

Fr. Thomas Dowd

***INTRODUCTION TO
THEOLOGICAL STUDIES***

***CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND
POST-MODERN CULTURE***

© FR. THOMAS DOWD, 2004, 2010.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank Msgr. Sean Harty, c.s.s., who first proposed that I begin to teach theology at a university level. Thank you for encouraging me in what has been a tremendous learning opportunity.

Next, I would like to thank my research assistant, Francesco Giordano, without whose many hours of research and redaction many parts of this work might never have been completed in time.

Finally, I'd like to thank my students, who have had to put up with working from a draft textbook, sometimes receiving a chapter only a day before a class, or sometimes even a couple of weeks later! I wrote this work for you -- I pray it has served you well.

TABLE OF TOPICS

Topic 1:	Theology and the problem of suffering	7
Topic 2:	Theology and history	31
Topic 3:	Theology in a scientific and technological age	53
Topic 4:	Theology of the body	67
Topic 5:	Theology in a culture of "well-being"	91
Topic 6:	Theology and the fine arts	115
Topic 7:	Theology in a society of plenty	127
Topic 8:	Theology and feminism	139
Topic 10:	Theology and the law of the land	151

Theology and the problem of suffering

In this second half of our course we will be examining the relationship between religion and culture. Culture changes over time, of course, but since religion itself has a process of “development of doctrine” it can change over time as well, particularly in its cultural expression but even in its theology. True, the “deposit of faith” cannot change, but the understanding of that deposit and the means of living it out can evolve. But we need to ask ourselves: what is the engine of all this change, whether cultural or religious?

There are many possible answers to this question, of course, but one stands out for our purposes: *the pursuit of happiness*. This principle, written into the American Constitution itself, has an ancient lineage. Aristotle himself, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, wrote that “all men pursue happiness,” and placed this principle at the centre of his philosophy of ethics and social organization. From a Christian point of view, even God’s actions can be explained by this principle. True, God is understood to be happy in himself, but out of love for us he has intervened in history to try and help us to be truly and fully happy. The entire doctrinal category of Salvation is about God’s actions to save us from the things that ultimately will lead us away from happiness, and to show us the path to the fulness of joy.

The fact that all persons pursue happiness provides us with the basis for all possible discussion between religions and ideologies. Even if we disagree with each other on many profound levels, as long as we are all oriented towards the good and happiness of each other we have a common principle upon which to dialogue and build respect. This is why theology cannot remain in an ivory tower, but has to engage the culture: out of love for our fellow human beings, we need to help that culture achieve what it needs to promote the happiness of its members. This being said, it must be recognized that there is one fundamental challenge to all God-centred approaches to happiness, and that is the *problem of evil*, also often called the *problem of suffering* (although the two do not necessarily mean exactly the same thing). Evil, by definition, is opposed to happiness, and suffering is often placed in the same category. If we are going to develop a theological approach to critiquing current assumptions about human happiness and the proposed means of promoting it, we need to start by examining the problems of evil and suffering, and our theological response to it.

Rebellion

In order to start to examine the theological problem of suffering we should in theory begin by examining all the forms of suffering in the world, cataloguing and categorizing them. This would not only be exhaustive, however, but exhausting, so instead we are going to turn to literature, which has throughout history been a means to explore profound themes of human existence.

The Brothers Karamazov, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, is widely considered one of the most important literary works of all time. It is a work written on many levels. On the surface it appears like a murder mystery, but just below the surface it is a profound examination of human nature and the problems confronting humanity. In the fourth chapter of Book V, entitled “Rebellion”, two of the brothers are engaged in a discussion about human suffering. Again, it is much more than a simple dialogue: through the characters of the two brothers, Dostoevsky is using his characters to confront two radically different approaches to the problem of suffering itself.

The main speaker in the chapter is Ivan Karamazov, who, in his own confrontation with the problem of human suffering, has chosen to become a Marxist. His younger brother Alyosha, while he speaks much less, is no less important. Alyosha is a young novice monk, and is blessed with a pure, believing heart. For Ivan to be confronting Alyosha with the problem of suffering, then, is much more than a discussion between two brothers: it is a confrontation between a believing Marxist and a believing Christian, or if you prefer, between an ideology hostile to God (or the idea of God), and a religion which, by definition, places God at the very centre of its structure of thought.

Ivan and Alyosha set the stage for their discussion by first speaking about love.

“I must make you one confession,” Ivan began. “I could never understand how one can love one’s neighbours. It’s just one’s neighbours, to my mind, that one can’t love, though one might love those at a distance [...] For any one to love a man, he must be hidden, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone.”

“Father Zossima has talked of that more than once,” observed Alyosha, “he, too, said that the face of a man often hinders many people not practised in love, from loving him. But yet there’s a great deal of love in mankind, and almost Christ-like love. I know that myself, Ivan.”

“Well, I know nothing of it so far, and can’t understand it, and the innumerable mass of mankind are with me there. The question is, whether that’s due to men’s bad qualities or whether it’s inherent in their nature. To my thinking, Christ-like love for men is a miracle impossible on earth. He was God. But we are not gods [...] One can love one’s neighbours in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it’s almost impossible.”

Ivan then begins to set the tone for the presentation of his case.

I meant to speak of the suffering of mankind generally, but we had better confine ourselves to the sufferings of the children. That reduces the scope of my argument to a tenth of what it would be. Still we’d better keep to the children, though it does weaken my case. But, in the first place, children can be loved even at close quarters, even when they are dirty, even when they are ugly (I fancy, though, children never are ugly). The second reason why I won’t speak of grown-up people is that, besides being disgusting and unworthy of love, they have a

compensation—they've eaten the apple and know good and evil, and they have become like god.' They go on eating it still. But the children haven't eaten anything, and are so far innocent.

Ivan then starts to present specific examples of the kind of horrible suffering that even the smallest innocents sometimes are forced to endure.

A well educated, cultured gentleman and his wife beat their own child with a birch-rod, a girl of seven. I have an exact account of it. The papa was glad that the birch was covered with twigs. 'It stings more,' said he, and so he began stinging his daughter. I know for a fact there are people who at every blow are worked up to sensuality, to literal sensuality, which increases progressively at every blow they inflict. They beat for a minute, for five minutes, for ten minutes, more often and more savagely. The child screams. At last the child cannot scream, it gasps, 'Daddy! daddy!' By some diabolical unseemly chance the case was brought into court. A counsel is engaged. The Russian people have long called a barrister 'a conscience for hire.' The counsel protests in his client's defence. 'It's such a simple thing,' he says, 'an every-day domestic event. A father corrects his child. To our shame be it said, it is brought into court.' The jury, convinced by him, give a favourable verdict. The public roars with delight that the torturer is acquitted.

[...]

There was a little girl of five who was hated by her father and mother, 'most worthy and respectable people, of good education and breeding.' [...] This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty—shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans! Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and the cold, and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand that, friend and brother, you pious and humble novice? Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not have known good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to 'dear, kind God'! I say nothing of the sufferings of grown-up people, they have eaten the apple, damn them, and the devil take them all! But these little ones!

[...]

It was in the darkest days of serfdom at the beginning of the century, and long live the Liberator of the People! There was in those days a general of aristocratic connections, the owner of great estates, one of those men—somewhat exceptional, I believe, even then—who, retiring from the service into a life of leisure, are convinced that they've earned absolute power over the lives of their subjects. There were such men then. So our general, settled on his property of two thousand souls, lives in pomp, and domineers over his poor neighbours as though they were dependents and buffoons. He has kennels of hundreds of hounds and nearly a hundred dog-boys—all mounted, and in uniform. One day a serf boy, a

little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favourite hound. 'Why is my favourite dog lame?' He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog's paw. 'So you did it.' The general looked the child up and down. 'Take him.' He was taken—taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out on horseback, with the hounds, his dependents, dog-boys, and huntsmen, all mounted around him in full hunting parade. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them all stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lock-up. It's a gloomy cold, foggy autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror, not daring to cry.... 'Make him run,' commands the general. 'Run! run! shout the dog-boys. The boy runs.... 'At him!' yells the general, and he sets the whole pack of hounds on the child. The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother's eyes!...I believe the general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates. Well—what did he deserve? To be shot? To be shot for the satisfaction of our moral feelings? Speak, Alyosha!"

Alyosha answers, "to be shot." Ivan is triumphant: even his monk brother "has a little devil sitting in his heart". Alyosha protests, saying his own response had been absurd. Ivan replies with a defence of the very absurdity Alyosha sees as problematic:

Let me tell you, novice, that the absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and perhaps nothing would have come to pass in it without them. [...] I don't want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I try to understand anything, I shall be false to the fact and I have determined to stick to the fact.

Finally, in a dramatic and powerful fashion, Ivan summarizes his case:

Ivan for a minute was silent, his face became all at once very sad. "Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its centre, I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. I am a bug, and I recognise in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. Men are themselves to blame, I suppose; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, though they knew they would become unhappy, so there is no need to pity them. With my pitiful, earthly, Euclidian understanding, all I know is that there is suffering and that there are none guilty; that cause follows effect, simply and directly; that everything flows and finds its level—but that's only Euclidian nonsense, I know that, and I can't consent to live by it! What comfort is it to me that there are none guilty and that cause follows effect simply and directly, and that I know it—I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth, and that I could see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it, and if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair. Surely I haven't suffered, simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when every one suddenly understands what it has all been for. All

the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That's a question I can't answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I've only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among men. I understand solidarity in retribution, too; but there can be no such solidarity with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers' crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension. Some jester will say, perhaps, that the child would have grown up and have sinned, but you see he didn't grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old. Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be, when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.' When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony. And while I am on earth, I make haste to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it really may happen that if I live to that moment, or rise again to see it, I, too, perhaps, may cry aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child's torturer, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' but I don't want to cry aloud then. While there is still time. I hasten to protect myself and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God'! It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, *even if I were wrong*. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket."

Finally, Ivan confronts the problem of suffering with the question of the meaning of suffering (which

is at the heart of any theology of suffering).

[...] “Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.”

“No, I wouldn’t consent,” said Alyosha softly.

“And can you admit the idea that men for whom you are building it would agree to accept their happiness on the foundation of the unexpiated blood of a little victim? And accepting it would remain happy for ever?”

“No, I can’t admit it. Brother,” said Alyosha suddenly, with flashing eyes, “you said just now, is there a being in the whole world who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? But there is a Being and He can forgive everything, all and for all, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything. You have forgotten Him, and on Him is built the edifice, and it is to Him they cry aloud, ‘Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed!’ ”

“Ah! the One without sin and His blood! No, I have not forgotten Him; on the contrary I’ve been wondering all the time how it was you did not bring Him in before, for usually all arguments on your side put Him in the foreground.” [...]

The novel then continues with perhaps its most famous chapter, “The Grand Inquisitor”.

Analysis

In the closing words of this chapter, Dostoevsky reveals to us his literary goal: the confrontation of the raw lived experience of horrible suffering, with the explanations (typically religious) of that suffering. Through the mouth of Ivan, Dostoevsky is presenting the frustration of the human person confronted with the problem of suffering, and the various paradigms (religious and secular) that have been presented to explain it. Ivan has rejected the paradigms that see suffering as part of some “vast harmony”, either because such a harmony does not exist or, if it does, that it is unjust. This is what explains his own embrace of Marxism: “While I am on earth, I make haste to take my own measures.” From Ivan’s point of view, if any suffering is absurd then all suffering is necessarily absurd, because it implies either that God does not exist or is unjust. In either case, Ivan sees himself left with no other option, and like so many others have done, he rejects God and “gives him back the ticket”.

It is important to note, though, that Dostoevsky the author does not necessarily agree with Ivan the character. True, he has very powerfully presented Ivan’s case, but in fact this simply sets up a point of dramatic tension for the novel. Much of the rest of the novel is dedicated to exploring the question of who/what is right, Alyosha or Ivan, belief in God or rejection of God. Dostoevsky seems to provide his answer by how he presents his characters. Alyosha, a man of profound and simple faith, is uncertain in the face of his brother’s logic, but is nevertheless clearly the happiest character in the novel, able to confront the evils surrounding him with simplicity and joy: the evils affect him, but they do not get a hold on him. Ivan, on the other hand, remains an unhappy character, and in the end goes insane: one gets the impression that his belief in the absurdity of existence and

the desire to live in this absurdity rather than accept “harmony” is what breaks his mind and drives him mad.

Dostoevsky, then, is confronting every reader with a choice. On the one hand, the more logical position seems to be to simply reject the mystery of suffering as a pure absurdity, and reject God along with it, and yet those who do seem unable to fully “love their neighbour” and live in joy. On the other hand, those who do live in faith seem somehow able to love with a “Christ-like love”, and to be happier, at the price of accepting the reality of suffering as a mystery, and trusting in a “harmony” behind it all. What, then, is the sign of truth? The logical consistency of Ivan’s position? Or the practical reality of the joy that Alyosha is able to live?

Examining the problem of suffering

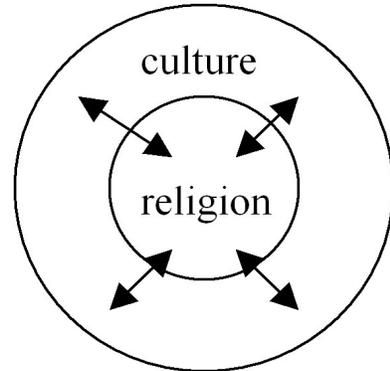
Every religion has to come face to face with the problem of suffering,¹ as the question of suffering is one of the most difficult problems we face in our human existence. There seems to be a general conviction in the human race that nobody in their right mind wants to suffer. Suffering is bad. Suffering is an evil. And yet suffering exists, and appears to be a universal experience. Many attempts have been made to develop a "philosophy of suffering," usually with a view to trying to find a way to eliminate suffering entirely. The stakes are high in the quest for a solution: on the religious side, many persons have simply given up their faith in the face of the problem of suffering. Faced with the difficulty the problem poses, and unable to resolve it to their satisfaction, they have (like Ivan Karamazov) refused to believe in God, developing alternative systems of thought to try and pursue happiness. Others have attempted to develop responses that include God to a greater or lesser degree, but ultimately are placing something else at the centre of their system. When this occurs, the end result is not a *theology*, but an *ideology*. **An ideology is a paradigm, a collection of internally coherent ideas that helps to interpret the world and its actions upon us and offers counsel on how to best react and manage our participation in the world, with the end goal being (hopefully) happiness.** Ideologies are powerful. While many people just seem to be “going with the flow” in life, others require reasons to keep on going, and want to ensure their actions have meaning. Ideologies, like religions, can provide these sorts of answers, leading people to all sorts of actions, for good or for (sometime terrible) evil.² In fact, over time, ideologies can even come to resemble religions, complete with key texts, legendary leaders and teachers, and even zealots and

¹ Buddhism, for example, began as an extended reflection on the problem of suffering by the Buddha himself, and his moment of enlightenment was said to come when he supposedly understood the origin of suffering. In a sense, Buddhism could be called a theodicy-based religion.

² The Holocaust, for example, was not just a product of anti-Semitism, but of anti-Semitism united to the ideology of Nazism, which took various ideological elements and united them to a set of ideas that justified the anti-Semitism. These ideas proved powerful enough to induce an otherwise civilized nation like Germany to provoke World War II, as well as undertake the execution of millions of Jews, Poles, Gypsies, and so on. We must not imagine that our own nation is immune to falling into its own ideological traps! Some would even argue that our own Western secular approach has become an ideology, with its own hidden dangers.

fanatics.

The relationship between ideologies and religion is, in fact, implied in the elements contained in Lonergan’s definition of theology. Ideology is an important shaper of culture. While ideology is often seen as opposed to religion, just as culture contains religion it is possible for ideology to contain religious elements. We need to distinguish religion as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and religion as a source and object of faith. It is possible to only be “culturally religious,” without any real deep faith commitment. It is also possible to put our faith in a system of religion, to the extent of obscuring the core elements of that system for the sake of the system as a whole.



The relationship between religion and ideology, then, exists on a continuum:

<i>CATEGORY OF IDEOLOGY</i>	<i>EXAMPLE(S)</i>
Ideologies actively hostile to religion	Communism
Ideologies with contempt for religion	Nazism, positivism
Ideologies that assign religion “its place”	Caesaro-papism, secular humanism
Ideologies generally neutral to religion as such, except when certain teachings conflict with the ideology	Capitalism, feminism
Ideologies often seeking to associate themselves with religion while remaining distinct	Nationalism
Ideologies that sometimes seem indistinguishable from religion (often the ideological ideas are expressed in religious or theological terms)	Islamism (not to be confused with Islam), religious Zionism (not to be confused with Judaism), Christendom (not to be confused with Christianity)

These are not hard and fast categories: it is possible for an ideology to slide from one box to another. Many feminists, for example, are not neutral to religion, but instead have an active contempt or hostility to it. Other feminists have sought to include religious elements in their system, such as the emerging phenomenon of “goddess worship”. It is a situation that can change, just as culture itself changes.

As can be seen, ideologies often have a rocky relationship with religion. While only a few are overtly hostile to religion, often there exists a kind of silent contempt for religion. When theologians write about science, for example, scientists often scoff; when theologians write about economics, business people and economists often scoff; and when theologians write about social justice, politicians often scoff. Sometimes this is because those theologians don’t write all that intelligently about the topic in question, but often it is because there is a hidden assumption that

theology could not have anything pertinent to bring to the discussion. This is a shame, because theology does have, within itself, the potential to contribute something to culture. The Christian religion is rooted in a special revelation, the revelation of God in Jesus, continued in the world by the action of the Holy Spirit. This special revelation, because it comes from God and is not something which can be determined by reflection on creation alone, by definition transcends culture. All ideologies are measured relative to each other: for example, if you want to critique one economic or social paradigm, you have to do so from the perspective of another paradigm. Theology, however, does not root its critiques in relative paradigms, but in something which transcends those paradigms: the special revelation already mentioned. **This rootedness in transcendent revelation is unique to theology, and allows theology to provide a unique perspective in the development and critique of culture and ideologies, as long as the theology does not slip into becoming an ideology itself.**

The last category of ideologies (those that sometimes seem indistinguishable from religion) is particularly difficult, but critical for theologians to be aware of. It is so easy for theology to slip into becoming an ideology, because while it is rooted in transcendent truths, those truths are culturally expressed; it is all too easy for the cultural expression, which is meant to be a vehicle for the truth, to wind up obscuring some of that truth instead. Some might argue that, in fact, because the truths of faith are expressed culturally, all theology is necessarily culturally tainted and it is not ever really possible to know if the theology has remained rooted in the transcendent revelation or not. It is here that Christians invoke the doctrinal category of the Holy Spirit. Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is God, present and active in the world, and that presence and action keeps us from ever irrevocably losing our contact with the transcendent revelation, no matter what the imperfect cultural expressions may be at the time. Even if we drift into theological-sounding ideologies, rootedness in the Holy Spirit will eventually mean He will lead us back to the transcendent truths themselves.

How do we know when our religious system is slipping from being a faith into becoming an ideology? A key indicator lies in the relationship between Church and State. Ideology could be considered a kind of the “theology for the State” or the “religion of the State”, because in ideologies

The difference between ideology and theology

The difference between ideology and theology can be summed up in this diagram:

Ideology

Man ↔ World

Theology

Man ↔ World

↙ ↘
God

If there is no God, or if it is impossible to know anything about God apart from the knowledge that comes from general revelation, then theology and ideology are exactly the same. In such a case, one could even argue that theology is a dangerous illusion. Theology requires special revelation to offer anything different from an ideology -- but obviously if God does exist this rootedness in special revelation gives theology the chance to make a genuine and unique contribution to the structure of human culture and society.

it is typically the mechanisms of the State that the “true believers” of the ideology turn to. When the focus of the discourse shifts from matters of faith and morals to matters of Statehood and the use of State mechanisms to enforce religious matters, it is quite possible that the line between religion and ideology is becoming blurred. In nations where everyone has the same basic beliefs, perhaps this distinction is less urgent, but in our increasingly pluralistic world the task of finding ways for religion and ideology to co-exist peacefully becomes even more urgent. Theologians have a lot to potentially contribute to this discussion.

Ultimately, however, both religion and ideology are concerned with the same thing: the “salvation” of the human person. But what does this salvation consist of? And how can it be attained? Unless theology can help religion develop satisfying answers, ideologies will always be around to offer alternatives. And so we must now examine the theological response to the problem of suffering.

Theodicy: the theological study of the problem of suffering

The term *theodicy* was first coined by the philosopher Leibniz in a text he wrote that sought to demonstrate the goodness of God,³ which is challenged by the reality of suffering. Since then, “theodicy” has come to have both a philosophical and a theological meaning. On the philosophical side, it generally refers to attempts to prove the existence of God, particularly in the face of objections to the existence of God (such as the problem of suffering already mentioned). On the theological side, since belief in the existence of God is already a given, theodicy tends to mean the theological investigation of the goodness of God and the challenge posed by the problem of evil and suffering.

In its essence, theodicy is concerned with the following problem statement:

If suffering is bad
And God exists
And God is all-good and all-loving
And God is all-powerful
Then why does suffering exist?

Different theodicies tackle this problem statement differently. In general, there are three possible approaches: (1) to eliminate one of the major premises, (2) to try and solve the problem with all its elements, (3) to declare the problem beyond the limits of human reason to solve.

Approach #1 is hard to accept as part of Christian theology, given that all the major premises (certainly, those about God) are part of Christian doctrine. There have been some interesting attempts, but most typically the premise that is eliminated as part of approach #1 is the notion that “suffering is bad”. While this has led to the realisation of certain truths (for example, that some

³ GOTTFRIED WILHELM VON LEIBNIZ, “Essais de Théodicée sur la bonte de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal”, published in 1710.

forms of suffering are relative in their “evil”), it can lead to a glorification of suffering and a forgetting of the principle that, in Jesus, God will one day “wipe away every tear from their eyes”. (Rev 21:4). In recent years some theodicies have tackled approach #1 by denying all-powerful nature of God, which is an interesting contemporary development.⁴

Approach #2 is the typical approach Christian theologians take, but it is the most difficult, and the resulting theodicies are often so subtle that they are difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, approach #2 is often the most theologically fruitful, as it requires a deep exploration of the underlying essence of each of the elements of the problem statement. For example, while suffering may be bad, is it always the worst of all possible evils? Are there categories of suffering? Another example: if God is all-powerful, does this extend to redefining logical contradictions? For instance, can God make $2 + 2 = 5$? And how do these attributes of God interact? If God is all-good, does that not limit his omnipotent nature (because it means he cannot sin)? And so on...

Approach #3 is sometimes seen as the only alternative. Suffering is understood (and rightly so) to be a “mystery” in the real theological sense of the term. While alternative #3 can be a fideistic approach (“look, we can’t understand it, just believe in God anyway”), it is perhaps possible that, at the current time, the mystery of suffering is simply too deep for us to grasp. But is it too deep for us to grasp *now*? Or will it always remain so deep that we’ll never really get a handle on it? Maybe so, but this remains to be demonstrated, and since “mysteries” are things that we can always understand a little bit more, theology marches on even if the perfect “theodicy theory” has not yet been developed.

All attempts to further develop theodicy, whether theological or philosophical, have to come to grips with three issues: the “what” of suffering, the “how” of suffering, and the “why” of suffering. We will examine each in turn.

The “what” of suffering

In order to reflect on the problem of suffering, we need to come to an understanding of what suffering is. Most typically, suffering is considered to be something which, in the strict sense, can only be experienced by living things capable of feeling pain. As a working definition, then, **let us**

⁴ Dorothy Soëlle, in her book *Suffering*, took exactly this approach. Regarding the Holocaust, she famously asked the question, “Was God on the side of the victims or on the side of the executioner?” Soëlle’s chosen option is that we must drop the notion that God is all powerful in order to preserve faith in a loving God. Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote the famous little book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, follows Soëlle in this regard. He writes:

I believe in God. But I do not believe that same things about Him that I did years ago, when I was growing up or when I was a theological student. I recognize his limitations. He is limited in what he can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom...I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason. (p. 134)

In this regard, Rabbi Kushner is not that much different from Ivan Karamazov.

define suffering as the discomfort experienced by a living being when, for some reason, the existential requirements of its nature cannot be met.⁵ This discomfort is not limited to simple acute physical pain (although that is the simplest example). Other forms of discomfort exist as well, such as emotional hurt, stress, lack of meaning in life, and fear, particularly the fear of death. In our technological age it may be that some of us suffer from these latter causes much more than from acute physical pain. In fact, these other forms of suffering are not necessarily limited to the human condition. For example, we often think of animals in a zoo as suffering. Imagine a lion being kept in a whitewashed concrete room, being fed meat through a slot in the door. Many would consider this a pitiful image of suffering. But why? It is because the existential requirements of the lion, to be roaming the plain and hunting its own food, are not being met. The lion is not existing according to its nature. Even if it is feeling no physical pain, it can be said to be suffering simply because it isn't able to live up to its "lion-ness". Of course, humans, with our developed social structures and mental (and even spiritual) capacities are more complex than lions, and the demands of our natures are even more complex. On the philosophical side, then, the identification of the "what" of suffering, of the components of suffering, requires a reflection on human nature.

Certain philosophies deny the existence of a universal human nature at all. Existentialism, for example, holds that "existence precedes essence". In other words, while there may be commonalities between human beings, these commonalities are not enough to determine a human nature (an essence) which is normative for individual existing human beings. In such a case, individual human nature is made complete by

Non-religious philosophies of human nature: type #1

- ✗ No such thing as human nature*
- ✗ No spiritual component*
- ✗ No religious dimension*

An example of a philosophy in this category:

Existentialism

⁵ In a previous class, one student called this definition into question. He cited the example of seeing the suffering of a friend: I may very well suffer as well, because he or she is suffering, but which of my existential requirements is not being met in that case? So he rejected the definition. I submit to you, however, that the definition can still stand, with one prerequisite: the solidarity of the human race. In other words, the definition implies that one of the existential requirements of my nature is that all your existential requirements are met as well. In rejecting the definition, the student was also rejecting this concept of solidarity of the human race. What is interesting is that, if the principle of the solidarity of the human race is true, it has interesting implications for Christology and soteriology. Why? Because, in Jesus, God became a human being! God therefore, in Jesus, has chosen to participate in this solidarity of the human race, such that Jesus' existential needs would have included ours as well. It is a very strong statement of the relationship between God and humanity.

It should be noted that it is possible to conceive of intermediate forms of this solidarity. For example, the student spoke of the suffering of a friend, but what of the suffering of an enemy? In addition, certain ideologies do not automatically accord every human being equal dignity, but place it on a relative scale based on distinctions of race, intellectual capacity, gender, social class, etc. We need to ask ourselves the question: whenever this solidarity is relativized, is this justified? Christian theology has great difficulty seeing such distinctions are just: Jesus taught us that we must love our enemies, and the book of Genesis teaches that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, which is the ultimate source (in Christian theology) of human dignity, a dignity that is by definition universal, not relative. Perhaps it is for this reason that concepts of human rights evolved principally in Western civilization, rooted as it was in a Christian world-view.

each individual through his or her choices, and as a consequence the demands of that nature (and the possibilities for suffering) can be as varied as the individuals considered. It is not a surprise, then, that Jean-Paul Sartre, a key existentialist philosopher, noted that “hell is other people.”⁶ Why? Because the demands of their happiness may easily become the source of my suffering, simply because our existential natures differ and, because those natures never become fixed, continue to risk to differ sometime in the future.

Other philosophies do not necessarily deny the existence of a universal human nature, but do deny that it contains any spiritual component. Materialist philosophies fall into this category, for which life is merely a certain pattern of chemical organization (albeit complex) and for which mental activity is merely a matter of brain structure and chemistry. With such a set of assumptions, suffering is strictly a material problem, and

Non-religious philosophies of human nature: type #2

- ✓ *Yes, there is such a thing as human nature*
- ✗ *No spiritual component*
- ✗ *No religious dimension*

An example of a philosophy in this category:

Materialism

salvation from suffering is theoretically possible by material means. Certainly there is an understanding that physiological suffering can be relieved by either satisfying the underlying need (such as supplying food where there is hunger) or by supplying painkillers where the cause of pain cannot be removed. Psychological pain is treated the same way, with an almost-religious belief in the efficacy of therapy or, when therapy looks unavailable or difficult, through the use of mood-altering substances (legal or illegal). Where materialist philosophies tend to stumble is when they face the question of the meaning of life in the face of death. Even if it were possible to prevent and reverse aging, even if it were possible to cure every illness, prevent every murder, stop every accident, and resist every material threat, the threat of death would still exist as something fight against, and which, in the event it were by some fluke to win, could never be conquered. The response of the philosophies to this situation varies. Some focus on the suffering in the face of death that is caused by fear.⁷ Other philosophies focus on the sense of meaning in life, proposing that meaning in life in the face of death can be found in being part of a social or ideological project that continues even after we are gone. Being part of the Communist Revolution or some other ideology, “giving your life in the fight for freedom”, making your mark in history, having lots of grandchildren, writing a book, founding a successful company and leaving it to others – all are proposed as possible solutions to the question of meaning. Ultimately, however, they tend to deny the place (and thereby risk denying the dignity) of the individual, who becomes merely a tool of history or of ideology, without meaning in himself or herself, except as part of a larger whole. And the sad thing is, each of these larger wholes is itself threatened. The grandchildren themselves will one day die, and their grandchildren will probably not remember you. Books get left on shelves,

⁶ JEAN PAUL SARTRE, from his play “No Exit”.

⁷ In Aldous Huxely’s *Brave New World*, children assist at the dying of terminal patients to desensitize them to death, thereby attenuating the possibility of suffering fear in the face of it; painless euthanasia is also available in the face of otherwise unconquerable suffering, with death thus appearing as a friend and even a saviour.

history is forgotten, and companies go bankrupt over time. Ideologies may present themselves as eternal solutions, but one can be forgiven for having doubts about their promises...I wonder how betrayed the true Communist believers must have felt once the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. And there is the saying that “the price of freedom is eternal vigilance,” showing that even this value is always threatened. A new materialist response emerging to the problem of meaning can be termed “ecological salvation”. In it, meaning in the face of death is found in the notion that the universe comprises a single web of existence, and in death all we are doing is going back to become one with the cosmos (possibly to be reincarnated as another living thing, animal or human, at some point). Apart from the vaguely mythological nature of this idea, the simple fact is that there is no guarantee that the universe itself is eternal. Even the universe may one day end. So materialist philosophies retain their difficulties in coming to a complete solution.

Certain philosophies have tried to take into account a spiritual component of human nature, without necessarily having recourse to religion. Plato, for example, believed in both the existence and immortality of a spiritual soul.⁸ There is some debate in the religious studies community about the status of Buddhism as a religion, given that it does not oblige any sort of belief in God, but does definitely have spiritual doctrines such as reincarnation. It is remarkable, in fact, how each approach, Platonic and Buddhist, resembles the other. Both see the source of suffering as material existence, both believe that reincarnation is a curse, and both propose a salvation outside of material existence (whether as part of Nirvana or existing amongst the ideal Forms). Aristotle believed in a spiritual component of the human person, even though he did not consider this soul to be immortal. Nevertheless, its spiritual functions needed to be taken into account in the quest for happiness. He considered knowledge, for example, to be a basic need that was part of human nature, albeit the spiritual part.

Christian theology and the “what” of suffering

In reply to these philosophical approaches, Christian theology seeks understanding by including faith in the equation. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes, it takes the whole gospel to

Non-religious philosophies of human nature: type #3

- ✓ *Yes, there is such a thing as human nature*
- ✓ *Yes, there is a spiritual component*
- ✗ *No religious dimension*

An example of a philosophy in this category:

Platonism

Christian perspective on human nature

- ✓ *Yes, there is such a thing as human nature*
- ✓ *Yes, there is a spiritual component*
- ✓ *Yes, there is a religious dimension*

⁸ C.f. PLATO, *Phaedo*.

respond to the problem of evil.⁹ In general, the definition we have proposed of suffering, that is to say, “the discomfort experienced by a living being when, for some reason, the existential requirements of its nature cannot be met”, is adequate. Christianity does have definite beliefs regarding human nature, however, and its existential requirements. The problem of death and the suffering in the face of death has always been of importance to Christians, particularly since its founder, Jesus Christ, died on a cross one Friday afternoon, but rose from the dead the Sunday later. With certain of their Jewish predecessors, particularly the Pharisees, Christians believed that all of the dead would one day be raised and be judged, and would thereby live forever. In the Resurrection of Christ, however, we see more than just a coming back to life in this regular earthly body. Christ definitely came back with a human body, he did not come back as a ghost: his body was somehow changed, elevated to a “glorified” state. It is the Christian belief that, through Jesus, God wishes to share this glory with every human being, and that, through faith in Jesus, we may one day join in this glory when the general resurrection of the dead occurs. In this glorified state, all the existential requirements of our human nature will be fulfilled.¹⁰ It should be noted that no other religion or philosophy takes this view of salvation from suffering. Even philosophies which believe in a spiritual component to human nature do not guarantee any kind of continued existence of our bodies, much less their glorification – at best, they promise we might come back as another living being, not as ourselves. Certain religions do promise a resurrection from the dead, most notably the Jewish and Muslim religions, but their understanding of how such a body might be “glorified” and have all the existential requirements of our human nature met, is very unclear. Certainly, there is a vague sense that “God will take care of it,” but only Christianity presents a picture, in Jesus’ resurrection, of *how* God will take care of it.

Remaining questions in the Christian response to the "what" of suffering

Even in the Resurrection, however, not all suffering seems to disappear. Alongside eternal salvation exists the possibility of eternal damnation, otherwise known as “going to Hell”. The exact nature of Hell has always been a particular concern for theology. It comes down to questions as simple as “Is Hell an actual place? Is there really fire in Hell?” St. Augustine proposed that there were, in fact, two kinds of suffering in Hell: the *poena sensus*, that is to say sensory pain, and the *poena damnatis*, or the pain that comes from being deprived from the friendship of God and the glory necessary for total existential salvation. The latter is, in fact, the more closely related to the nature of Hell, given that Satan and his fallen angels are supposed to also wind up “in Hell”: since they are beings of pure spirit, without bodies as part of their nature, physical pain has no meaning for them. In general, most Christian churches today agree that, whatever physical torment may or may not exist in Hell, it is nothing compared to the existential torment. To illustrate it further, one

⁹ From the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 309: “If God the Father almighty, the Creator of the ordered and good world, cares for all his creatures, why does evil exist? To this question, as pressing as it is unavoidable and as painful as it is mysterious, no quick answer will suffice. Only Christian faith as a whole constitutes the answer to this question.”

¹⁰ The Bible describes this poetically as “every tear will be wiped away” (Rev 21:4)

theological question that has sometimes been asked is, “Do those in Hell try to alleviate their sufferings by consoling each other, or do they participate in the tormenting of each other?” In fact, it is quite possible that neither occurs. The torment of Hell may simply consist in eternal isolation and hopeless loneliness, akin to the most severe clinical depression imaginable, only without end or even the possibility of its ending. In this situation, Hell is not “other people”, but rather quite the opposite: the loneliness of attempted (and failed) self-sufficiency. But what of those in Heaven? Another question that has been raised is: “Can those in Heaven truly be happy, knowing that there are those in Hell?” On the one extreme we have St. Thomas Aquinas, who replied that part of the joy of heaven was to contemplate the justice of God in sending some people to Hell.¹¹ On the other extreme, there are those who solve the problem simply by making Hell something non-eternal. The Seventh Day Adventists believe that, after a time of punishment after the final judgement, the souls of the damned will not exist forever, but will be utterly annihilated, thereby cutting short their suffering (almost like a spiritual “mercy killing”). The early theologian Origen proposed a theory called *apokatastasis*, which taught that Hell was temporary, and that all beings in Hell (including Satan and his fallen angels) continued to have a chance at repentance and would one day “learn their lesson” and be received into Heaven. This theory, however, was rejected by Pope Vigilius as well as the 5th Ecumenical Council, although variants of it crop up now and again. The mystery of eternal suffering continues to stimulate theological reflection, and it remains “ever-knowable”.

Another interesting issue raised by the problem of suffering is the question: can God suffer? In fact, the earliest known Christian heresy, known as *docetism*, revolved around this question. The early docetists freely acknowledged a belief in divinity of Jesus, that Jesus was God, but were repulsed by what Jesus had suffered on the cross. Surely, they reasoned, God could not have suffered in such a way! So the early docetists simply denied the humanity of Jesus. His human nature, for them, was merely an appearance, his suffering an illusion, demonstrated for our benefit, to be sure, but not something Jesus actually experienced subjectively. St. John, in the text of the Bible itself, replied to these docetists, by stating that “many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist”.¹² There have been other attempts to resolve the question of the suffering of Jesus, in some cases positing a separation between his human and divine natures, in other cases simply denying that he in fact ever suffered and died.¹³ Christianity cannot go that route, however, because belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus is at the very core of Christian belief. Even St. Paul taught that “if Christ is not raised then your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). Nevertheless, theological questions about the suffering of God still remain. St. Thomas Aquinas taught that there

¹¹ SUMMA THEOLOGICA, *Supplementum Tertiae Partis*, article 94, no. 3.

¹² 2 John 7

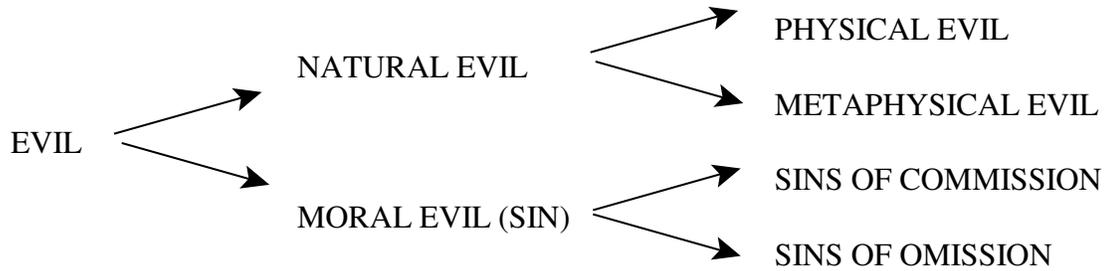
¹³ This latter belief is held by the Muslims, for example, who generally accept a “substitution” theory, that the person who actually died on the cross was not Jesus but a look-alike, while Jesus ascended undying into Heaven. The Muslims, of course, do not believe in the divinity of Jesus, but they do believe that he was the greatest prophet ever until Mohammed came along, and they find it hard to believe that God would allow someone so beloved by Him to suffer in such a grievous way.

is no passive potentiality in God, which would mean that God cannot change, because he is self-sufficient. However, our working definition of suffering is “the discomfort experienced by a living being when, for some reason, the existential requirements of its nature cannot be met”. Where is there room for a suffering God in this vision? Clearly, reflection on the possibility of the suffering of God therefore either challenges our notion of God, or our notion of suffering. Either way, the problem does not vanish with the wave of an intellectual wand. It continues to be a stimulus for theological reflection.

A final issue raised by the problem of suffering is the question: can the universe suffer? We do not normally think of inanimate objects (rocks, for example) as being able to suffer. And yet, the Christian vision of the renewal of the human person in the Resurrection is matched by a view that the whole universe will participate in this renewal. In the book of Revelation, St. John describes a “new heaven and a new earth.” (Rev 21:1) St. Paul taught that the “whole creation is groaning in pain, as we do awaiting the redemption of our bodies”, and that the universe would one day be set free “from its bondage to decay”. (Cf. Rom 8:19-23) In what sense can the universe be said to be “groaning in pain”? Again, it is related to our definition of suffering. If there is no purpose to the universe, if even its mere existence is ultimately meaningless, then certainly it cannot be said to be suffering. If, on the other hand, the universe does have a purpose, then the universe becomes, if not a living being, an existential being. This bondage to decay, then, becomes a barrier to the universe being able to meet the existential requirements of its nature, and therefore unable to achieve its end and purpose. In this sense, the universe can be said to “suffer” as it awaits its own completion. In Hegel’s philosophy, this inner conflict and even violence in the universe is an evolutionary process which inevitably allows for existential progress in the universe to an eventual state of perfection. It should be noted that modern physicists would disagree with this assessment, given the Law of Entropy (one of the laws of thermodynamics), which states that the universe as a whole tends to decay, not greater complexity. Of course, Hegel introduced a spiritual component into the universe, allowing for a kind of eventual “phase transition” to a higher level of existence for the universe (without actually explaining how this would occur). In Christian thought, this “salvation” of the universe does not come through a process in purely internal evolutionary development, but by the providence and intervention of God, who by his own power and glory “divinises” the whole universe. The glorified body of Jesus is already considered the “first fruits” of this process of the divinisation of matter.

