religions are also inadequate for this task, because each of them begins with an impersonal deity or deities that do not love or communicate, but just exist. In pantheism, for example, morals do not exist, for everything in pantheism is equal. There is no diversity, no particulars to match the unity, the universals. The final Karma of Hinduism is to accept your impersonality and reject your individuality so that you can become absorbed into the One impersonal. But if we begin from the personal (as Christianity does), then morals do not depend on mere metaphysics but on pure love.

The third answer is to begin with the personal. Please note, there are no other answers than these three. As someone once said, when you get down to the basic questions, there are few people left in the room. We can use this to our advantage in evangelizing modern man, for we can safely show him that Christianity is not merely the best answer, it is the only answer. God and man are separated by infinity, but they are joined by personality. Man and animal are joined by being finite, but they are separated by personality. So man must bridge the chasm between God and himself through personality, or by relating to God on a personal level. As Christianity teaches, for example, if we have offended a personal God, we seek his personal forgiveness, we draw on his personal quality of mercy and compassion. Likewise, in being offended, yet also being infinite in majesty and power, God requires, in the personal realm, an appeasement of his person in order to preserve his honor. Thus the Second Person of the Trinity, by his own personality, voluntarily gave himself to be the propitiation to appease the First Person. It is all based on personhood and what is required to preserve personhood. This is why we also call God “Father,” and not “The Other,” or merely “the Infinite,” for “Father” is a personal term.
And in that answer we have not only the personal and infinite God, we have the Three Persons who each have their own Personality, within that infinite God. There was a very good reason that our Church Fathers referred to the Trinity as Persons, as opposed to Modes (as in Modalism or Sabellianism), because each one in the Trinity is personal. The Persons of the Trinity loved and communicated with each other before creation, and when the Trinity created man the Persons instilled in man the same personal traits so that man could love God and love his fellow man. And because God is personal and the members of the Godhead loved each other, God did not need to create man in order to love. Rather, God created man because of love, to foster love, to reflect the Godhead’s love. The finite and the infinite could be joined together by love, which would hold them together for the rest of eternity. This contrasts to Hinduism. Although there are five faces in the Hindu presentation of God, they are not persons, they are impersonal entities. One of the entities is feminine, Kali, but she is a destroyer, often pictured with fangs and skulls hanging around her neck. This is because there is no difference between cruelty and non-cruelty in Hinduism. Perhaps the feminine representation in Kali is a picture of Eve, which is not uncommon in pagan religions.

So we see how in all these instances philosophy has an overwhelming effect on how modern man thinks and lives his daily life. There is only one answer for modern man. It is Christianity. Go out to the highways and byways and tell them the Good News!

Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D.

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