Will Winter Ever End? Groundhog Day and Modern Thought

Rick Wade takes us on a journey through the movie Groundhog Day to see what light it sheds on a modernist worldview. The protaganist's self-centered, materialistic, career-driven view of life exemplifies the modernist thinking applies to actual life. As Christians, Rick points out a number of good examples from the movie that will help us better understand this view of the world.

Its All About Me

Did you see the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*? In this film, we meet Phil Connors, an arrogant and self-obsessed weatherman on a local TV station who is sent to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to report on the events surrounding Groundhog Day. Phil, played by Bill Murray, is rude to his co-workers, Rita the producer (played by Andie MacDowell) and Larry the cameraman (played by Chris Elliott). He has a condescending attitude toward the people of Punxsutawney who he calls hicks. Phil is very taken with himself. He tells his coworkers that a major network is interested in him, and at one point calls himself the talent. But now Phil is stuck in this awful assignment (too insignificant for someone of his stature) and only wants to finish up and get back to Pittsburgh. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately as things turn out), the team is trapped by a blizzard and forced to stay in Punxsutawney. The next day, however, something bizarre happens: Phil awakens to the same music on the radio and the DJs saying the same things as the morning before. Its February 2nd, Groundhog Day, all over again.

And thus begins Phil Connors nightmare. Every morning Phil awakens to February the second again . . . and again and again. We arent told how many times this happens, but it happens often enough that he is able to go from not being able to play the piano at all to being an excellent jazz pianist. What does Phil do with this strange situation?

Phil's responses to his circumstances illustrate some modern ways of thinking and one distinctly *un*modern way. I'd like to use this film to focus on these philosophies. This won't be a film review or an exercise in film criticism. *Groundhog Day* will simply serve as a mirror to hold up to modern thought.

In Phil Connors we see what Michael Foley, professor of early Christian thought at Baylor, calls a typical modern.{1} He is self-centered, materialistic, egotistical, and career-driven. He exemplifies what sociologist Craig Gay calls modern mans desire for *autonomy* and . . . what might be called the *will-to-self-definition.*{2} Gay quotes Daniel Bell who says that self-realization and even self-gratification have become the master principles of modern culture.{3}

This describes Phil, but not only Phil. What is more obviously true to moderns than the idea that one must look out for number one? Modernists want to define themselves. Were the captains of our own lives, and were our own number one concern.

But with this strange turn of events, Phil, the one who likes to think of himself as on the rise, finds himself stuck in one place. Every day he faces the same routine. Nothing he does seems to matter, for time is no longer progressing. The past doesnt matter, for yesterday was like today. And as far as he knows, tomorrow will be the same.

What Goes Around . . . Goes Around

When Phil finally accepts his predicament, he asks his new drinking pals, Gus and Ralph, a question: What would *you* do, he asks, if you were stuck in one place, and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that you did mattered? This question sets the stage for what follows in the film as Phil discovers over and over that nothing he did yesterday matters; nothing carries over.

But one can see something deeper going on here than simply an illustration of a boring, repetitive life. Perhaps not incidentally it also serves on the larger scale to describe the situation many people face. The situation of Phil going nowhere is a subtle illustration of a major philosophical shift in modern times, namely, the abandonment of a *teleological* view of the world.

What do I mean by that? *Teleology* is the theory of purpose, ends, goals, final causes.{4} Before Christ, Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle taught that there was design behind the universe; its forming wasnt just an accidental occurrence. In the West, with the rise of Christian theology, there came the understanding of the universe as made by God for a purpose. That is what *teleology* is: the idea of design with a goal in mind.

In modern times, however, that understanding is gone. We are taught that the universe is an accident of nature, and hence that we are, too. We werent put here for a purpose; there is no goal to life beyond what we choose. Any meaning we have in life is meaning we supply ourselves. When this idea really sinks in, the ramifications are truly alarming. We want to have purpose; people with no sense of purpose have nothing to move toward. This idea was the root of the despair of existential philosophy. It drove thinkers such as Jean Paul Sartre to teach that the burden is on us to form our own lives, that to *not* do so is to live inauthentic lives.

Although the existentialists tried to transcend this sense of meaninglessness, they werent successful. The sense of loss that comes with thinking we have no purpose reflects what we know deep down because of being made in Gods image: we were made by Someone for some purpose. To not have purpose necessarily diminishes our lives.

Phil Connors life no longer has purpose. He is stuck in one place going nowhere, and it isnt a happy situation.

So what does he do? He looks to Rita for help. You're a producer, he says. Think of something. Rita advises him to see a doctor. In modern times we typically look to science for the answer, in this case medical science. First, a medical doctor is unable to find anything wrong with Phil. Then a psychiatrist finds Phils problem to be beyond his abilities. Science is supposed to be modern mans savior, but here medical science fails. Technology fails Phil, too. The highways are closed because Phils own weather forecast is wrong he predicted the blizzard wouldnt hit Punxsutawneyso he cant drive back to Pittsburgh. Long distance phone service is down so he is unable to call home. So Phil is stuck. This modern man cannot be rescued by modern means.