The “how” of suffering

In considering the “how” of suffering, we are examining the origins of suffering. In general, things which are at the root of suffering are called “evils”. Traditional theodicy identifies two types of evil: natural evil, and moral evil. We must examine each in turn.¹⁴

*Natural evil*

Natural evil means those sources of suffering and pain which exist in the natural world, and arise as a consequence of natural processes. Because the word “evil” often has a moral connotation, natural evil is also often called “imperfections”. Generally, natural evil is in turn subdivided into *physical evil* and *metaphysical evil*. Physical evils include earthquakes, tornadoes, diseases (physical and psychological), meteor strikes that cause mass extinctions, and so on. Also included in physical evils are suffering caused by human beings that is not directly willed, either because it is accidental, or because it arises out of ignorance. Metaphysical evil is more subtle: it is a property of all created things (the only uncreated thing being God), in that, by being what they are, they are by definition limited. As a simple example, animal and vegetable organisms are highly dependent on their environment for continued existence as living things, although it is even more subtle than this: every created thing possesses some metaphysical evil simply because it does not possess every possible

¹⁴ An early philosophy Christianity had to contend with was Manicheanism, which taught that there were two basic principles in the world, good and evil, and that these were in a constant struggle (a notion similar to the eastern *yin* and *yang* concept). It is important to understand, however, that in traditional Christian theology, evil is not a “something” but a “lack of something”. Cold is not a “something,” but a “lack of something”: the lack of heat. Blindness is not a “something,” but a “lack of something”: the lack of sight.

If evil is defined by a “lack of something,” goodness in turn consists in an accumulation of positive qualities called “perfections”. The ability to see would be such a perfection, although the most basic perfection is simple existence: it is better to exist than to not exist, i.e. to “lack” existence. Curiously, this implies that the Devil himself is not entirely evil: he still possesses the perfection of existence itself. The tragedy of the Devil (as well every other being in Hell) is that they have become self-corrupted on a moral and spiritual level and therefore, while they do still exist, they are incapable of attaining their ultimate perfection.

The ultimate good is, of course, to be found in God Himself, because He possesses every possible perfection. Christians do not believe that we can become other gods, but the Christian understanding of divinisation does mean that our ultimate destiny is to grow without ceasing from one perfection to the next, ever becoming more and more like God.

perfection. Only God does not have metaphysical evil as part of his nature, because he is the only being who is absolutely and utterly perfect, and whose very essence is his existence (i.e. he is the only non-contingent being, the only being whose existence does not depend on something outside himself).

Moral evil

Moral evil means evil which is directly willed as a deviation from the moral order. Only intelligent beings capable of acts of free will (i.e. human beings, or fallen angels) are capable of being a source of moral evil. Another name for moral evil is *sin*, and individual acts of moral evil are called *sins*. There are two kinds of sins: *sins of commission*, which are things we do which act contrary to the moral order (such as the deliberate killing of an innocent person), and *sins of omission*, which are things we fail to do which the moral order otherwise requires (such as not taking proper care of a helpless person, to the point that he or she is seriously harmed or dies).¹⁵

“The devil made me do it”

The Bible affirms several times that evil spirits exist, and that their evil activity can affect human beings (and even lead us on a path to evil ourselves). These evil spirits are angels, originally created good by God, but who became evil through their own choice (hence, they are often called “fallen angels”). They remain intelligent (albeit with an intelligence that functions differently from human intelligence), and continue to possess whatever preternatural powers they had before their fall from grace.

In his sermon “The Powers of Nature,” John Henry Newman reminded his listeners of the ancient doctrine that the universe operates under the governance of the angels:

I do not pretend to say, that we are told in Scripture what Matter is; but I affirm, that as our souls move our bodies, be our bodies what they may, so there are Spiritual Intelligences which move those wonderful and vast portions of the natural world which seem to be inanimate.

Newman is referring, however, to good angels. It is unknown to what extent fallen angels have control over the physical universe. The Bible does contain dramatic descriptions of the healing of certain diseases, healings which came about by expelling demons (in addition to performing miracle cures). The jury is still out on how precisely to interpret these passages, however.

While fallen angels would seem to be able to cause some physical evils, and are themselves

¹⁵ It should be noted that traditional moral theology recognizes that natural evil and moral evil can overlap. Sin can therefore also be divided into lesser, or *venial* sin, and grave, or *mortal* sin. It is possible to commit a sin which is objectively very serious, but we honestly did not realise how serious it really was, or perhaps we were under tremendous psychological pressures such that a genuine free will choice was not possible. In such cases, the sin can only be venial, even if the consequences were atrocious. In order for a sin to truly be a mortal sin, it requires (1) objectively grave matter, (2) full knowledge of the gravity of the choice, and (3) an act of free will involving full consent.

able to sin, we must realise that they are unable to cause (in the strictest sense) moral evil in others. Moral evil, for it to be moral evil, must be directly willed, so if it were ever really true that “the devil made me do it”, then those actions would not be sins (or at least, not our sins)! Even if a person is possessed, any evil actions he or she may accomplish while under the effects of total possession are only natural evils (no matter how heinous they may seem). It has been said that this is why the demons prefer to act by means of temptation, rather than more dramatic forms of intervention (like possession): because they want to destroy us morally, much more than to destroy us physically.

The “why” of suffering

In the secular concept, there is no real meaning to suffering *per se*, only applications of suffering to particular situations for the sake of some greater good. The suffering of children described by Ivan Karamazov remains absurd, but there is (for example) a general sense that criminals can be made to suffer for their crimes. Is the purpose the reform of the individual? Is it to exact some form of satisfaction of justice, or to control the revenge motive? The exact purpose of this form of imposed suffering is still debated, but it is generally not considered absurd in itself.¹⁶

When theology begins to consider the question of the “why” of suffering, it finds itself facing a much more difficult problem. Secular ideologies do not pretend to offer solutions to suffering which are either all-good or all-powerful, although some believe that even these might one day be attainable (through technology, through economic progress, etc.); still, they are not there yet. Religion, on the other hand, is immediately confronted with the problem statement we have already seen. Unless we are willing to go the route of approaches #1 or #3, a theological approach to suffering can’t just ask why this or that form of suffering exists, but has to wonder: why does God allow any suffering at all?

A failed response

As we saw above, there is a common acceptance that suffering is “ok” if it is a form of just punishment, such as a criminal punished for his or her crimes. A common response of people of faith, then, when faced with their own suffering, is: “God must be exacting punishment.” In theory this is possible in particular circumstances, but it can lead to tragic situations when misapplied.

Take, for example, the following situation. “Bless me Father,” the woman began. One could not tell who it was behind the screen of the confessional, but she was obviously very nervous. “I have a problem,” she continued. “I don’t know my sin that I did, but whatever it was I want to confess it and ask God’s forgiveness.” Right away we know that this is not really a confession, but

¹⁶ It should be pointed out that this sort of analysis can quickly become warped, especially when divorced from a concept of objective justice rooted in human nature. “Doing evil for a good end” can quickly lead to atrocities of the worst sort (I think here of Stalin’s murder of millions of property owners, called *kulaks*, for the sake of the Communist Revolution).

a moment of pastoral counselling. “If you can’t think of your sin, what makes you think you even committed one?” asks the priest. “Well, I just became a mother recently, but my baby seemed a bit slow and odd, and even now still doesn’t talk. We took him in for testing, and now they tell us he might be autistic. I have been racking my brains trying to figure out what I did to offend God so that he’d punish us like this, but I just want to tell God I’m sorry for whatever it is.” By now the woman is sobbing. “I’m really, really sorry.”

How does one answer this? It is Ivan Karamazov’s protest, all over again. Can it really be that God is punishing her, through her child? Or has she simply transferred certain human expectations onto a situation not designed to be analysed that way? If so, she is in good company, as we will now see.

Biblical approaches to the problem of suffering

It is not my intention here to try and “solve” the problem of suffering, but rather to offer certain paths of reflection regarding the Christian conception of suffering. The Bible itself has much to offer as reflections regarding suffering, and we can even see an evolution in the theology of suffering contained there.

The earliest Hebrew concept for the origin of suffering was that all suffering was a punishment for sin, and this punishment carried itself down through the generations. The book of Deuteronomy contains this passage:

I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishments for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation. (Deut 5: 9).

Later, however, this concept was to evolve. The book of the prophet Ezekiel records this passage:

Only the one who sins shall die. The son shall not be charged with the guilt of his father, nor shall the father be charged with the guilt of his son. The virtuous man's virtue shall be his own, as the wicked man's wickedness shall be his own. (Ez 18: 20)

We see a concept of personal responsibility for sin starting to emerge, rather than a more tribal notion. Nevertheless, suffering is still considered a punishment for sin, and often we see (such as in the book of Proverbs) statements that demonstrate an opposite belief: that good fortune is a reward for virtue.

Jesus, in his teaching, definitely did retain the notion that punishments exist for sin, and he repeatedly warned people about the possibility of eternal punishment in Hell. He also challenged the notion that wealth automatically meant that one was favoured by God. He taught both concepts very clearly in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man:

There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of

sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' (Luke 18: 19-26).

Nevertheless, Jesus did challenge some of the contemporary notions about suffering being necessarily a punishment for sin. Jesus made a reference to this when discussing a well-known accident that had occurred:

Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No. (Luke 13: 4-5a)

The most dramatic development of this doctrine came, however, which Jesus curing the man born blind:

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9: 1-2)

We need to understand the conundrum. Suffering was considered a punishment for sin, but this man was *born* blind. How could he have possibly merited being blind as a form of punishment for sin? Behind it all is the question: is God unjust? Jesus stakes new ground with his answer:

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him." (John 9: 3)

In other words, the blindness of the man is not a result of sin, but has a purpose. This is part of the great insight of the teaching of Jesus: suffering is only absurd when it is utterly without purpose.

Christian theology has never looked back. The suffering of Jesus on the cross was for a reason: the salvation of the world. And in this context, even our sufferings can take on meaning. St. Paul wrote:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. (Col 1: 24)

Imagine being able to rejoice in sufferings! It is a sign of total inner fearlessness and freedom.

The key notion to retain is that all suffering is symptomatic: it reveals something, just like

the symptoms of disease reveal the presence of the underlying cause of the symptoms. Disease symptoms, while unpleasant, are good, in that they reveal something that is otherwise hidden. Suffering acts the same way. **All suffering contains a gift**, and our job is to discover that gift. It may be a gift for us, it may be a gift for others, but it is there nevertheless.¹⁷

Christianity, therefore, believes in *redemptive suffering*. True, eventually a new world will emerge in which all evil has been conquered, but in the meantime suffering itself is transformed into a means to defeat evil. The one thing required for this to succeed, is love. It is not the intensity of the pain, or the duration of the suffering, that makes the difference: it is that we are willing to live it, to experience and endure it, out of love for God, for our neighbour, and even for ourselves. The suffering of others is a call to a greater and greater compassion, which Jesus taught was part of the essence of God himself, and he taught his disciples to “be compassionate as your Father is compassionate” (Luke 6: 36). And the word “compassionate” literally means “to suffer with”.

A concluding story

Being a university teacher means that I possess an advanced degree in my subject, and I have always enjoyed thinking and speaking and writing on the subject of theology. I enjoy the gift of intelligence that I have been given. This, however, did mean that at one point in my life I had a particular horror of the idea of one day suffering from some sort of dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease. But once in prayer, I felt a strange communication in my soul, as though God were asking me something. To my dismay, the question was: "If in my plan of salvation for the world it was necessary for you to come down with Alzheimer's disease, would you accept it?" As you can imagine, I asked for more details! I felt the following scenario form in my mind: "Suppose there was an orderly working in an elder care hostel, the one you would be sent to if you came down with Alzheimers. Suppose it was only in caring for you, perhaps only after many months, that he would be able to somehow turn his life around and achieve salvation. Would you accept the disease in order to help him find his salvation?" My answer is my business, of course, but I can say that it showed me a whole new dimension of the mystery of the Cross: that this scenario somehow mysteriously parallels what Jesus lived, in that somehow his suffering and death were meant to save us. And I can say this: today I measure the strength of my spiritual life partly by my readiness to answer exactly this kind of call.

¹⁷ There is actually a school of psychology, called *logotherapy*, that is founded on this principle. It was begun by Dr. Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist who survived being interned in Auschwitz during World War II. While imprisoned there he paid close attention to the reactions and behaviours of those in the camp, who of course were living in conditions of incredible suffering. He found that the capacity to psychologically survive the conditions of the camp depended on the depth of a person's meaning in life -- and in particular, in his capacity to find meaning even in his suffering. (Cf. VIKTOR E. FRANKL, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Beacon Press, 1984.)

Theology and History

“History” is a uniquely human concept. While we do sometimes speak of “natural history” or the “history of nature,” we need to recognize that “nature” is not something that reflects on itself. While it is interesting to investigate fossils and see what species of animals existed millions of years ago, or to investigate the universe with our telescopes to see how stars and galaxies are born and die, it is important to note that it is humans that are doing this observation and reflection. While some higher animals seem to have a sense of the passage of time, only humans clearly have a sense of history, i.e. that there has been a profound past, and that there is a tendency towards a future. This “sense of history” has found its expression in art, in philosophy, and in religion, and helps shape the basic assumptions upon which human culture is built.

The study of history can exist on many levels. It can be the study of particular historical events and persons, simply to provide an accurate record and answer the questions “what *really* happened?” and “who was this person really?”. Eventually, however, the “what” and “who” questions lead to the greater question of “why?” Why did certain events occur? Was it simply the result of the convergence of a set of factors and circumstances? Or are there patterns and forces to history? Once we arrive at these sorts of question we are no longer looking at individual historical events, but are now examining history *as such*. This has been called the “philosophy of history,” in order to distinguish it from the more event-based “historical studies”. Often the word history then takes on a capital-H, to distinguish *history-as-such* from the sum of the events of history, and we will follow this convention for the rest of this set of lecture notes.

Why is history important?

There is an old proverb: “Those who do not study the mistakes of the past are bound to repeat them.” At the very least, then, we should study historical events simply to grow in wisdom and knowledge in how to proceed (and not to proceed) in our own day and age. But what of the study of History as such? Why should we undertake this?

The first reason is the *question of control*. If behind the sum of historical events there is a clear pattern, then knowing that pattern would offer a society a powerful tool to shape its destiny. This has been attempted many times, for example, in the financial world, where (with regards to the stock market) it has given rise to a field called “technical analysis”. Normally one should invest in

a company only after a careful investigation of the company products and management, and in theory the financial performance of a company should be based on these sorts of factors. If that is the case, then the overall performance of the stock market is really nothing else than the total of the performance of all the stocks listed on the stock market. But what if there is more to it than this? What if the market, *as a market*, is greater than the sum of its parts? What if it has its own laws and dynamics, *as a market*? “Technical analysis” is an attempt to find those laws and dynamics, and use them to try and help build a superior investment strategy that has less of a need for the in-depth investigation of hundreds of individual investment opportunities. Now the stock market is like a “mini-society,” in which the individual members are stocks. What of real societies? Again, there is a question of control. If the leaders and shapers of a society were able to discover the “laws and dynamics of History,” then again they would have an important tool to plan the overall direction of that society, abstracted from its individual members. They would become “masters of culture” for that society.

The second reason History is important is the *question of meaning*. The question of control touches more on the elites of the society, while the question of meaning touches on the individual members of the society. Individual human beings, to the extent they are rational, ask themselves questions like “who am I,” “where did I come from,” “what is my place in this society I am a part of,” and “where am I going with my life”. Human beings tend to want to make their life choices as a function of some future value. But which future values are going to be really “worth it”? Notice that these are questions with a historical dimension, covering past, present and future! Our vision, therefore, of how History works will also shape our action in the world; indeed, it will help shape the very meaning we give to our lives.

History and Christianity

The study of History is of particular importance to Christianity, because Christianity is what is called a “historical religion”: it is religion that claims to root itself in historical facts and events. Not every religion does this. Many Eastern religions, for example, communicate their fundamental truths through the vehicles of story and myth -- whether or not the events actually happened is not as important as the lessons to be drawn from the story as told.¹⁸ Now the Bible can (and does) contain poetry, stories and legends, but it also contains historical works, especially in the New Testament. More than just recording the historical events, however, is the belief that these historical events matter: God doesn’t just sit above historical events, but has *intervened* in history (getting his hands dirty, in a sense, in human history). These events and “deeds of power” themselves are just as important as the lessons to be drawn from them.

Which books of the Bible are to be read historically and which aren’t has been a question of

¹⁸ A good example of this is the story of the Bhagavad-Gita, which tells of the discussion between the blue-skinned Krishna and his friend Prince Arjuna just prior to an important battle. Was there ever such a dialogue? For many Hindus the question is really immaterial, as what is more important are the “eternal truths” the story communicates.

Another example is the prevalence of creation myths in different societies. Of course, nobody was around to witness these original creations, except the “gods” themselves.

some debate. For example, are the creation accounts in Genesis to be read as history, or as myth? What about the story of Job, or the prophet Jonah? Some scholars go even further, calling into question the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, or even openly discounting the accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus.¹⁹ Even some of the controversy over the 2004 film “The Passion of the Christ” provides a good example. One objection to the film is that it does not show very much of the teaching of Jesus, but simply the last 12 hours of his life and what he was subjected to in those last 12 hours. Often the response to this objection is that the purpose of the film was not to show what Jesus came to *teach* us, but what he came to *do* for us. Do you hear the distinction between the two approaches to the film? The latter position focusses on the historical event as something important in itself, while the former tends to abstract away from the historical event as such and seek the “lesson in the myth” as the thing that is most important.

There have been attempts in the past to “mythologize” Christianity, sometimes by denying the historical events that it is based on, but more often simply by discounting the importance of the events themselves in favour of the “lessons to be learned”. Christianity remains, however, a stubbornly historical religion. Was Jesus actually conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was he actually born of a virgin? Did Jesus actually suffer under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and die on a cross? Did he actually rise from the dead on the third day, and ascend into heaven as King of the universe? Will he actually come again in glory one day to judge the living and the dead, with all the authority of God? It is simply not possible to deny these events and be in communion with the belief of Christians throughout history. And if they are true, then it begs the questions: What difference does this make for the world? What difference does it make for me?²⁰

Regarding the “question of control” and the “question of meaning” that have been described earlier, Christianity unites these two questions and provides an answer through the concept of *God’s loving providence*. Christianity does believe that there is an ultimate motor to history beyond the sum of the choices that human being make -- and that motor is God himself, who has created the universe and actively guides its development out of loving concern. But it is more than a question of control, it is also a question of meaning: this development has an end, which is the glorification of God through a participation by his creation in His essence of love. Christianity therefore proclaims God as the “Lord of History,” and finds in this belief the very meaning of existence, both human existence and the existence of the whole universe.

¹⁹ Bishop John Selby Spong, an Episcopalian bishop, has written books and articles on this topic. He claims that by denying the literal resurrection of the body of Jesus he is “saving the Bible” from fundamentalists. His view is greatly in the minority, however.

²⁰ I am of the opinion that one of the reasons that Christianity has often been in such strenuous conflict with the various ideologies is because it is rooted in history and the interpretation of that history. Ideologies often have their own ways of interpreting history, ways which leave little room for the events of Christianity (except, perhaps, as pious myths). The stubborn proclamation of these events as things which *actually happened* or *actually will happen* is very often a thorn a side in the side of ideology, which cannot incorporate those events into its world-view without, in fact, becoming Christian itself.

Theories of History

It is fine to simply declare what the overall Christian perspective is regarding History, but we must recall that theology involves the constant interaction between religion and culture, and it is not a given that culture and religion will simply agree on a common vision of History. The philosophical theories of History can be essentially divided into 3 broad categories, with each individual theory either falling squarely into one category or borrowing and merging attributes from two or more categories.

Category #1: the cyclical view of History

One of the earliest views of History is the cyclical view. The patterns of nature are themselves often cyclical: the passage from day into night, and back into day; the changing of the seasons year after year, not just in terms of weather and temperature but in the patterns of plant and animal life; and even the pattern of birth and death, in which beings who are themselves going to die reproduce themselves and perpetuate life despite that threat of death.

These experiences of cycles of nature create patterns of thought in the human imagination, such that early humans seem to have often simply assumed that cyclical patterns underlie all movements of History. Sometimes these cycles are seen as themselves containing the meaning of existence, an assumption found (for example) in the Walt Disney film “The Lion King” and its song, “The Circle of Life”. On the other hand, sometimes these cycles were seen as ultimately harmful, with the goal of human existence to break out of the cycles somehow. The Hindu and Buddhist theories of reincarnation, for example, do not portray reincarnation as a good thing: ultimately the goal of human existence is to break out of the cycle and attain Nirvana.

On the philosophical side, the Greek philosopher Plato subscribed to a cyclical view of human history especially in his doctrine on the transmigration of souls, something similar to the Hindu and Buddhist doctrines (although rooted in philosophy, not religious myth). The cyclical view is also popular among modern scientists as they propose theories of the cosmos, because if the universe is cyclical then it is possible for the universe to be eternal as well. Take, for example, the question of the Big Bang. Many scientists believe that while the universe began with a Big Bang, ultimately all matter will fall back together in a “Big Crunch,” to be followed by another Big Bang & Big Crunch, etc. etc. throughout history. This is simply a cyclical view of natural history, and one that conveniently avoids certain tough questions. For example, what if there is no pattern of Big Crunches? It then begs the question, “What happened before the Big Bang? What caused it?” Suddenly we are in an area what sounds very much like religion.²¹

²¹ Recent astronomical observations have indicated that the expansion of the universe is not slowing down for an eventual Big Crunch, but in fact is accelerating! It is amazing to note how some scientists are now scrambling to find alternative theories that preserve the concept of an eternal universe even if this universe we live in had a definite starting point. In one such theory, our universe is simply a random fluctuation, a “bubble” in a much larger eternal meta-universe that we cannot see or experience. Perhaps, but given that there is no way to prove this we can only accept this notion on faith, which makes the theory sound less like a true scientific theory and more like a “myth” expressed in scientific language.

With regards to human history, particularly the history of culture and civilization, the cyclical view was popularized by Arnold Toynbee in his work *Study of History*. It was on a train ride across Thrace in 1921 that he began to reflect on the civilizations of human history, and what had happened to them. He began to jot down some reflections of a sheet of notepaper, and wrote his last page 30 years later. His work was an attempt to discover where we stand as a Western civilization, and where we are going. Toynbee identified 27 civilizations in his study, and as he studied them he discovered clear, consistent patterns for the birth, growth, maturity, decline, disintegration and death of civilizations.

A “primitive society” is confronted by challenge and responds heroically and creatively. It is led out of its primitive condition by a “creative minority” of individuals and becomes a bright, thriving civilization. But the “creative minority” soon loses its vitality and turns into a “dominant minority” that refuses to release its cherished power. Internal power struggles begin as the disintegrating civilization fragments; it is bound together less and less by common values and shared visions. It sinks into a “time of troubles” and becomes vulnerable to dissolving forces from within and without. It unifies briefly into a “universal state”; but it has no vital, creative resources left, and it dies. But from death there is a resurrection. From its ashes there arises, Phoenix-like, a second-generation civilization that carries on the great insights and values of the now-dead society.²²

While his theory has been criticized, for Toynbee these patterns were unmistakable and real, not simply subjective. Many people have wondered: are these identified patterns inexorable? Or can we break out of them, and attain to a civilization that will not collapse and die like the others? The very questions themselves show the Toynbee model, for all its modern scientific language, to be another form of the cyclical view of history.

Category #2: The indeterminist view of History

The cyclical view represents one view of History that has captured human imagination, especially since it implies that there are patterns and laws to History that can be discovered and “used”. The indeterminist view of History takes the opposite view, even with regards to natural history and the laws of nature. This view has been famously expressed by the scientist and philosopher Karl Popper in his concept of an “open universe”. Popper believes that the laws of nature, which he believes are not “self-contained”: new information continues to flow into the universe, such that certain elements of fundamental physical behaviour are essentially random. There are no real patterns, therefore, to natural history, because the physical laws themselves leave room for some indeterminate “openness”.

Beyond these principles of physical laws, however, Popper developed indeterminism into a critique of social and political thought. The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* summarizes this critique as follows:

²² JAMES L. CHRISTIAN, *Philosophy: an Introduction to the Art of Wondering*, 4th ed., pp. 291-292.

[Popper] developed a deep and abiding interest in social and political philosophy. However, it is worth emphasising that his angle of approach to these fields is through a consideration of the nature of the social sciences which seek to describe and explicate them systematically, particularly history. It is in this context that he offers an account of the nature of scientific prediction, which in turn allows him a point of departure for his attack upon totalitarianism and all its intellectual supports, especially holism and historicism. In this context holism is to be understood as the view that human social groupings are greater than the sum of their members, that such groupings are “organic” entities in their own right, that they act on their human members and shape their destinies, and that they are subject to their own independent laws of development. Historicism, which is closely associated with holism, is the belief that history develops inexorably and necessarily according to certain principles or rules towards a determinate end (as for example in the dialectic of Hegel, which was adopted and implemented by Marx). The link between holism and historicism is that the holist believes that individuals are essentially formed by the social groupings to which they belong, while the historicist - who is usually also a holist - holds that we can understand such a social grouping only in terms of the internal principles which determine its development.

These beliefs lead to what Popper calls “The Historicist Doctrine of the Social Sciences”, the views (a) that the principal task of the social sciences is to make predictions about the social and political development of man, and (b) that the task of politics, once the key predictions have been made, is, in Marx's words, to lessen the “birth pangs” of future social and political developments. Popper thinks that this view of the social sciences is both theoretically misconceived (in the sense of being based upon a view of natural science and its methodology which is totally wrong), and socially dangerous, as it leads inevitably to totalitarianism and authoritarianism - to centralised governmental control of the individual and the attempted imposition of large-scale social planning. Against this Popper strongly advances the view that any human social grouping is no more (or less) than the sum of its individual members, that what happens in history is the (largely unplanned and unforeseeable) result of the actions of such individuals, and that large scale social planning to an antecedently conceived blueprint is inherently misconceived - and inevitably disastrous - precisely because human actions have consequences which cannot be foreseen. Popper, then, is an historical *indeterminist*, insofar as he holds that history does not evolve in accordance with intrinsic laws or principles, that in the absence of such laws and principles unconditional prediction in the social sciences is an impossibility, and that there is no such thing as historical necessity.²³

Category #3: The teleological view of History

The Greek word “telos” means “end,” not the sense of the finishing of something, but in the sense of a goal or something toward which we tend (e.g. as in the expression “the ends justify the

²³ STEPHEN THORNTON, "Karl Popper", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2002 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2002/entries/popper/>>.

means”). The teleological view of History is different from the indeterminist view in that it does believe that there is a definite pattern to History. It differs from the cyclical view, however, in that it also believes that this pattern is evolutionary, so that what will come in the future will in fact be different from what went on in the past. History, in other words, tends to some sort of perfection. Whether or not it is meant to ever actually attain this perfection depends on the theory being considered, however -- sometimes it is simply meant to be a concept of eternal progress, with no end in sight, but constant growth nonetheless.

Teleological views of History have not been historically very popular, simply because our most obvious human experience seems to be that humanity is not always moving forward from one perfection to another. How could a period of bitter warfare be seen as a perfection, for example, over the time of peace that came before? With the advent of the philosopher Friedrich Hegel, however, a new teleological view was put forward that seemed to take into account the backsliding of humanity but which nevertheless allowed for progress. The key was his theory of the “dialectic”: a particular principle (called the thesis) encounters an opposed principle (the antithesis), and out of their confrontation comes a new and superior synthesis. Even violence, then, can be a source of a greater perfection -- a concept adopted by Darwin in his theory of evolution, driven by the concept of the “survival of the fittest”.

Regarding the purpose of the dialectic,

Hegel was quite sure that this is the way God’s mind works. God is pure thought, or, in Hegel’s words, the Absolute Mind. Here is no love or compassion (no emotion), just pure thought. The Absolute Mind of God manifests reason through the mind of man and therefore in human history. Whenever men think and act more rationally they are actualizing God’s will, and this progressive manifestation of logic is the teleological purpose underlying human history...All this would end in a state Hegel described as “pure thought thinking about pure thought” -- Absolute Mind contemplating itself.²⁴

All of History, therefore, is the process by which God comes to contemplate and understand himself, and the dialectic, even with its possible violence, is a tool for God to come to this self-understanding.

This vision of the dialectic as the engine of History was adopted by Karl Marx, who used it to interpret the economic and political struggles between classes in society. He used it to develop the theory of Communism, whose promised goal is a so-called “classless society” in which equality, justice and plenty will prevail. What is interesting to note is that Marx was an atheist. While Hegel originally proposed his theory with God in mind, Marx adapted it to a godless viewpoint -- and promised, in effect, that he had found a way to create a perfect world without reference to God at all. His vision was incredibly attractive, especially since it seemed to be rooted in scientifically derived “laws of History” that promised a positive outcome and which offered a sense of meaning and

²⁴ JAMES L. CHRISTIAN, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

purpose to people's lives: participation in the "class struggle" became a defining feature for many.²⁵

Towards a Christian theology of History

As mentioned in a previous section, Christianity is a historical religion and therefore cannot be neutral in the debates about which view of History is correct. It is not an accident, for example, that one of the greatest Christian theologians -- St. Augustine -- was also one of the first philosophers of history, his major work in this area being *The City of God*. But what does Christianity think of these 3 types of views about History?

The Bible does contain certain nods to the cyclical view of History, such as this passage from Ecclesiastes:

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.²⁶

The Old Testament also seems to present a cyclical view of the relationship between Israel and God. The Israelites do something evil in the sight of God. God's anger blazes against them, and they are given over to the power of some enemy. The people then repent, and God raises up a saviour for them. Finally peace reigns, not only in the land, but between God and his people. This pattern repeats itself over and over again in Old Testament history.

The Bible is also compatible with some elements of the indeterminist view of History, especially in the respect it shows for human free will. People are responsible for their own sin, and

²⁵ Including, I might add, some of my relatives, who were proud Communists during the time of Cold War, even choosing to live behind the Iron Curtain. As my grandmother (who was a staunch Christian woman) put it, "They were looking for hope in a world full of despair, and thought they found it in Communism". Millions shared their opinion.

²⁶ Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8. The book of Ecclesiastes is also sometimes known as the book of Qoheleth. And yes, this passage was the inspiration for the popular song "Turn, Turn, Turn" by the Byrds

the sins (and virtues) of the moment do determine particular events. God himself, however, is never considered to be subject to indeterminist forces -- he determines his own will freely and perfectly -- and so his will ultimately reigns supreme. What becomes hard, then, is trying to figure out the relationship between the Divine Will and individual human free will. Can the two co-exist? Can human beings, for example, “thwart” God’s will? Different answers have been proposed. On the one extreme is the theory of “double predestination”, which holds that ultimately we are not free and that God has already predetermined which human beings are to go to Heaven -- and which are going to Hell. On the other extreme is the theory of “open theism” which holds that God’s will is not perfect and immutable, but can change over time and can even be thwarted. The truth likely lies somewhere in the middle, and many theologians have taken up the task of trying to find a solution which holds the two elements -- Divine Will and human free will -- as each fully present.

Most importantly, however, the Bible is strongly teleological in character, especially in the Christian view. Christians believe that Jesus will one day come again “on the clouds of heaven” to judge the living and the dead and inaugurate the Reign of God over all humanity (and, indeed, over the whole universe). All human history tends, in essence, towards this point. It should be pointed out, however, that this teleological view is different from those of Hegel and Marx in one important respect. In those views, the teleology of History is driven by inexorable laws built into History, i.e. the “law of the dialectic”. In the Christian vision, however, the Second Coming is not subject to some law, but solely to the will and initiative of God. It could, in theory, come at any time. Our job is to “stay watchful,” for “we do not know the hour when the Lord is coming” (Cf. Matthew 24:42).

Christian theology, then, offers the elements of a vision for interpreting History in all its modes: past, present, and future.

Interpreting the past: the concept of “salvation history”

The Old Testament is a religious work, but it fundamentally concerns a single people: the Hebrews, also known as Jews. What is important to remember, however, is that the *story* of this people records direct interventions by God in history. Judaism is, in a sense, the very first historical religion, and Christianity is based upon it. Looking back on the past history of this people, then, the theologian will tend to interpret it in view of these “historical events of salvation”. It isn’t this battle or the rise of this king or empire that is important, but rather it is the actions of God to save his people. The term “salvation history” expresses this reality: that the key to interpreting History is the actions of God for salvation.

Christianity takes this concept of salvation history and expands it from a Jewish-only context into a universal concept. While the Old Testament vision does seem to contain a repeating cycle of salvation (as we have already seen), the New Testament expands this vision into one giant cycle of salvation which encompasses all of history and which therefore does not need to be repeated. The “original sin” was committed by Adam, the definitive Saviour is Jesus, the Son of God, and the definitive salvific act is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The cycle in its most all-encompassing form has been accomplished. The Resurrection of Jesus is not simply the cycle starting over, it is something new, in that Jesus has risen in a “glorified” body which pre-figures the total renewal of all of creation. The sending the Holy Spirit by Jesus at Pentecost is not just a happy event of the

past: it is the inauguration of a new episode of History, in which something new has happened, and a new motor for History has appeared: the Holy Spirit himself, whose action in the world (and especially in the Church as a historical reality) will cause human history to advance to its ultimate conclusion. The “Jesus-event” is considered by Christians to be the fulcrum around which all History turns, human history and even natural history. The fact that History is now under the definitive influence of the Holy Spirit explains one of the titles sometimes given to Jesus: “the Lord of History”.

Interpreting the present: reading the “signs of the times”

The fact that God’s providence is put into practical effect by the presence of the Holy Spirit in history gives rise to the question: how are we to see the action of the Holy Spirit in our day and age? Obviously it is possible for the Holy Spirit to intervene directly by, for example, inspiring someone with a prophetic message or calling them to some sort of prophetic action. But the Holy Spirit is not limited to such action, and it is part of the Christian understanding that, if the Holy Spirit really is the new motor of History, then part of his action is in helping to determine some of the cultural patterns of the day. These divinely-guided cultural patterns are called the “signs of the times,” that is to say, the signs of the activity of the Holy Spirit in our present age. The job of the Church within culture then becomes to detect and promote those cultural patterns which it believes are indicators from the Holy Spirit of God’s active providence.

How does the Church go about detecting these “signs of the times”? Generally this starts with an investigation of what makes our current historical age unique. If the Holy Spirit really is guiding History, then each historical age should have something “new” to it that distinguishes it from all previous ages:

- Sometimes this “newness” is something compatible with the Christian gospel, in which case Christians are called upon to support and encourage it. An example of this is the development of human rights theory, which in general has resulted in a greater sense of the dignity of the human person.
- On the other hand, sometimes the “newness” is something with elements opposed to the Christian gospel, in which case Christians are called upon to refine their presentation of the gospel and to present it with greater clarity and profundity. An example of this is the Sexual Revolution, which has prompted Christianity to not just repeat past teaching but to develop a new way to look at sexuality as part of God’s goodness and generous plan of love for humanity.
- Sometimes this “newness” is a mixed bag, containing both good and evil elements. Economic progress holds great promise for reducing human suffering, for example, but only if the wealth produced is produced and distributed equitably and justly. Technological progress can also hold great promise to reduce suffering -- or it can increase it. Nuclear power, for example, can be used to produce electricity, or to produce bombs. When it is a

“mixed bag” the task of the Church is to help the world discern the good and the bad, by offering a penetrating critique of the issues at hand.

- Finally, this “newness” can be pointing to a development in the Church itself, usually to point out either an opportunity for spreading the gospel, or (more often) to point out an area of necessary internal reform. The ecumenical movement, which seeks to reduce and eventually eliminate the divisions between Christian churches, is often seen as a “sign of the times” calling the churches to greater fidelity to Jesus’ prayer “that all might be one”. The clergy shortage experienced by many churches has also been proposed as a “sign of the times” calling for greater internal reforms -- although what those reforms might be has been the subject of great debate internally in those churches.

Interpreting the future: awaiting the “parousia”

The term *parousia* refers to the ultimate manifestation of God on the so-called “Day of the Lord” at the end of time. Christians believe that on this Day Jesus will descend from heaven in a process some call the “Second Coming”. Christianity is fundamentally a faith that is “wait in joyful hope for the coming of the Saviour”. Curiously, however, the notion of the Second Coming does not always fill people with “joyful hope”. Sometimes it is quite the opposite -- it fills people with dread. It is important that we examine what this doctrine really means.

1. When Jesus comes at the Second Coming, the whole universe will be transformed. This teaching is well expressed in this passage from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans:

The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:18-23)

Jesus is God, with a divine nature united to his human nature. So while Jesus will come again as a man, it also means that he will come bringing with him the very presence of God. This presence of God will flood all reality, to the farthest stretch of the universe, and will elevate it to a new state. The Bible passage says it will be “set free from its bondage to decay”. This means that there will be no more disease or death, no more suffering or pain, no more entropy or decay. God’s glory and power, come to perfection in all creation, will prevent these things from ever happening again. The last reference in the passage, regarding the redemption of our bodies, is particularly significant, in that given our bodies are part of

the universe they will also participate in this transformation of the universe:

This perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:53-54)

From the Christian point of view, the pledge of this transformation is found in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Unlike the other persons Jesus himself raised from the dead, Jesus not only rose in his body but his body itself was transfigured. The physical matter sitting in the tomb became the first part of the material universe to experience this spiritual transformation.

2. The transformation of the universe will effect a general resurrection of all the dead. The life-giving power of God, now flooding the universe, will permit another promised reality to take place: the general resurrection of all the dead, Christian and non-Christian.

How does this general resurrection work? Christians believe that the natural origin of the soul is in union with a body, that is to say, we begin life as a soul in union with a body. Over time, however, this body will eventually wear out, and may cease being able to keep itself alive. Upon death the soul (which is immortal) then separates from the body, and the body eventually turns to dust. If you think about it, this is not a normal state for the soul, which up until this point has always been in association with a body. That being said, dust does not normally get back together and reconstitute itself into a body *as we know it* for the soul to once more have a home. But what about when the universe itself is transfigured? In such a case, even the dust is changed! Somehow, in this new state of matter, there will once again be a material element able to properly be in union with our soul, and it will be possible to truly be complete once again, with both a body and a soul.

If you are wondering what this new body will look and be like, you are in good company. The Corinthians in the early Church asked the same question (c.f. 1 Corinthians 15:35). He replied as follows:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the

perishable inherit the imperishable. Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:42-52)

Once again, the Resurrection of Jesus provides us with the template to understand our own resurrection:

Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15: 20-22)

Beyond this it is not really possible to say what the new body will be like, except to say that (similar to the transfigured body of Jesus after his Resurrection) it will have some identity with our current physical body while at the same time participating in the general transformation of the universe.

3. God's glorious omnipresence will mean that all evil will be expelled from the universe. Evil cannot co-exist with good, darkness cannot co-exist with light, and God is Good and God is light. If in this new universe "God is all in all," then all evil must disappear.