What is Phils next move? He simply takes his hedonistic self-preoccupation to new levels. Its Feb. 2nd yet again, and Phil is out drinking with Gus and Ralph and reflecting on his predicament. After imbibing quite a bit, they get in a car to leave. As they drive away, Phil asks Gus and Ralph, What if there were no tomorrow? Gus responds that there would be no consequencesno hangovers! They could do anything they wanted! Phils eyes brighten. He can do whatever he wants! It's the same things your whole life, he says. Clean up your room. Stand up straight. Pick up your feet. Take it like a man. Be nice to your sister. . . . Im not going to live by their rules anymore!

And thus begins Phils hedonistic binge.

Its All About Me . . . With a Vengeance

What does he do with this newfound freedom? When Phil realizes that there are no consequences to his actionssince there is no tomorrowhe indulges his every whim in a sort of hedonistic binge. He eats like a glutton, seduces a woman, robs an armored car and buys a fancy car with the money.

Then he sets his eyes on the real prize: Rita, the producer. Day after day (or Feb. 2nd after Feb. 2nd!) he collects tidbits of information from Rita about herself and about what her ideal man would be like. He then tries to fit the image himself in order to ingratiate himself to her with the hope of seducing her.

Michael Foley says that in this Phil becomes Machiavellis prince.{5} In his book on political philosophy called *The Prince,* Machiavelli said a prince should always *appear* to be virtuous because that is what people expect. However, he said, the prince shouldnt actually concern himself with *being* virtuous, for that would often work against his own interests.

> *A prince should not necessarily avoid vices such as cruelty or dishonesty if employing them will benefit the state. Cruelty and other vices should not be pursued for their own sake, just as virtue should not be pursued for its own sake: virtues and vices should be conceived as means to an end. Every action the prince takes must be considered in light of its effect on the state, not in terms of its intrinsic moral value.{6}*

This is Phils attitude. He wants Rita, so he pretends to be the good man she desires. The end justifies the means, right?

As a society we have lost any sense of going somewhere. In the West, weve been taught to live for the moment, to savor the experiences of today. Yesterday is gone, and there is no ultimate tomorrow before us which will draw together the pieces of our lives into a meaningful conclusion. The world came about by accident and is going nowhere. In fact, were told its winding down to some cosmic death. The utopian vision of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was crushed by World War I. Following the devastation of the next World War, existentialist philosophers said we should create our own sets of values. Increasing or at least maintaining our personal peace and prosperity now seems to be our highest ambition because, quite frankly, we have nothing else to hope for. What is left to do but enjoy ourselves as much as we can while here? Our national moral consensus goes little further than dont hurt other people unnecessarily, and we are left to our own ideas about what constitutes necessity. If there is nothing to hope for, today is all we have, so we pad our own nest and enjoy what we can out of life. I am the center of my universe, and its your duty to not interfere.

To be honest, there is nothing wrong with enjoying the experiences life offers (given the limits of biblical morality and wisdom, of course). I recently read Francis Meyes book *Under the Tuscan Sun* made into a movie starring Diane Lane. The movie barely scratches the surface of the pleasures of life in Tuscany described in the book: preparing and enjoying wonderful food; preparing the olive trees for next years harvest, and at harvest time discerning when and how quickly to pick to avoid mildew; picking herbs like sage and rosemary from plants growing in front of the house for seasoning the evenings dinner; choosing the best local wine for the main course at dinner; taking in the smells and sights of a small Italian town; discovering a portion of an ancient Roman road or a wall built by the Etruscans; enjoying the company of friends and loved ones outdoors in warm weather, or gathered around the hearth in winterthe riches of such experiences have

been lost to many in modern times.

Problems come, however, when *I* become the center of my ultimately purposeless world, when other people become objects to enjoy or reject as I might a certain food. Its bad enough when we become the centers of our own worlds. We go further than that and expect to be the centers of *others* worlds as well! For some reason, we expect the lives of others to revolve around ours. But while we are crafting our own worlds, others are crafting theirs. What if my plans dont fit theirs or vice versa?

Phil tried repeatedly to win Ritas affection to satisfy his own desires. Night after night Phil tries to woo her, and night after night she slaps him in the face when she realizes what hes up to. Phil cant manipulate Rita the way he wants to.

Phil is so much the center of his world that, at one point in the film, Phil the weatherman said he creates the weather! But of course he doesnt. He cant even predict it perfectly. If Phil cant control the weather which has no will of its own, how can he possibly control Rita who does? He could have learned something from Jim Careys character, Bruce Arnold, in *Bruce Almighty* who could not manipulate the free will of his girlfriend Grace to regain her love.