As mentioned earlier, the transformation of the universe will mean that all physical evils, such as disease and death, will cease. Spiritual evils, however, will also lose their power. Angels who through their own wicked choice became evil fallen angels will not be participating in this new creation, and will no longer have any dominion over the material world (or over us as part of that material world). As for human beings, any human being who has chosen to reject God and to live a life marked by selfishness, who has chosen the darkness rather than the light and who has not repented -- has not been willing to turn their back of their evil past to turn to a future with God -- such human beings will shrink before God's light as well. This is well summarized in this passage from the gospel of John:

This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God. (John 3: 19-21)

As shown in the passage, the exact mechanism by which evil (particularly moral evil) will be expelled from the universe is called "judgement". The Second Coming will include a general judgement of all moral beings. The term "moral beings" includes both angels and humans. This general judgement is vividly depicted in this passage from the book of Revelation:

The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:10-15)

The Bible teaches that the basis for this general judgement will not be race, or social class, or material success, but moral behaviour, particularly regarding the poor:

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25: 31-46)

In general it is nervousness about this general judgement that makes most people nervous about the Second Coming as a whole. While different Christian denominations have different things to say about "who gets saved," all agree on one thing: faith in Jesus, combined with putting that faith into fruitful action according to one's ability, yields salvation:

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." (Romans 10: 9-11)

The whole point of Jesus dying on the cross, after all, was to save us from our sins. Genuine faith in Jesus is the means by which we take advantage of that sacrifice, and it therefore means that those sins do not count against us.

4. With the Second Coming we enter into the very life of God. This is the final and greatest glory which is promised as part of the Second Coming. It is, of course, impossible to describe this new life in terms intelligible to us who are not yet enjoying it, but the Bible nevertheless attempts to do so by using the analogy of a wedding feast:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21: 1-4)

Eternity, far from being boring, will be a life without limits. It is a life of perfect communion with God and each other, characterised by peace, joy, and love. This is why the Second Coming is necessary -- to allow all this to take place. And it is why the Second Coming is something generally to be desired.

Are there any signs by which we can detect that the Second Coming is imminent? Curiously, Jesus does offer concrete signs that will precede the Second Coming, but he also warns his disciples not to try and predict its day or hour. Why might this be? By offering concrete historical signs, Jesus effectively reminds his disciples that the Second Coming will be a historical event, and not merely a mythological symbol -- there will be an actual day and hour when all this will take place. But by offering indicators that are a bit vague (and warning us that they are, in fact, vague), it also prevents us from trying to "get away with" as much evil as we can before the End comes. Were it possible to predict the exact day and hour, there would be people who would delay their repentance until the last possible moment -- and would that then be really a genuine repentance? Holding us "in suspense" forces each human being to confront, in the present moment, where they stand with God, and acts as a motivator to a life of faith, hope, and charity.

It should be pointed out that since the beginning of Christianity there have been people who have wondered at the apparent "delay" of the parousia. This has prompted some to create new theologies of salvation which do not include a literal return of Christ in glory, i.e. they "mythologize"

this element of Christianity, or they place it in another "order of reality" somehow beyond History itself. This trend became particularly strong in the wake of Hegel's philosophy, and many churches absorbed this "theory of eternal progress" into their systems of thought. Such theories are today particularly prevalent in the mainstream liberal Protestant traditions, but are not the dominant view of most Christian churches today.

Appendix: What are the concrete historical signs of the Second Coming?

Ok, ok, so after warning you that there is no use trying to predict the Second Coming from the signs that will pre-figure it, you want to know them anyway. Here is a list of the major signs traditionally mentioned, as well as their current status in the theological discussion.

The signs which are generally accepted as being signs

There are 3 signs of the End Times which are generally accepted within Christianity: (1) the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world, (2) the "great apostasy", and (3) the "great persecution".

The precondition of the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world is rooted in the words of Jesus himself, when he stated, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14) At stake in this sign are questions like "Does it have to be preached to each and every individual?", "Do they have to all accept the Gospel, or just hear it?", and "With what degree of effectiveness does it need to be preached for this precondition to be met?"

The "great apostasy" refers to a widespread falling away from the Christian faith, as referred to in this passage: "Many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray." (Matthew 24: 10-11) St. Paul also refers to this sign in one of his letters: "For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first." (2 Thess 2: 3a)

The "great persecution" refers to a bitter hatred of Christianity that will develop within the wider world, and which will lead to an attempt to exterminate the faith: "They will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake." (Matthew 24: 9) The book of Revelation is replete with images of the great persecution which Christians will one day undergo.

An interesting dimension of these three elements is they all beg the question: What is the Gospel? What is a Christian? After all, the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world can only be a sign if it is possible to identify what the Gospel contains! A person can only be understood to have abandoned the Christian faith if it is possible to identify what that faith contains. Implicit in these signs, then, is a sense that the Christian world will have sufficient internal unity on the essentials of Christianity that such measurements are even possible. In the present day we are not there yet, but some see in the modern ecumenical movement a step towards helping make these signs meaningful.

The signs which are subject to some discussion

There are 4 signs which are generally accepted within Christianity, but which are the subject of great discussion regarding their exact meaning. These are: (1) a predicted set of natural and social disasters, (2) a sea change in the relationship between Christians and Jews, (3) the appearance of the Antichrist, and (4) the reconstruction of the Temple.

The natural and social disasters mentioned include wars, famines, earthquakes, plagues, and "signs in the heavens" (failing of the light of the sun and moon, disappearance of some stars, etc.) Some of the mentioned disasters are harder to interpret, such as the "flaming mountain cast into the

sea" (cf. Revelation 8:8), or the "blazing star that falls from heaven, named Wormwood, that turns the waters bitter" (cf. Revelation 8:10-11).²⁷ But even with the more mundane disasters, the difficulty has always been to try and connect these to the Second Coming. Wars, famines, plagues, and earthquakes have been with us for a very long time. Some are convinced that these are increasing in frequency, but this is very hard to measure. Finally, there is the reality that the Bible believes that these disasters are to be connected to human sin. For wars and even famines this is easily comprehensible, but earthquakes and the "failing of the sun's light"? Science-minded persons have typically scoffed at such a connection. Still, there is an increasing awareness of the effect of human activity upon the ecology of our planet -- perhaps the idea is not so far-fetched after all.

There is general agreement that there will be a major change in the relationship between Christians and Jews as part of the progress of human history -- the real question is about the connection of that relationship to the Second Coming, as well as the nature of the change in that relationship. Chapters 9-11 of the letter to the Romans contains many references to the theological relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and contains this cryptic reference: "If their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" (Romans 11: 15). Many commentators believe that this implies a connection between the Jewish people and the Second Coming. In practical terms this has historically resulted in a concerted effort to compel the Jewish people to convert to Christianity, in order to hasten the Day. Since the Holocaust, however, there has been a new re-reading of these and many other New Testament passages regarding Judaism, in an effort to develop a new "Christian theology of Judaism" that preserves another important insight in Paul's letter: "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." (Romans 11:2a)

The mention of the Antichrist can be found in the earliest Christian literature. The earliest titles given to him are "man of lawlessness" and "son of perdition" (cf. 2 Thess 2:3). The book of Revelation refers to him as "the Beast," and in St. John's letters we find the term "Antichrist" itself being used. Modern theological literature, however, currently is trying to understand this reference better. Is the term "Antichrist" to refer to an actual single individual? Or does it refer to a "pattern of behaviour" that many persons might emulate, each being an "Antichrist" in their own right? Take, for example, this passage: "Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour." (1 John 2: 18) It does not deny that there will be one "Antichrist," but also allows for a multiplicity in the concept. Some have even gone so far as to say that "Antichrist" refers not to an individual but to a movement, or perhaps to both, with the evil individual serving as the inspiration for an evil ideology, and vice versa. We have already seen this kind of connection at least once in recent history, in the connection between Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist movement -- it is hard to image the Nazis

²⁷ The difficulty of interpreting these signs does not prevent some from trying, of course. While the Bible does not say what these events might be, some commentators note that the "flaming mountain" image has a strong resemblance to a meteor strike. As well, it is curious to note that the word "Wormwood" translates into Ukrainian as "Chernobyl" -- another fact that some commentators have sometimes seized upon.

without Hitler, and Nazism itself defines Hitler in many ways.²⁸

The sign of the Temple is mentioned most directly in St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, again in a passage referring to the Antichrist: "He takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God." (2 Thess 2:4b). Of course, he can't take his seat in the Temple if there is no Temple! Many commentators therefore believe that the reconstruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem is a necessary precondition for prophecies of the Second Coming to be fulfilled. The term "temple of God," however, is somewhat ambiguous in the New Testament, because it can also refer to the Christian Church (cf. Ephesians 2: 19-22). Some Catholic commentators have speculated that this is not a reference to the Antichrist taking his seat in an actual physical temple, but that a false Pope would one arise to illegitimately assume the Papal throne.²⁹ Another ambiguous element is that some are uncertain that the Temple has been sufficiently destroyed! In the Gospel of Luke Jesus starts his discussion of the Second Coming with this comment regarding the Temple: "As for these things which you see, the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." (Luke 21:6) This prophecy has not yet been completely fulfilled, as one wall of the old Temple still remains. So what will be the sign of the end? The building of a new Temple? The final destruction of the bit that remains? Both? It is hard to say with certainty.

Signs which are not universally accepted or are highly controversial

All of the previous signs are generally understood to be part of the Christian tradition, although some are more subject to discussion than others. What follows are so-called "signs" which are strongly held by certain Christians to be a necessary part of the Second Coming, but for which there is little or no widespread agreement. These are: (1) the Rapture, (2) the Warning, and (3) the establishment of a one-world government. There can be many others, depending on which authors you read.

The term "Rapture" is used in Evangelical Protestant circles to refer to a moment in the future when those who believe in Christ will be miraculously "taken away" from the Earth, to be spared the terrible tribulations that will immediately precede the Second Coming. The word "Rapture" is not found in the New Testament itself, but many believe it is alluded to in several places in the Bible. The theology of the Rapture has been increasingly popularized in the Protestant world through a book series called the "Left Behind" series, but it remains that the Catholic and Orthodox churches

²⁸ Certain Protestant theologians have even speculated that this concept referred to the papacy, with the Pope himself being called the Antichrist and the Catholic Church called the "Harlot of Babylon". This interpretation was particularly prevalent in the time of the Protestant Reformation, with Martin Luther himself writing these words: "It is plain that the marks of the Antichrist coincide with those of the pope's kingdom and his followers." (MARTIN LUTHER, *Treatise on the power and primacy of the Pope*, "The Marks of the Antichrist", 1537) A modern day equivalent of this sentiment can be found in authors like David Hunt (author of *A woman rides the Beast: the Catholic Church in the Last Days*).

²⁹ The so-called "Prophecies of St. Malachy," which have captured the imagination of so many, were written in this vein.

see the Rapture doctrine as a recent innovation that is not part of the apostolic teaching. Additional discussion is needed to clarify this doctrinal point, especially given that there isn't even a consistent doctrine of the Rapture among Protestant churches.

While the "Rapture" is largely a Protestant speculation, the "Warning" is a Catholic one. The concept gained increasing currency after a number of children reported seeing the Virgin Mary at Garabandal in Spain. In these apparitions Mary is supposed to have told the children that the world will receive a great "Warning" before the time of the Second Coming, which would take the form of some sort of total interior clarity regarding one's state of conscience. This would be to give everyone one last chance to repent before the day of judgement. It remains, however, that there is no mention of such a "Warning" in the New Testament, and the apparitions of Garabandal have not been approved by the Catholic Church as authentic.

The establishment of a one-world government is alluded to in the New Testament as a feature of world society before the Second Coming, but only in passing and only in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev 17:18). In practical terms this has been translated into a hostility for internationalism and a deep suspicion of global institutions like the United Nations. This is, however, a difficult concept to interpret into today's language, because "the world" in those days meant essentially the Roman Empire, upon which all other known "nations" depended (whether under direct Roman governance or not). It is hard to see how the establishment of law and order throughout the world would be in itself a bad thing -- is it not preferable to lawlessness? (Of course, it could be abused, which is perhaps the point of the authors in question.)

Theology in a scientific and technological age

Some students might be surprised to see that we are devoting a class to the relationship between theology and science/technology. Nevertheless, this is an important discussion. First of all, as we have seen, “Nature” is considered one of the sources of theology, and so we need to have some understanding of the functioning of nature (or at least how that functioning is investigated by scientists). Second, we must recognize that there have been important controversies between theology and science (or, more accurately, between scientists and theologians). These have led to distracting divisions between the two disciplines, and some have even said that science and religious belief are incompatible.³⁰ Lastly, we need to recognize the link that exists between technology and culture. Technology is an application of science that, in an extreme use, might risk even changing human nature itself. Theology, grounded as it is in transcendent principles, must be ready to make a critique of technological innovations.

Theology and science

The first person to use the word “theology” in a positive sense was Aristotle, who is also considered by many to have been the first scientist. He himself believed that the consideration of the operation and existence of the material world (the science of *physics*) necessarily led to an eventual consideration of the principle of existence itself (the science of *metaphysics*), which included as its end point a consideration of the One-Who-Exists above all else, i.e. God. Historically, theology always included as one of its major areas of study some investigation of Creation. And yet today, as already noted, many people believe that science and faith are incompatible. What has happened? To explain this divided state of affairs, we need to review two major historical confrontations between science and theology.

³⁰ Bertrand Russell, the great scientist and mathematician, himself felt moved to write an essay entitled “Why I am not a Christian”. Even while refusing religious belief, he found himself doing theology (or perhaps better described as a kind of anti-theology).

Confrontation #1: the trial of Galileo Galilei

The story of the condemnation of Galileo in 1633, on charges of heresy, is a widely known but poorly understood part of our modern mythology. His conflict with Church authorities is a complex case which has become condensed into a simplified but often inaccurate account of the actual disagreement. The underlying problems of this case concern both the nature of science and the message of faith. The tragic mutual incomprehension at the heart of the case has been interpreted as the reflection of a fundamental opposition between faith and reason. This interpretation has only recently begun to reverse itself, in the hopes of a more fruitful cooperation between the two fields.

Rome of the Baroque era was a center of European culture and learning, and in that spirit generously fostered the advance of the arts and sciences through the patronage of the wealthy families and the Church. This accord when terribly wrong when one of the great astronomers, Galileo Galilei (b.1564 – d.1642), expanded upon the theory of his predecessor Copernicus. Based on his observations using the newly invented telescope in 1610, he stated that the Earth revolved around the Sun and not vice-versa. His findings completely contradicted the generally accepted Ptolemaic model of the universe, which was generally uncontested since its formulation in 150 B.C., and accepted at the time by the majority of learned minds.

This new scientific theory was in itself was not the root cause of the problem, but rather it was the seeming contradiction of Galileo's discovery with the celestial descriptions in the Bible that generated friction between himself and the ecclesial authorities. In particular, it seemed to contradict this description found in the book of Joshua:

Then spoke Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the men of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand thou still at Gibeon, and thou Moon in the valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel. (Joshua 10: 12-14)

Ultimately, the theologians felt that Galileo's assertions challenged the validity of the truths in the Bible, in effect saying that the Bible was wrong. During the period of the Counter-Reformation, where authorities worked vigorously to establish their legitimacy and stem what they perceived as a flood of heresy, Galileo's challenge to Sacred Scripture was not met with enthusiasm. In fact, the scientist could not have chosen a worse moment. In the end, Galileo was banned from publishing his findings, subjected to an investigation and sentenced to house arrest for the final ten years of his life (1632-1642).

What went wrong? How did one of the most celebrated scientists of Rome, who at one time enjoyed great prestige and the graces of the Church to conduct his research, end up in such a fate? The central cause of the disagreement had to do with the relation between different kinds of knowledge (scientific, philosophical, theological, etc.), and with biblical **hermeneutics** (the science of the interpretation of texts). In the 17th century, modern science was still in its fledgling state, and it would centuries before liberal Protestantism introduced new forms of biblical interpretation. How

the different branches of knowledge should be integrated, especially theology and pure science, was still uncertain. The theological issue at stake was the relationship between two of the sources of theology: Nature and Scripture. In other words, which should be allowed to interpret the other? Also at stake was the distinction between "top-down" and "bottom-up" methods. Science is a very "bottom-up" method, starting from actual observations, while theology (at the time) was a very "top-down" exercise. The error of the philosophers and theologians was believing that the centrality of the earth and the physical world's structure, was imposed by a literal sense of Sacred Scripture. For Galileo's part, he insisted on the irrelevance of Biblical data in scientific arguments -- effectively declaring Nature to be superior to Scripture, and placing scientists over theologians in the quest for truth. The consequences of this dispute is a confusion, still often felt today, where one branch of knowledge seems to discredit the other. For example, if scientific proof firmly established that the earth revolved around the sun, while the Bible seems to be more compatible with an earth centred model, does that necessarily mean that one of the two is wrong?

The lessons to be learned from this episode are a recognition of the need to approach the different realms of study with a clear view of all the disciplines of knowledge, and a rigorous awareness of its own nature and limits. One must avoid undue extrapolations which link strictly scientific discoveries to particular visions of the world, or to an ideology, or to philosophical affirmations, which in no way are corollaries of it. Similarly, one must respect the truths revealed in Sacred Scripture while remaining conscious of the jurisdiction of these truths to the spiritual and moral realms, without necessarily literal implications to the physical world. Both branches, science and religion, seek to understand reality, each in its own particular way, but the distinction between the two realms ought not to be understood as opposition, and they do have points of contact. When comparing the various deposits of knowledge of different disciplines it is perhaps useful to remember that "Truth cannot contradict truth."³¹ Recognizing the complimentary relationship between the different branches of human knowledge demands a constant effort to synthesize and integrate learning into a cohesive whole, in the hope of developing an appreciation of how the various branches of learning can nourish each other and progress our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Controversy #2: the debate concerning evolution

The debate concerning evolution had its own historical moment at the event known as the "Scopes monkey trial," which took place in 1925 in Tennessee. At this point in history Liberal Protestantism had already begun to propose new ways to interpret the Bible that did not always require a literal reading. The theological reaction to this was Fundamentalism, which sought to protect what were believed to be the "non-negotiable" truths of the Christian faith. One of these was the total inerrancy of the Bible, and therefore the necessity to read it literally. As with the Galileo case, this would lead to conflict with the scientific community, and as with Galileo, it resulted in a trial before public authorities.

³¹ Leonis XIII Pont. Max. Acta, vol. XIII (1894), p.361. Cf. also "Faith can never conflict with reason", Holy Father's Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, printed in L'Osservatore Romano, 4 November, 1994, p. 1-2

The scientific flashpoint was the theory of evolution put forward by Charles Darwin, which put proposed that more complex species evolved from less complex ones, rather than them all coming into existence at the same time. It explained the existence of fossils, which seemed to be impossibly old for a world which classical theology believed to be less than 6000 years old. But it also challenged the Biblical view that the world was created in 6 days. Fundamentalists managed to secure anti-evolution laws in four US states (Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee), which prevented the teaching of evolution in schools. "In 1925 John Scopes, a biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, assigned his students readings about Darwinism, in direct violation of state law. Scopes was arrested and placed on trial. In what was the major trial of its time, American defence attorney Clarence Darrow represented Scopes, while American politician William Jennings Bryan argued for the prosecution. Ultimately, Scopes was convicted and received a small fine. However, the "Monkey Trial," as it came to be called, was seen as a victory for evolution, since Darrow, in cross-examining Bryan, succeeded in pointing out several serious inconsistencies in Fundamentalist belief."³² Despite this setback, however, Fundamentalists have persisted in promoting a literal view of Scripture, recasting their views as a form of "creation science" -- a term that meets with scorn in the scientific community.

It should be pointed out that the evolution controversy is largely a Protestant controversy. In 1996 Pope John Paul II gave a public address to the Pontifical Academy of sciences regarding evolution (among other things) which the international press reported as "Pope accepts theory of evolution". What is even more remarkable, however, is that this would be seen as news. For decades Catholic theologians had been grappling with the theological ramifications of the theory of evolution, but generally had no problems with the idea of evolution as such. Many persons had already pointed out that, in the story of creation in the first book of Genesis, the "six days" seem to follow an evolutionary pattern, with more complex structures coming after the creation of less complex ones. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, was a world renowned philosopher, theologian, and anthropologist, and he proposed some radical new ideas concerning the question of *hominisation* (i.e. the process by which human beings arose as a distinct new type of animal: a rational animal). Karl Rahner, the German Jesuit theologian, as well as others, wrote tracts and articles on the subject, tackling questions such as: "If evolution is true as an explanation of human origins, how does this affect our view of Original Sin?" This is not a neutral question, as it could have serious repercussions for our whole theology of salvation. But there has been really no question of scrapping the discussion of evolution as such in favour of preserving the theology of Original Sin. "Truth cannot contradict truth."

What, then, really is at stake in the controversy around the theory of evolution? In this case it is not at its origin a conflict between Nature and Scripture, but instead it a debate within the area of Scripture itself. In other words, are the approaches of Liberal Protestantism legitimate or not? If evolution is true, then a major element of the Fundamentalist reaction to Liberal Protestantism disappears.

Of course, there is the issue of Nature as well. Apart from the question of Biblical interpretation is the underlying assumption that, if evolution is true, God is somehow unnecessary

³² Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, "Evolution", 2001.

as the grand “Designer” of the universe. Instead, though, could one not simply state that evolution does exist, but that it (as a process) has been guided by the hand of God? John Polkinghorne, noted scientist and theologians, explains this as follows:

Charles Darwin, by the publication of *The Origin of Species*, presented us with natural selection as a patient process by which such marvels of “design” could come about, without the intervening purpose of a Designer being at work to bring them into being. At a stroke, one of the most powerful and seemingly convincing arguments for belief in God had been found to be fatally flawed. Darwin had done what Hume and Kant with their philosophical arguments had failed to achieve, abolishing the time-honoured form of the argument from design by exhibiting an apparently adequate alternative explanation.

Since then, two important developments have taken place. One is the realization in the late 1920's that the universe itself has had a history and that notions of evolving complexity apply not only to life on Earth, but to the whole physical cosmos. The other is the acknowledgement that when we take this cosmic history into our reckoning, evolution is by itself not sufficient to account for the fruitfulness of the world. Let me explain.

A convenient slogan-encapsulation of the idea of evolution is to speak of it as resulting from the interplay of chance and necessity. “Chance” stands for the particular contingencies of historical happening. This particular cosmic ripple led to the subsequent condensation of this particular group of galaxies; this particular genetic mutation turned the stream of life in this particular direction rather than another. “Necessity” stands for the lawfully regular environment in which evolution takes place. Without a law of gravity, galaxies would not condense; without reasonably reliable genetic transmission, species would not be established. What we have come to understand is that if this process is to be fruitful on a cosmic scale, then necessity has to take a very specific, carefully prescribed form. Any old world will not do. Most universes that we can imagine would prove boring and sterile in their development, however long their history were to be subjected to the interplay of chance with their specific form of lawful necessity. It is a particular kind of universe which alone is capable of producing systems of the complexity sufficient to sustain conscious life.

This insight, called the Anthropic Principle, has given rise to much discussion.³³

Put another way, when it was discovered that the universe began with a “Big Bang” it did not take long for people to propose that, just maybe, that was then moment when God said “Let there be light,” and the rest has simply unfolded as God’s plan. And why not?

The place of faith in an age of science

It is important for us to realise that the act of faith does not necessarily have to be an act of faith in God: it can also be an act of faith in an intellectual system or ideology. The moment we find ourselves constructing a paradigm of through based on certain necessary assumptions or axioms that

³³ JOHN POLKINGHORNE, *Belief in God in an age of science*, pp. 5-6.

themselves cannot be proved by the methods of that paradigm, we are entering the realms of philosophy and faith. This faith is sometimes just as simple and primitive as faith in the existence of the world around us, no matter what Descartes might have said on the subject. The Scottish philosopher David Hume accepted Descartes' principle of methodological doubt, but also saw that this led to a position of radical skepticism regarding the world around us. And yet, Hume also noted that, in practical terms, we just don't go through life doubting all the time:

Should it be asked of me whether I sincerely assent to this argument which I have been to such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those skeptics who hold that all is uncertain,...I should reply...that neither I nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion...I dine, I play backgammon, I converse and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold and strained and ridiculous that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further...Thus the skeptic still continues to reason and believe, though he asserts that he cannot defend his reason by reason.³⁴

“He cannot defend his reason by reason”: does this not imply a certain necessary primitive act of faith to be operating at all times? Some have called this “belief in the things of experience,” but once this kind of belief is admitted, what prevents a person from going the next step? As Jesus himself said to the apostle Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (John 20: 29).

This is not to say that there have not been attempts to try and found a science without reference to axioms that must simply be accepted. Surely mathematics, for example, which in its pure form does not have necessary references to the real world, could be such a science. This was the idea behind the *Principia Mathematica*, an attempt by Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead to show that all the essential principles of mathematics could be logically derived without a need for an axiomatic starting point. But as Polkinghorne notes,

This heroic labour was shown to be abortive when the young Kurt Gödel proved that all axiomatic systems rich enough in structure to incorporate the natural numbers (the integers), contain stateable but undecidable propositions and that their self-consistency cannot be established. Mathematical truth is found to exceed the proving of theorems and to elude total capture in the confining meshes of any logical net.³⁵

If mathematics cannot escape the necessity of placing some sort of act of faith in an axiom (God or otherwise), physics certainly cannot escape it either. In the 19th century there was considerable debate about the miracles of Jesus, and whether they would have been possible. The prevailing cultural notion was that even if there was a God, the fact that He had given the universe its own set of rules (in the form of natural laws) implied that miracles were impossible because they violated

³⁴ DAVID HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, book I, part IV, section VII.

³⁵ JOHN POLKINGHORNE, loc. cit., p. 127.

those natural laws. But the obvious reply to this is: if God made those laws, can he not suspend them to do what He will? The anti-miracle proponents had, in essence, a vision of God who wound up the universe like a clock and then set it in a shelf, independent from himself, such that performing a miracle would be the equivalent to removing some of the cogs of the clock: in this vision of the universe, a miracle would somehow diminish the perfection of the universe. But who says this vision of God is correct? Is not the choice of this vision itself an act of faith?

We see echoes of this choice in the work of the world-renowned physicist Stephen Hawking. In his book *A Brief History of Time*, he makes the following observations about his own theories of the origins of the universe:

With the success of scientific theories in describing events, most people have come to believe that God allows the universe to evolve according to a set of laws and does not intervene in the universe to break these laws. However, the laws do not tell us what the universe should have looked like when it started--it would still be up to God to wind up the clockwork and choose how to start it off. So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?³⁶

In fact, there is still plenty of “place” for God. Hawking’s comment concerns the notion of creation “in time,” but there is also the concept of creation *ex nihilo*. Creation *ex nihilo* means **the process of giving existence to contingent being**. Even if the universe was eternal, always was and always would be, creation could be possible as a process. It is a bit like using one’s imagination. It is possible to imagine the existence of a world in one’s mind, complete with land and oceans and cities and people. What would happen if you were to cease thinking about that world? It would cease to exist! You are its creator, in the sense that you are its source of being: it depends

Two modes of creation

Students sometimes have a big of trouble distinguishing "creation in time" and "creation ex nihilo".

Creation "in time" is the classic understanding. In the beginning there was nothing, and then suddenly there was something. This vision requires some external source for the origin of the universe -- the obvious candidate being God. But once the universe is created, does it still need God?

Creation ex nihilo says nothing about the origin of the universe in time. It does not say if the universe is eternal or if it had a definite temporal beginning. What it does point out is that the universe, whether eternal or having a temporal origin, still needs an external source for not just the start of its existence, but the continuation of that existence.

It is not possible to conceive of a creation "in time" without some sort of creation ex nihilo, at least in the moment of the universe's origin. For this reason scientists who wish to exclude the question of God entirely need to establish that the universe is eternal. They err, however, if they believe that an eternal universe necessarily means there is no room for God. Even if there is no creation "in time" there is plenty of room for God to be the eternal creator, continuously sustaining the universe and preventing it from falling into nothingness.

³⁶ STEPHEN HAWKING, *A brief history of time*, pp. 140-141.

on you not only for the start of its existence, but for its continued existence.³⁷ And if you were an eternal being, you could theoretically have always been “thinking” that universe into being. The eternity of that derivative world does not take away from your role as a creator.

Still, while there is still place for a creator despite Stephen Hawking’s views, one could argue that it is important to nevertheless apply the principle of *Occam’s Razor*, which states that we should eliminate any part of a hypothesis that is not in itself essential. Under this principle God may not be excluded as part of the theory, but should he be included? Or should Occam’s Razor simply show God to be possible but unnecessary to the physical explanation of things? Once again, however, this sounds a lot like faith. Is “Occam’s Razor” not a principle, an axiom, that cannot be proven in itself? Beyond this problem, however, is the fact that in order for the Razor to apply in this case it must be demonstrated that the universe truly is “self-contained”. But is it? Even the theories of physics are not so sure, demonstrated particularly in the theories of quantum mechanics.

The theory of quantum mechanics includes, as a necessary component, a principle called the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. This posits (among other things) that it is impossible to know both the position and momentum of a sub-atomic particle at the same time. The difficulty is not in that our detection equipment is not sensitive enough, but that this uncertainty it simply is built into the very fabric of the universe. Quite literally, the only way to know both of these things would be to be an observer located somehow “outside” the universe -- an observer such as God, who would know such things not because they are being detected and discovered, but because God is the very source of being of these things. Other sorts of indeterminism can also be found as necessary components of quantum theory as well, and philosophers have speculated that these kinds of indeterminism are necessary if free will actually exists. Otherwise everything follows immutable physical laws and all outcomes can be predicted, and there is no real room for free will at all. Indeterminism points to a universe that is not “self-contained,” but one that constantly needs to be “informed” as to how to exist and what to be, from one moment to the next.

The need for a new theology of nature

All of these developments in modern science, particularly the bizarre discoveries of quantum mechanics, have led to a new life for the philosophy of nature, which inevitably leads to new declarations (from scientists no less!) about metaphysics, and even about God. Take, for example, the title of Paul Davies’s book, “God and the New Physics”. We find on the back of the paperback edition the following declaration:

Science has come of age, Professor Davies believes, and can now offer a surer path to God than can religion.

But while the scientists are boldly making such declarations, where are the theologians?

³⁷ I should point out, performing a miracle in this context does not diminish the universe, but rather adds to it: miracles form part of the act of continuous creation, and contribute to the perfection of the universe

Polkinghorne points out the following:

The most grievous absence from the conversation is that of the theologians. Their presence, in a sustained rather than a merely occasional way, is earnestly desired as part of future developments.³⁸

Science and theology need a new dialogue, to both enrich modern theological reflection as well as help the scientists avoid making theological errors (such as the one Hawking makes through his lack of nuance regarding creation).³⁹

Theology in a technological age

We live in the most technologically advanced civilization human history has even known. Given that technology tends to progress over time, some might say that this should not be surprising. What is particular about our age is the speed of this development. With this rapid pace comes a correspondingly rapid development of our culture, driven by technological change. How are we to understand this feature of our society? The effects of technology can be grouped into three categories: *economic*, *cultural*, and *natural*. We will examine each in turn.

Economic effects of technology

The earliest technology we know of was the development of tools. Certain animal species seem to use tools as well, but it is either part of their nature, or they simply take advantage of some element of nature already existing. For example, apes have been noticed to stick twigs in termite hills, and then withdraw the twigs (now with many termites crawling on it) as an easier way to obtain a meal of termites. The twig, however, already existed in nature as a twig. True tools are a second order of development. Hammers do not grow on trees: they are invented to fulfill a purpose.

The primary effect of invention is economic: use of the tool renders some form of production more efficient, either by increasing quantities produced (new agricultural methods, such as the agricultural revolution), reducing time or cost of production (methods of mass production), or reducing spoilage (e.g. refrigeration). A more efficient economy increases wealth, which allows for the diversion of more resources to luxury items, to services (such as education and health care), and to the so-called “cultural industries” (such as music and literature).

³⁸ JOHN POLKINGHORNE, loc. cit., p. 80.

³⁹ To see the possible fruits of such collaboration we only need to examine the field of “process studies”. Process philosophy was founded by the scientist Alfred North Whitehead in the 20th century through his work *Process and Reality*. Starting from a consideration of nature Whitehead goes as far as giving reflections on the nature of God. This led to the development of a corresponding “process theology” and even a “process hermeneutics” (a new way of reading the Bible). Whitehead and his followers put forward a colossal effort and attempted to bridge the science-philosophy-theology gap. Their effort is not without critique, though, so it begs the question: who says it should be the only one?

At times the application of economic technologies has a more direct effect on cultural patterns. The Agricultural Revolution in England was accompanied by the expulsion of thousands of traditional farmers from their ancestral lands (and their flight to the cities); this disrupted existing cultural patterns, some of which had been in place for centuries. The Industrial Revolution brought forth a new class of industrialists and capitalists, whose economic power was eventually leveraged as political power in the British House of Commons. These economic changes led to the continued development of modern democracy and the parliamentary system.

Cultural effects of technology

An economic determinist would argue that all features of culture are ultimately economic in origin. While it is not our place to argue this here, there is no question that certain technologies have a direct cultural impact without an immediate economic use. Take travel technologies, for example. People of average means are today able to undertake voyages to distant lands in a few hours, voyages of such a distance that they previously would have taken months to accomplish and only at tremendous personal cost (and therefore reserved to the cultural elites). Through massive travel and immigration cultures are coming into contact at an incredible pace, influencing each other and in some cases blending together (or even disappearing).

Another major factor in cultural contact is the explosion of communications technologies. One can travel the world without leaving one's chair simply by turning on the Discovery channel. People often surf the web and exchange email simply for pleasure. The idea that I can pick up my cell phone and call just about anywhere in the world from just about anywhere is truly remarkable. This ease of communications, which will only be enhanced as language translation technologies improve, increases the inter-cultural contacts already mentioned.

Another way technology can alter culture is by permitting changes in behaviour, particularly by removing its undesired consequences. For example, can it really be a coincidence that the Sexual Revolution of the 1960's coincided with the release of the birth-control pill on the market? "The Pill," a new technology, radically altered patterns of sexual conduct by separating the effects of pleasure and pregnancy. Even Hugh Hefner, founder of Playboy, prophetically declared "At last, sex can be used for recreation, not procreation." But whether it is the Pill or any other technology, a key question is whether or not a new technology re-writes the basic laws (if they exist) of human morality.

These increased cultural contacts have led some to believe that a new global culture is emerging. The Roman Catholic Church, examining the situation at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's, made this declaration:

The circumstances of the life of modern man have been so profoundly changed in their social and cultural aspects, that we can speak of a new age of human history. New ways are open, therefore, for the perfection and the further extension of culture. These ways have been prepared by the enormous growth of natural, human and social sciences, by technical progress, and advances in developing and organizing means whereby men can communicate with one another. Hence the culture of today possesses particular characteristics: sciences which are called exact greatly develop critical judgment; the more recent psychological studies more profoundly explain human activity; historical studies make it much easier to see things in their mutable and evolutionary aspects, customs and usages are

becoming more and more uniform; industrialization, urbanization, and other causes which promote community living create a mass-culture from which are born new ways of thinking, acting and making use of leisure. The increase of commerce between the various nations and human groups opens more widely to all the treasures of different civilizations and thus little by little, there develops a more universal form of human culture, which better promotes and expresses the unity of the human race to the degree that it preserves the particular aspects of the different civilizations.⁴⁰

But what will this emerging culture look like? Currently the major exporter of culture in the world is the West, from economic and political patterns to modes of dress and Hollywood movies. But many other cultures are starting to reassert themselves. The title of Benjamin Barber's book *Jihad vs. McWorld* expresses well both the fact of this tension and its potential for conflict. As Vatican II stated, as this universal culture develops it will be important that it not simply be the result of one culture displacing all others, but that it preserve the true genius of the different civilizations.

The alteration of nature

The final kind of cultural change that can come from technology comes from the possibility of altering nature itself. We do not speak here of simply making changes to the natural world -- we've been doing that for a long time -- but of altering the very patterns which make up the organisms themselves. For animals and plants, this means modifying them at a genetic level to create entire new species (called GMO's -- "genetically modified organisms"). For humans, it also means making new human GMO's, as well as producing a whole new set of pharmacological products to alter brain chemistry. The latter changes are the more serious for our consideration of culture. Francis Fukuyama points out some of these in his book *Our Posthuman Future*:

Neuropharmacology has already produced not just Prozac for depression but Ritalin to control the unruly behaviour of young children. As we discover not just correlations but actual molecular pathways between genes and traits like intelligence, aggression, sexual identity, criminality, alcoholism, and the like, it will inevitably occur to people that they can make use of this knowledge for particular social ends. This will play itself out as a series of ethical questions facing individual parents, and also as a political issue that may someday come to dominate politics. If wealthy parents suddenly have open to them the opportunity to increase the intelligence of their children as well as that of all their subsequent descendants, then we have the makings not just of a moral dilemma but of a full-scale class war.⁴¹

Genetic manipulation could go as far as causing the unity of the human species to split into several sub-species, or even give rise to new human-animal crossbred species (such a crossbreed is called a "chimera"). What would the consequences of such a result be? For those who think Fukuyama's scenario of a class war is far-fetched and only the stuff of science fiction, we should keep in mind

⁴⁰ VATICAN II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 54.

⁴¹ FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, *Our Posthuman Future*, p. 16.

that there has been at least one political regime in human history that believed that the human race was actually split into relative categories. This was the Nazi regime of 1933-1945, that divided humans into races, with the “Aryan race” at the top, and the Jews at the bottom, with the Gypsies and Poles not far from them. This “racial caste system” justified the worst sorts of crimes, including genocide. The ultimate Achilles heel of Nazism, however, was not only that it was monstrous, but that it was wrong: the human race cannot, in fact, be justifiably sub-divided into biologically distinct races with the understanding that some are inherently superior to others. But what will happen with our new biological technologies? In creating true biological distinctions between classes of people we would unwittingly provide a genuine scientific justification, rooted in nature, for a Nazi-like doctrine. Old horrors could easily then return, this time justified by genetic distinctions of our own making.⁴² Of course, it would not be necessary for us to have extermination camps before society finds itself profoundly transformed. Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World*, as well as the film *Gattaca*, both portray societies profoundly divided along biological lines -- and both pose the essential question: what is the essence of what it means to be human?

What does theology have to say about this? Remember, theology must both respond to changes in culture as well as challenge culture. According to the book of Genesis, human beings are created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1: 26). It is this that provides the true unity of the human race, and explains the dignity that should be accorded to every human being, no matter what their biological or intellectual powers might be. Theology must therefore constantly remind our society that issues such as human rights and the dignity of the human person are ultimately not rooted in biology, but simply in the fact that we are human. Theology must itself start to be prepared to respond to a new challenge, however: what if some of us are eventually no longer fully human? What if our genetic code is somehow “artificial”? What if we invent human-animal crossbreeds? Are they still to be understood as being “in the image and likeness of God”? In other words, theology will be challenged to articulate the true essence of what it means to be human. Given that such distinctions could very well give rise to Nazi-like horrors, or a class war, such a message will not only be welcome, it will be necessary and even essential to our survival as a society.

Conclusion: science and morality

"Guns don't kill people, people kill people," or so says a popular slogan of the National Rifle Association (NRA). Despite this reality, many people still favour gun control! A parallel debate exists within science: are scientific endeavours, motivated as they are by the desire to increase knowledge, always morally neutral? Just because we can build a nuclear bomb, or clone human beings, or create new life forms, should we? Beyond the question of the morality of particular forms of scientific and technological progress, however, is the question of the interaction between scientific and technological progress *in itself* and morality *in itself*. At play is the old debate between Plato and Aristotle, regarding the essence of human nature.

⁴² Some would argue that pre-natal testing technologies are the early start of this process. Many genetic diseases or other deformities are easily detectable, with abortion being the usual recommended option.

In the Dualist line of thinking, human nature is essentially confined to the soul, leaving the body largely malleable: if we want to replace it with robotic parts, or modify it with drugs or genetic manipulation, there is really no problem. In fact, there is a movement today called the "Transhumanist movement" which sees this as the next logical step in human evolution -- a vision powerfully endorsed by the science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke in his "Space Odyssey" series of books.

The Realist line of thinking, on the other hand, believes that human nature necessarily includes both soul and body. To change the body is therefore not a neutral endeavour. The Realist schools also believe that the rules of morality are written into our human nature -- a nature that includes having a body. These rules cannot be re-written just because a new technology is developed, or else we risk losing some element of our humanity. To give an example of their point, normally it would be wrong to shoot someone else in the chest with a firearm. But imagine that our society issued bullet-proof vests to everyone. Is it still wrong to shoot someone else in the chest? Is the law against shooting fundamentally rooted in the nature of the person, or is it modifiable based on added-on technology? Can technology make what was once wrong now ok?

One thing is certain: as technological progress continues its rapid pace, the very notion of what it means to be human will be more and more challenged -- and with it, the very structure of human society.

Theology of the body

Christian theology and religion are obviously concerned with spiritual things. God is understood to be pure spirit, and certainly angels and human beings are understood to at least possess a spiritual element (in humans, this being the **soul**). Much of theology over the course of history has focussed on this spiritual dimension, sometimes taking the body more or less for granted. But with the Enlightenment period of philosophy came a new surge in explicitly materialist philosophies which denied the existence of anything spiritual, whether the existence of God or the existence of a spiritual soul. One of these materialist philosophies -- Communism -- took hold in a large portion of the world, while another -- existentialism -- has captured the imagination of much of the West. With this came a greater focus on the body in the philosophical literature, because (after all) if there is no spirit, then there is only the body. Theology has had to develop responses to these challenges from the culture, and in the 20th century many theologians have contributed to the development of a more complete theology of the body.

Philosophical background: Dualism and Realism

For the reasons cited in the introduction, a theology of the body needs to begin with an analysis of the philosophical background. As we have seen, there have been two major philosophical “families” in the history of philosophy: the Platonist, or *Dualist* branch; and the Aristotelean, or *Realist* branch. Each perceives the relationship between the body and the soul quite differently, so the philosophical approach we take will have profound implications for our theological conclusions.



The Dualist approach sees the essence of the human person as residing in the soul. The body is under the control of the soul (ideally) and is meant to be an instrument of the soul, like the movements of a tool or a set of worn clothes is under the same sort of control. The soul is seen as the principle of reason and intellect, and can be understood to be sexless (sex being an attribute of the body).

SOUL + BODY =
PERSON

The Realist approach sees the essence of the human person as arising from a unity of the body and soul. Both body and soul are necessary for an integral understanding of the human person. The soul is not simply the principle of reason and intellect, but of life, such that anything that is alive (rational or not) has a soul. Because of the profound unity of body and soul, it is possible to conceive of the soul as sharing the principle of gender with the body.

Each approach has made recommendations throughout history as to how we should use our bodies.

Dualist approach

Dualist approaches often see the body as relatively unimportant for the determination of human nature. Thus, while they can be moderate in their recommendations, Dualist approaches often tend to extremes.

In some cases, the body is viewed with tremendous suspicion as something from which unreasonable sensations, passions and drives arise. Since the soul is meant to be rational and in control, the body is therefore “at war” with the soul and is meant to be subdued. In extreme cases this led to a total denial of the goodness of any pleasures as sinful. In this approach, often called **stoicism**, the ideal is to transcend the body, to escape from it through perfect “mind over matter”. In this mode Dualism often rejects sex, marriage, and indeed all pleasure as “dirty” and suspect, social attitudes the early Christians had to struggle against.⁴³

In other cases, there is a tremendous confidence in the powers of soul of control the body, or a sense that the soul is so separate from the body that anything that happens to the body is inconsequential to the soul. In such cases, since we are stuck with having a body in the meantime, we might as well make the experience as pleasant as possible. This approach, often called **hedonism**

⁴³ St. Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, wrote: “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” (1 Tim 4: 1-3) This is certainly no ringing endorsement of this form of extreme Dualism!

or **epicureanism**, seeks to maximize the pleasure available to the body. The only way for pleasure to be excessive is if it harms the future possibilities of pleasure, but there are no inappropriate pleasures as such. Again, the early Christians struggled against such extreme attitudes.⁴⁴

These approaches are opposite in their conclusions, of course, but both arise from the same principle of the dualism of the soul and the body. Societies that tend to Dualism often can be seen flitting from one extreme to the other. Our own society has seen extremes of stoicism and hedonism: the rigidity of the Victorian period and the discipline imposed by the sacrifices of World War I gave way to the casualness of the Roaring Twenties, which tightened up from the difficulties and sacrifices of the Great Depression and World War II, which then loosened up again in the cultural revolution of the Sixties.

Images of Christianity often depict a very strict and suspicious approach to physical pleasure. To a certain degree, this is historically accurate. Until the renewal of the Realist approach in neo-Scholasticism, the Christian churches often were limited either to Dualist approaches tempered by the approach of the Bible, or to a Scholasticism not adequate to the task of responding to the Dualist philosophies. Because hedonism is definitely condemned in Scripture, that essentially left the stoic extreme (or some lesser form of it) as the philosophical response. So yes, Christianity has been associated with negative attitudes to the body, but rather than being intrinsic to the religion itself it arose from the poverty of philosophical thought at the time.

Realist approach

The Realist approach, because it sees the body and soul as part of a unity, tends to greater moderation in its recommendations for living, a moderation that is not simply coincidental to the approach but arises from the dynamics within Realism itself.

Let us recall that the Dualist approach emphasises the freedom that comes from having an intellectual soul, either placing tremendous confidence in that power of freedom or suspicious that that freedom is threatened. The Realist approach, however, sees the soul and the body as being in a partnership. The body is a source of self-actualization for the soul, acting as the recipient of positive sensations and as a means for acting in the world, but the soul in turn is at the service of the body, directing its actions for it so as to enhance its powers and its dignity. This recognition of a need for “give and take” between body and soul helps prevent the extremes of Dualism.

Because the Realist approach starts from a consideration of objective reality, there is a greater acceptance of the notion of an *objective human nature*, which contains an implicit code of conduct for human behaviour. Realist philosophers therefore tend to try and discover this nature and code of conduct, rather than prescribe or invent it (as many Dualists, such as the existentialists, claim can be done). This quest for objective knowledge provides Realist philosophies with a sort of anchor outside themselves, and thus preventing the extremes of Dualism.

⁴⁴ There are very many New Testament examples of condemnations of certain sexual practices or other forms of bodily self-abuse, such as drunkenness. It is not our place to list all of them here. A good starting place for personal research would be 1 Corinthians, chapters 5 and 6, using a Bible that lists parallel passages in other books of the Bible.

What are we?

Our current society is composed of a combination of Dualists and Realists, and often both perspectives are present (however uncomfortably or uncritically) in the same person -- it just depends on the issue at hand.

In general, we start life as Realists. A little child, offended at being struck by another child (say a boy) who won't share a toy, does not complain "He hit my body!", but rather, "He hit **me!**" The child already has an identification of himself with his body, i.e. his body *is him*. This is a classic "naive Realist" perspective, albeit one that has not yet withstood scrutiny.

The dominant philosophies and ideologies in our society, however, are currently very Dualist, which means that, unless some strong Realist influence capable of critical thinking is present, with time the little child-realists are often socialized to accept certain Dualist conclusions.

The end result is a society composed of people who have internalized two sets of philosophical systems (even though they didn't know it). It can be a very confusing experience. Those persons with the opportunity to reflect on these sorts of questions (such as university students) owe it to themselves to untangle their opinions and put some consistency and order into them. Dualism has had many legitimate philosophical successes, thanks to its focus on the "mental" or "spiritual" dimension of the human person (such as the articulation of human rights theory), and sees itself as a champion of human dignity through an emphasis on freedom. Realism believes it is in better contact with reality, and feels it can incorporate the successes of Dualism and improve upon them by discovering what human freedom is *for*. The goal, therefore, should not be to politicize the question, but for each side to understand the other in a common quest for Truth.

Is the Bible Dualist or Realist?

If we are to undertake theology, and not only philosophy, we must ask ourselves which of the two approaches (Dualist and Realist) does the Bible support? In fact, it supports both. It simply depends on which kinds of intelligent beings one is speaking of.

With regards to Dualism, this method applies best when speaking of angels. Angels (and by extension demons) are, by nature, purely spiritual beings. They are capable of entering into a relationship with matter, but to do so does not change their underlying nature. Should an angel assume a body, for example, it would no more change its nature than our putting on a set of clothes would change our human nature. A "naked angel" is bodiless, and any body it might assume, like any other matter it might influence, is merely an instrument for it to use. In this context, Dualism is an entirely appropriate approach to describing the spirit-body relationship for an angel.

With regards to humans, however, the Bible has a definite leaning towards Realism. The second creation account of Genesis (chapter 2) describes the creation of Adam as follows:

The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Gen 2: 7)

In this passage the body comes first, and the only mention of a separate "soul" is in the reference to

the animation of the body with life. Let us not forget that in the Realist school the soul is the principle of life for the body -- clearly there is a closer correlation with Realism than Dualism. In addition, the expression "living being" is a translation of the Hebrew concept "nefesh", which is a strongly unitary concept -- there is barely room in the concept for the duality of body and soul, much less a strong dualism.⁴⁵

The New Testament does seem to possess passages which suggest some kind of duality within human beings, such as this passage:

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. (Romans 8: 5-9b)

At first reading this sounds dualistic, with the references to "flesh" and "spirit". In fact, though, the word "spirit" in this context means the Spirit of God; the word "flesh" is a reference to the "nefesh" concept, in that we humans are "made of living flesh". The duality in this passage, and in ones like it, is not soul-body dualism, but the duality of human beings and God -- a duality which Christ was understood to have heroically overcome (see Romans 8: 3). There is little if any room in the Bible for full-blown body-soul dualism in human beings.⁴⁶

The body: locus of self-expression

What is the cultural function of the body within the context of these philosophical schools? We need to keep in mind that, even they do have spiritual souls, when we first observe another

⁴⁵ Be careful: Soul + Body is definitely a duality, but NOT a dualism, because of the unity of the two concepts.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that the inherent Realism of the Bible in matters concerning the body has led to important tensions within the Protestant world. The Reformation movement is inherently Dualist in its origin. From this Dualism came the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, which emphasizes the authority of the Bible over any human doctrine or tradition. However, the Bible itself is quite Realist, which creates a certain inner tension: the Dualism of Protestantism leads to a special emphasis on the Realism of the Bible. In fact, the more Dualist the particular Protestant denomination, the more fundamentalist and literal it tends to be with regards to the Bible, and the more Realist it therefore is in its theology of the body. On the other hand, Liberal Protestant denominations, because they apply the methods of Liberal Protestantism to the reading of the Bible, have more flexibility to allow their "inner Dualism" to come out in their application of Biblical teachings. This leads to strange scenarios: many Evangelicals and Pentecostals, normally diametrically opposed to Catholicism, now see the Catholic and Orthodox churches as allies in the cultural debates of our day, while the Liberal Protestant churches, who originally led the way in establishing good relations with Catholics and Orthodox, now seem farther than ever from not just Catholics and Orthodox, but their own Protestant co-religionists (some of whom don't even see the Liberal Protestants as fellow Christians any more).

human beings the first thing we observe is their body. Telepathy has not yet been demonstrated to exist, and so the only means one soul has to not be isolated from another is by interactions that occur on the level of the body. Whether one is a Dualist or a Realist, there is a general agreement that the body is the means by which people enter into relationship with one another.

This use of the body for relationships we see in even the most basic cultural interactions. When people wish to impress one another, for example, it is often through gifts which in some way affect the body: going out for dinner (nourishing the body), gift of clothes or jewellery (adorning the body), and going dancing (patterned bodily movement) are all simple examples. Beyond this, there is the simple question of so-called “body language”. Our body postures and proximity as we sit or stand next to someone often already communicates volumes without a word being spoken.

Beyond a use for relationship, however, the body is also a tool of self-expression. High heels and neckties, for example, are completely useless forms of clothing outside of a particular cultural context. The wearing of certain kinds of clothing, however, becomes a form of self-expression: we identify ourselves as belonging to a certain professional or peer group, or perhaps we are simply expressing our way of feeling comfortable. And this desire for self-expression goes beyond clothes. Tattoos, body piercing (whether ear lobes, noses, tongues, etc.), scarification (such as circumcision), hair styles -- all these are a way for us to express “on the outside” (i.e. in our bodies) who we are “on the inside”.

How “plastic” is the body?

If the body is a kind of canvas upon which we express ourselves, the next question to be addressed is: how far can we go in this self-expression before it becomes inappropriate? This question is particularly pressing in this age of elective cosmetic surgery, also known as “plastic surgery”. Just how “plastic” is the body, anyway?

Dualist approach

Within the Dualist approach, there are really no inherent limits to the degree of modifications we can legitimately make to the body -- it just depends on how Dualist you really are. After all, if the body is simply an instrument of the soul, and the soul (being especially a principle of free will) has no inherent limits to its manner of self-expression, then there should not be any corresponding limits in the changes we can make to our bodies for that self-expression. We see this Dualist approach in such far-reaching applications as the use of surgical sterilization and gender reassignment surgery (which used to be known as “sex-change operations”). Given that the soul is essentially a non-sexed or unisex principle in Dualism, there really is no inherent reason to object to even such procedures, however radical. We also see this Dualism in the increasing acceptance of assisted suicide and even active euthanasia, even for people who are “brain dead” or just mentally disabled, whether from birth or due to later accident or disease. “Quality of life” arguments are profoundly Dualist in nature.

Realist approach

Within the Realist approach, however, there are particular limits to what can be legitimately done. While individual philosophical approaches may vary, Realists hold that the body is intimately united to the soul and therefore shares in the dignity of the human person in itself. The soul is the principle of life as well as reason, and so one cannot legitimately choose bodily self-expression options which diminish that life. This can be summarized in the following principle:

We cannot legitimately alter the body in a way that attacks the healthy functioning of that part of the body, or of the body as a whole. (Realist principle)

Certain forms of body alteration, then, are legitimate within this norm, such as circumcision or piercing of the ear lobes for earrings. The use of other forms of cosmetic surgery, such as breast enhancement or reduction, face lifts, “nose jobs”, and so on, are also not forbidden according to this principle.⁴⁷ Certainly the removal of diseased organs is not forbidden, given that they already lack a healthy functioning, nor is the removal of organs that do not normally have a contribution to the healthy functioning of the body (elective appendix removal, for example). Organ donation can be considered as well, as long as the removal of the organ (in whole, such as with kidney donation, or in part, as with liver donation) does not impair the overall health of the body -- the donation of one’s key organs before one’s own death, for even the most noble purpose, would be therefore forbidden, as while the other person might live, our own healthy functioning would be eliminated.⁴⁸

This Realist principle would also, by extension, mean that assisted suicide and active euthanasia are to be rejected as impermissible. Sterilization (vasectomy, tubal ligation) are also to be rejected as a diminishing of the otherwise healthy functioning of the body. Gender reassignment surgery would also be improper, because it necessarily involves the irreparable removal of otherwise healthy bodily organs: either the removal of the breasts (for female-to-male reassignment) or castration (for male-to-female reassignment).

Chemical alterations to the body

The examples we have seen so far to illustrate the difference between Dualism and Realism have had to do with physical changes to the body, such as through surgery or assisted suicide. The same principles, however, could just as easily be applied to the use of chemicals to modify the body without actually treating any particular illness. For example, the Dualist approach is generally much more open to the possibilities of using recreational drugs, such as the legal ones (caffeine, nicotine,

⁴⁷ It should be noted, though, that some ethicists would object to them on the basis of their relative cost (could that money be put to better use?) or because of their frequent connection with the vice of vanity.

⁴⁸ It should be noted that the body can get by very well with only one kidney, and the liver regenerates remarkably quickly. We have no known cases of removed hearts growing back, however!

or alcohol). The Realist approach would tend to be much more cautious, and would declare that these or other drugs can only be used as long as they are not impairing the healthy functioning of some part of the body (such as the brain, or the liver). Even the Dualists are cautious about drugs which affect the brain, though, since that seems to be the organ that allows the soul to have some control over the body. The distinction is sharper, however, when we refer to drugs which affect non-cognitive functions, such as steroids, or hormones. The use of steroids for exceptional physical enhancement, for example, speaks of a profoundly Dualist approach to the body. The same is also true for the use of chemical birth control, such as “The Pill”, which often enough is used to induce temporary sterility without actually treating any diseases. (We will examine other issues surrounding birth control in a later section.)

An analysis of the morality of abortion

We have already examined the theology of the body in issues surrounding the end of life (assisted suicide and euthanasia). Equally important, however, are issues regarding the beginning of life, most notably the issue of abortion.

Dualist approach

The issue within Dualism is generally to try and determine the moment at which the developing cells in the uterus can be considered a person. As we have seen, within Dualism the soul is considered the principle of the intellect. Dualist approaches to the question of abortion have tended to focus on the question of “ensoulment”, which would be the moment that the soul becomes active in the body. As long as the foetus does not have any functioning brain cells, for example, many would argue that the foetus cannot be considered a person (because of course, the intellect have nothing yet to work with). The argument would then be that, before this necessary stage of development (whenever it might be) abortion cannot be wrong, because it is not a person that is being aborted, but just a pre-human clump of cells.⁴⁹

Realist approach

The Realist approach has a much more cut-and-dried approach to the abortion question. For Realists, the soul is the principle of life. Therefore, once a new life has begun at the moment of conception, complete with its own unique DNA code, a new soul (and by extension a new person) exists. Abortion at any stage would therefore be an attack on the functioning of an otherwise healthy

⁴⁹ It should be noted that this is a very slippery argument, mainly because within Dualism it has proved impossible to agree on a precise biological definition of the moment of becoming a human person. Peter Singer of Princeton University, for example, has argued in favour of the possible legalization of infanticide, on the basis that a newborn baby has not yet attained any demonstrable measure of rationality. Can such a being, even though out of the womb, yet be considered a person? If the principle of human dignity is rationality, not life, infanticide (as awful as it sounds) becomes arguable.

body, an attack leading to death, and so would be morally wrong.
What about quality of life arguments?

With the advent of forms of pre-natal diagnosis, it is now possible to know if the developing foetus is likely to be born with birth defects, mental handicaps, genetic diseases or other potential problems. In such cases, abortion is often recommended. How are such recommendations to be evaluated? In fact, they are really no different from quality of life arguments for people at the end of their life. Abortion in this case is really just a kind of pre-natal active euthanasia, and so is subject to the same kind of analysis, depending on your school of thought (Dualist or Realist): the Dualists tend to see less of a problem, while the Realists would see it as an attack on the dignity of the developing human person.

Therefore, abortion recommendations, even in the face of potentially serious handicaps, are strongly Dualist in nature.

The religious dimension of the abortion debate

The abortion debate, as it is typically lived and portrayed in our society, is seen to pit secular forces against religious forces. In fact, none of the arguments we have examined yet regarding abortion are particularly religious in nature. So why does the abortion issue, particularly the “pro-life” side, attract such numbers of people motivated by religious faith?

The very name “pro-life” is an indicator of the philosophical Realism underlying the anti-abortion position, given that Realism focuses on the soul as the principle of life. Catholic and Orthodox theology are fairly strongly grounded in the Realist approach, so it should be no surprise that these churches are strongly opposed to abortion. These churches are not Realists simply for philosophical reasons, however. As we have already seen, the Bible itself contains a strongly Realist focus. While it does not mention abortion by name, there are many passages that refer to unborn children as true persons. Take this passage from the Psalms as an example:

You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, so wonderfully you made me. (Psalm 139: 13-14a)

Note that it states “you knit **me**”, not “you knit my body”. This identification of the body with the person is another example of the biblical Realist perspective.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The abortion debate is just one example of a cultural divide that has split the Protestant world. As mentioned earlier, while the Reformation was itself born in a Dualist perspective, the stark realism of the Bible means that many Protestants, when it comes to issues surrounding the theology of the body, are in fact Realists. The Protestant world is, therefore divided on the question. The Liberal Protestant churches, such as the Anglican or United churches, are often more open to the Dualist perspective on abortion. The Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, however, who are more literal in their reading of the Bible, tend much more to the Realist approach -- and so also tend to be very opposed to abortion.

The “language” of the body: human sexuality

It is a demonstration of the increasing sexualization of our society that the word “intercourse” is often automatically understood to mean sexual intercourse. In fact, it simply means “exchange” or “conversation”. To say that two people are having intercourse could just as easily mean they are chatting over coffee. Nevertheless, it is significant that we refer to the sexual encounter as “sexual intercourse,” because it implies that what is going on between two people is a kind of conversation. And just as a true conversation is not just random sounds people utter in each others’ direction, but words which have meaning, the acts of sexual intercourse can be presumed to have some sort of meaning as well. Meaningless sex cannot be true “sexual intercourse,” in the strictest sense.

The “grammar and syntax” of bodily sexual acts

If the acts of sexual intercourse constitute a kind of language, how are we to evaluate the “grammar and syntax” of this language?

The Dualists, quite predictably, tend to a kind of “sexual nominalism”, just as they tend to true nominalism when studying regular language. In this context, sexual acts mean whatever they are intended to mean in the exchange between the individuals -- there is no inherent meaning to specific sexual acts as such. What is most important is the intent, and the satisfaction from a “meaning well communicated”. Our modern culture gives a broad place for sex acts “between consenting adults,” and phone-in sex shows emphasize that no sex acts are in and of themselves wrong, as long as “it works for you and your partner”. These attitudes are profoundly shaped by Dualism, which (once again) sees the body as a tool of the soul, and not as having meaning in and of itself apart from the meaning and intentionality that the soul can give it.

The Realists, on the other hand, tend to see in sex acts a kind of “primitive vocabulary” already built into human nature. The meaning of sexual acts can be found not only in the manner in which they are used in particular circumstances, but also in the very structure of the acts themselves. Realist ethicists, therefore, often go into some detail in their philosophical (and by extension theological) analysis of specific sexual acts, as they try and “decipher” this language they believe is built already into human nature and expressed in the human body. When we hear people complain that certain sex acts are “not natural,” we are hearing a Realist-inspired perspective being expressed.

The difference between the two schools of thought is stark. For the Dualists, the meaning communicated through sex acts is essentially independent of the acts themselves, and they are equally capable of communicating meaning as long as the proper context (such as mutual consent) is maintained. For the Realists, on the other hand, the meaning of sex acts is confined to the possible “true” meaning(s) inherent in the acts themselves -- and perhaps some sex acts are better than others at communicating higher orders of meaning and love.

The objectification of sex vs. intersubjectivity

Accompanying the question of the meaning of sexual acts is the question of the sexual actors,

satisfaction but starts with the intimacy of the formation of the joint subject (of course, the physical pleasure is not to be rejected, and forms part of the process of forming the joint subject). The question then becomes: if the couple are not objects for each other but become a joint subject, then what is the new object for that joint subject?

Masturbation, both physical and mental

If sexual acts are part of a sexual “language”, how are we to understand these acts when performed alone? In fact, as silly as it may sound, it becomes the sexual equivalent of “talking to yourself”. The real issue is how these acts are to be understood morally.

The Dualists generally find little problem with masturbatory acts as such. After all, since the body is a tool and instrument for the soul, using the body for solo sexual pleasure has nothing inherently wrong with it. Of course, Dualists do generally recognize that it is possible for masturbatory practices to indicate an underlying illness, just like if we saw someone muttering to themselves nonsensically we might get a sense there was something wrong with them. That being said, just because we occasionally talk to ourselves doesn’t mean we are sick or crazy, so likewise occasional masturbatory acts really aren’t a problem in a strict Dualist perspective.

The Realists evaluate masturbation quite differently. For Realists the purpose of the “sexual conversation” is to be able to enter into intersubjectivity, something which is impossible when a person is alone. What is worse, because one treats one’s body as an object, masturbation becomes a denial by the person of the dignity they possess from being a subject. Masturbation, in this context, is seen as an activity which at the least is very base, and at the worst is immoral. Different Realist ethicists will offer different moral analyses, depending on the particular branch of Realism that is speaking, but all agree that masturbation is something that is best avoided by a mature and autonomous individual.

It should be noted that certain solo sexual acts are not physical at all but reside on the level of the mind, such as the sexual excitement that comes from the viewing of pornography, or from engaging in deliberate sexual fantasy. Generally the moral analysis of such mental acts parallels those of the physical acts of masturbation, even if they cannot be called “masturbation” in the strict sense. After all, solo mental acts of fantasy are often accompanied by solo physical acts of masturbation, and vice versa.

In former times the Realist school used arguments against masturbation that today seem laughable (like the famous “You’ll go blind” warning). This was an attempt to root the prohibition against masturbation in the body, something very Realist to do, but it has backfired because -- and the bottom line is -- it was not *true*.⁵¹ Our current post-modern culture is very Dualist, and so generally does not look unfavourably on masturbation (in fact, it is sometimes quite approved of). But the Dualist approach is not without its problems as well. Strangely, what is often overlooked is that masturbation is for many an addictive behaviour, a habit that becomes ingrained and can be difficult to break (similar to smoking). Given that the Dualist perspective highly prizes individual

⁵¹ Current Realist arguments rely more on the concept of human dignity rooted in intersubjectivity rather than relying on dubious medical recommendations.

freedom, and that addictive behaviours diminish the ability to exercise that freedom, this seems like a strange contradiction.

A theological analysis of methods of birth regulation

The availability of modern scientific methods of birth regulation was one of the major factors leading to the Sexual Revolution of the 1960's, a Revolution which is still being lived today. Before we can do an intellectual analysis of the methods of birth regulation, however, we need to understand what it is we are talking about. The following categorizes these various methods of birth regulation.

METHODS FOR THE REGULATION OF THE NUMBER AND SPACING OF BIRTHS	
ARTIFICIAL METHODS	
<i>BIRTH CONTROL</i>	<i>CONTRACEPTION</i>
Abortion Intra-uterine devices (IUD's) RU-486	Condoms Spermicides Cervical cap
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 200px; margin: 0 auto; padding: 5px;"> "The Pill" </div>	
<div style="text-align: right;"> <p><u>Unreliable:</u> Calender / Rhythm methods</p> <p><u>Highly reliable:</u> Billings ovulation method Sympto-thermal methods SERENA</p> <p><u>100% guaranteed:</u> Sexual abstinence</p> </div>	

Methods for the regulation of the number and spacing of births

It should be pointed out that none of the major Christian denominations objects to the idea that parents should have the right to decide the number of children they will have, as well as the spacing of those births in time. None. Not even the Catholic Church, which while it insists that a marriage should be open to having children, prefers to leave these decisions to the prudential judgement of parents.

What is at stake, therefore, is not *whether* couples are allowed to plan their family, but *what methods* are morally permissible. These methods can be classified into two types: artificial, and natural.

Artificial methods of birth regulation

Artificial methods of birth regulation are called both “contraception” and “birth control”, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. This is unfortunate, because the two do not mean the same thing. Contraception is about who gets conceived, birth control is about who gets born. We must not forget that there is generally a nine-month period between these two events! Abortion is a form of birth control, but it is most definitely not a form of contraception, because it does not prevent conception but presumes it. Condom use, on the other hand, is purely a form of contraception, because once conception does occur the use of a condom is of no consequence in the continuing process toward birth. The other artificial methods listed on the table are:

Intra-uterine devices: Conception generally occurs in the woman’s fallopian tube, with the conceptus then passing into the uterus and implanting itself in the uterine lining. IUD’s interrupt pregnancy by interfering with the implantation process, by either irritating the uterine lining (thus making it unsuitable for implantation) or by changing the chemistry of the uterus, rendering it toxic to the conceptus. Because IUD’s do nothing to prevent conception, they are purely a form of birth control, not contraception.

RU-486 is a newly-approved drug which chemically provokes a miscarriage. The woman then develops labour-like pains a few days later, and the dead foetus is then expelled (as with a natural miscarriage). RU-486 is generally only used once a pregnancy is underway, and so is a form of birth control, not contraception.

Spermicides are chemicals inserted into the vagina before intercourse that are toxic to sperm. They are considered a contraceptive because the sperm then die before reaching the ovum, and so conception never occurs. There is no guarantee that all the sperm are killed, however, so the use of spermicide on its own is generally not recommended as effective.

Cervical cap: Similar to condoms, the cervical cap is a barrier method. Placed over the cervix (the entrance to the uterus), it physically prevents sperm from entering deeper into the woman’s body, thus preventing conception.

“The Pill”: The birth control pill is a method which counts as both contraception and birth control. Through the use of artificial hormones the Pill acts in two ways. First of all, it tricks the woman’s body into thinking it is already pregnant. Ovulation is therefore suppressed, and without any ova being released from the ovaries conception cannot occur (this is the contraceptive function). On occasion, however, a “breakthrough ovulation” does occur, making conception possible. The Pill’s second function then becomes important. The Pill acts as birth control by altering the lining of the uterus, making implantation of the conceptus difficult (analogous to how an IUD works). The fertilized ovum is then flushed from the body with the next menstrual period.⁵²

⁵² It should be pointed out that the so-called “Emergency Contraception” that can be taken after unprotected sex is nothing more than a triple-strength birth control pill. This “Emergency Contraception” is deceptively named, however, because it is not being used to prevent ovulation, but to provide a rush of hormones to alter the uterus and prevent implantation should conception have occurred. It really should be called “Emergency Birth Control”.

Natural methods of birth regulation

Natural methods of birth regulation rest on the reality of the feminine cycle of fertility. While men are generally 100% fertile all the time, women are fertile only for a few days of each month. If it were possible to discover what these days were, and simply not have sex during them, pregnancy would be prevented simply by taking intelligent advantage of cycles already built into nature -- hence the name "natural family planning". Therefore the trick to natural family planning has been to develop a method that reliably predicts and/or detects feminine fertility.

The early *calendar and rhythm methods* depended on tracking the menstrual cycle of the woman. They proved highly unreliable in a number of cases, however, because many women do not have regular menstrual cycles, as well as because it is possible for women to ovulate at times outside of their regular cyclical fertility.

Later research discovered that there are reliable external symptoms that indicate with a high degree of accuracy whether or not a woman was fertile.

The *Billings ovulation method* teaches women to read differences in the consistency of a certain cervical mucous. During infertile times this mucous acts as a toxic barrier to germs seeking entry to the body through the vagina, but it is also a toxic barrier to sperm. When the woman is fertile, however, the consistency changes, and it actually becomes nourishing to sperm, helping them to survive long enough to reach the ovum. Feminine fertility, in fact, depends on more than just ovulation, but also on this mucous. Learning to read this symptom (which only take a few moments each day) has proved to be an indicator of fertility with a level of effectiveness equivalent to that of the birth control pill.

The *Sympto-thermal method* adds on an additional physical symptom: that of body temperature. As it turns out, a woman's body temperature changes during fertile times around ovulation. Charting these changes in body temperature allow the woman to know when she is fertile, and plan accordingly.

The *SERENA method*, as well as others like it, are practical techniques of applying some or all of the Billing ovulation and sympto-thermal methods.

Which methods better help plan the number and spacing of births?

In terms of preventing pregnancy, studies by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that the most effective natural methods, used properly, are as effective as the most effective artificial methods.⁵³ If the couple, in planning a family, wishes to prevent pregnancy for a time, they therefore have a genuine choice in what kinds of methods to use. Do not believe critics who inaccurately pretend that only artificial methods can be trusted! What is really at stake it not the underlying physical effectiveness of the methods, but the ability of the couple to abstain from sexual intercourse during periods of fertility. The ability to delay gratification is one of the signs of psychological maturity and stability. If one or both members of the couple is/are truly unable (not simply

⁵³ WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, "A Prospective Multicentre Trial of the Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning. II. The Effectiveness Phase," *Fertility and Sterility* 36:5 (November, 1981) 591-598.

unwilling) to avoid making demands for sexual gratification for the few days in a row that are necessary, this is indicative of a more serious problem of immaturity that the use of artificial methods will not cure, but only keep below the surface.

Sometimes, however, as the couple plans their family, they do not want to make pregnancy less likely, but more likely. In this regard, artificial methods are quite useless: they can only act to prevent pregnancy, not encourage it. Because natural methods allow the couple to detect precisely when fertility is at its peak, the couple can simply choose to engage in sexual activity more intensely in that time and increase their odds of pregnancy dramatically.

Moral analysis of contraception

The chart on the following page summarizes the moral analysis of the methods of birth regulation from both the Dualist and Realist schools.

CATEGORY OF METHOD	DUALIST ANALYSIS	REALIST ANALYSIS
Birth control	<p>For the Dualist, because the person is not considered fully human until a certain level of development, the birth control methods that interrupt pregnancy at an early stage (e.g. IUD's, the secondary effects of the Pill) are generally considered acceptable.</p> <p>Other forms of birth control fall under the same form of analysis as abortion (see previous discussion).</p>	<p>For the Realist, human life (and therefore a human soul) starts at conception. All methods of birth control that interrupt pregnancy are therefore really forms of abortion, and are considered unacceptable.</p> <p>Because the Pill has a dual effect, one of which is the interruption of pregnancy, it is also unacceptable because it potentially places persons in peril.</p>
Contraception	<p>Contraception involves an alteration of a natural bodily function. Since Dualists see the body as a tool of the soul, no problem is usually seen with the use of contraceptive methods.</p>	<p>While many Realists have no problem with the use of contraception, some (most notably the Catholic Church) do, on the basis that it harms the intersubjectivity that the Realist school holds in such importance.</p>
Natural family planning	<p>The Dualist school has no problem with the use of natural methods. Because Dualists prize freedom of action, however, there is often a bias in favour of artificial methods, because artificial methods permit sexual relations 100% of the time, while natural methods mean no sexual relations during certain periods of the monthly cycle.</p>	<p>The Realist school has no problem with the use of natural methods. This includes the Catholic Church, unless the natural methods are being used without any inner spiritual openness to the possibility of conception (i.e. with a "contraceptive mentality"), which would of course harm the intersubjectivity once again.</p>

Contraception and the Catholic Church

One of the things that seems to bewilder our culture is the continued staunch official opposition of the Catholic Church to the use of contraception. While there was a time when all Christian churches opposed the use of contraception, starting with the Anglican Church in 1930 all the other churches seem to have undergone a revision of their teaching on the subject, or at least a new openness. The Catholic Church also undertook a new study of the question in the 1960's, but the final decision of Pope Paul VI, announced in his 1968 encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, was to re-affirm the traditional teaching. On the issue of contraception, the Catholic Church often seems to stand alone. Why is there this seemingly hard-line stance?

Much ink has been spilled since that 1968 letter, not the least of which by Pope John Paul II, starting ever since he was a priest-theologian teaching at a university in Poland and helping to prepare couples for marriage. It would be difficult to summarize hundreds of pages of Catholic theology in a few lines, but I will try.

We must recall that the Catholic Church is firmly in the Realist camp, both because that has been the traditional philosophy and because the Bible tends to Realism. The highest standard for sexual activity, therefore, is intersubjectivity. The Catholic Church sees contraception as wrong for two reasons which flow from this.

First of all, when artificial contraception is being used, and a break is made between pleasure and procreation, it is much easier for a person to treat his or her sexual partner as an object, and not as a fellow subject. Pope Paul VI pointed this out himself in the letter *Humanae Vitae*, and predicted that the widespread use of contraception would lead to a new cultural mentality, a consequence of which would be the increasing objectification of people, especially women. He wrote:

It is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of anticonceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.⁵⁴

Subsequent experience in our society has led many people to believe that Paul VI was right.

Secondly, and more importantly, there can be an important difference in the psychological openness to conception between the two methods. The intersubjectivity of human sexual acts joins the two people “in one flesh”, i.e. it moulds them into a single subject. Conception is the only human act that cannot occur without two contributing persons, and so is perfectly and naturally the logical outcome of sexual activity. For a truly intersubjective sexual experience to take place, therefore, there must be more than the pursuit of sexual satisfaction: there must also be at least a minimal openness to the possibility of conception. Artificial methods, by definition, are a deliberate attempt to erect a barrier to conception and pregnancy, and so necessarily shut off the openness necessary for a true intersubjective sexual encounter. Natural methods can be used in a “closed-minded” way as well, with no openness to conception at all, and this is no better. However, because

⁵⁴ PAUL VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 17.

natural methods do not in and of themselves involve creating barriers to pregnancy, but simply take advantage of natural cycles of fertility, they do not necessarily mean a closed-minded approach is being used. Therefore it is possible to avoid pregnancy using natural methods without harming the intersubjective dimension of sexual acts, which is so important to the Realist school.⁵⁵

Some people believe that with the election of a new Pope some radical shift in Catholic teaching might become possible. This is unlikely and somewhat simplistic, partly because the process of “development of doctrine” within the Catholic Church depends on much more than the Pope, partly because of the tremendous weight and internal consistency of both the philosophical and theological traditions, and partly because of the practical experience of couples who actually follow the Church on this point. Whether they are Catholic or not, couples who lives happen to match what is proposed by the Catholic Church -- including couples who once used artificial methods and who switched to natural ones -- report having happier, healthier, and sweeter relationships.⁵⁶ Not all couples use natural methods for religious reasons -- some, for example, choose not to use “the Pill” for the sake of a healthy lifestyle (why ingest artificial hormones if there are natural methods that are just as effective?). Even abstracting out the question of religious practice, therefore, studies suggest that the use of natural methods in a spirit of openness and intersubjectivity improves the quality of relationships and reduces the risk of divorce. Oddly enough, this means that couples who use artificial methods for the sake of their happiness often wind up jeopardizing their happiness instead. The Catholic Church believes itself to be the carrier of a message of truth about sexual activity that leads to the practical benefits of more successful and happier marriages, and some evidence has been collected to back that up. It is not reasonable to expect that church to change its doctrine if it honestly believes to do so would lead people to a path of lesser happiness. If a doctrinal change were to occur, new theological and philosophical arguments would have to be developed that concretely addressed the Catholic intellectual tradition from within the Realist current of thought (rather than just throwing barbs at it from the Dualist perspective), as well as new non-ideological studies of relationship success that contradict the current evidence.

A current theological question: homosexual erotic relationships

A new major cultural debate has opened up within Western culture in recent years -- the question of same-sex marriage. There was a time not long ago when homosexual erotic contact was illegal in many Western nations. This was eventually replaced with a general "don't ask, don't tell" social policy, in which persons were free to do what they wanted behind closed doors. Many persons felt that this was still inadequate, however, particularly in cases where a long-standing relationship was at stake -- social benefits might be denied to same-sex partners, for example, or one same-sex

⁵⁵ By extension, one could argue that the highest form of an intersubjective encounter would be when a couple is actively trying to conceive a child. In such as case the “joint subject” is pursuing its highest possible object, the creation of new life. There is a total acceptance of both possible outcomes (pleasure and pregnancy), and so therefore the potential for the intersubjective bond is at its highest level of possibility.

⁵⁶ C.f. NONA AGUILAR, *The New No-Pill No-Risk Birth Control*, Rawson Associates, NY, 1986.

partner might be denied access to the other during hospital visiting hours reserved for "family". Some jurisdictions, notable the state of Vermont and the province of Quebec, then created the new legal category of "civil unions", which would allow all the legal benefits of marriage while at the same time being open to same-sex couples. The term "marriage" itself was reserved, however, to opposite-sex couples only, a point which was challenged as being unjustly discriminatory. This logic eventually led courts in both British Columbia and Ontario to declare the reservation of marriage to opposite-sex couples to be unconstitutional, with other jurisdictions now following suit.

As we have seen, religion is a component of culture, and theology mediates between the two. The Christian churches of the West have been profoundly implicated in the cultural debate around homosexual erotic relationships. Different churches have reacted differently, either paralleling or rejecting the changing social situation. Some Protestant churches, most notably the United Church, have begun performing full-blown same-sex marriages. In the Anglican church there is a bitter international debate about the legitimacy of performing the blessing of same-sex unions, with the diocese of New Westminster in British Columbia at the centre of this controversy. Other Protestant churches, along with the Catholic and Orthodox churches, reject any form of moral equivalence between homosexual and heterosexual unions (without denying that there can be good values found there, such as loyalty and friendship). The split is deep, and widening.

It is impossible to avoid noticing, however, that the membership patterns of each theological "camp" parallel those of other key debates already examined. Approval of homosexual erotic relationships, or the lack of such approval, cannot therefore be reduced to name-calling and labels. Each theological position is, in fact, coming from a distinct philosophical background. This needs to be kept in mind as we examine two key elements of the question: the erotic dimension of such relationships, and the relationship of marriage to the question of the family.

Homosexual erotic contact

To begin this discussion of homosexual erotic contact, we need to first define what we are *not* talking about. This is not the place to discuss simple same-sex friendships which are bereft of erotic contact, as profound as those might be. Friendships can exist between men and women regardless of their sexual orientation. Sometimes these friendships become charged with a certain erotic tension, but again this is not the point of our discussion. We are limiting our subject to a theological evaluation of moments and modes of actual homosexual erotic contact.

This is also not meant to be a discussion of sexual orientation as such. Granted, persons with a stable homosexual orientation are the ones more likely to be involved in homosexual erotic contact, but questions of sexual orientation and identity are often not simple. Adolescents sometimes explore homosexual erotic contact, certain cultural situations sometimes make such contact more likely (such as in prisons), and some people claim to be bi-sexual or simply wish to experiment. So we are not going to explore the orientation behind the actual events and actions of erotic contact, but simply the "sexual meaning" of such moments regardless of the orientation of the persons involved.

The Dualist perspective, as we have seen, tends to focus less on the physical acts being performed, than on the attitude the persons involved bring to those acts. The Christian churches which perform same-sex blessings and marriages tend to emphasize this dimension. To their credit,

they generally do not approve of licentious behaviour, but believe that only *committed* same-sex relationships should be "blessed". This commitment of the heart trumps any discussion of the actual sexual acts involved.

Given that they arise from a Dualist tradition, one would expect that all Reformation churches would be open to performing same-sex blessings of some sort. However, as mentioned, the Bible itself is quite Realist in its approach to the theology of the body, and this creates a certain inner tension. The Bible does not mention homosexuality *as an orientation* within its pages, but it does mention homosexual erotic contact. In every case, it does so negatively.⁵⁷ To adopt a more favourable position therefore requires that the first-hand meaning of these statements be somehow re-interpreted, usually through the help of the techniques of Liberal Protestantism. Those Reformation churches which hold to a more literal reading of Scripture, however, reject such an approach, preferring instead the "plain sense" of these passages. The divide in the Protestant world is deep, with each side accusing the other of "betraying the Bible".

The Catholic and Orthodox churches, coming as they do from a Realist perspective, derive their position from a combination of the data of the Bible with the historical Tradition they have received. This historical Tradition has also generally had a negative evaluation of homosexual erotic contacts, despite claims that contrary examples exist.⁵⁸ Some argue that this historical pattern is not due to something inherent in homosexual erotic acts, but simply because of the presence of homophobia in those cultures. That being said, these churches hold their positions not simply because of the presence of this historical Tradition, but because Realists also evaluate the nature of acts and not just their intent. The Orthodox have tended to go less in this direction, preferring to rely on the argument from Tradition, but the Catholic Church has developed this dimension of the argument quite extensively. In general, it comes back to the question of intersubjectivity. A homosexual erotic encounter, it is argued, cannot create a true intersubjective union because its acts are fundamentally incapable of giving the greatest of gifts -- the gift of new life. The latter, barring some extreme technological intervention, requires a heterosexual union.⁵⁹

The relationship of marriage to the question of the family

Apart from the simple question of the theological evaluation of homosexual erotic acts is the question of homosexual erotic relationships, and the degree of social recognition that they should

⁵⁷ Cf. Gen 19:1-11; Lev 18:22 & 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Jude 7.

⁵⁸ One example which received great media attention was John Boswell's *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, which argued that the Eastern (Greek) practice of *adelphopoiesis* was a form of "same-sex marriage" sanctioned by the Eastern church. His thesis was highly controversial, however, and received a strong (and scholarly) response from Kenneth W. Kemp and Robert Kennedy in a review essay published in the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (volume 41, no. 1, 1996).

⁵⁹ It should be pointed out that this kind of analysis can and does include certain forms of heterosexual contact! Anal sex, for example, is seen for these reasons as incapable of creating the intersubjective union, whether the couple is heterosexual or homosexual. It is therefore to be excluded, even if it is performed between a husband and wife.

be given. Most Realists argue that heterosexual marriage should remain a distinct legal category because only heterosexual relationships are capable of producing children, and such relationships should obtain all the social recognition and assistance necessary to ensure they remain viable places for child-rearing. They do recognize that legally limiting marriage to heterosexual couples is a form of discrimination, but they do not see it as unjust discrimination because, in essence, that would be same as declaring that nature itself is unjust. Dualists typically respond with the argument that having children is not a necessary component of marriage, because there are infertile heterosexual couples who get married. Behind all of this is the very important question, scarcely heard above the din: what is marriage all about? Is it about the founding of a couple, or a family?

We need to keep in mind that the current debate is about the *legal definition* of marriage. We also need to keep in mind that Dualists approach the crafting of definitions in a manner quite different from Realists.

A Dualist tends to take two cases of the same definition and eliminate that which is not common to them to find the "true essence" of what must be defined. The above argument regarding infertile married couples is a classic Dualist approach -- since the possibility of new children is not necessarily common to all couples getting married, the argument is that it should not form part of the eventual definition. This then leaves the door open to a redefinition of marriage to include same-sex relationships, as marriage is seen more as the founding of a permanent couple, rather than a family.

Realists, on the other hand, place the things to be defined in a hierarchical order, with one key definition at the centre and others drawing their meaning from that one by analogy. In such a case, heterosexual marriages with the possibility of new children remain the prototypical form of marriage. Other forms of infertile heterosexual marriage can still be praiseworthy, however, if they contain the same openness to the possibility of children. The individual physical acts of marital love are therefore not infertile by *nature*, but by *circumstance* (such as of age or physical condition). The existence of infertile heterosexual married couples does not, therefore, challenge the essential role of marriage, which is not so much the founding of a permanent couple, as the founding of a family which will depend on the strength of that couple for its growth and full development. Since definitions should follow the essence of the thing defined, the argument then goes, for the definition of marriage to be restricted to heterosexual couples is not an unjust form of discrimination, but rather simply matches a pattern found in nature itself.

The "three C's"

The religious terminology around human sexuality is sometimes confused, especially in the popular media. To conclude this set of lecture notes, let's just clarify what certain words mean.

Continenence, in the strict sense, means the absence of genital sexual expression. In a broader sense, it could also include physical acts meant to provoke sexual excitement.

Celibacy means living in an unmarried state as a chosen form of life, as well as the surrender of the search for a spouse during that time (i.e. no dating or "checking others out"). We are born unmarried, if you think about it, but that does not mean we are celibates -- it must be chosen.

Celibacy can be chosen as a permanent choice (such as with Roman Catholic priests) or temporary one (such as with monks or nuns before they make their final vows).

Chastity means the ability to live in a state of spiritual purity of body and mind regarding sexual matters, using the will of God on sexuality as our guide. Chastity is both a virtue and an obligation. Because the will of God is always meant for our good, if we actually are able to live the virtue of chastity (i.e. we do have the ability to exercise sexual self-control), then we are obliged to do so, and if we are not able to live chastity (i.e. some psychological wound or force of habit has reduced our ability to exercise self-control) then we are obliged to try and obtain it.⁶⁰

These terms can overlap, but should not be confused. For example, many people think chastity means never having sex, but in fact that is continence. In most Christian traditions if you are single you are called to continent chastity, but on the other hand if you are married your obligation of chastity obviously does not mean that you are to never have sex, but simply that it is to always be with your marriage partner. In this context, chastity does not mean continence, but fidelity. In fact, to take it a step further, marital chastity normally means you *should* have sex, and have plenty of it! If fact, a continuous refusal could be a type of unchastity, unless some higher spiritual value was involved. As a priest, if a married couple came to me and told me they had utterly ceased to have sexual relations, my immediate reaction would not be to congratulate them but to try and find out if anything might be wrong.

Conclusion: the spirituality of the body

Regardless of whether one is Dualist or Realist, Christian theology ultimately needs to make sure it is not limiting itself to philosophical arguments but is truly engaged in an exploration of faith. In the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, the theology of the body is presented as an exploration of a symbol built into the very pattern of existence. Undue attention to the body, whether through vanity or shame, is seen as a form of idolatry -- because the body forms part of the image and likeness of God built into the human person. This image and likeness cannot be limited to the soul, because the body itself is meant to be redeemed in the Resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. In fact, this Last Day is presented to the reader in sexual and marital terms! God is presented as a male figure, actively offering existence and grace to a Creation, while Creation (and particularly the Church) is presented as a feminine principle having an "active receptivity" to this loving offer of existence and union. Indeed, the final goal of the "new heavens and new earth" is divinization, which (to put it in terms just discussed) would mean the creation of an intersubjective union between God and humanity. How profoundly intimate such an encounter will be! And even more interesting, an intersubjective union is meant to be fundamentally oriented to an object outside itself. While God himself will not change, this can only mean that the part of humanity that will participate in this

⁶⁰ Of course, the key theological question becomes: what is the will of God regarding particular issues? Most Christian churches, for example, would teach that adultery and pre-marital sex are contrary to the will of God. But some issues are more controversial. For example, the United Church of Canada is quite convinced that homosexual acts, done within the context of a committed relationship, do not violate the will of God, while other churches are not so sure or actively teach the contrary.

intersubjective union will not only be living in bliss, it will also be taking part in some new project of God that will be as "open to new life" as intersubjective relationships are meant to be on earth. Heaven will not be boring, but fundamentally creative and life-giving.

As for what we are called to do in the meantime, the answer is *holiness*. Holiness, at its best, is meant to be creative and life-giving, even if it doesn't always produce babies. Even those living lives of chaste celibacy are called to give life and love within that context -- their pursuit of holiness through chastity and celibacy doesn't make sense otherwise. If the Christian churches seem at times to place a certain emphasis on questions of the body, particularly regarding sexuality, this is not just because sex is sooner or later on everybody's mind, but because bodily sexuality is believed to contain patterns which provide a natural education for this greatest challenge -- the challenge of holiness. If we live these patterns incorrectly, some part of us becomes weakened or stunted, as we potentially damage the inner "spiritual reflexes" which make us open to receiving the grace of divinization. But if we live them well, then our capacity for holiness increases immeasurably -- and with it, the very life of God in us.

Theology in a culture of “well-being”

The 20th century was, par excellence, a century of struggle for meaning. It witnessed two great ideological conflicts: the struggle with Fascism, which exploded in the Second World War, the most violent war human history has ever known; and the struggle with Communism, which pitted the “free” West against the “communist” East in the Cold War. These two struggles were not merely military or ideological, but went at the very root of the meaning of human existence.

This “quest for meaning” was explored in literature through the publication of two extraordinary books: George Orwell’s *1984*, and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Each presents a vision of the future called a **dystopia**, which is the opposite of a utopia: rather than a positive vision of the future, it is quite negative and is meant to serve as a warning.

The future Orwell presented is very obviously a dystopia: people live in a cruel dictatorship which seeks to control every aspect of their lives. The images of the leader, called Big Brother,⁶¹ are everywhere. The people have televisions they cannot turn off, and which seem to watch the people as much as the people watch television. Every aspect of people’s lives is micro-managed, including their amount of exercise and even their sex lives. The government has even gone so far as to legislate against “thought crime”, which means the very thinking of anti-regime thoughts, and in an effort to make sure everyone is thinking correctly is instituting a new language called Newspeak that will be purely functional in nature without any capacity for literary expression. As a final abomination, the government even goes so far as to regularly re-write history: the main character’s job is to read old newspapers and books, see how they need to be changed to fit the current policies, and make sure they are changed -- with all old copies destroyed. As the slogan of the Party states: “He who controls the past, controls the future; he who controls the present controls the past.”

The future presented in *Brave New World*, on the other hand, is harder to identify as a dystopia at first. The citizens of this world seem very content. They live in a society of plenty, with no worries about material want. They each have a well-defined place in society, with a job which genetic engineering has ensured that they have been designed from conception to fulfill. They have been conditioned as children to fear the decrepitude of disease and age more than death, and to accept the benefits of gentle euthanasia when the time comes. Not only are all persons trained in the

⁶¹ Yes, this is the actual origin of the name of the reality television show that touched off the whole reality TV trend.

use of contraceptive methods, new humans are now created through a process of genetic engineering and cloning to ensure only the best and most appropriate specimens. All of this means, of course, that sex is now completely divorced from reproduction and is solely an instrument of pleasure; the people act with absolute sexual freedom and without any social constraints or personal inhibitions, to the point where most public entertainments are pornographic in nature (they are called "feelies" because technology has advanced to the point where the audience not only has a feast for sight and sound, but can even enter into a "virtual reality" experience and experience the sensations being presented to the people). And finally there is "soma", a drug everyone carries so that, when unpleasant circumstances come to someone -- even something as simple as bad feelings -- there is a chemical solution that restores a sense of inner well-being.

What is wrong with this picture? In fact, that is the whole question of the book. Is there anything wrong, in fact, with this picture? The Controllers who manage the global society argue that humanity is better off with this simple life of contented existence, free from the "big questions" of meaning. No one is permitted to practice religion anymore, for example, because to do so asks questions deemed dangerous for the society. And while our society rejects quite readily the dystopic vision of *1984*, it has been argued that we are, bit by bit, embracing Huxley's vision. To be sure, many of the technologies are now coming into place: genetic engineering, cloning, contraception, and even virtual reality and so-called "happy pills". Some of the cultural transformations have also taken place: there is an increasing acceptance of euthanasia, and certainly the sexual revolution has had an enormous influence in Western culture. And even religious expression is gradually being removed from the public square (and public schools), with religion denounced as "dangerous" and a source of violence and misery for people.

What is a culture of well-being?

The expression "culture of well-being" is taken from Philip Rieff's book *Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*. Published in 1966, this book defined the cultural outlook of a generation. It is also prophetic in many ways, in that it accurately predicts certain cultural trends we see today, and even attempts to explain them. In a world tending to become "new and brave" à la Huxley, it offers a matrix of explanation. Huxley only described what kind of world our culture is tending toward; Rieff provides arguments as to why and how it is going that way.

Faith after Freud

Before we can examine what this "therapeutic" dynamic is that supposedly has triumphed, we need to examine the meaning of the sub-title of the book, "Uses of faith after Freud". What exactly is this referring to?

Sigmund Freud (b. 1856 - d. 1939) is more than an early psychologist: he marks a transition of eras regarding our view of the psyche. Psychology, in fact, existed long before Freud. For centuries philosophers had tried to describe and understand how the human mind worked,

particularly with regards to the functions of intelligence (i.e. how we come to a true knowledge of things) and of free will. In general these functions were ascribed at the very least to the soul, or **psyche**, giving rise to the twin names for this science: *epistemology*, from the word “episteme” (knowledge), or *psychology* (regarding the psyche).

Theologians, particularly those interested in understanding the morality (or not) of human behaviour picked up on the work of the philosophers and expanded on it. They probed the mystery of free will, and readily admitted that there existed “modifiers to the will” that seemed to reside in the hearts of men and women and which seemed to make certain choices particularly difficult (and therefore not perfectly free).⁶² They also consulted the Bible and found there a vision of the human person that included both a bodily and a spiritual component.

During the period of the Enlightenment, however, the study of the human mind was largely taken over by scientists, particularly those of a materialist tendency. For them, the mind could be reduced to the brain, and the salvation of persons suffering from mental illness was to be found in neurology, not psychology. Freud himself did his medical internship as a clinical neurologist. Nevertheless, in 1889 he had a breakthrough insight -- the possibility that there could be powerful mental processes which nevertheless remained hidden from the consciousness of man. In practical terms, Freud proposed the existence of the unconscious mind, and set about to propose a theory about how it worked (involving 3 forces: the *id*, the *ego*, and the *super-ego*). In essence, Freud proposed that there was an element of the human person that could be abstracted from the merely physical, but which nevertheless worked according to principles subject to valid scientific analysis. Despite initial criticism from the scientific community psychology was reborn, not as a branch of philosophy, but as a branch of science.

This vision of a scientific view of the individual mind quickly led to speculations about how societies work, given that a society contains a “collection of minds”. How did these scientific theories of the individual mind translate into social theories, and even social policy? The study of individual behaviour led to the development of theories of group and social psychology, which evolved into the twin sciences of sociology and anthropology. All three sciences, in a sense, are facets of the same object: the scientific study of that part of the human person that seems to be greater than the mere physical, or that at the very least can be studied with a certain abstraction from our physical nature. We even see this in university studies, in which students of psychology, sociology or anthropology often have to take courses offered by one of the other disciplines. Whether we call it psychology, sociology, or anthropology, we are undertaking sciences that have a common root.

The triumph of the therapeutic

Rieff builds upon these developments in the human sciences to argue that a new phase has begun in Western cultural evolution: the development of a “psychological” culture. In a sense, psychologists have become the new priesthood, with people turning to them for answers to questions

⁶² This list of “modifiers” includes: fear, ignorance, immaturity, mental illness or handicap, poor socialization and bad example, and bad personal habits (vices).

about the meaning of their lives in their quest for "well-being". Rieff contends, however, that the real question is whether there is any real point to looking for "meaning in life" at all beyond well-being itself:

Religious man was born to be saved; psychological man is born to be pleased. The difference was established long ago, when "I believe," the cry of the ascetic, lost precedence to "one feels," the caveat of the therapeutic. And if the therapeutic is to win out, then surely the psychotherapist will be his secular guide.⁶³

This transition to a psychological culture began with the rejection of institutional religion by the cultural elites (and later by the masses):

As cultures change, so do the modal types of personality that are their bearers. The kind of man I see emerging, as our culture fades into the next, resembles the kind once called "spiritual" -- because such a man desires to preserve the inherited morality freed from its hard external crust of institutional discipline.⁶⁴

Doesn't this sound so much like the often-heard refrain "I'm not religious, but I'm a spiritual person"? But Rieff contends this is only a step in a continuing evolution:

Having broken the outward forms, so as to liberate, allegedly, the inner meaning of the good, the beautiful, and the true, the spiritualizers, who set the pace of Western cultural life from just before the beginning to a short time after the end of the 19th century, have given way now to their logical and historical successors, the psychologizers.⁶⁵

What makes this new development unique is that, according to Rieff, it promises to not pit one ideology against another. This was, after all, the scourge of the 20th century, so some new solution, one that is "above the fray", is actually what is proposed:

Our cultural revolution does not aim, like its predecessors, at victory for some rival commitment, but rather at a way of using all commitments, which amounts to loyalty toward none. By psychologizing about themselves interminably, Western men are learning to use their internality against the primacy of any particular organization or personality. If this re-structuring of the Western imagination succeeds in establishing itself, complete with institutional regimens, then human autonomy from the compulsions of culture may follow the freedoms already won from the compulsions of nature. With such a victory, culture, as previously

⁶³ Ibid., p. 24-25.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 2

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

understood, need suffer no further defeats.⁶⁶

Rieff here anticipates an objection: “How can you organize a society if there is to be no guiding plan, no common vision, whether present in religion or in ideology?” He himself acknowledges the difficulty:

The ultimate interest of sociology, like that of psychiatry when it is not lost in a particular patient, turns on the question whether our culture can be so reconstructed that faith -- some compelling symbolic of self-integrating communal purpose -- need no longer superintend the organization of a personality.⁶⁷

It is here that he introduces his concept of the “therapeutic,” encompassing all social sciences, as the tool for the emergence of the new psychological culture:

The culture to which I was first habituated grows progressively different in its symbolic nature and in its human product...By this time men may have gone too far, beyond the old deception of good and evil, to specialize at last, wittingly, in techniques that are to be called, in the present volume, “therapeutic,” with nothing at stake than a manipulable sense of well-being. This is the unreligion of the age, and its master science.⁶⁸

In such a context all absolutes, whether of faith or of ideology, slowly fade away:⁶⁹

Evil and immorality are disappearing...mainly because our culture is changing its definition of human perfection.⁷⁰

Does this not sound like our culture? How harsh it sounds to our ears, when someone proposes something as right or wrong in a way that is meant to bind us, particularly in our conscience! In fact, Rieff predicts this sort of a transformation in our understanding of the role of authority, including the rejection of authorities (religious or ideological) that propose moral absolutes:

The wisdom of the next social order, as I imagine it, would not reside in right doctrine, administered by the right men, who must be found, but rather in doctrines amounting to permission for each man to live an experimental life. Thus, once again, culture will give back what it has taken away. All governments will be just, so long as they secure that consoling plenitude of option in which modern

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁹ Except, some might argue, the absolute that there are no absolutes!

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

satisfaction really consists. In this way the emergent culture could drive the value problem clean out of the social system and, limiting it to a form of philosophical entertainment in lieu of edifying preachment, could successfully conclude the exercise for which politics is the name...The danger of politics lies more in the ancient straining to create those symbols or support those institutions that narrow the range of virtues or too narrowly define the sense of well-being; for the latter seems to be the real beatitude toward which men have always strained.⁷¹

The rejection of “absolutist” politics, then, goes hand in hand with this broad, experimental pursuit of “well-being” over pre-packaged solutions found in faith or ideology. Reiff does point out precondition for this cultural shift to take place, however. As long as people struggle for their continued material existence, as long as that existence is tenuous, they will seek refuge in solutions of faith and ideology. This new cultural evolution therefore necessarily requires the creation of a society of affluence:

Not until psychological men overcome lives of squalor can they truly test their assumption that the inherited ideals of glory are no longer required. Affluence achieved, the creation of a knowing rather than a believing person, able to enjoy life without erecting high symbolic hedges around it, distinguishes the emergent culture from its predecessor.⁷²

Psychological man is likely to be indifferent to the ancient question of legitimate authority, of sharing in government, so long as the powers that be preserve social order and manage an economy of abundance.⁷³

Once established, this new “psychological culture” will find its social parameters in the process of the “therapeutic” itself. Rather than needing religious faith or ideological symbolism to unite people, people will naturally unite with each other because they will be naturally predisposed to explore and reveal their innermost being to one another:

It is conceivable that millennial distinctions between inner and outer experience, private and public life, will become trivial...Reticence, secrecy, concealment of self have been transformed into social problems; once they were aspects of civility...Self-knowledge again made social is the principle of control upon which the emergent culture may yet be able to make itself stable. Indeed, with the arts of psychiatric management enhanced and perfected, men will come to know one another in ways that could facilitate total socialization without a symbolic of communal purpose.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷² Ibid., p. 22-23.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

The popularity of shows like Oprah, Dr. Laura, Dr. Phil, and even the spectacle of the parade of guests on the Jerry Springer show all seems to indicate that Rieff was right -- we seem to have an increasing urgency to bare our souls to one another.

So what, then, happens to God? In fact, there is no need for God anymore, as human beings have defined their own end-goal to human existence:

Psychological man, in his independence from all gods, can feel free to use all god-terms; I imagine he will be a hedger against his own bets, a user of any faith that lends itself to therapeutic use...Of course, the newest Adam cannot be expected to limit himself to the use of old constraints. If "immoral" materials, rejected under earlier cultural criteria, are therapeutically effective, enhancing somebody's sense of well-being, then they are useful. The "end" or "goal" is to keep going.⁷⁵

For Rieff the psychological culture is the "last" culture, in which "man" is his own god, and well-being and openness abound in a "therapeutic" culture. In effect, he has described the internal dynamics that would drive a culture to become a Brave New World.

The Christian response

In order to be able to respond to such a vision, scientific as it proposes to be, it is necessary for Christians to start at the beginning. The starting point of the psychological vision is a particular understanding of human nature. Does Christianity have the same starting point?

To be sure, Christianity does not deny the existence of the body, nor does it deny the existence of the psyche. But to these two elements the Bible adds a third:

May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your *psyche* and *pneuma* and *sarx* be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

The word *sarx* refers to the body, but the two other words (*psyche* and *pneuma*) are more difficult to translate. Both have been translated in the past as "spirit" or "soul", and in modern Greek the terms are almost interchangeable. But there is a nuance between them. The *psyche* is the place of the mind, and of the two is more closely associated with the body. The word *pneuma*, on the other hand, is related to the concept of "air": it refers to the very breath of life, and so more closely associated with the spiritual part of the human person, the very seat of intelligence and will.

The secular scientific approach tends to see the functions of the *pneuma* as merely another part of the *psyche* (effectively denying the existence of the *pneuma*), and sometimes goes even as far as to declare that the *psyche* is also merely an abstraction, and all psychology is really just brain chemistry (i.e. is rooted in the *sarx*). The theological vision, on the other hand, tends to not *absorb* the three components into each other, but to *integrate* them. The human person is still a single

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

subject, but has different dimensions of their humanity that work together but are distinguishable from each other. It is here that we come to the dividing line between the scientific and theological approaches to psychology:

Body (sarx)	The secular scientific approach, by definition, can only study these two. It therefore tends to identify the <i>pneuma</i> with the <i>psyche</i> .	The theological approach is capable of developing an integrated vision of the human person which includes the scientific but which distinguishes between intellectual and spiritual functions (i.e. psychological vs. pneumatic functions).
Mind (psyche)		
Soul (pneuma)	Science assumes this is just another aspect of the <i>psyche</i> .	

Note that it is a mistake to assume that theology studies only the soul without any consideration of the body or mind. A quick study of moral theology will quickly reveal that true theology requires the theologian to be a student of human nature in all its dimensions.⁷⁶

It is one thing to simply oppose the secular scientific vision of psychology with the theological one: it is another to be able to decide between them. Three kinds of experiences highlight the practical differences between the two visions.

Asceticism

According to Rieff the advent of a truly liberated “psychological man” can only come through a society of abundance. Quite remarkably, however, Christian spirituality has long encouraged a practice of asceticism, classically expressed in the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.⁷⁷ Each vow expresses some kind of renunciation:

Poverty	Renunciation of money and ownership of personal possessions.
Chastity	Renunciation of family life and sexual union.
Obedience	Renunciation of power and the control of one’s destiny

Taken from the point of view of the *psyche* only, these renunciations at best can only be understood as dolorous sacrifices accepted in view of some higher value, and at worst are

⁷⁶ I might add that priests discover this very quickly once they start providing concrete pastoral care, especially through hearing confessions.

⁷⁷ Some religious order add even more vows, such as a vow of stability: the promise to live in one place for the rest of one’s life, come what may. The Trappist monks in Algeria who were murdered in 199x, for example, had been given the opportunity to flee to France, but chose to respect their vow and remain in Algeria.

negative limitations imposed on a person that cannot lead to their happiness (unless they are somehow already psychologically unbalanced). But what if there is a truly *pneuma* psychology also at work? In such a case, it is theoretically possible for the vows to be lived in an entirely different way.

A <i>psyche</i> viewpoint...	A <i>pneuma</i> viewpoint...
Sees personal renunciation of money, sex, and power as impositions upon our freedom. These can be accepted for the sake of some higher cause, but would not generally be sought for their own sake.	Sees personal renunciation of money, sex, and power as sources of inner freedom and an opportunity to restore inner harmony among body, mind and spirit, as well as to give room for the presence of God in the soul.

In a sense, then, the ultimate test to discover if the *pneuma* psychology is valid is to see if there are people living these vows with joy -- not simply tolerating them, but really living them with a joy and happiness that cannot be explained without the presence of these vows. While there are perhaps many religious persons who live these vows on a *psyche*-level only, I can personally testify to having encountered extremely happy people who live these vows with a joy that just radiates.⁷⁸ But apart from personal testimonies, it might be worthwhile to undertake special studies to compare the “happiness levels” of persons in vows and those outside of them, just to see if there is something particularly special about the contribution of ascetical choices. If there is, it just might be an indicator of the *pneuma*.

Death and the denial of death

The expression “denial of death” comes from Ernest Becker, who wrote an Pulitzer-Prize-winning book with the same name. Death is a universal element of the human condition, and it cuts across cultures. How we react to death, however, is definitely part of culture. Becker’s book is a major cultural investigation of the ways in which we deny our human finitude, i.e. in which we deny

⁷⁸ I have also had many people challenge my decision to live a life of celibacy. I know many of these people mean well -- they simply cannot understand why I might choose such a life without any complaint. The reason it is so hard to see eye to eye is because they are coming from a *psyche* viewpoint, while I live my calling (I believe) from a *pneuma* viewpoint. I understand where they are coming from, however, because I myself had to make the shift from a *psyche* to a *pneuma* point of view (although I didn’t realise that’s what it was at the time). One winter night I experienced a call from God to live as a celibate, and when I asked why the answer was: “Because I want you to love.” Has the answer been “Because I want you to be more available to love others, to be more available to love others, etc.”, it would have remained simply part of the package deal that I would just have to accept. What was revealed to me, though, was that my celibacy was actually part of my very vocation to live the fullness of what it means to be a human being: the call to love God and our neighbour. And that is taking it from a *psyche* level to a *pneuma* level. I have never looked back.

death. Our Western culture, in fact, seems to be undergoing a gradual shift in its traditions of mourning and of facing death. Our wake services and visitations at funeral homes are getting shorter and shorter. Many persons opt for a funeral at the funeral home for the sake of convenience, if they have a funeral at all. Even our burial rituals have undergone major changes -- when there is even a burial! With the increasing prevalence of cremation, many new customs are springing up, such as keeping the ashes at home on the mantelpiece, or even distributing the ashes among smaller urns for people to take home as keepsakes.

Why is our culture drifting more and more to a denial of death? Our civilization has achieved a tremendous level of success of combatting traditional enemies to happiness -- enemies like poverty and disease. Our technological achievements and level of wealth allow us a range of experiences undreamt of for most of our history. And yet, we have not yet found the cure for death: it is still the last, greatest enemy. For Becker, working in a Freudian context, death renders human existence ultimately meaningless. Therefore, as we advance more and more and our continuing powerlessness in the face of death becomes more and more embarrassing, the suppression of the cultural memory of death becomes all the more necessary for the continuation of culture, and as an antidote to despair. Human beings hunger for meaning and significance, something Becker sees as narcissistic, and which is threatened by our finitude and rendered meaningless in death. The human situation is essentially quite tragic.

Not all have taken Becker's analysis as the final word, however. In his book *The Fire and the Rose are One*, Sebastian Moore enters into dialogue with Becker by developing a "theological psychology". His starting point is this need for meaning and significance. He agrees with Becker that there is an essential need to feel significant and worthy. But Moore takes it a step further, in pointing out that our need for significance is essentially a need to be significant *for another*. And this other person is not just any person, but a person who is significant *for me*. The context of self-esteem, therefore, isn't *necessarily* narcissistic: our self-concern can find its meaning in our concern for the other.

The leap from psychology to theology takes place when search for an ultimate answer to the question of our self-esteem. For Becker there is no transcendent answer, no transcendent meaning, which can survive facing the fact of death. For Moore, on the other hand, our restlessness in the face of death is a powerful indicator of our hunger for God. We are tense and restless before death because it risks declaring our lives meaningless. But if real meaning comes from significance *for another* who is significant *for me*, then the cry of the heart for ultimate meaning in the face of death is really a cry of the heart for the Ultimate Other, i.e. for God. Our human search for meaning and significance, the desire to "make a difference" and "be somebody," is really a religious quest, a pre-religious desire to know and be with God.

As someone who has led many wakes, funerals, and burial prayers, I can attest to the different faith makes when we are confronted with death. Faith is something which, in its highest form, extends to include not only the *psyche* but also the *pneuma* level of our being. Lived on a level of *psyche* only, where faith is non-existent, weak, or superficial, death is a brutal tragedy too painful to contemplate. Such funerals are gloomy affairs, very silent and sometimes despairing. Where faith is really being lived on a level of *pneuma*, however, the atmosphere surrounding the funeral rites changes: it becomes a lot lighter, as hope penetrates and the tragic dimension of the funeral

dissipates. St. Paul describes the difference well in one of his letters, when he points out one of the positive benefits of knowledge of the faith: “We would not have you ignorant, brethren...that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13) Even our grieving, then, becomes an indicator of the *pneuma* level of our psychology. The early Christian martyrs were known to go out singing joyful hymns as they were being marched to their deaths!

Guilt

One of the universal human experiences is the experience of guilt. Many persons struggle with feelings of guilt, which are (by nature) unpleasant, and so we would like to be rid of them. How psychology treats the question of guilt is highly indicative, however, of the acceptance (or rejection, as the case may be) of the concept of the *pneuma*.

Let’s examine this question a bit backwards, by presuming the existence of the *pneuma* and asking ourselves the question: what is guilt? In fact, two kinds of experiences of guilt can be identified:

Psychological guilt	The inability to request, offer, and/or accept forgiveness, or the struggle with guilt imposed from the outside (this might also be termed <i>pathological guilt</i>).
“Pneumatic” guilt	The inner discomfort that comes from the sense of being separated from goodness (this might also be termed <i>moral</i> or <i>spiritual guilt</i>).

From the theological perspective, most of the individual experiences of guilt that we feel are “pneumatic”, although many people do also carry around psychological guilt from particular deep wounds in their past. As well, it should be pointed out that “pneumatic guilt” can also lead to temporary emotions of guilt on a psychological level -- haven’t we all “felt bad” when we knew we had “done something wrong”? These guilt feelings are not necessarily pathological, however -- they are simply part of the “inner discomfort” that naturally arises when we are separated from goodness by our evil choices. The resolution of these feelings comes through reconciliation with the one offended. Real pathology enters the picture, therefore, not when a person “feels guilty”, but when a person is psychologically unable to enter into a process of reconciliation.

Secular scientific psychology, on the other hand, tends to blend these two experiences of guilt together. As Rieff pointed out in the passages quoted earlier, “good” and “evil” as moral categories do not really enter into the scientific framework. If there is no such thing as real good or evil, then the inner discomfort that comes from the sense of being separated from goodness is ultimately a dangerous and possibly destructive self-delusion. The solution to such feelings of guilt can come from living a reconciliation, but this is not, strictly speaking, necessary. Often instead the process is one of choosing to examine where the “guilt-inducing” behaviour came from, and is usually presumed to come from our unconscious, informed by certain formative experiences (such as when we were children). There is no question of making moral judgements in this situation, but rather of

simply "bringing to light" where this behaviour originated. Freedom from guilt, it is assumed, can come through self-knowledge as much as it can come through reconciliation.

In essence, the difference between the two visions of guilt is that the secular scientific approach promises a way to *live with* your guilt, while the theological approach promises a way to be *freed from* your guilt. At first glance it would seem that the secular scientific approach is better, because:

- It does not exclude reconciliation, and therefore does also allow for genuine freedom from guilt; and
- It allows for a means to deal with guilt when direct reconciliation is impossible, such as when the offended party has died, or when the offended party is more of an abstraction (such as "society").

The theological vision, however, also does not exclude the insights of the scientific vision, but does offer the promise of going beyond it. This is even possible in cases where direct reconciliation with the offended party is impossible, because reconciliation is always possible with God.⁷⁹ Part of Christian belief is that God identifies with each individual human being, as well as with human society as a whole (composed as it is of human beings), and so is just as offended (or more) when a person or society is offended. In the Christian vision, reconciliation between human beings is necessarily tied to reconciliation with God, as we hear in part of the *Our Father*: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." The intimate link between human-God reconciliation and human-human reconciliation also means, however, that in situations where direct human-human reconciliation is impossible it is nevertheless possible to achieve closure by reconciling with God (and by extension with the Church, which is God's "society" on Earth). The two approaches can be compared as follows:

	Secular scientific theology	Theological psychology
When direct reconciliation is possible	While direct reconciliation has good benefits, it is fundamentally optional; through therapy it may be possible to live with guilt, reducing its effects to a tolerable level, and not have to directly reconcile.	The distinction between the two kinds of guilt means that therapy cannot replace direct reconciliation. Each method is appropriate, but only when used to address the corresponding type of guilt.

⁷⁹ Why might reconciliation be impossible? Perhaps the person offended refuses to forgive. Perhaps the person is dead, or it is no longer possible to communicate with him or her. Perhaps it isn't a person who was offended, but "society" (e.g. acts of public vandalism). Perhaps the person offended is oneself -- often we have a hard time forgiving ourselves.

When direct reconciliation is impossible	Therapy offers a way to deal with psychological guilt that otherwise is impossible to address.	Reconciliation is <u>always</u> possible through reconciliation with God and the Church.
--	--	--

The test case, therefore, to determine who is correct, is confession. Each Christian denomination has some mechanism to achieve reconciliation with God (who is always willing to offer reconciliation to us). The one common denominator of these methods is some form of confession of sins, and (in the case of the Catholic, Orthodox, and many Protestant churches) the declaration of absolution. If the theological viewpoint is correct, then the promotion of forgiveness and the use of confession (and especially confession with absolution) should have a special effectiveness in helping people be liberated from the baggage of guilt. As a priest, and therefore as someone who regularly hears confessions, I have observed this liberation many times in people, and I consider it to be real, although it would be worthwhile to have studies done comparing the two approaches to how effective each really is.

Spiritual and moral theology: the Christian sciences of human beatitude

*“What can bring us happiness?” many say.
Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord.⁸⁰*

There is a fundamental premise in Christianity that God wants us to be happy, and is willing to help us to be happy. The psalm quote presented above expresses this hope. But what is happiness?

In the modern secular view, the word “happiness” often expresses contentment, or more accurately, *satisfaction*. The word “satisfaction” comes from two Latin words: *facio*, which is the verb “to do” or “to make,” and *satis*, which means “enough,” “sufficient” or “adequate”, and is closely related to the English word “sated,” i.e. to have your fill. To satisfy something therefore means “to do enough” or “to make enough”. To be satisfied, as a recipe for happiness, means to live in a state where we “have our fill” and do not live with any lack whatsoever, whether material or psychological. This closely parallels Rieff’s vision that the advent of psychological man will require a society of material abundance in order to achieve psychological satisfaction as well. Satisfaction, as a component of happiness, is somewhat of a static principle: one is restless until the satisfaction is attained, and then a time of calm ensues until a lack requires one to “become sated” again.

The Christian vision of happiness, however, contrasts “satisfaction” with the concept of *beatitude*. Beatitude is a hard concept to explain in English. Often it is understood as “blessed,” but more accurately expresses “overflowing happiness,” “excitement,” “bliss,” and “joy”. Beatitude,

⁸⁰ Psalm 4:6, Grail translation.

when compared with satisfaction, is more of a dynamic principle: the more one lives in beatitude, the more one becomes capable of living an active life oriented towards others. In addition, beatitude implies a greater capacity to sit and appreciate the beauties and joys of the present moment *for what they are*, as opposed to using them as means to achieve satisfaction. Human activity that arises from beatitude is not driven by need or restlessness, but by an overflowing bounty of joy and goodness.

This does not mean that there is no room in the Christian vision for satisfaction! To be sure, some satisfaction of our basic physical and psychological needs is necessary, if only to keep going, and Christian teaching does emphasize the importance of charitable work to this end. But the Christian vision does emphasize that true happiness will never be attained by satisfaction alone. The makeup of the human person includes the *pneuma*, which is the place where God enters and desires to dwell. With God, the *pneuma* finds itself filled to overflowing (because God is much bigger than what our puny souls can contain), and this overflows into our *psyche*, modifying our personality by what are called the "virtues," "gifts," and "fruits" of the Spirit.⁸¹ Without God, on the other hand, the *pneuma* will always present a feeling of being "unsatisfied," an unsatisfaction that can be numbed by filling life with all sorts of distractions, but which can never really be filled otherwise. St. Augustine expressed this very well as follows:

The thought of you stirs [man] so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.⁸²

Who will grant me to rest content in you? To whom shall I turn for the gift of your coming into my heart and filling it to the brim, so that I may [place behind me] all the wrong I have done and embrace you alone, my only source of good? ...My soul is like a house, small for you to enter, but I pray you to enlarge it. It is in ruins, but I ask you to remake it.⁸³

These few passages contain the essence of the human condition with regards to God, and illustrate well the key components necessary for people to achieve true beatitude.

"My soul is like a house, small and in ruins" -- the tragedy of original sin

All the great Christian theological traditions agree that the soul is made for God to take up residence. They also agree, however, that there isn't always somebody home. God can be present to the soul in many ways, but the most profound way is called the "Indwelling of the Holy Spirit". Part of the tragedy of the human condition is that, while God can be present to us in so many ways, most notably as our Creator, we are not automatically born with this "presence of indwelling". The

⁸¹ Cf. THOMAS DOWD, *Introduction to Theological Studies*, chapter 4, "Doctrinal category #4: Holy Spirit".

⁸² ST. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book I, no. 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Book I, no. 5.

lack of this particular form of the presence of God in the soul is called *original sin*. This does not mean that Christians believe that babies (or even foetuses) are actually committing sins that cut them off from God! The term simply expresses that, from our origin, we start in a state of being ready to receive God, but without God being present in His fullness.

Fortunately, God does not wish for us to remain in this state of disconnectedness, and make the first steps necessary to close the resulting gap between us and Him. Christians believe that through the death and resurrection of Jesus a new force, called *grace*, has entered into the world. Grace can be divided into two categories. *Uncreated grace* is nothing other than the Holy Spirit now present and active in the world. *Created grace* is the effect the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit has on creation. A good example of these two categories and their relationship to each other can be seen in the story of Moses and the burning bush:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3: 1-6)

In the burning bush we have an example of uncreated grace, because it is God himself who is present there, and Moses hides his face accordingly. Moses also, however, removes his shoes. This is because the presence of God is having a secondary effect on the ground, making it holy. This is analogous to created grace, which is not the presence of God *per se*, but is the effect of the presence of God within some element of creation (in this case, the ground).⁸⁴

Many different theological theories have been put forward as to how created grace is related to uncreated grace, and what exactly are its effects. There are, however, a few common denominators, such as the belief that the Indwelling presence of God can be lost through serious sin,

⁸⁴ The importance of Jesus as the only source of created grace is one of the reasons Catholics, Orthodox, and many Anglicans honour and revere the Virgin Mary to the extent that they do. Mary is a human being, and therefore is as much a part of creation as anyone else. But Mary's womb was also the place where the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, became incarnate and assumed the nature of a human being. The food she ate helped nourish the foetal Jesus, the air she breathed helped sustain the foetal Jesus. Her body was integrated with *uncreated* grace in a way that could not be closer. The understanding of the aforementioned churches, therefore, is that she must have also been imbued with *created* grace in a way no one else could be. The Biblical text states that the angel Gabriel greeted her with the words: "Hail, full-of-grace, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28, RSV) The Greek word for "full-of-grace", *kecharitomenè*, is not found anywhere else in scripture, and indicates being overflowing with grace, to the point of utter plenitude. One big question is whether she was "full-of-grace" *through* her pregnancy with Jesus, or *before* her pregnancy with Jesus (Catholics teach before, while the Orthodox have a more varied opinion). Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate why the most important title attributed to Mary is *Theotokos*, the "God-bearer": because it is this function that explain why she would have lived the extraordinary graces many Christians believe she did.

and that it is possible to grow in our capacity to manifest in our lives the created graces that the Indwelling brings (a process called *theosis*, or “divinization”). First of all, however, and most importantly, is the belief that faith in Jesus is the only way to obtain grace. Jesus is both fully divine and fully human, meaning that he *is* uncreated grace itself (in his divine nature), and he lives the fullness of the possibilities of created grace (in his human nature). Faith in Jesus therefore places us directly in touch with uncreated grace, and opens us to to receive the created grace “effects” that stem from the action of God. And the most important (and primary) created grace is the grace of *salvation*.⁸⁵

Apart from the importance of faith, however, come two questions: (1) how can we avoid losing the indwelling presence of God? And (2) how can we grow in the created grace that the indwelling presence of God brings us? These questions serve as the basis for two branches of theology meant to help us attain and live beatitude: moral theology, and spiritual theology.

“How may I place behind me all the wrong I have done?” -- the place of moral theology

As mentioned previously, there is a belief that the presence of God, the “Indwelling,” can be lost through serious sin (also called “mortal” sin). As well, while they do not necessarily cause the loss of the Indwelling, even minor sins (called “venial” sins) can damage our relationship with God.⁸⁶ A good analogy is that of a marriage. The Rev. Nicky Gumble, in one of his talks for the Alpha Course, tells the story of a couple who had been married for 70 years. The news media asked the husband, “In all those 70 years, did you ever consider divorce?” “No,” he replied impishly, “never divorce, although I did contemplate murder a few times!” No married couple is perfect, and within the life of the marriage each partner will do things that hurt the other. It is possible for the sin to be truly major and to provoke the destruction of the marriage, such as in divorce. This would be the equivalent of a “mortal sin” against the marriage. But hopefully most of these sins within

⁸⁵ This, of course, begs the question: what about people who (through no fault of their own) don’t have faith in Jesus? Many ingenious solutions have been proposed throughout the centuries to this problem. These generally fall into two categories:

(1) Let us recall that prior to his Incarnation as Jesus, the Word/Logos of God was nevertheless present in the world, particularly through the act of creation. All people are capable of having, if not an explicit faith in Jesus, than an implicit faith in him through faith in the Word/Logos whose presence is made known through general revelation. This ancient theory is called the *logos spermatikos*, the “seeds of the word”.

(2) All persons, when they die, come face to face with Jesus, who is Lord of Heaven and Earth. At this moment they have the opportunity to place their faith in him, or to reject him. Most recently this approach has been called the “theory of final decision”.

It should also be pointed out that some people have simply tried to get rid of the question by either declaring that Jesus is not the only way (the “many paths” approach), or that most people wind up not saved even if their lack of faith is not their fault (the *massa damnata* approach). The first is not really reconcilable with the Bible, however, and the second seems to denigrate God’s mercy.

⁸⁶ The word “venial” is from the Latin word “to wound”, while “mortal” is from the Latin word for “death” or “killing”. A mortal sin kills our relationship with God, while a venial sin merely wounds it. This is bad enough, of course, but there is a tremendous degree of difference between hurting something and killing it.

marriage are relatively minor, and will not in themselves cause a marital breakup. These “venial sins” against the marriage still wound, sometimes very painfully, but can be overcome -- as long as we are serious about the relationship, and don’t take a casual attitude to our sins and the wounds they cause in the other person.

Our relationship with God is like a marriage: at its best it is meant to be a union of mutual love that is a total gift of oneself to the other, with nothing held back. Just as within a marriage each partner learns about the other, what pleases and displeases the other, so it is in our relationship with God: we learn what pleases and displeases Him, and we seek to avoid harming our relationship with Him no matter what. Hopefully this knowledge transforms our behaviour, out of our love for God. There is no room within Christian theology or spirituality for a casual attitude towards sin and the wounds it causes in our relationship with God.

What, then, is moral theology? On the surface it can appear to be a simply exercise of trying to figure out “the rules” so as to not lose grace (and risk, ultimately, going to Hell). Going a bit deeper, we see that it isn’t just about finding “the rules,” but is about discovering the best way to live -- a life of excellence in conformity with our nature. Ultimately, however, the real motive for moral theology is the love of God. The Christian spiritual life, as it journeys towards total beatitude, is a process of falling in love with God, of growing in love with Him. Just as within a married life each partner would want to make it his or her business to learn about the other, and discover what displeases the other (and avoid it), moral theology is the intellectual process by which Christians, as a religious community, enter into this dimension of our relationship with God. At its best, Christian moral theology includes “the rules” as well as the desire for personal excellence, but goes beyond these motives and transforms them by the question of the love of God and our relationship with Him -- a real, living, vital relationship.

“Come into my heart and fill it to the brim” -- the role of spiritual theology

Continuing with our analogy of the marriage, while a good marriage demands that the marriage partners not hurt each other, hopefully the married life is not limited to that! In addition to avoiding evil, married persons want to learn how to actively love their partner and to express that love. After all, a marriage that has no sins, but no expressions of love either, is not much of a marriage. So what is spiritual theology? It is the intellectual process by which Christians, as a religious community, discover how we can grow in our love relationship with God. It implies the existence of a love relationship in the first place: treating God as an object, as some sort of “spiritual vending machine” from whom we seek to get what we want (and ignore the rest of the time), is no basis for spiritual theology.

Once this love relationship is established, however, it needs to grow -- much as human love relationships need to grow, or else they stagnate and die. The Holy Spirit’s presence in the soul, as uncreated grace, is of course infinite and perfect. The created grace which arises from that presence, however, depends partly on us. There is an old philosophical maxim: “everything which is received is received according to the mode of the recipient”. God may be making an infinite offer, but our capacity to receive it is limited. Spiritual theology is about growing in that capacity to receive and

live the grace of God in a dynamic relationship of love with Him.

There are a great many schools of Christian spirituality, each with its own approach to growing in this relationship with God. It is not possible to go into all of them here, but so as to not leave you hanging I will include a mention of my personal favourite. One of the most highly developed is the Carmelite school of spirituality, whose great founders have outlined a well-traced path to the highest peak of spiritual union with God, which they appropriately call "spiritual marriage". This can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

Appendix: A summary of the path to holiness described in Carmelite spirituality

St. Theresa of Avila developed a description of the stages of spiritual developed in her book *The Interior Castle*, in which she spoke of the person as a dwelling place for the Lord. This dwelling place can be divided into seven “zones”, corresponding to stages in spiritual development.

Prior to actually being in the Interior Castle, however, is the stage of being “in the world”.

STAGE 0: In the world

In this stage, the person is very much “in the world,” in which they have not made a commitment to God to the extent of being willing to repent, change direction, and modify their life. They may be believers, but as the Bible says even the demons believe! (James 2: 19) What is lacking is the transition from being believers to becoming disciples of Jesus.

STAGE 1: The Entranceway

In this stage, the person has made a firm decision for God and has repented. The word “repent” means to “change direction”. In this stage, the person has made a firm decision to orient their life to God and desires to cease offending God through serious sins.

Often in this stage a person makes a general confession of their whole life up until that point, just to let go of the past and make a fresh start.

It is possible that in this stage a person may continue to commit certain serious sins which, for reasons of habit or other causes, are not in fact subjective mortal sins. Obviously all sin offends God, but it may take time for a person to be freed of these sins. God works at His own pace.

STAGE 2: Enthusiastic discovery

In this stage, a person feels God is very present in their life. There is an active pursuit of God, undertaken with joy. Everything seems new, both spiritual things and even the ordinary things of everyday life. There is a hunger and thirst for things of God. It is a bit like falling in love.

In this stage, the person is exploring the spiritual life. It is important to respond to this enthusiasm, helping the person to find answers to their questions, putting them in touch with new spiritual experiences (e.g. new forms of prayer, encountering groups of Christians,

developing a more in-depth knowledge of the Bible, etc.)

It is a mistake in this stage to dampen someone's enthusiasm, although it may need to be channelled to spiritual things which have stood the test of time and meet general approval (e.g. the liturgy) rather than more fantastic but questionable things (e.g. excessive focus on apparitions and private revelations).

STAGE 3: Finding your place

In this stage, God is still very close, but the person is settling down a bit. Patterns of devotion develop, as the person discovers "what works best" for them (based on their temperament, etc). A person in this stage is in touch with a stable community of Christians able to support them in their faith journey (e.g. a prayer group, a daily Mass community, etc). Sometimes, they will develop an unofficial rule of life designed to guide them on their path.

In both stages 2 & 3 God often graces the person with special consolations: strong positive emotions, extraordinary prayer experiences (such as inner locutions, which often come when journaling), a general sense of His presence and comfort. These consolations are sometimes called "divine touches", and when we receive them we can feel like we are about to burst with love.

It should be noted that in these stages there is often a strong zeal to do the work of the Lord. The motivation for this work is often rooted in the intelligence and our perception of what is true and correct (i.e. we will change the world to what it should be). This is often because a conversion is like having your eyes opened to a whole new reality – you see things differently, and better – so there is a zeal to share this new enlightenment. An example would be that in the earlier stage we try and convert someone by showing how the Gospel is true.

STAGE 4: The Dark Night of the Senses

This stage has been most succinctly described by St. John of the Cross. The purpose of this state is to purify the mind of the person, and especially to purify his habits. Up until this stage, the person has still been carrying with him certain habitual sins or habitual tendencies to sin. God has tolerated these as the person has slowly strengthened in his faith and devotion, but it is now to let go of these more habitual sins and imperfections.

Therefore, in this stage God withdraws his divine touches and the consolations that go with them. A stage of true spiritual dryness sets in. God is present, but more objectively (in the Eucharist, for example), but this presence is not felt subjectively like it once was.

Why does God do this? Up until now, a person has conquered their big sins and now has the tools to grow BUT is also often content to remain at that level, especially after having the joy of receiving the divine touches. We therefore need a kick in the pants to progress further to perfection.

This stage is characterized by a strong combat with venial sins, especially those that have grave matter. Our examination of conscience shifts from examining our sins to examining our sinfulness (the Seven Deadly Sins are especially useful as an examination tool). What is needed is to come to an honest appraisal of self, and a detachment from those things -- even (and especially) good things -- which nevertheless are part of patterns in our lives which lead us to sin.

In stage 4 there is often a cooling off of one's ardour for doing the work of the Lord. This is because it doesn't bring the consolations it used to -- but that is just another part of this stage. This can be accompanied by feelings of guilt and doubt about whether or not one was ever really in it for the right reasons in the first place, etc. Stage 4 purifies one's motives. In the meantime, what is most important is to remain faithful to one's duties of state.

STAGE 5: Active holiness and selflessness

This stage is characterized by a new zeal for the Lord's work, but instead of being motivated by the intelligence seeking to promote truth, it is motivated by the will seeking to promote love. In this stage the person has an active love for others, born out of sacrifice (of time, of money, etc). The person is learning to make a true gift of self, and because the energy behind this zeal is charity, God often blesses it with extraordinary fruits.

STAGE 6: The Dark Night of the Soul

In the prior dark night, there was a purification of the "senses", which means those parts of our intelligence and will related to the more physical, sensate parts of our nature. For example, our memories reside in our brain, and so the former dark night might involve healing of certain memories. Certain sinful tendencies have a corporeal dimension (e.g. excessive drinking), and these are purified in the previous stage as well.

This "dark night" is different. In this stage, the sensible portions of our nature have largely been healed and mastered. What happens now is a new dark night, meant to purify the intelligence and the will AS SUCH, especially the will. In this stage, God withdraws his consoling presence once again, but because the person now has a certain detachment from sensible things, this dark night is felt much more intensely.

The spiritual battle can be intense, often emerging as terrible (and even bizarre temptations). This is normal: because the person is freed of attachments to even their previous “favourite” sins, the soul therefore has no “familiar territory” to go to for sin. In such a situation, when temptations do come up, they can be anything, no matter how strange, bizarre, or out of character. Chief among these temptations are temptations against faith in God, but they can include anything -- blasphemy, murder, sexual deviance, anything.

The solution to this Dark Night of the Soul is total rootedness in God, to the point of forgetting self. In this Dark Night, we walk by faith, hope, and love, without consolation. Ultimately, this stage is about getting rid of the last vestiges of spiritual pride in us. For this reason, passing through this stage involves growing in humility. A good spiritual director can help someone through this stage, and a person in this stage should become totally transparent to their spiritual director, describing everything that is happening (even naming the temptations felt) without shame.

Because this stage involves a person in the purest elements of their free will, it is impossible to predict the outcome. God’s grace is always present, of course, but in this stage a person is in some ways most free to accept or reject that grace. The stakes are high in this stage, and people sometimes come out of it quite broken (e.g. religious persons losing their vocation), because they were, on some level, unable or unwilling (at this stage there is not much difference between these terms) to let go of the final elements of their pride.

It should be noted that this stage can be provoked by extreme external events in a person’s life, such as terminal illness, or some other extreme loss. St. Therese of Lisieux experienced her Dark Night of the Soul on her deathbed. St. John of the Cross was kidnapped by his own religious brethren and kept in solitary confinement for months. The foundress of the Sisters of Ste-Anne, was kicked out of her job as superior and relegated to the laundry for decades -- her loss was one of dignity, and of her apostolic work that she had founded. Any such loss can provoke this Dark Night -- a parent who loses a child, for example.

STAGE 7: Divine Union, or Spiritual Marriage – the Burning Bush stage

In this stage we are like the Burning Bush that Moses encountered: truly ourselves, but wholly possessed by God (and yet not consumed). In this stage a person has achieved the perfect elevation of their being. In a sense they have become like Adam before the Fall -- still able to sin, but with the very notion now alien to their nature. In such a stage a person truly is in the world, but not of it. The world is seen differently, as though one were constantly looking through God’s eyes. Apostolic zeal also reappears, but not like it was in stage 5. In this stage, specific works may be very small, but characterized by great love, such that just smiling at someone, or giving them a flower, might be enough to overwhelm them with consolation. Great conversions of heart often come from such seemingly small

gestures.

St. John taught that someone who attained stage 7 had no purgatory left to undergo after death, as any necessary purgation had already been accomplished on Earth. Stage 7 is just the natural flowering of this before we die: we are already in heaven, even in the body, just awaiting the beatific vision.

QUESTION: What stage am I in?

People on the spiritual path, especially beginners, often want to know which stage they are in. In fact, while these stages are numbered in a linear way, it is possible to jump around a bit between them. What is key is not to ask “where am I today” but “where am I habitually”. And it is possible to find certain features of multiple stages at once in the life of a person, usually from the stage immediately before or immediately after their current habitual stage (but not always limited to that). The saints have taught that sometimes God “lifts us up” out of ourselves and gives us a special grace to experience a stage we normally have not attained yet (even to the point of having a taste of stage 7, which is often the case for people who have sudden and radical conversions in their lives -- just one taste is enough to change everything). We eventually come back down, to our stable level, as we cannot even tolerate that much grace yet -- we are not yet habituated to the varying degrees of God’s light. But with time He works on us, always bringing us closer to Him at a pace and in a manner best suited to our uniqueness.

For further reading:

Obviously, the works of St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, especially:

The Interior Castle

The Ascent of Mount Carmel and the Dark Night of the Soul (a two-part work)

The Living Flame of Love

But as a more readable introduction, the following two-part work is a summary of the above:

I want to see God

I am a daughter of the Church

Both of these were written by Fr. Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, O.C.D., to provide a practical synthesis of Carmelite spirituality. They are still in print, in both English and French (*Je veux voir Dieu* and *Je suis fille de l’Eglise*).

Theology and the arts

There are many ways to begin an exploration of the arts. Those of us with artistic ability are able to live the experience of creating something, and explore the arts by honing and expanding that ability. Others begin by learning to appreciate that arts, or by taking courses in art history. On the philosophical side, the discipline of *aesthetics* has tried to codify the arts by exploring the very question of beauty itself. Unfortunately, this has proven to be a much more difficult exercise than originally expected, because art and beauty have both an objective and a subjective dimension that are difficult to always reconcile. The Dualist school of thinking tends to a subjective view, often stating that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”⁸⁷ The Realist school tends to a more objective view, seeking the “elements of beauty” that are supposedly present in things themselves. In fact, both are correct in their own way: it is true that different people find different things beautiful, but it is also true that the experience of beauty is occasioned by the experience of things outside of ourselves. Clearly this debate is beyond the limits of this text, and we do not want to get bogged down in intricate controversies from the get-go. For our purposes, then, rather than start by examining what different people find beautiful, we will start by examining the experience of beauty itself.

What is beauty?

Beauty is notoriously difficult to define: we know it when we see it, but it is extraordinarily hard to put into words. Rather than start with an abstract definition, then, let us begin with looking at one attribute of beauty: it is pleasing. The experience of something that is pleasing can be broadly divided into three categories:

Basic level of “pleasingness”	Physical pleasure, delight of the senses	<i>sarx</i>
Higher level of “pleasingness”	Enjoyment, delight of the mind	<i>psyche</i>
Highest level of “pleasingness”	Ecstasy, delight of the soul	<i>pneuma</i>

⁸⁷ This view is very prevalent in modern schools of art, in which the question of “What is art” is almost taboo.

This final word, “ecstasy,” needs to be properly understood, because modern language has given it a very carnal connotation, even naming an illegal drug after the word. The word “ecstasy” is from the Greek “ek-stasis”, which literally means “to be taken out of oneself”. Ecstasy is an experience of transcending what we thought were our limits, and bring brought to a new place in ourselves. The experience of physical pleasure or of enjoyment can generate a certain satisfaction in the human person, but this eventually fades. The experience of *ek-stasis*, however, elevates the person to a new level, and a level which can last. Even artists and philosophers who don’t believe in God often resort to using religious and spiritual language to describe the experience of *ek-stasis*.⁸⁸

Where, then, do we find beauty? In other words, where do we find the things which provoke the reactions of “pleasingness”? There are two key sources: (1) in nature, such as in the smell of beautiful flowers, the sound of rain falling, or the sight of a sunset; and (2) in created things, in which human beings strive to themselves make things which provoke the experience of beauty. This second point now brings us to a discussion of the arts.

What are the arts?

The original meaning of “art” comes from the Latin word *ars*, which meant trade, skill, or profession. An artist, then, meant anyone skilled at making something. A carpenter, a seamstress, a stonemason...all were “artists” in the original sense. The “arts” were distinguished from the “sciences,” which were disciplines meant to allow us to pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge, without looking to necessarily develop a practical application. Somehow over time these terms became a bit confused, however. Theoretically, modern universities should be giving a B.A. in Engineering, because engineering is an “art,” an attempt to use knowledge to make something. As well, modern universities (had they kept the original meaning of the words) would give a B.Sc. in philosophy, not a B.A., because philosophy is, in its purest form, the pursuit is wisdom for its own sake.

Because the term “arts” is so broad⁸⁹ and, as well, the terminology is somewhat muddy, scholars generally use the term *fine arts* as a way to refer to those areas of human endeavour that relate to aesthetics. The term “fine arts” comes from a time when there were strong class distinctions in society. The lower classes had “crafts” and “entertainments”, while the supposedly more refined

⁸⁸ For this reason I draw a parallel between the 3 “levels of pleasingness” and the 3 dimensions of the human person described in our lecture on “Theology in a culture of well-being”. The basic level corresponds to a pleasing in the *sarx*, while the next level corresponds to a pleasing in the *psyche*, and the highest level corresponds to a pleasing in the *pneuma*. As previously noted, not everyone agrees with this threefold division, and sometimes the *psyche* and the *pneuma* are really seen to be simply the same thing. Still, because spiritual language is used to describe this highest level of “pleasingness”, even if there is not parallel in fact there is at least a correspondence in language between these three levels and the three dimensions of the human person.

⁸⁹ My brother is an electrician, which makes him an “artist” in this original meaning!

upper classes would experience “finer” arts.⁹⁰ Nevertheless the supposedly upper-crust artists often found their inspiration in lower-class arts, such as composers who often based their melodies on folk tunes as basic as “Twinkle, twinkle, little star”. Today the term itself is less associated with class distinctions (even if we do still see some difference in the patterns of artistic enjoyment between people of different socio-economic classes), and instead we use it to refer to patterns of artistic production meant to provoke what is called an *aesthetic experience*.

The “aesthetic experience”

Many of us are familiar with the old conundrum “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it fall, does it make a sound?” Most people immediately answer yes, because they believe that the world has an objective experience whether or not someone is observing it. But the question is more subtle than that, because it is asking “What is sound?” The falling tree definitely creates vibrations in the air that can carry quite a distance before fading. But without an eardrum to react in the presence of the vibrations, can we really say there is a sound? Can all vibrations in the air be called sound? Or only the ones that an ear can hear?

This simple conundrum illustrates well the more complex conundrum of beauty. Again, we do not want to enter into a sterile debate about whether beauty is objective or subjective, so we will continue our investigation by looking at the point where objective and subjective meet: the *aesthetic experience*. The aesthetic experience is what occurs when a human subject encounters some object (physical, mental, or spiritual) which provokes one or more of the reactions of “pleasingness”.

What are these “objects” mentioned in the definition? A physical object is the easiest to understand, such as a painting, sculpture, sunset, tree, etc. An example of a mental object is a mathematical equation: many scientists, as they investigate the functioning of the universe and as they discover the equations which describe this functioning, speak of them as “elegant” and “beautiful”. Spiritual objects are the hardest to describe, because they do not involve an encounter with things which exist, but with Existence itself. In a sense there is only one spiritual object, and that is God, although other created things (including us) can reflect the image of God or even, in the case of human beings, contain an “indwelling” of God’s presence. Such things are spiritual objects by analogy, because they point to the Ultimate spiritual object.

Dissecting the aesthetic experience we find that it is a meeting to two elements, the *formal interest* and the *commemorative interest*. Some works of art are more on the formal end, with no apparent commemorative interest, and others are the reverse, but every work of art possesses both.

The formal interest

The formal interest is generally defined as the *encounter with order*, that is to say with the

⁹⁰ The film “Titanic” represents this very well. Rose, the female lead character, is bored by the dancing happening in the main ball room, so she descends the decks to the lower-class cabins and dances with gusto to the sound of fiddle music. In the minds of the people at the times, which experience would have been seen as truly “fine art”?

order present within beautiful object. Human beings seem to have positive reactions to patterns of contrast and balance. These orderly patterns constitute the formal interest, and reflect the classic distinctions of unity, harmony, proportion, wholeness, and radiance. This being said, this typical definition of the formal interest is based very strongly on the idea of beauty residing in the object, when what we are studying here is more the encounter between object and subject. The definition of the formal interest as the “encounter with order” is challenged by certain art forms that seem to thrive on chaos, not order, and yet which nevertheless are still considered art. An example of this is abstract arts, which while seemingly chaotic on the canvas nevertheless provokes an inner experience. Another example is free verse poetry, which does not possess rhyme or metre, and which sometimes even breaks the very rules of grammar, syntax, and punctuation, and yet in doing so does not diminish meaning but seems instead to be able to communicate a meaning “between the words”. Certain musical forms also seem to challenge the definition. The members of the musical rock group Metallica certainly know how to play their instruments, yet many of their songs seem bereft of harmony. Can this harsh-sounding music be said to art? Does it possess a formal interest?

Because of these issues, I prefer to define the formal interest as the *encounter with truth*, rather than with order. Truth is defined as the correspondence between knowledge and its object -- in other words, if the object outside my mind is the same as the one in my mind, then there is truth (rather than hallucination, for example, where what is inside the mind and outside the mind do not correspond). But what if the truth inside of me is chaotic? Take, for example, a person who has lived a terrible emotional trauma. What kind of art will they respond to? What kind of art will they produce? It is often difficult to express the chaos many of us live inside, especially since a lot of this subjective knowledge can be non-conceptual (and therefore almost impossible to put into words). The young man listening to Metallica is not listening to it for its melodious harmonies, but he may be listening to it because it acts as a way for him to encounter *outside of himself* something that is going on *inside of himself*. The same may also be true for abstract art, or free verse poetry: it reaches past the conceptual, orderly level, to encounter another non-conceptual level of truth. By acting as a bridge for the encounter between knowledge and its object, the work of art is provoking an encounter with truth, and in doing so is contributing some element of order, even if only on a very basic level. The formal interest is still maintained.

While some might argue that it is possible for certain works to have no formal interest at all (and it is true that the aesthetic experience produced by such works might be limited in scope and appeal), as long as those works contribute something to truth, they possess a formal interest. Even the simplest gravestone marker, just by the fact that it reveals a truth (that someone lies buried there, and that this someone once lived), possesses a formal interest.

The commemorative interest

The commemorative interest is generally defined as the *encounter with significance and meaning*, that is to say with that which is we value and see as good. Often works of art are used to commemorate things which represent our highest ideals and values, such as commemorating a

significant achievement, person, or even an idea.⁹¹ Just think of all the statues, monuments, and even postage stamp designs created to commemorate particular persons, events and ideas of history!

Sometimes, however, it can seem that this definition is too limited. Take, for example, the creation of war memorials, or the memorials to the professors killed at Concordia in the 1992 shootings at the Faculty of Engineering. Are we actually celebrating war and violence? In fact, these kinds of monuments, while tied to historic events, are actually commemorating more certain values than the persons involved. A war memorial is generally erected to honour the values of honour, duty, self-sacrifice, and service to one's nation. The memorials to the professors are even simpler: in some ways they simply commemorate our need to express and live solidarity in the face of shocking tragedy. To commemorate means literally "to remember with": a work of art with a strong commemorative interest serves as more than just a historical marker, they are also a cover to commemorate the values those persons lived and represented, or what their passage called us to live in ourselves.⁹²

While some might argue that it is possible for a work of art to have no commemorative interest at all, in fact every work of art commemorates at least one thing: the aesthetic experience itself. Even the most abstract art, by seeking to reach inside our souls, affirms the capacity for human beings to be the centre of the aesthetic experience.

Multiple dimensions of the aesthetic experience

What can provoke an aesthetic experience? All arts are mediated by the senses -- if we are unaware of the work of art, it cannot generate an aesthetic experience. That being said, which senses apply? Some limit the arts to visual and auditory experiences, but is this valid?

Certainly the senses of sight and hearing and the ones most closely associated with our ability to perceive order, and are the ones used to communicate the meaning present in the commemorative interest. All senses, however, mediate our contact with the outside world, and therefore contribute to our knowledge of truth, and certainly all are capable of producing a pleasing reaction. Garments can certainly be seen as works of art -- why should the feel of the fabric against the skin not be as much a part of the aesthetic experience as the look of the garment itself? As for food, special attention is often made to ensure a pleasing appearance of a culinary creation -- but why should the taste and smell of the food not also be part of the aesthetic experience?

While art starts in the senses, however, it can also reach beyond them. While a great work of literature may be contained between two beautiful covers, it is the meaning (and not the appearance) that makes it great. These verbal arts contain a beauty not perceived by the senses, but by the mind.

What of the soul? Can the aesthetic experience reach the most profound dimension of the

⁹¹ An example of the latter is the Statue of Liberty, which is a commemoration of the idea of liberty itself.

⁹² This is also why there are no publicly erected statues of Adolf Hitler: we not only do not wish to commemorate the man, we also want to avoid giving any impression of commemorating his monstrous ideas and legacy.

human person? Human beings seem to believe it can (or at least to hope it can), since we in fact see a close association between religion and the arts in all human cultures. The religious impulse and the artistic impulse seem very closely intertwined.

Religion and the arts

When the cave paintings were discovered in the area of Lascaux, France, scholars immediately began to speculate as to why the early humans made these paintings. A general theory emerged that these paintings were produced as a way to request favours from the spirit world for success in future hunts. What is interesting to note is that the scholars leaped to assume that whatever commemorative interest there might have been in the paintings, it would have been religious. While we can never really know what was motivating the authors of the cave paintings, there is, in fact, a close association between religion and the arts, generally driven by the commemorative interest. Religion contains high ideals and values, and throughout history we see human beings wanting to give their best to them.

At the same time, however, religious art can be driven by the formal interest. As one commentator of the day said about the cave paintings, "Perhaps they were painted because the artist liked to paint!" There is a joy that comes from artistic creation, and that joy can be its own motivation. As we have seen, the formal interest is about the contact with truth, and religion is about attempting to contact the deepest truths of all. We see this formal interest in much of the art produced by the great mystics (many of whom were also artists). St. John of the Cross, in addition to being a saint, spiritual director, and mystic, was also a poet, and his poems are still studied by Spanish literature students as a high form of Spanish poetry of his day. He wrote his poems as a way to mediate between his mystical experiences and his explanation of them. It is very hard to put the content of mystical experiences into words, so St. John would write a few brief lines of a poem to summarize them -- and then write a book explaining the poem. But the poem came first, because he was better able to capture the essence of his encounter with ultimate truth in a few lines of artistic expression than in the thousands of words that came later.

Many of the arts we associate with religious expression are the static arts, such as the paintings and statues we see decorating the interior of churches, or even in the planning of the architecture of the church building itself. There are also performance arts, most notably music -- the most widely attended musical performances in the world continue to be religious ceremonies, with more people hearing live musical performance in church per week than in all other secular entertainment venues combined. Apart from these formal arts, however, where else do we encounter the aesthetic experience within religious practice?

Worship and liturgy -- an exercise in beauty

The worship of God through the Christian liturgy is meant to be an exercise in beauty. We see this focus especially strongly in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, as well as in "high church"

elements of the Catholic and Anglican traditions. On the level of the physical senses, all 5 senses are used: the visual symbols and interior decoration of the worship space provide a feast for the eyes, the musical chant touches the hearing, the incense stimulates the nose, the bodily postures and gestures are part of the sense of touch, and the bread and wine taste of the Eucharistic food consumed affect the tongue. Going beyond the physical element of the aesthetic experience, however, we also have the experience of the mind. The Biblical readings put people in contact with important works of human literature (the psalms alone are considered classic poetry), and the preaching is meant to be a practice in the literary art of oratory. Most importantly, however, all these symbols are arts are meant to open up the heart to allow God's presence to penetrate, leading to the highest level of aesthetic experience -- that of "ek-stasis", of being "outside oneself". In the Orthodox and "high church" Catholic and Anglican traditions the liturgy is more than a ceremony performed out of duty, it is meant to be a meeting place between Earth and Heaven.

If the liturgy is meant to an artistic act, then, who are the artists? The spontaneous response from many is "the minister" or "the choir," as though the liturgy is some sort of performance with the people in the church being largely passive spectators. In fact, however, the word "liturgy" comes from the Greek *leitourgia*, which means "the work of the people". Every single participant in a liturgy is meant to be one of the artists, combining their "work" to produce the work of art. The presiding minister is meant to be more of an orchestra conductor than a soloist, with all the people together being the orchestra -- no matter how humble their contribution. If this is true, however, it is important that each Christian come to know and understand the meaning of the liturgy, as the various prayers and actions communicate the commemorative interest of this special "work of art". Beauty in the liturgy involves more than a successful technical execution -- it must be done with understanding, so that its spirit is communicated ever more successfully than its letter.⁹³

Liturgy is driven principally by the commemorative interest, as Jesus himself commanded at the Last Supper: "Do this in memory of me." But as important as the commemorative interest is, the formal interest is also very important. The liturgy is meant to be an expression of faith, a faith that is composed of mysteries. Because it is composed of mysteries, the greatest sermons and spoken prayers could never capture the entirety of the faith experience -- there is always more to learn, discover, and express. So while a Christian who wishes to enter fully into the liturgical aesthetic experience needs to learn the commemorative interest, the fact that we don't yet "get it" should not deter us from liturgical participation. The simple fact is that because liturgy is an expression of mystery we will never entirely "get it" -- there is always another level of knowledge and experience to discover. Our simple presence at the liturgy is a sufficient start, and even if the commemorative interest is lost on us (as it often is on small children, for example, who attend liturgy without much

⁹³ One could argue that this is why so many people find liturgy boring. It is not only because sometimes liturgy is not "done well" by the leaders, it is also because it is not "done well" by the observers -- who are not meant to be mere observers in the first place! There is an inherent contradiction from the get-go: it is not possible to attain to the heights of the aesthetic experience that liturgy promises without (1) active participation and (2) understanding. Being mere observers without participation or understanding almost guarantees a minimalist spiritual benefit from the liturgy. To put it another way, people who say "I don't go to church because I don't get anything out of it" are missing the point: as "artists" themselves of the liturgy they are meant to have something to give. And having a generous attitude of giving of ourselves is the very definition of the start of an experience of "ek-stasis".

knowledge), the formal interest component of the liturgical aesthetic experience alone can put us in touch with a deeper truth.

The ultimate protagonist in the liturgy, however, is God himself. The Holy Spirit is invoked several times within a liturgical celebration, with the intention of asking God to gather and lead us in the worship service. Liturgy is not just something we offer to God, it is also something we receive from God even as it is enacted. The presence of the Holy Spirit is ultimately what makes a liturgy beautiful, and therefore different from a sterile re-enactment of a ritual: we ask God to take charge, to mould us into one body, to transform us, and then to take us to himself. The Second Vatican Council expressed this reality as follows:

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.⁹⁴

The liturgy that happens in church, therefore, is really meant to simply be a special meeting place with God as we live out the real liturgy -- the “work of the people” that we carry out as we live our lives in the world.

If our ordinary lives can be form of liturgy, however, and if liturgy is a place of encounter with the beautiful, it then begs the question: what is the link between religious practice and the aesthetic experience?

The moral and spiritual life as an exercise in beauty

The word “virtue,” which is often used in a moral context, actually has its origin in an artistic usage. While many people are born with a seemingly innate ability to draw or paint or play a musical instrument, it still requires many years of practice for these skills to be honed to a fine degree. At a certain point, however, these abilities become so well-practised that they become second nature, and the person can rightly be called a *virtuoso* -- a person who has the virtue of being able to produce a work of art with true excellence.

Have you ever heard the phrase (often heard around funerals) “So-and-so was a beautiful person?” This is often not a reference to their physical appearance, but to the quality of their soul, and yet the language of beauty is being applied! The moral life is often seen by people as an exercise in “following the rules”. To be sure, there are certain moral rules within Christian belief, just as there are “rules” to artistic production (the laws of harmony in musical composition, for example). The Christian moral life, however, is meant to be more than a following of the rules. Our life is meant to become a life of virtue, or (to put it another way) our life is meant to be a work of art and beauty. We are called to become “virtuosos” of life, knowing how to live well, combining both the commemorative and formal interest -- living a life of excellence in form, and also of values and significance. There is an ancient expression which summarizes this well: “The glory of God is man fully alive.”

⁹⁴ VATICAN II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10.

The Christian moral life and spiritual life meet in the two commandments which Jesus affirmed are the greatest of all:

A lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." (Luke 10:25-28)

As much as these are moral commandments they are also a guide to the spiritual life lived in a spirit of beauty. Christian reflection on beauty discovers that love is what is ultimately at the heart of the aesthetic experience, because love is itself an experience of "ek-stasis" -- love, as a force, draws us out of ourselves towards the thing that is loved. And, similar to the three types of reaction to beauty that we have already identified, the Bible distinguishes between 3 kinds of love:

<i>eros</i>	Love of attraction, desire to possess. A love that flows from the good things we receive from the thing loved.	A love that flows from the <i>sarx</i> part of our nature.
<i>philia</i>	Disinterested love for the sake of higher ideals. The control of the passions.	A love that flows from the <i>psyche</i> part of our nature.
<i>agape</i>	Preferential love for the sake of God and the other.	A love that flows from the <i>pneuma</i> part of our nature.

Growth in Christian virtue and spirituality is ultimately growth in the ability to love the love of *agape*. Little children, while cute, are actually often quite centred on themselves and their own needs. While understandable in little children, such attitudes are hardly tolerable in grown adults. Growth as a human being means growing out of this childish narcissism toward a true altruism -- from being self-centred to being other-centred. This, however, is simply "ek-stasis" described in other words -- not an ecstasy of an intense but temporary feeling, but an *attitude* of ecstasy that carries with us throughout every moment of our life.

The theology of beauty

Classic philosophy identifies certain high-level categories of being as "transcendentals". These include Being, Truth, and Good, all of which have been identified as properties intimately associated with God. What about transcendental of Beauty? How does theology treat this category in relation to God?

The existence of Beauty as a proof of the existence of God

While there are often many disagreements about what is beautiful, the fact the human beings live the aesthetic experience and speak of beauty at all points to the existence of some mysterious underlying reality called Beauty. Up until now we have been discussing the existence of beauty in artificial works of art, but we must not forget that we also encounter the aesthetic experience in the elements of nature. It is possible to see a sunset that just takes our breath away, or to experience the vista from the top of a mountain and have it be more than just a pretty view. Contemplation of the works of nature has been a source for many of a religious experience, the origin of an experience of “ek-stasis”. Even the expression “it took my breath away” is code-language for a spiritual experience -- because “breath” is another word for *pneuma*.

Many people have pointed to the inherent order present in nature as an argument for the existence of God. This is called the “argument from design,” and it is meant to point to the transcendental of Truth which seems inherent to nature. But the fact that the encounter with natural beauty can also provoke the aesthetic experience can also be seen as pointing to the existence of God. The aesthetic experience comes from the union of the formal and commemorative interests, but what is the commemorative interest in the beauty of nature? In fact, all works of art have at least one element of commemorative interest: they all point to the existence of an artist. Not every encounter with nature provokes an aesthetic experience, but when it does it can be experienced to a tremendous degree, and it begs the question: who is the Artist who placed this beauty here? The answer is God.

So why did God create the universe? For the same “highest reasons” why a painter paints, or a sculptor sculpts: for the joy of creation, for the desire to make something beautiful for its own sake. The simple existence of the world, and the beauty present in that existence, points to the existence of God. While many disagree with this perspective, the Book of Wisdom has this to say about this attitude:

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature;
and they were unable from the good things
that are seen to know him who exists,
nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works;
but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air,
or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water,
or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world.
If through delight in the beauty of these things
men assumed them to be gods,
let them know how much better than these is their Lord,
for the author of beauty created them.
And if men were amazed at their power and working,
let them perceive from them how much more
powerful is he who formed them.
For from the greatness and beauty of created things
comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.
Yet these men are little to be blamed,
for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him.
For as they live among his works
they keep searching, and they trust in what they see,
because the things that are seen are beautiful. (Wisdom 13:1-7)

The seeking for Beauty, and the instinct in us which recognizes it, is ultimately from God and is meant to return to him.

Is God beautiful?

It is one thing to see God as the author of Beauty, but quite another to ask if God himself is beautiful. After all, God is himself pure spirit and therefore invisible. If there is nothing of God for us to experience directly, how can God be understood as beautiful?

The beauty of God can be seen from an argument from general revelation, which starts from the argument that God is the Supreme Good. Since Beauty is something which is good, God must necessarily be beautiful. Turning to special revelation, however, we can take this a step further. One of the things we know of God from special revelation is that "God is love" -- not simply that God is loving, but that God himself *is* love, love is his substance, he is made out of love. As we have seen, however, love is the ultimate enduring source of the aesthetic experience. If God *is* love, then it means that God is not simply supremely beautiful, but that God *is* Beauty itself.

The other element of special revelation -- that God is a Trinity -- takes us to the next level of reflection. The fact that God is a Trinity is closely associated with the fact that God is love. St. Augustine used a famous analogy to describe the Trinity: the Father is the Lover, whose love overflows to beget the Son who is the Beloved, and from the love between the Father and Son proceeds the Holy Spirit, who is the love between them made eternally real. In essence, the doctrine of the Trinity points to a "God-in-ecstasy" -- God-the-Father, being Beauty itself, is by nature in a state of "ek-stasis", eternally overflowing "outside himself" to produce the Son and the Spirit, who are co-divine and co-eternal with him.

Ultimately, then, the experience of the beauty of God does not come from "seeing" God without eyes or "hearing" God with our ears, but of entering into this eternal movement of the love of God -- learning to love God with everything we have, and of receiving and living that love in return. This is, for human beings, the ultimate ecstasy, and it explains why extremely holy people (and I don't mean people who are just very pious) sometimes seem to be from another planet while at the same time being very practical and grounded: while they remain anchored in reality, they are always "outside themselves," not because they are mentally ill but because they, in their holiness, have become more and more like God himself -- the Trinity-in-ecstasy. And in becoming holy, they become beautiful. Mother Teresa was no super-model, but she radiated beauty -- not a beauty that came from clothes, or make-up, or plastic surgery, but the beauty of holiness.

If you want to pursue true beauty, the kind that will endure no matter what your age or appearance, pursue holiness.

Theology in a society of plenty

In terms of material wealth, modern Western civilization is the wealthiest civilization humanity has ever known. This unprecedented state of affairs is largely due to the success of an economic theory called **capitalism**, the modern founder of which is considered to have been the Scottish economist Adam Smith (1723-1790). This economic ideology is not without its critics, the most severe of which has been **communism**, founded on the economic ideas of Karl Marx (1818-1883), one of the reasons it is also called Marxism. Because communism is by nature anti-religious, many persons assumed that the Church and capitalism were natural allies, but this is true in only a limited sense. In reality, theology has many critiques to offer of both systems, and some theologians have tried to develop the elements of a “third way” vision.

On what basis is theology able to offer economic critiques? After all, most theologians are neither economists nor experts in finance. The latter are not theologians either, so this often offers a stumbling block to dialogue between the two disciplines. Nevertheless, theology *is* able to offer a critique because at the root of economic theory is a vision of human nature that structures the subsequent (more mathematical) theories and applications. If this vision of human nature is subject to legitimate critique, then it should be theoretically possible to construct a subsequent economic theory based on a theological vision of human nature. In all honesty this has not yet happened, but the theological critiques of the 19th and 20th centuries have at least contributed to some of the parameters of the discussion.

Background to modern economics

Until the advent of capitalism, the Western world was still largely an agrarian economy, working under a semi-feudal system. Cities could only exist to the degree that farmers were able to produce food beyond their own subsistence, and so the level of city living and industry was comparatively low, and not very productive as it still largely relied on human labour. The only real mechanism of large-scale capital accumulation was by government, largely by land-ownership and taxation, although there were wealthy families that managed to become rich through trade. The basic units of currency were based on a precious metal standard, typically the gold standard. This provided a medium of exchange, but limited the money supply to the actual amount of gold available in the

system.

The discovery of the Americas caused a radical shift in this system, by increasing the amount of available capital in Europe. While originally meant to increase wealth by promoting trade with China and India, this wealth was effectively stolen: capital, in the form of gold and silver, were torn away from conquered empires (such as the Aztec and Inca), and labour was also stolen through the re-institution of slavery by Europeans.⁹⁵ While gold and silver are themselves not terribly useful, especially not for a pre-industrial society, it did have the effect of increasing the money supply (and therefore created an increasing demand for goods). More goods were produced, and food commodities coming from the new world became particularly cheaper thanks to the use of the slave labour. Overall the levels of wealth increased dramatically.

Certain technological developments then occurred that changed this picture even more dramatically. The agricultural revolution permitted farmers to become even more productive, which then meant that fewer were needed. Thousands were thrown off the lands their ancestors had worked, because only nobles had title to that land. They flocked to the cities, hoping to find some form of subsistence. Along with the agricultural revolution came the industrial revolution, in which new forms of production, relying largely on machines, came to the forefront. These methods of mass production allowed huge quantities of be produced, reducing the per unit cost and therefore the price of these goods. The traditional skills of human labour became relatively less important, and because of the agricultural revolution there was a surplus of this labour in the first place. Many people were reduced to terrible poverty and virtual slavery, as their lack of useful skills meant they had little to offer in the industrial age.

Industrialization promised the possibility of tremendous wealth, with one entry barrier: the new machines were expensive, and only those who had capital in the first place could afford to establish a factory.⁹⁶ The development of the corporation created a tremendous boon to the new economy, in that (through the selling of *share capital* in the form of stocks) persons who individually could not afford entry to the new economy could pool their resources, attaining the levels of capital needed. These new **capitalists** were able to attain previously unheard-of levels of wealth, beyond even the levels of the landed nobility.⁹⁷ Secondary markets developed to trade those stocks, appropriately called “stock markets”, and soon it was possible to find people whose whole livelihood depended on investing alone, without any personal implication in production or management. They used their capital simply to accumulate more capital.

⁹⁵ Slavery already existed in Africa among the various tribes, and among the Muslims, from whom many of the slaves were purchased.

⁹⁶ The word “factory” comes from the Latin verb “factus est”, i.e. “to be made”.

⁹⁷ It should be noted that these capitalists soon sought to translate their new wealth into political power. While the King of England was still sovereign, his ability to do anything depended on taxation, and the main generators of wealth were the new capitalists. The nobility controlled the House of Lords, but political reform resulted in the House of Commons coming under the control of the capitalist class. Similar to the election of a board of directors for a corporation, the capitalists decided who would sit in the House of Commons by elections. This was the start of modern parliamentary democracy, although it should be noted that we are still a long way off from a system of universal suffrage.

Capitalism as a system

Capitalism as a system of thought, as an ideology, received its basic structures under Adam Smith, a Scottish economist. The new economic situation was causing new social situations to emerge, and new recommendations for public policy were needed to guide both these social changes as well as the continued success of the capitalists. Smith wrote a now-classic book, *The Wealth of Nations*, which was published in 1776 and which, while now considered simplistic, contains the basic concepts needed to underpin a capitalist society.

“Economic man”

Also known as *homo economicus*, “economic man” identifies a vision of human beings as the fundamental protagonists in economic relationships. Animals, while they exist in a kind of balance of nature, do not have an “animal economy” as such. Once two or more human beings enter into a relationship in which they exchange things, however, an economy has started. Economics, then, is much more than the study of mathematical models: it is a description, written in a distilled and scientific form, of human property and exchange relationships. Smith believed that human beings are fundamentally rational in their behaviour, in that, out of self-interest, they seek to maximize the utility of the economic goods available to them.

Scarcity

Economic theory explains economic activity by the principle of *scarcity*, which can be summarized as follows: **man has unlimited needs but limited means, and so constantly seeks to maximize the utility of the means available to him.** This difference between needs and means, coupled with the fact that human beings are rational, causes human beings to exchange among themselves in order to permit a greater maximization of that utility. These exchanges, taken together, constitute the basis of an economy.

What about people who have no goods in the first place? Smith saw them as possessing at least one economic good: the contribution of their labour. In contributing their labour, they earn wealth which permits them to purchase goods. This increased demand for goods leads to more production, which results in more jobs at higher wages, which increases demand for goods, and so on. Smith did recognize that it was possible for persons to be poor, but he believed that if everyone acted according to “enlightened self-interest”, then over time the economy will naturally tend to improve. Smith called this trend the *invisible hand*, and it was not hard to see an analogy with the idea of the guiding hand of God. Others have called this the “greed is good” principle, because (under these set of assumptions) if human beings were ever to get to a state where their needs ever could be met (i.e. they were in fact not unlimited), the economy could potentially stagnate.

The concept of scarcity is at the origins of our modern idea of **consumerism**, which has at its core the idea that **happiness can be achieved through things which can be purchased and consumed.** It also justified a certain judgmental attitude towards the poor. After all, if there really was an invisible hand guiding us all to greater prosperity, then a lack of prosperity on the part of an

individual must mean that person is either stupid or lazy. The notion that human worth was tied to production value was reinforced, and a kind of social “survival of the fittest” attitude began to set in. Finally, there was a sense of the “inevitability of progress” -- the idea that history was ultimately on the side of a capitalist ideology.

The “free market”: free trade, free enterprise, free labour

The application of Smith’s ideas led to certain vision of public policy, involving free trade, free enterprise, and free labour.

Free trade was proposed as a way to maximize the number and volume of economic exchanges going on in the world. Up until this point trade was managed by a system of mercantilism, a system of trade monopolies and protectionist policies which was designed to force a transfer of wealth to the mother countries at the expense of the colonies. The new economic thinkers demonstrated that it was more advantageous, in the long run, for the colonies to themselves become wealthier by free trade, i.e. letting the invisible hand assist all in obtaining greater wealth.

Free enterprise meant the dismantling of industrial monopolies and their replacement by a multiplicity of businesses each in competition with the other. The original theory of monopolies was that certain ventures were very capital intensive, and so (it was argued) needed to have a guaranteed market to be able to recoup investments over time. The providing of government sanctioned monopolies was often used for political purposes, such as the building of colonial regimes.⁹⁸ But with the development of share capital corporations, monopolies were less important for domestic production. In fact, Smith demonstrated that such monopolies (or their related form, oligopolies) tend to abuse the power of their monopolistic position, and therefore do not maximize wealth production, but that instead this was best accomplished by a system of competitive enterprise. Monopolies began to be broken up, and anti-trust laws were established to ensure that anti-competitive practices did not take hold in the free market.

Free labour, i.e. non-unionized labour, was believed to also be necessary for a truly free market. Each worker was like an individual small business, selling his labour in exchange for wages. Theoretically, a trade union with the right to strike establishes a small labour monopoly, and as such was seen as a distortion of the free market (and ultimately harmful to everyone involved). Early capitalists were often quite brutal in their repression of labour organizers, who in turn often had to partner with organized crime (a typical dominant force among the poorer classes) for assistance in organizing.

Communism: the revolution of Karl Marx

Karl Marx was of German origin, but was living in England when he wrote his key work *Das Kapital*. Marx was a philosopher, but he believed that true philosophy should not simply stop at thought: it had to be put into action. He was living in the wealthiest society in the world at that time, but everywhere he looked he saw the continuing misery of the working classes. How could this be,

⁹⁸ Such as through the Hudson’s Bay Company, or the British East India Company.

given the theoretical conclusions of the dominant capitalist ideology? His reflections formed the basis for a powerful ideology, called **communism**, that seemed to explain the failures of the capitalist system while at the same time proposing a solution to those failures.

Economic determinism

Marx emphasized the “economic man” principle to a high degree, combining it with a materialist philosophy and extending it beyond the individual person to including whole societies. After all, a human being living on a deserted island, while a rational being, is not really living in an economy. According to these theories of *economic determinism*, all social patterns -- cultural, political, even religious -- ultimately were determined by economic forces. In some ways, this principle seems obvious. After all, isn't the globalization trend of today's world not driven by economic considerations? On the political side, we have the example of the European Union, which is currently in the process of drafting a constitution to serve as its basic political document. The EU was originally called the European Economic Community, and its purpose was to integrate the economies of the nations of Europe (beginning with free trade) to such an extent that in the future war between these nations would become inconceivable. On the cultural side, the business and political elites of the world already share much of a common culture: they dress the same, they all speak a common language (English), and are even educated in the same schools (or school systems). What is interesting is that Karl Marx himself predicted that this would happen, and even saw it as a necessary pre-requisite for a true communist revolution.

Marx's materialism meant that he also accepted a modified form of the consumerist premise, believing that prosperity and wealth, properly distributed, would in effect succeed in providing a world of peace and happiness. Much of Marx's theory, then, accepts certain fundamental capitalist premises, albeit “corrected” ones.

The concept of class

Prior to Marx's time, European society had been highly stratified with many levels of social class, from the ranks of the nobility down to the levels of the peasants. Marx saw that the development of capitalist societies was causing a collapse of this class system, such that it was no longer your birth that determined your social class, but your level of wealth. Marx saw the eventual evolution of two classes: the *bourgeoisie* (i.e. the “haves”) and the *proletariat* (i.e. the “have-nots”).

Marx believed that the bourgeoisie acted according to a “class consciousness”, and that their behaviour as a class was determined by their status as “haves”. Because of this common class consciousness, it was possible for the bourgeoisie, *as a class*, to act as a monopoly. It would not be a monopoly of trade or industry, but of capital itself. Those in the lower classes, by definition, contribute to the economy by their labour, not their capital. Being a monopoly, however, would mean that not only capital would be concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie, but power, and with it the reality of the abuse of power.

Regarding the proletariat, Marx developed the twin concepts of alienation and exploitation. The labourer, he argued, produced goods, but these were always for the benefit of others -- he was,

in other words, alienated from the fruits of his labour, unable to take home any of the good he had produced. The workers were being exploited, he argued -- the wealth they produced was not being brought back to them, but (because of the abuse of power of the bourgeoisie) was simply going to build up capital for others. "The rich get richer, the poor get poorer" is a slogan that expresses this concept.

The class struggle

Marx described the relationship between these two classes as a "Master-Slave Dialectic". At this point Marx applied Hegel's philosophy of history to the situation to see what its outcome would be. Hegel believed that history consists in a series of confrontations between opposing principles. One principle is the "thesis", the other the "anti-thesis", and the outcome of their confrontation is a "synthesis" which is somehow greater than both. Marx saw history converging on a point when, throughout the whole world, there would only be two final and opposing social classes, which would inevitably (and violently) clash.

Who would emerge victorious? While wealth offered power, Marx realised that the two were not perfectly equal. "Power comes from the barrel of a gun", as has been observed, and this applied in that a poor man armed with some sort of weapon, all other things being equal, has more power than a rich but unarmed man. While the bourgeoisie had money, the poor had numbers. Sooner or later (Marx believed) the poor would rise up as one in a vast communist revolution and violently overthrow the bourgeoisie. This clash of "thesis" and "anti-thesis" would then lead to a new "synthesis" -- the classless society, called "communism", in which no one would ever be alienated from their labour any longer (a kind of economic perfection). This form of society would be able to eliminate misery by ensuring total prosperity for everyone, and because of Marx's faith in economic determinism, it was believed that this total prosperity would eventually eliminate every social ill.

In the meantime...

Once again, Marx believed that it was the responsibility of the philosopher to be actively engaged in the development of culture. He believed that it was necessary to work for the hastening of the communist revolution, primarily through the building of the "class consciousness" among the proletariat. This would be done through leadership, organization, and political education, all to be provided by the Communist Party. The Communist Party, then, was much more than a political party among political parties: it was an entire social movement, with a very clear (and ideologically motivated) agenda. Where necessary (and possible) the Party would also start to prepare the Revolution, training men as soldiers and building an "army of the proletariat" for the eventual inevitable confrontation.

A key corollary of Marx's ideas was his attitude to religion, which he saw as a negative force in human history. Marx was a materialist which made him also an atheist, denying the existence of spiritual principles (such as God). He called religion "the opiate of the masses", because he felt that belief in an other-worldly paradise was a comforting but dangerous delusion that prevented the

proletariat from taking their destiny in their own hands.⁹⁹

This work for class consciousness, as well as the justification of violence, found a receptive audience in the labour union movement. A labour union, by definition, depends on the solidarity of its members (a kind of “class consciousness”), and the labour union often found themselves having to defend themselves from violent attacks -- often resorting to violence themselves. Labour unionists were often accused of being communists, whether they really were or not.

What happened to the Revolution?

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, as well as its transformation into a kind of pseudo-capitalism in the societies of Asia, seems to put the lie to Marx’s faith in the inevitable progress of communism throughout history. But does it? Marx believed that in order for a true communist revolution to occur, it would have to be a worldwide revolution against a universal bourgeoisie. He saw universal economic integration (through free trade and globalization) as a necessary prerequisite to the development of this true universal bourgeoisie. Communism was impossible in a single country, according to this model.

This calls into question whether the communist revolutions of the 20th century were really communist at all. The Russian experience flies in the face of this notion of the impossibility of communism in a single country. It begs the question: did communism collapse because it was flawed? Or because the concrete experiments in communism were not faithful to basic communist principles? In his book *The Mystery of Capital: why Capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*, the noted Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto points out the following:

We must not underestimate the latent power of Marxist integrated theory at a time when masses of people with little hope are looking for a cohesive worldview to improve their desperate economic prospects. In a period of economic boom, there tends to be little time for deep thinking. Crisis, however, has a way of sharpening the mind’s need for order and explanations into obsession. Marxist thinking, in whatever form it reappears—and it will—supplies a much mightier array of concepts for grappling with the political problems of capitalism outside the West than capitalist thinking does.¹⁰⁰

While Marxist thinking has its flaws (and it does), it is an attempt to address real problems with the capitalist ideology. How can these contradictions be resolved? It is here that theology may be able to provide some necessary elements to complete the ideological jig-saw puzzles.

⁹⁹ Marx was, in a sense, reacting to a dualist conception of salvation, originally promoted by St. Augustine. This vision sees the attainment of heaven as the goal of our existence on Earth. While true in itself, this vision places the entirety of “salvation” in the hereafter, as the salvation of the soul. But while this is important, does the salvation of the soul exhaust the concept of salvation? A hylemorphist view should tend to be more balanced, seeing salvation as including the body (and therefore beginning in the here and now).

¹⁰⁰ Loc cit, pp. 213-214.

Theology and the economy: beginnings of a new approach

Christian theology has been concerned with economic questions since its inception. Jesus confirmed the legality of paying taxes to the Emperor (Luke 20: 19-26). He also taught the dignity of the poor and the danger of riches as a spiritual distraction. In the story of the final judgement, Jesus taught that our final destiny was intimately linked with how we treated the less fortunate:

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25: 31-46)

After Pentecost the members of the early Church put these teachings into practice by their way of life. They placed their goods under the sovereignty of the community:

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. (Acts 4: 34-35)

They also extolled the virtue of industriousness and the value of human labour:

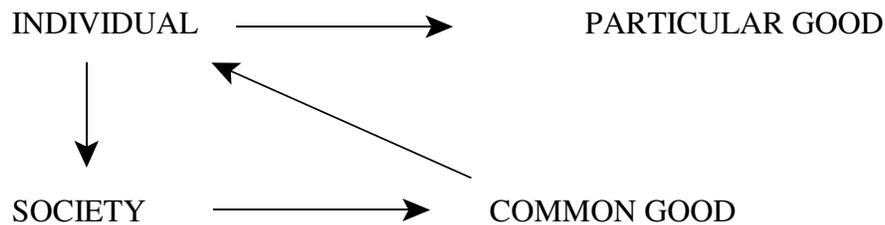
For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. (2 Thess 3: 7-12)

This vision of the early community has led some to speculate that the early Christians were, in fact, living a primitive form of communism. In fact, it would be more accurate to call this form of life “communitarianism”, but the close resemblance has led some Christian theologians to try and find some accommodation between Marxist principles and Christian theology.

The Middle Ages: a vision of the common good

The idealism of the early Christians seems to have died down with the years, although there was always a strong sense of the need for commitment to the poor. Monasteries were often founded with the intention of trying to re-live the ideal vision present in the early Church, and indeed members of monasteries and other religious communities do put their goods in common. As we have seen, they were important sources of cultural development in the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages also saw, however, a development of reflection on the nature of society itself. A powerful political reflection emerged from St. Thomas Aquinas in his theories of the common good, which can be represented by the following diagram:



The individual seeks his or her own particular good, but is unable to attain it completely on his or her own. S/he then bands together with others into a society, which pursues the elements of the common good. **The common good consists of those social features which must be present for the individual to be able to properly pursue the particular good.** Supported by the common good, the individual is then able to properly pursue the particular good.

This vision of society provides the mental structures that were necessary to the development of both capitalism and communism. Capitalists band together, for example, by the founding of joint stock companies. Communists, on the other hand, band together through the building of class consciousness. What is always at stake, however, is the question: what constitutes the particular good? And what elements are necessary in the common good to be able to support the pursuit of the particular good?

The development of economic critique

The desperate poverty of the industrial age was of major concern to the Christian churches, which responded in the traditional way, through charitable works. The Methodists, for example, began their work by teaching the people of the lower classes to read. The Salvation Army responded

by organizing food relief. Many Catholic charitable organizations were also founded, such as the St. Vincent de Paul Societies.

The new forms of analysis of the economy, however, whether capitalist or communist, forced a new evolution in the approach of the Church, which went from simply focussing on works of charity, to reflections on the nature of social justice. The Catholic activist Dorothy Day summed up this new development as follows:

When you see a man walking on the road, and he is run down by a truck, of course you will run to his aid. And if you see the same thing happen to another person, you will respond the same. And you would continue to respond to these scenes. But, after a while, you would start to question where the trucks running people down are coming from. And when you found out, you would try to stop them at their source.¹⁰¹

Theologians began to reflect seriously, then, not only on the spiritual value of works of mercy, but on the need to “stop the trucks at their source”.

The major force behind Christian social justice reflection came at first from the Catholic church, and its first major task was to respond to the increasing threat of communism, which was overtly and necessarily hostile both to it and to all religious belief in general. A major flash point of the 19th century, as already mentioned, was the development of labour unions, which were generally thought to be communist in inspiration if not in control. Did this not necessarily mean that membership in a union was an anti-Christian act? A watershed moment came in 1891, when Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, subtitled “On the condition of the working class”.¹⁰² Pope Leo strongly refuted the doctrines of the “socialists”, but at the same time declared the right of association of workers, i.e. the legitimate right to form labour unions. He encouraged the development of a partnership between labour and capital, and promoted the development of Christian labour unions.

Here in Quebec, all the original labour unions were Christian in nature, although Marxist tendencies did creep in once the Quiet Revolution took over and Quebec became a more secular society. Quebec thinkers took the Pope’s intuition one step further, however, and wondered: if there can be association for labour, can there not also be associations for capital? This led to the development of the first *caisses populaires*, in which financial resources were pooled on a local level so as to provide a ready source of capital to small borrowers. These micro-financial institutions have been copied the world over, lowering the bar to entry into the world of finance. Other financial institutions were also developed out of Christian initiatives, such as insurance companies -- the Knights of Columbus being one example of a Christian fraternal organization with a joint insurance

¹⁰¹ Source unknown. There is a similar story told about the rescue of babies from a river.

¹⁰² Even secular economists generally agree that *Rerum Novarum* was an important moment in the economic history of the world.

component.¹⁰³

The development of human rights theory has contributed to the concept of the common good and what it constitutes. In general, the concepts of common good, social justice, and human rights are interdependent. A society can be said to exist in a state of perfect social justice when the common good properly exists and is properly made available, and this can be measured by the degree to which members of that society enjoy human rights -- not simply political rights, but economic, social and cultural rights as well. The ongoing development of human rights theory can be said to be an on-going explicitation of the contents of the common good.

One form of theology which captured the imagination of some Christians in the 20th century was the *theology of liberation*, which had an explicit economic agenda. While Marxism and Christianity are opposing concepts, liberation theologians wondered if this was necessarily so. After all, the early Christians (it would seem) lived a sort of communist ideal, and both Marxists and Christians held the poor in high esteem and sought to promote their dignity. Traditional Christian theology also held that a people had a collective right to self-defence. While the Pope had defended the rights of people to organize into association, what if those rights were simply being categorically denied? What if the injustice in a society existed on a pervasive scale, such that the people lived without any hope of bettering their condition? Did there exist a right of collective self-defence that could be exercised by a class of people, through revolution? Some liberation theologians, particularly in Latin America, espoused a form of theology that at times was hard to distinguish from Marxism itself. Some of those theologians (and even priests) even assumed political office in revolutionary governments, such as Fr. Ernesto Cardenal in Nicaragua. The development of a theology of liberation faithful to genuine Christian principles has been an ongoing struggle in the Christian world, even up to this day.

Economics and theology in the 21st century

The apparent victory of capitalism over communism, as well as the rapid march of globalization, has led us to a new situation in the world of economics, one which the world of theology needs to understand and be able, where necessary, to critique. Theologians are generally not economists, however, so sometimes these critiques are a bit obtuse, or come across simply as complaints about “irritants” in the system. For the sake of the credibility of theology, as well as for the good of the culture, we need to realise that the modern dominant economic system is inspired by a powerful ideology, one which many sincerely believe in as a path to promoting the good of humanity. Our critiques must be focussed on the basic foundations of that ideology. As it turns out, this is exactly where theology excels, because at the basis of all economic theory is a vision of the human person.

It is not my intention here to provide a complete economic critique (I am still working on my own vision of things), nor to provide an exhaustive review of Christian social theory, but I would like to leave us with an overview of the fundamental issues which need to be addressed.

¹⁰³ It could be argued that these forms of financial association are the real heirs of the model of common economic life of the early Church.

<i>ISSUE NAME</i>	<i>ELEMENTS OF CRITIQUE</i>
Human nature and rationality	While humans share a rational nature, are individual human beings as perfectly rational as Smith theorized? If not, how does this change the subsequent theory? How important is rationality to the concept of human dignity?
The principle of scarcity	Is it true that our needs are unlimited? Are there categories of needs? Is it possible to attain a level of “contentment”? If scarcity of not true, what should be the true motivator of human economic behaviour? What economic model emerges from these new assumptions?
Consumerism	Is it true that all elements necessary for human happiness can be purchased? What might be lacking? What does human happiness require? How are we to understand the increasing “commoditization” of elements of human activity (e.g. sexuality, parenthood)?
The principle of confidence	What moral underpinnings are needed to ensure the continued existence of “confidence” within financial markets? Does current economic theory provide sufficient justification for these necessary moral attitudes?
The principle of productivity	How important is personal productivity to our vision of human dignity?
The “invisible hand”	Can it be true that greed is the real source of economic dynamism and growth? What moral alternatives might exist to explain the “invisible hand”?
The place of labour vs. capital	Capitalism began as a reflection on the role of capital in economic progress, and sees its accumulation as a measure of success. Is there a complementary model that places the dignity of work at the centre?
The measurement problem	How do we measure economic success? How do our measurements take into account issues of human dignity, such as human rights?
The structure of society	To what extent is the shape of societies dependent on economic factors? Is it true that generalised prosperity can remedy every social ill? Can unjust social structures persist even if underlying causes are eliminated, and if so, how can they be corrected?
The role of the church	What roles can/must the Church play to promote an economy that functions according to Gospel principles? What is the responsibility of Christians in this area?
The unification of cultures	How are we to evaluate the increasing globalization of culture promoted through greater economic links? Is the current economic ideology destructive to traditional culture?

Theology and feminism

There can be little doubt that modern Western civilization has been greatly influenced by feminist thought, aimed at promoting the place and role of women in society. For many people today this reality is simply accepted as a self-evident "given", but the debates surrounding the various roles of men and women continue, most particularly within new immigrant populations and within the Christian churches. How are feminist approaches to be understood and evaluated? What has been the influence of such thought in the religious sphere, and within Christian theology in particular?

A brief history of the feminist movement

There are many descriptions that have been offered of a history of feminism, some going so far back as to draw on examples ancient history. To be clear, therefore, this chapter will not attempt to address the entire history of womankind, but rather the history of the modern feminist movement as experience within Western civilization (where, it must be stated, the movement began). As well, this will not be a history of feminist thought, but rather a more modest attempt to see how feminist thinking has had an impact on Western popular culture in general and on Christian theology in particular.

Phase 1 of popular feminism: the quest for women's suffrage

The modern feminist movement, as a popular movement, has its origins in the anti-slavery movements of the early- and mid-19th century, especially in the United States in the run-up to the US Civil War. A great many of the people working for the liberation of the slaves were Christian women, who were motivated to do so by their Christian faith and their belief that God had created all human beings in his likeness, therefore sharing with each a common dignity. Slavery, it was believed, was contrary to that dignity. Very quickly, however, these women realised they were facing an ironic reality: the moment the slaves, particularly the male slaves, were emancipated, they would have more legal rights than the white women working to emancipate them! The struggle for rights

for the slaves, therefore, soon also included a parallel struggle for the emancipation of women.¹⁰⁴

The movement for woman suffrage started in the early 19th century during the agitation against slavery. Such women as Lucretia Mott showed a keen interest in the antislavery movement and proved to be admirable public speakers. When Elizabeth Cady Stanton joined the antislavery forces, she and Mott decided that the rights of women, as well as those of black slaves, needed redress. In July 1848 they issued a call for a convention to discuss the issue of women's rights.¹⁰⁵

The earliest political goal of those working for women's rights was the call for the right to vote, as no democratic societies at the time of the American Civil War had women's suffrage. The theory was that once women had the right to vote, politicians would have to appeal to women in order to be elected, and a natural push would occur within political society to grant equal rights and opportunities to women. However, the early "suffragettes", as they were called, did not find it easy to obtain the vindication of such rights. Some of the negative reactions they received attempted to justify the lack of equality through recourse to the Bible, which does seem in a great many passages to present a male-dominated world view.¹⁰⁶ A "woman's theology" then almost had to emerge as a response, especially since (as we have regularly seen) religion and culture are inextricably intertwined.

The rise of Liberal Protestantism and its new forms of scriptural criticism meant that one of the earliest projects of feminist theology (even though it wasn't even called that at the time) was an attempt to create a "Women's Bible", deleting or re-writing sections of the Bible which were thought to be repressive of women. Given the importance of the Bible, this was a controversial project to say the least. Apart from challenging religious sensibilities, the Women's Bible project called into question the traditional "hierarchy" of the sources of theology, putting *experience* over *Scripture*.

Phase 2 of popular feminism: the post-war experience

The women's suffrage movement was gradually successful in changing political structures, with women gradually acquiring the right to vote in nations all over the world (starting with New Zealand in 1893). Success, however, led to a following decline in interest by the masses. Certainly feminist authors and thinkers continued to work, but the public responded less and less. After all, had the suffragettes not "won"? Nevertheless, certain influences were beginning to emerge which would have a major impact and whose convergence would change modern feminism forever.

¹⁰⁴ The expression "women's lib" (or liberation) is related to this concept of freedom from slavery.

¹⁰⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, *Micropaedia*, volume 12, p. 733.

¹⁰⁶ Take, for example, this passage from Saint Paul: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." (1 Tim 2:11-14)

The first of these influences was Marxism (aka Socialism, or Communism). This socio-political ideology first acquired political power through the Communist (or Bolshevik) revolution in Russia in 1917, in which the Soviet Union was born. The new nation immediately recognized women's suffrage, a year before Canada (1918) and three years before the United States (1920). Marxism had already generated considerable intellectual interest, especially given its analysis of the experience of human alienation and the master-slave dialectic, issues which seemed directly applicable to the situation of women (who themselves had worked for the emancipation of slaves, and who were now working for their own "emancipation"). The experience of rejection many women felt at the hands of Christian religious believers during their struggle for suffrage led many to question the value of the Christian faith as well, thereby finding an ally in Marxism which interpreted religion itself as a tool for oppression. Finally, the immediate recognition of the right to vote by the first Marxist state in the world seemed to show Marxism putting its money where its mouth was, and greatly impressed many feminist thinkers. Even today, feminism is generally considered to be on the political "left".

Another emerging school of thought was that of existentialism, founded in France and largely driven by the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism tries to root itself in metaphysics, especially in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, but generally can be understood to be a division of the dualist "Plato line". Sartre was trying to understand human freedom and its relationship to human nature: which is dominant (note the form/matter dispute here). He concluded that "existence precedes essence", that is to say there is no determinate human nature. His views had direct political implications, for example in post-war France, trying to get a grip on understanding the surrender and collaboration of many of its citizens with the occupying Nazi regime. For Sartre, our nature is not determined, we determine it through our choices. Human freedom, then, has the capacity to not just choose what to do in that or that situation, but indeed, to determine the very essence of our being.

These two schools of thought were merged by another powerful thinker, Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre's common-law partner (neither of them believed in the institution of marriage). In her 1949 book *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir states that it is her intention to examine the situation of women in the light of both Marxism and Existentialism¹⁰⁷. Her method of writing is true to her objectives and principles, and is very complete. However, it is also quite dense, and her thought might have just remained confined to books, if it weren't for the inter-gender social ferment of the post-war period. To put it simply, while the men had been off fighting in World War II, the women were recruited to fill roles that had traditionally been filled by men, such as factory work, and proved that "they could do it". Parallel women's voluntary para-military organizations, such as the WAC (Women's Air Corps) gave a whole generation of women training in leadership. When the men returned from the war, then, not everyone was ready to accept a simple return to the way things had been. Many did accept it, and in retrospect it may have been a good thing, as the last thing society needs is a group of young, weary, battle-hardened men unable to find meaningful work (demographers typically refer to this group as the most dangerous demographic group there is). But under the surface, something was building. *The Second Sex*, called by some "the first manifesto of

¹⁰⁷ In the Introduction to her work de Beauvoir applies the Master-Slave dialectic to the relationship between man and woman, and later states that her perspective is that of Existentialist ethics.

the liberated woman", found an audience ready for change. It is my personal thesis that every major element of today's dominant feminist ideology cannot be fully understood without referring to roots in questions raised (and solutions proposed) in *The Second Sex*.

As much of the issues of feminism are ideological, many of these issues and their proposed analysis and solutions have a theological parallel. Again, theology is the "thinking boundary" between religion and culture, so this is natural. What is necessary, however, is for feminist theology to be true to its calling and not just become a "religionized ideology". It must offer critique, not only of religion and religious practices and attitudes, but of the cultural movement which spawns the questions in the first place. Therefore, at this point, let us take a look at the basic philosophical and cultural critique modern feminism offers

The "issues paradigm" of modern feminism

In its examination of the place of woman (used in the singular to denote both individual women and women as a whole, analogous to the French use of *la femme*) in culture and society, feminism quickly concludes that a certain injustice is present in this society, an injustice called *sexism*. This is the first key building block to understanding modern feminism. Sexism can be defined as the existence in a culture or society of an unjust pattern of discrimination favouring the members of one gender over another. In theory there can be two forms of sexism, one favouring men over women, and one favouring women over men. In practice, however, the term sexism normally refers to the former, to the point of certain feminist thinkers scoffing at the very notion that the reverse form deserves any attention at all.¹⁰⁸

In order to explain where male-dominated sexism comes from, feminists turn to the concept of *patriarchy*. In its etymological roots the word "patriarchy" comes from *pater* (the Latin word for "father") and *arche* (the Greek work meaning "source" or "first principle"). Patriarchy therefore is an ideological perspective that sees "the man as the primary principle". According to feminist thought, signs of patriarchy can be seen in a great many elements of society:

Political institutions: The restriction of the right to vote was an initial point of resistance encountered by the women's movement, but the lack of female politicians is often cited by others as an ongoing form of patriarchy.

Vocational opportunities: Certain forms of higher education were restricted to men only, giving rise to stereotypes like "boys become doctors, girls become nurses". Some see the fact that certain field of study remain male-dominated (such as engineering) as proof of ongoing patriarchy.

Gender stereotypes: The idealised form of a woman literature was often portrayed as

¹⁰⁸ This is, in fact, the very complaint of the recent emerging "men's movement", which as a result has an upward battle for credibility.

someone who was passive and submissive.

Legal structures: For a time, women were legally subject to men, unable to manage their own money or even have a bank account. In a sense, the men were their legal guardians.

Marriage traditions: Certain cultures have a tradition of paying a dowry or bride price, which is seen as treating women as sexual property. There are also often unequal punishments for adultery as committed by a man versus a woman.

Historical understanding: Historical writing seems to present a dominant male viewpoint, not capturing the point of view of women, nor using examples of feminine historical influence. It is as though the male pattern is considered historically normative.

Language patterns: Certain linguistic patterns are seen as evidence of patriarchy. For example, the correct term in English to express the human race as a whole when used as a subject is "man". In French, there is the grammatical principle that "the male gender includes the female", e.g. should there be a reference to a mixed group, the pronoun "ils" is to be used.

Modern feminism seeks to understand the origins of these patterns of patriarchy, in order to be able to make recommendations to change it. In this regard, we can immediately see the usefulness of existentialism (a philosophical view of the human person emphasizing freedom from predefined notions of human nature, as well as the right to self-determination) and Marxism (an ideology proposing a practical plan of action in situations of injustice and oppression).

In Simone de Beauvoir's thought we see a view that, early in human prehistory, women had two major (supposed) disadvantages: a lesser physical strength, in general, than men, which meant as a consequence less of a capacity to wield instruments (not necessarily weapons, but including them) that required this strength; and the confinement that motherhood imposed, through greater vulnerability in pregnancy as well as the burden of being the primary food source for the young children. These disadvantages set the stage for the origins of patriarchy as a cultural pattern. There is a certain undeniable male specificity (I hesitate to say superiority) in biological realities, but patriarchy (so it is argued) extends these limited areas of dominance to a belief that the very nature of man is superior to that of woman (as view often seen in ancient philosophy, for example). This notion that there is a fundamental essence that is inferior is, however, utterly rejected by de Beauvoir through her application of an existentialist critique. She doesn't only disagree with the idea that the nature of women is inferior: as a good existentialist, she denies the existence of any prior essence in the first place. As she states in her book:

It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman.¹⁰⁹

If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to

¹⁰⁹ SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR, *The Second Sex*, Introduction (Bantam Books, p. xiii)

explain her through "the eternal feminine," and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman?¹¹⁰

According to de Beauvoir, however, the cultural paradigm of patriarchy is fragile:

Technique may annul the muscular inequality of man and woman...Thus the control of many modern machines requires only a part of the masculine resources, and if the minimum demanded is above the female's capacity, she becomes, as far as the work is concerned, man's equal. Today, of course, vast displays of energy can be controlled by pressing a button. As for the burdens of maternity, they assume widely varying importance according to the customs of the country: they are crushing if the woman is obliged to undergo frequent children without assistance; but if she procreates voluntarily and if society comes to her aid during pregnancy and is concerned with child welfare, the burdens of maternity are light and can be easily offset by suitable adjustments in working conditions.¹¹¹

The path to women's emancipation from her alienation is, therefore, economic, a point of view perfectly in keeping with Marxism, which believed in economic determinism. De Beauvoir did see, however, another important parallel with Marxism, which offered an organizational goal for the feminist movement: the creation of a class consciousness among women. She points out that women are not, in fact, a minority in human society, but often act and are treated as though they were (i.e. they are often easily exploited). As with many oppressed peoples, de Beauvoir sees this as a consequence of women being told that their reference point for self-understanding is not other women, but men, thus creating an identification between the oppressed and the oppressor that perpetuates the patriarchal system. The feminist project, therefore, has as a critical goal the awakening of women to their universal sisterhood and the building of structures of solidarity and resources for feminine identity that do not rely on men.

It should be pointed out that there is an important link between post-war feminism and the sexual revolution. The availability of relatively reliable contraception allowed the separation of procreation and human sexual behaviour (something seen as necessary by feminists in order to promote economic liberation), but it also meant that sexual libertinage became possible. A major debate among feminists today revolves around the impact of this development on human dignity and feminine dignity in particular? Is the spread of easy divorce, easy pornography, and easy prostitution liberating for women, or the reverse? The jury is still out among feminist thinkers.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. xv.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹¹² Prostitution is a good example of this debate. The prostitute provides a service that most women throughout history have provided for free (or been forced to provide). If liberation is necessarily economic, does that mean that prostitutes are, in fact, the most liberated of women?

It should also be mentioned that there is an important link between post-war feminism and the modern GLBT movement. The understanding and evaluation of non-heterosexual sexual orientations very often depends on patterns of thought already well established by the feminist movement (for example, the notion that human nature is a cultural construct rather than being a true universal)¹¹³. Even more importantly, however, feminist authors often present a specific lesbian approach to feminism; de Beauvoir herself devotes an entire chapter to "The Lesbian" in *The Second Sex*. The lesbian approach to sexuality is often seen as a vanguard to full liberation, as the lesbian woman does not seek sexual union with men (and therefore is far less likely to fall into the trap of "identification with the oppressors". Thus, they are often considered better able to contribute to the building up of class consciousness among women. While recognizing that heterosexual intercourse will always be necessary for the continuance of the species, current feminist thinking often promotes not just tolerance but active respect for lesbian women as cultural heroines.

Feminist theology: the critique of religion

Following the philosophical and cultural critique feminist thought offers, certain parallel criticisms have been made in the area of the Christian religion. These include:

1. The question of a lack of a "historical voice" for women. This is the basis of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's book *In Memory of Her*, the title of which is a reference to Mark 14: 9: "In truth, I tell you, wherever throughout all the world the gospel is proclaimed, what she has done will be told as well, in remembrance of her." Ironically, however, that Gospel passage itself does not even relate the woman's name: it is as though she represents a kind of "anonymity of womanhood" in Christian history. Feminist theology therefore often attempts to reconstruct the Christian historical narrative, to create a place for women in the Christian story.
2. The place of the Bible. Liberal Protestantism, with its historical criticism, showed us the importance of culture in reading the Bible accurately. But the culture in which the Bible was written was quite arguably a patriarchal culture. How is the Bible then to be read? Rejecting the Bible is tantamount to the founding of a new religion, as in fact many modern feminists feel is the only option (e.g. so-called "goddess religion"). Feminist theology tries to find a hermeneutical approach that can "salvage" a true, non-patriarchal meaning underlying the actual text itself.
3. The understanding of original sin. The story of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:16 seems to justify the subjugation of women to men as a punishment for the sin of Eve. In

¹¹³ The current notion of "heteroflexibility" as an approach to sexual orientation is an example. It means a person who sees themselves as heterosexual, but who is not opposed to experimenting or having a liaison involving a person of the same sex.

what way is sexism a consequence of original sin: is it a just punishment from God, or a by-product that is just as morally abnormal?

4. The importance of the maleness of Jesus. Much of modern feminism follows de Beauvoir in seeking to avoid the pattern of female identification with masculine archetypes. That being said, Christianity most definitely presents Jesus as the perfect human archetype, and Jesus is most definitely male. Some feminists argue that this means that Jesus cannot truly be the saviour for women as well as men. Feminist theology must therefore come to grips with the importance (or not) of the maleness of Jesus with regards to the Christian message.¹¹⁴
5. The use of language. This is the "inclusive-language" debate that rages especially in the English-speaking world. How do we speak of God? When St. Paul writes to his "brethren", he means both men and women, so often we will translate the word that way. But what about the "Our Father" prayer? Is that patriarchal? Should it be translated as "Our Parent", or "Our Mother-Father", as some suggest?
6. The place of women in leadership in the Church, i.e. the clergy question. For most of the history of the Church, hierarchical leadership has been reserved to men. The Protestants generally did away with the notion of a hierarchical priesthood distinct from the "royal priesthood" of the baptised, such that ordained ministry became (in theory) open to women (a cultural development which nevertheless took some time to come about). The Catholic and Orthodox churches, however, while acknowledging a leadership role for lay women, continue to reserve ordination to the priesthood to men.¹¹⁵

Christian theology critiquing modern feminism

The Christian theological reaction to modern feminism has generally been one of positive (if cautious) reception. There is no question that patriarchal patterns have existed (and continue to exist) in society, and in the Church. However, it is also true that Jesus Christ treated women in a revolutionary way. For example, in Luke 13:16 Jesus refers to a crippled woman as a "daughter of Abraham", an expression nowhere else found in the Bible (as the obligation to enter into the covenant was incumbent upon men, not women). Jesus admitted women as disciples, something no

¹¹⁴ Extreme examples of attempted solutions to this include referring to Jesus as "Sophia" (the Greek word for Wisdom, of which Jesus is the incarnate form) or "Christa" (often portrayed as a woman on the cross).

¹¹⁵ There is some discussion in these churches regarding the ordination of women to the diaconate, although this is accompanied by debate as to whether the diaconate of women is ontologically identical to the diaconate of men.

rabbi would have normally done at the time.¹¹⁶ Christianity, therefore, contains within it the theological seeds of gender equality in the example of Jesus himself.

However, because modern feminism has its roots in philosophies that have in the past been hostile to religion in general (and Christianity in particular), this does not mean that feminism is spared some critique of its own. Such critique is not simply a patriarchal reaction to the advancement of women, but rather is often a genuine statement of intellectual concern. The critiques include:

1. What is the place of sexual complementarity? The Genesis account of the creation of the woman from the rib of the man (Genesis 2) has the man exclaiming that the woman is "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh". Despite the fact that she is clearly different from the man, this declaration is a profound statement of an equality of dignity in the fact that the woman is the perfect "helpmate", a role none of the other members of the animal kingdom could fulfill. Modern feminism tends to ground the notion of equality in a "unisexual" concept of the human person, however, in that their dignity comes from a dimension of their humanity that transcends gender.
2. What is the role of biology in the understanding of gender? Modern feminism tends to see gender as a social construct, in which the biological reality of being male or female informs that construct without determining its contents. This flows from the Existentialist view that there isn't really any predetermined human nature as such. The Bible, however, presents a view of the human person as having been created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1), thus implying that there is a human nature that determines what a person *is*, prior to that person determining what he or she *does*.
3. Modern feminism, following de Beauvoir, has a particularly economic view of salvation, in that (following Marx) it tends to see social development as being determined by patterns of production and the distribution of wealth. This is one of the major arguments, for example, for the insistence upon ready access to birth control and abortion. The Gospels, however, regularly show Jesus Christ warning his disciples about the pursuit of wealth as a distraction from spiritual realities (famously telling them that one cannot serve "both God and Mammon"¹¹⁷). Poverty is regularly seen as a purifying force allowing a person to focus on God in a more singular way.
4. Is modern feminism alienating women from themselves? While the gains made by women

¹¹⁶ Cf. Luke 10:19, where Mary (the sister of Lazarus) is seated at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching, as a disciple would. When her sister Martha complains that Mary is not helping to serve, Jesus takes Mary's side, telling Martha that Mary has "chosen the better part". In Luke 8:2 we also see that some of the women are even mendicant disciples, following Jesus from town to town, a kind of discipleship normally reserved to men.

¹¹⁷ Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13. While the word has a generic meaning ("riches"), it is here personified as a false God (some commentators have even interpreted it as the name of a demon).

thanks to the modern feminist movement was undeniable, there are some women who argue that certain aspects of feminine experience, such as motherhood, are receiving short shrift. The Bible, however, regularly proposes motherhood one of the highest callings of womanhood, even to the point of identifying it as a path of salvation.¹¹⁸

5. Can gender terminology be used analogously to describe other realities, and if so, how? For example, while the Son of God became incarnate in Jesus, and therefore can be understood as male, God the Father is a pure spirit, and yet is still called "father". Is this terminology mere metaphor, or is the attribution of gender to God so regularly uses feminine imagery to describe the People of God (i.e. Israel, and later the Church). In other words, the Bible proposes that the relationship between God and his creation is to be understood in the context and image of an opposite-sex relationship, an image God himself has inspired (if one takes a perspective of faith). This implies that a pattern of thought that sees gender as a mere social construct might cause a person to overlook a key theme in divine revelation!

The future of Christian feminist theology

There can be no question that the feminist critique of Christian theology, and the response found in feminist theological approaches themselves, are here to stay. Such new forms of thought have forced a deeper exploration of the mysteries of faith using the lense of feminine experience to do a "rereading" of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. That being said, there are still new developments to come from the Christian feminist project.

Firstly, there is an important opportunity for current feminist theology, there is the fact that there is a certain geography to feminist thinking. Simply put, patriarchal structures exist in different human cultures to varying degrees, and so the patterns of feminist thought have been received to varying degrees in those cultures. Christianity, of course, is present the world over, and as a genuine feminist theology develops the Christian churches slowly become sources of social critique from within culture itself. Theology, of course, mediates between a cultural matrix and the religion(s) within that matrix. As feminist theology continues to advance geographically in the world's churches, those churches become a vector for the dismantling of unjust patriarchal systems.

This being said, a second major development on the horizon will be the creation of a Christian feminist theology based on hylemorphist thinking. Simply put, the philosophical heritage of modern feminist is staunchly within the Plato-line of philosophical thinking. As such, while feminist theologians are usually quite convinced that their positions are justified theologically, they may not always see how their hidden philosophical assumptions are informing their review of the sources of theology. A hylemorphist feminism might very well come to some different conclusions regarding the ideal relationship between the sexes, and would likely have a greater influence in

¹¹⁸ 1 Tim 2:15: "Woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty." This statement rather remarkably declares that there is a path of salvation exclusive to women that runs through a fairly common biological and sociological reality.

churches that are themselves more hylemorphist in thought (notably the Roman Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent the Orthodox churches).¹¹⁹

The development of doctrine is continuously ongoing within the Christian theological world, and feminist thinking has certainly been a key driver of this development for at least the past 100 years. At present, the current alignment of modern feminism with the GLBT community has already begun to push Christian theology into new (and sometimes quite public, and acrimonious) debates. Who knows that the future will hold?

¹¹⁹ A key work as part of this hylemorphist feminist project is *The Concept of Woman*, by Sister Prudence Allen. Her first volume of this review of the history of the philosophy of woman includes an important critique of Aristotle, in part to be able to separate his culturally patriarchal views from his underlying philosophical system. A successful conclusion to this project would permit a “redeemed” Aristotelian viewpoint to kickstart a complete review of the hylemorphist stream of thought through the ages, i.e. it would eventually lead to an entire new philosophical basis for doing feminist philosophy and theology.

Theology and the law of the land

Basic considerations and definitions

A society is a group of dependent and interdependent individuals, such that the decisions of one member have consequences for other members, whether immediately or through intermediary decisions. Each individual pursues his particular good, which can otherwise be termed as their “quest for happiness”.

The relationships within a society are termed altruistic, cooperative or exploitative. Cooperative relationships are so named because they involve two or more people who work together for their mutual benefit. Exploitative relationships are those where one person or group extracts benefit from the other without the other receiving just compensation. Altruistic relationships are those where a person or group freely gives of his/its resources to another group without expectation of reward or compensation. For a relationship to be truly altruistic, it requires both interior and exterior freedom on the part of the giver – if either is lacking, the relationship risks being exploitative.

Justice, which is a virtue, is classically defined as rendering to others according to their due. It is the virtue which is directly opposed to exploitation. Its proper establishment depends on a proper understanding of human rights and social duties.

In order to promote individual happiness, a society must promote the common good of the members of the society, so that their common action creates social conditions which support the individuals in the pursuit of their particular good. The first component of the common good is the establishment of public justice, so that relationships are (at a minimum) cooperative rather than exploitative. As a next level, it is necessary to coordinate human activity for the purpose of maximizing the common good. Finally, the common good also contains institutions that encourage altruistic behaviour (which, by definition, cannot be imposed absolutely).¹²⁰

¹²⁰ It can be imposed relatively, in that a person may freely choose to give another an authority of command over his or her life. This general grant of authority does provide some right to command altruistic behaviours, although the true altruism does depend on an ongoing grant of said authority (i.e. it must be possible for the individual to “take it back”).

The specific components of the common good, and the balance between those components, can change with time (for example, as technologies advance, as populations migrate, as climate changes, etc.) Discerning the existence and nature of these changes, as well as how best to react, is a rational exercise. As such, societies look to particularly gifted individuals to act as leaders. A leader is someone who is invested with the public trust, thanks to his or her integrity and capacity of discernment and communication regarding what is required for the common good.

Over time, a process of individual and collective experimentation establishes that particular courses of action are proven solutions to particular problems. Gradually, these customs become commonly accepted patterns of behaviour that are trusted as being wise. While they possess great social legitimacy, however, customs emerge slowly. When the pace of the emergence of social questions begins to outstrip the pace of the establishment of new customs, societies begin to vest their leaders with authority. Authority is here understood as a right to command obedience without those being commanded having to necessarily immediately assent to the justice of the command.

Why might social change accelerate, thereby requiring the establishment of authority? There are many possible reasons, one of the most common being an external threat of some kind. In the event of unanticipated natural disasters, for example, populations crave authority and are willing to assent to it quite readily. Another common sort of external threat, unfortunately, comes from social groups who seek to exploit a given society. Authority is therefore often vested in those able to coordinate a collective self-defense against external threats, or to root out and punish internal threats.

It is also possible that social change in some instances is not actually accelerating, but that the society in question has become so large and complex that the process of custom development slows down to a pace below that required to meet the challenges of social change. In such cases a society begins to establish laws, which are positive rational precepts established by a legitimate authority. Laws, by definition, are general rules meant to cover a multitude of particular (but similar) situations. At its best, a law is an attempt to more rapidly codify and communicate the wisdom needed to meet a particular social challenge, and because a law is established by an authority, it benefits from the general assent given by the members of society to that authority without needing to be specifically “proven” first. Of course, the relative wisdom of particular laws may continue to be debated, and the pace of social change will always continue. Laws therefore are always subject to a process of revision, being replaced by other subsequent laws. Of course, some laws establish precepts of proven long-term social value, and as such they may gradually achieve the level of legitimacy of a custom.¹²¹

Laws, on their own, are not enough: they must be a social mechanism to establish them, as well as a means to interpret and enforce them. The term government refers to that set of institutions which accomplishes these functions in a given society. At its core, a government consists of those leaders who possess proper authority to establish, interpret, and execute laws; in theory, this proper authority may even be vested in a single individual. Such authority, however, can (and typically

¹²¹ A good example of this principle is the form of government of Great Britain. Great Britain does not actually have a written constitution: its form of government depends on particular customs that are well-established in the social consciousness of the British people. A great deal of Canadian patterns of governance follows the same “Westminster” tradition.

must be) delegated to others in some fashion. It is all these individuals, taken together, who constitute a government. A government is said to be sovereign when it does not recognize any other superior level of government whose laws must be obeyed (true sovereignty, of course, being something that must be effectively defended). Social units whose governments are not sovereign are termed intermediate bodies, in that they group together individuals for some set of common objectives, but which are in turn subject to a higher level of social order.

The term corruption refers to a situation in which those who possess authority do not exercise that authority for the building of the common good, but rather use that authority for exploitative purposes.

The general position of Christianity regarding these basic considerations

Christianity, as a religion, has a particular vision of social morality and structure that depends on its vision of the dignity and nature of the human person. These religious ideas form the basis of all social critique brought by Christianity regarding law and government.

The social nature of human beings

Christianity, in general, sees human beings as being intrinsically social in nature, rooted in the concepts of mutual need and mutual gift. One of the earliest chapters in the Bible teaches this lesson, as it describes the creation of man and woman:

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2: 18-25)

The fact that "it is not good for the man to be alone" reflects a deep need within human nature for social contact, in order that a person might achieve his greatest possible personal good. However, the fact that human nature was created by God with this profound need cannot be seen as a justification for exploitation. The nakedness of the man and the woman is a symbol of the total gift of self for each other: nothing is "hidden" within their relationship.

Christianity believes that this intrinsic social nature within man is more than a biological accident: it reflects something of the Divine Nature itself. Christianity believes that God is a Trinity of divine Persons, i.e. the one God is at the same time an eternal "society". It is both as individuals

and as a society that human beings reflect this divine nature:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1: 26-27)

This Biblical passage refers to not just the individuals, but indeed the original couple, as a couple, as being patterned after the divine image. Human society, therefore, as a society, is called to live in such a way that it reflects the nature of God.

A key element to add to this discussion is that God is not understood as being apart from human society. Human beings, if they truly are stamped with the divine nature, are called to relationship not only with each other but with God. God, therefore, is part of human society, as a full and active member. Indeed, the term "human society" is somewhat of a misnomer: there is only "person society", with 3 divine members and countless angelic and human members. God-as-Trinity is at the centre, and all other humans are grafted into the life of that Trinitarian "society".

This understanding of human society in general informs the understanding of Christians regarding the nature of the Church. The term "Church" does not refer principally to buildings or governing institutions, but rather to a particular form of human society. Christians believe that God has come in person, through Jesus Christ, to establish a new society (the "Kingdom of God") which will live according to the ideal pattern envisaged in the original plan of creation. Faith in Jesus, therefore, is not merely a person choice to be lived personally, but one which necessarily opens one up to living in this new society (which is also known as the "Body of Christ"). It is also not merely an assent to live according to a way of life brought by Jesus, or else he would merely be another form of prophet. To acknowledge Jesus as Son of God is to acknowledge that Jesus is actually the very principle of social communion itself, as he therefore becomes the gateway for all rational creatures (particularly humans, but also angels) to enter into communion with the Trinity.

Dependence and independence

While Christianity does see the development of our natural human powers as a genuine good, Christianity does not believe that the lack of such powers represents a flaw that diminishes the degree of human dignity. Within the Christian spiritual vision, all human beings must recognize their profound interdependence which can never be overcome. The quest for total independence, which is typically accompanied by a horror of being dependent on others, is actually a subtle perversion of this good desire to develop our natural powers. At its worst, this illusion of independence is actually a form of idolatry:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which

is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
(Genesis 3: 1-5)

The man and woman eat of the fruit because they wish to develop a natural power (knowledge), but without reference to the other member of their primitive society (i.e. without reference to God). By becoming "like God" they hope to be emancipated from their dependence upon him, despite the fact that they are living in a natural paradise free from danger or need.

Christianity therefore sees personal development as something that is intrinsically tied to social development. The reason we should pursue personal development is to better pursue our relationships with others and with God. In other words, it is meant to develop and expand our capacity to love. Given this reality, dependence can even be seen as a social good. Certainly, any form of human weakness that diminishes our capacity to love others in a concrete way is something that should be overcome if possible. At the same time, however, such weaknesses are meant as occasions for others to love us and to put that love into practice through concrete action. The compassion that arises from witnessing the weakness of others is not a defect of human nature, but rather a gift to help humans live the love necessary for full self-actualization. The weakness present in some members of society is a constant challenge for us to overcome the subtle idolatry of independence.

Particular good, common good and the natural law

Christianity believes that there is a fundamental orientation towards the future present in human nature. The memories of the past are to be treasured as sources of wisdom and (hopefully) joy, but living exclusively in the past is ultimately unhealthy. This is not simply because times change and human beings must change with them, but because human beings have an infinite capacity for self-development. Living in the past negates the possibilities this self-development offers; stagnation is typically not offered as a model for human life! Human life is therefore fundamentally oriented towards a particular good, which is pursued ad infinitum, for the possibilities of human existence are endless.

The term "particular good", however, must be understood in a balanced way. Christianity believes, as already shown, in a fundamental unity of human nature, such that there are certain elements of the particular good of individuals which will be the same for all human beings. All humans need to sleep, for example, so receiving proper rest is a particular good which is universal. At the same time, however, there may be particular goods which are not distributed uniformly across all members of the human race. For example, some individuals may be particularly gifted artists, and so therefore they feel a particular drive to create works of beauty – while other individuals may instead have a gift at organization, or a gift of teaching, or a gift of athleticism and sports. The fact that human beings both share a common nature and are interdependent prevents these elements from being in contradiction.

The term "common good" is a somewhat more subtle concept. It does not refer to "universal

elements of individuals' particular good" but rather to a set of social conditions (wealth, social equity, access to opportunity, peace, social institutions, etc.) which are necessary for individuals to be able to best pursue their individual particular good. A good example is a university. Universities exist, in part, to offer educational opportunities for others to better "pursue their dreams". A university does not define what the particular dream of a student should be, but rather offers a collective resource to help all students, whatever their dreams, to be able to better pursue them.

The expression "natural law" refers to certain behaviours or interdictions which arise naturally and logically from the requirements of the particular and common good. In some cases, knowledge of the natural law seems almost instinctual (such as the profound sense within children that sexual abuse against them is wrong) while in other cases it must be deduced through the use of reason. Indeed, it is even possible to get the two confused: for example, people sometimes claim that they possess some sort of intrinsic drive which justifies particular behaviours (pedophiles, for example, often engage in such rationalizations), when in fact the use of reason can demonstrate that the actions that would result from such drives would harm the particular and/or common good. The reverse can also be true. In either case, the consequences of failing to live up to the requirements of the natural law are serious, in that it eventually stunts the possibility to live some element of the particular good. Individuals who stunt their capacity to live their individual particular good is bad enough, but when the case involves a failure to live up to the natural law that flows from the common good the consequences are typically more severe. Such societies tend to experience social divisions, as groups of people seek to defend their natural rights in the face of being "shut out" of the common good in some way. At its worst, such divisions lead one side to dehumanize the other, so that, through the denial of the full human nature of the other, the cutting off of one group from the common good can be justified.

With regards to the laws established by God, such as in the form of the Ten Commandments, Christianity believes that such divine laws never contradict the natural law that arises from the requirements of human nature. Because human reason can get easily side-tracked in its attempt to deduce the content of the natural law, however, Christians believe that God has graciously gifted human beings with the elements of a moral code to help make explicit which is merely implicit in human nature.¹²²

Forms of relationship and theories of social structure

The preceding major section mentioned three forms of social relationships: altruistic, cooperative, and exploitative. Every person has experienced some form of such relationships, but the question often arises: which form of relationship is the most "natural" for man?

Thomas Hobbes, the famous English social philosopher, argued that a group of humans

¹²² Observers of Christianity are sometimes puzzled to note that Christians seem somewhat selective in the choice of which laws of the Old Testament to follow. The division exists because Christians believe that some of the laws were an explication of requirements present in all human nature, while other laws were specific to the Jewish people as a people in a particular time and place. Obviously, the first kind of laws bind everyone everywhere in all times, while the latter only bind relatively depending on time, place, circumstance and purpose.

reduced to what he called the “state of nature”, without a supporting social structure, would become barbaric.¹²³ In his work *Leviathan*, he put forward the idea that society would be in a constant state of internal war, with everybody against everybody else. In his words, life would be “solitary, nasty, brutish, and short”. Hobbes clearly believed that the fundamental form of human relationship was exploitative, and that other forms of relationship existed only because they were imposed by some authority that had sufficient power to “force” others to be good. Order, in such a view, arises because those with power see the possibility of imposing a social structure that benefits themselves. In the process, however, the whole of society tends to benefit, giving rise to what amounts to a justification for tyranny as a state of affairs preferable to the state of nature. This situation is nevertheless fundamentally unstable, mind you, given the constant competition that arises out of this negative state of nature. Individual tyrants compete with each other, employing every form of violence and deceit, while groups within societies try and organize to overthrow the tyrants for the sake of their own gain. All this is justified as a kind of Darwinian “survival of the fittest” in which might, quite literally, makes right.

John Locke and Jean Jaques Rousseau, on the other hand, saw the State as something which arose from a free agreement among rational men. In their view, people are capable of moderate, practical behaviour even without a dominating authority over them. Such persons can then band together to form a “social contract” which lasts as long as it is truly mutually beneficial. Such a model sees government as arising from a set of natural cooperative relationships, rather than as being required due to the omnipresence of exploitative relationships.

Christianity, with its emphasis on the virtue of love as the highest possible virtue, accepts neither of these premises. To be sure, Christianity does accept that there is a weakness in human nature, called concupiscence, which does cause people to tend towards selfish behaviour. Christianity also accepts that humans are capable, through the light of the natural powers of intelligence and will, to moderate behaviour and work in genuine cooperation. From a Christian point of view, however, the form of behaviour that is most truly “natural”, that is to say in accord with human nature itself, is altruistic behaviour. Jesus affirmed this himself when he was asked about the greatest commandment of God’s law:

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22: 35-39)

Altruistic behaviour, however, cannot be forced. This illustrates an important dimension of the Christian view of law: its pedagogical purpose. In this viewpoint, the law exists not merely to regulate behaviour, but also to direct people towards virtue by outlining its fundamental principles. Certainly, there must be laws to protect people against exploitation and to better coordinate human activity, but in the Christian point of view these forms of law will never be sufficient, in part because they depend too much on a self-protective reflex that prevents people from aiding others. A new

¹²³ A famous fiction work to illustrate this very point was William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*.

kind of culture is required, which recent Christian thought has termed the “civilization of love”, in which a genuinely altruistic attitude, lived in an atmosphere of mutual trust, is a centrally accepted element of the quest for happiness within society. (cf. Acts 20: 35)

Justice and mercy

Flowing from the Christian understanding of altruistic relationships comes a particular understanding of the concepts of justice and mercy, and with them a particular view regarding vengeance.

Christian moral teaching tends to following the classical definition of justice, which defines it first and foremost as a virtue, that is to say a stable disposition within a person which enables him to spontaneously render to others according to their due. Christian moral teaching therefore also defends the idea of being treated justly, i.e. the right to demand that others render to us according to what is due. Justice, therefore, is the virtue and basic precondition that prevents relationships from falling from cooperation to exploitation.

Because Christian moral teaching values altruism, however, Christianity values mercy above justice. One does not sin in asking to be treated justly, but one does even better if one acts mercifully towards those who owe us. According to the Bible, God is just but is also merciful, full of compassion and forgiveness. Jesus himself taught that a moral duty exists to forgive, and that even the forgiveness we might hope for from God depends, in part, on our own willingness to forgive:

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18: 23-35)

Throughout history there have been those who believe that such an attitude of mercy is actually a form of weakness, and is in fact destructive to society. In such a view, others must be held accountable for their actions, to “pay in full” as it were, or else it will merely encourage additional bad behaviour. In such a view, even vengeance can be seen as part of the virtue of justice, as the one

seeking revenge is (supposedly) merely “rendering to the other what is owed”. Christianity, however, does not things in this manner. Christians believe that the “right” to exact vengeance has been reserved by God to himself for the day of the final judgement (Hebrews 10: 30), who therefore possesses the right to show clemency on behalf of others as well. Christians, instead, are called to surrender any desire for vengeance to God as a form of spiritual sacrifice, as exemplified by Jesus himself, when from the cross he declared, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23: 34)

As a final point regarding authority, it should be mentioned that Christianity believes that God is also an object of justice, in that human beings have a duty to render to him what he is due. At the core of this obligation lies worship, which at its root means “respecting and declaring the worth of another”. While specific forms of worship vary from one Christian denomination to another, today worship is commonly understood as a form of prayer by which God is praised for his holiness and goodness, and thanked for all his blessings. This worship has not merely a private, but also a public character, in that one should never have to fear exposing one’s love relationship with God to others. This public nature of worship necessarily carries with it a right to worship God, both individually and as a group, and also requires of Christians that they live lives of proper justice. After all, it does no good to praise God for his goodness but then live badly – it takes God for granted and drives others away from the fulfillment of their human nature. The Bible itself specifically connects moral behaviour and true worship together (cf. Proverbs 21: 3; Psalm 4: 6).

Leadership and authority

Christianity sees leadership and authority as rooted in the will of God for human society. St. Paul, in the first letter to the Corinthians, presents leadership as a personal charism given by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12: 28).¹²⁴ Numerous other passages indicate that authority exists through the will of God:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13: 1-2)

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. (1 Peter 2: 13-14)

While Christianity recognizes the necessity of the establishment of authorities, however, it also recognizes that authorities can overstep their legitimate boundaries. This leads to the on-going debate of the relationship between “Church and State”. Jesus himself first established the principle

¹²⁴ The exact word used to describe a leader is actually derived from the Greek term for the rudder of a ship. It involves a skill at being able to “steer” the correct course.

of separation of Church and State in response to a question regarding taxation:

Then the Pharisees went and took counsel how to entangle him in his talk. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax." And they brought him a coin. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesars." Then he said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God the things that are Gods." (Matthew 22: 15-21)

The key question, therefore, has to do with identifying what elements "belong to Caesar" versus what elements "belong to God". In general, this reduces to a set of positive rights that permit the community of believers to worship according to their religion (freedom of religion) as well as the right to refuse to perform a certain action because it would conflict with the duty of moral rectitude tied to the worship of God (freedom of conscience). We see these rights being affirmed in a scene in the Acts of the Apostles where some of the apostles have been called before the court:

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4: 18-20)

Establishing a practical *modus vivendi* between religious and secular authorities has never been easy. Throughout the history of Christianity there has been a temptation for one side to simply absorb the other. In cases where the Church acts in the place of the State, however, difficulties and scandals quickly arise, simply because the laws present in the Bible are typically only sufficient to establish general legal principals arising from the natural law. The Church is much more likely to stay true to its nature when it limits itself to a prophetic role as a social critic, than placing itself in a governing role. Of course, there are always those who believe that any voice of social criticism coming from a church authority itself violates the separation of Church and State, but this is to misunderstand the terms of this separation, which has to do with the specific exercise of authority rather than the general principles which govern that exercise.

One of the most sensitive issues today with regards to the separation of Church and State has to do with the duty of elected officials, and others who act in the public trust. To what extent can their personal faith be allowed to influence their decisions as public officials? Christian faith generally teaches, as stated earlier, that the moral law is actually not "imposed from above", but rather emerges from rational reflection on the natural law. As such, any person of good will who seeks the truth should be able to govern just as well as any other person, regardless of religious background. This being said, however, there are those who reject this principle of the connection between the natural and moral law, and this tends to form the real basis of most major arguments today regarding Church and State relations. In addition, Christianity generally teaches that nothing can justify a person acting against their conscience. In other words, just because a person has been given an elected mandate does not exempt that person from acting and deciding in accordance with

his deeper beliefs – he or she is not permitted to set them aside in order to act in a particular way so as to please others. “I was just following orders” is not an acceptable excuse!

As a final point, the separation between Church and State can just as often be violated by the State, which seeks to set itself up as a sort of secular religious authority. Just as kings and emperors in the past have demanded to be worshipped as gods, ideologies today can seek to supplant religions as the ultimate source of meaning for human existence. The Christian tradition terms such movements as belonging to the “Beast” of the book of Revelation:

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bears, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder. Men worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" (Revelation 13: 1-4)

Later in the book (chapter 17) the Beast is explained to represent an empire, with the various diadems representing individual rulers. This final empire sets itself against the authority of God, and commands worship of itself in place of worship of God. It makes war on all those who refuse to accept its mark. God's final intervention in history is provoked by this Beast, in a sense, as God comes to finally seek to restore the correct order of things by sending his Messiah.

The manner of government

A brief survey of the various nations of the world, along with their various social institutions (religious, corporate, community, etc.) quickly demonstrates that many different forms of government exist, and even coexist within the same society. Western civil governments, for example, are often based on a democratic model, but the governing structure of its corporations is far more autocratic – working for a family business can sometimes feel like living in small-but-absolute monarchy! The Christian tradition is generally quite open with regards to the various forms of government that exist (e.g. democracy, autocracy, monarchy, etc.), in that it does not generally recommend one form over another as long as that government is staying within its limits. That being said, experience demonstrates that a certain distinction of the powers of governance, at least within civil governments, is useful:

It is impossible to determine, in all cases, what is the most equitable form of government, or how civil authorities can most effectively fulfill their respective functions, i.e., the legislative, judicial and executive functions of the State. In determining the structure and operation of government which a State is to have, great weight has to be given to the circumstances of a given people, circumstances which will vary at different times and in different places. We consider, however, that it is in keeping with the innate demands of human nature that the State should take a form which embodies the three-fold division of powers corresponding to the

three principal functions of public authority.¹²⁵

In addition, it should be noted that the various branches of Christian tradition have certain predispositions regarding forms of government. The Catholic and Orthodox churches have a long tradition of working within imperial or monarchical societies, and are themselves hierarchical in nature; as such, they are quite willing to operate within such contexts, and even sometimes have trouble operating within a more democratic form of society. The Protestant tradition, on the other hand, arose within a context of rejection of the Catholic model of governance, and has tended to develop more democratic structures within itself. The very model of salvation itself found within Protestantism is more individual and less corporate than that of the Catholic/Orthodox tradition of government, and so Protestants tend to a more suspicious view of human authority (while at the same time seeking to promote the dignity of the individual).

While Christianity tends to be more open regarding forms of government, it definitely has a lot to say regarding the style of government. The key notion within Christianity is that a governing official must act as a servant, not a master, to those who are being governed. Jesus emphasized this very point himself:

Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
(Matthew 20: 25-28)

At his Last Supper, Jesus even expressed this doctrine in gestures, by washing the feet of his disciples – a task reserved for servants and slaves. The common Western idea that a public official is also a “public servant” is therefore directly rooted in the Christian tradition. It is also the basis of the widespread opposition to corruption. Corruption is defined as the use of the power of governance for reasons other than the good of the governed (i.e. for one’s own benefit, the benefit of one’s family, etc.). Corruption is often accepted as a simple fact of life, or even as a fringe benefit of government, in many societies, but in the Christian point of view it violates the principle of servant leadership taught by Jesus.

With regards to the relationship between the various levels of government within a society, the Christian tradition generally promotes a concept known as subsidiarity. A society is generally considered to be properly living subsidiarity when a higher-level authority does not assume functions that can be properly executed by a lower-level authority, i.e. there is a natural bias in favour of lower-level authorities and intermediate organizations. An example of subsidiarity would be the question of the education of children. In the Christian tradition, the education of children is a natural right and duty of the parents. The State has an interest in ensuring that children are properly educated, but the actual task of educating (whether at home, at school, etc.) should flow naturally from the rights and duties of parents, rather than be imposed by the State. Many Christian parents

¹²⁵ *Pacem in terris*, nos. 67-68.

homeschool their children, for example, and the Christian tradition generally supports their right to do so. Such parents may, at some point, choose to pool their resources and found a school, and then a school board, and so on, with each layer acting as a service body to the other, more immediate, layers.

Just as the Christian tradition tends to respect the principle of government closest to the governed, it also believes that the universal common good requires the eventual establishment of some sort of universal authority. This issue has become more pressing in recent years. In the past, the internal relationships within societies were far more important than the external relationships outside of them, but the development of communications technology, coupled with increased human mobility, has meant that the borders on maps no longer define the borders of societies. The interdependence of nations now means that they must find ways for joint action in the pursuit of the common good, and hence there has been a rapid proliferation of international organizations devoted to this purpose in a variety of different domains. One of the most advanced examples of this is the European Union, in which nations have actually transferred some elements of their sovereignty to a higher authority. It would not be unreasonable to expect that the emerging “global village” will one day endow itself with a “global government” of some kind, but with regards to this issue there is a deep ambiguity within the Christian tradition. On the Catholic and Orthodox side, there is no real objection in principle to the emergence of a world government, but many on the Protestant side believe that certain prophecies within the Bible identify a future world government with the forces of evil. On the surface, the issue is one of Biblical interpretation, but below the surface are different views of the nature and role of authority and law.

Freedom, the law, and the Holy Spirit

In conclusion, while Christianity has much to say regarding authority and government as it arises from the natural law, Christianity also believes that God has offered to human beings a supernatural principle which, in theory, should transform and elevate the way in which authority and government is lived. This principle is nothing other than the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

According to Christian teaching, God invites human beings into a relationship with him through his Son, Jesus Christ, who has been named the King of the universe. Jesus most definitely possesses authority, that is to say, the right to command, but generally does not exercise this authority directly with regards to those who are capable of choosing to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, primarily because he wishes that our ‘yes’ be always a free choice (and therefore done out of love). Christian spirituality generally sees the “authority of Christ” as something wielded against the evil spirits, who are beyond redemption, as well as against the damned at the final judgement. For those still capable of making the choice, however, Jesus offers his rule but does not impose it – it is up to us to choose to accept and follow him as King.

While Jesus does not presently rule in a direct manner, however, Christian teaching does hold that he governs his people through the Holy Spirit. Those who accept to follow him as King and Lord are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, a gift which can increase as they grow

in their spiritual lives, and which they retain as long as they do not renounce Jesus through serious sin. Thanks to this presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus does not need to issue new general ordinances from heaven for the sake of the governance of his people, because the Holy Spirit himself acts as a mechanism of social coordination. We must recall that the reason people establish laws and customs is to coordinate human activity – but what if the King of kings himself was present, coordinating that activity directly with perfect wisdom? No laws would therefore be needed, and indeed they would represent a step backward, as no body of laws can account for every single situation. In effect, the Holy Spirit is the “law” for Christians, sometimes referred to as the “law of grace”.

Christianity therefore sees the Church as more than just another club or organization. The Church, according to this definition, is the emerging presence of the Reign of God in the world. The word “emerging” is used not simply because the Church is growing numerically, but also because Christians do not always respond appropriately to the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit, distorted as they can be by sin. The Church is therefore still in a state of journeying towards the Kingdom of God, learning as it goes how to live as the People of God. Christians, whether individually or as a Church, have essentially made a declaration of independence with regards to every human authority in favour of the authority of Jesus Christ – but in turn, Christians believe that Jesus Christ then commands them to generally obey those authorities. For Catholics and Orthodox especially, this includes the governing authorities within the Church itself, who are necessary to help bridge the gap between the freedom promised in the Holy Spirit and the sad reality of the obscuring of his promptings. Ecclesial governing authorities therefore have a special duty not simply to govern with wisdom, but to seek holiness of life and union with the Holy Spirit to better help individuals and groups discern the call of the Holy Spirit.