It Has to Stop

So Phil cannot have what he really wants. What happens when one realizes that there is nothing lasting to hold onto? That is, if one can get hold of it at all? In the mid-twentieth century, beginning with the despair that comes from believing that there are no fixed and eternal values, existentialists tried to infuse individual lives with value by saying we create values ourselves. Other people, however, simply fell into despair and stayed there. Thats what happened to Phil Connors. First he tried to solve his problem through medical

science. Then he accepted the situation and tried to find fulfillment in the pursuit of pleasure. When that failed, he was lost.

A life with no tomorrow, and where yesterday and today dont matter, has no meaning because it has no explanation. But an explanation is what we crave. The discovery that there is no explanation is at the heart of what the existentialists called the *absurd.* Albert Camus said that a world that has no reason leaves a person feeling like a stranger. His exile is without remedy, wrote Camus, since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.{7} As a result, for some peopleor perhaps for manythe question that arises is, Why live at all? There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, said Camus, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.{8}

Even before Feb. 2nd, Phils life was absurd; he just didnt know it. His past wasnt forming his future, and he had no sure promised land before him anyway. He would be what he made of himself (a very modern idea), but he didnt seem to be doing a very good job. One of the key characteristics of the modern mind is the idea that the past is to be discarded in favor of the future because things just have to get better over time. There were such high hopes in modernity! But while Phil had hopes for tomorrow, he really was going nowhere. The repetition of Feb. 2nd only mirrored his real life.

The absurdity of Phils situation descended upon him on one of his many Feb. 2nds. Having tried to enjoy a life of no consequences, and having been rejected by Rita, Phil falls into despair. In his umpteenth report on Groundhog Day festivities he expresses his despair clearly. You want a prediction about the weather, you’re asking the wrong Phil, he says referring to the groundhog. I’ll give you a winter

prediction: It’s gonna be cold, it’s gonna be grey, and it’s gonna last you for the rest of your life.

Phil could only think of one thing to do. Remember that if the groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, sees its shadow, winter will last another forty days. Phil reasons that, if winter is to end, the groundhog cant be allowed see its shadow again. So Phil the weatherman decides that Phil the groundhog must die. There is no way this winter is *ever* going to end, Phil tells Rita, as long as that groundhog keeps seeing his shadow. I don’t see any way out of it. He’s got to be stopped. And I have to stop him. Here the parallel between the two Phils is made clear. To bring an end to winter, both the season and his own personal winter, Phil kidnaps the groundhog and drives off a cliff, killing them both. Neither Phil will now awaken to see his shadow again.

Or so he thought. The next morning, promptly at 6 AM, Phil awakens yet again to another Groundhog Day. A look of despair crosses his face. He gets out of bed, climbs into the bathtub with an electric toaster and electrocutes himself. But Feb. 2nd comes yet again. Phil tries many different ways to end it all. Later he tells Rita I’ve been stabbed, shocked, poisoned, frozen, hung, electrocuted, and burned. He keep trying to end his winter but he cant.

Although Camus raised the question of suicide, he didnt argue for it. He tried to persuade readers that there can be good reasons for living even though life as a whole has no meaning. But Phil, and many people in real life, have decided there is no reason to go on. Some dont go as far as suicide, but their nihilistic lives reflect the same idea: there is no meaning, nothing matters, nothing is of any value.

Is there any way out of this mess?

Phils Redemption

Phil Connors first two responses to his predicamenthedonism and despairwere failures. Once more he turns to Rita for help. He tries to prove to her he really is repeating the same day over and over. After seeing several convincing evidences that something strange really is going on, she offers to spend a day with him just to observe. Near the end of an enjoyable day, Rita takes a positive view and tells Phil that maybe what hes experiencing isnt a curse at all. It depends on how you look at it, she says.

With that little bit of encouragement, Phils whole attitude changes. He now sees Rita not as an object to possess, but as a person of intrinsic value. Before, he wanted to use her; now he appreciates her. As she sleeps he whispers to her that he doesnt deserve someone like her. Now Phil has a purpose. Before he bettered himself to fool Rita; now his ambition is to be worthy of her.

So Phil sets about improving himself. He betters himself morally; Michael Foley sees here a turn toward an ethics of virtue. Phil begins doing good things for other people such as giving money and food to an old man who lives on the streets, changing a tire for a woman, saving a mans life, giving tickets to *Wrestlemania* to a pair of young newlyweds, catching a boy who falls out of the tree (who never thanks him, Phil notes!). Because he keeps repeating Feb. 2nd, Phil performs these good acts again and again. He also betters himself intellectually and artistically. And in the end, Phil wins Ritas affections.

Conclusion

In this simple film about a weatherman from Pittsburgh, we can see illustrated a few modernistic approaches to life. Having found himself in a purposeless existence, Phil looked for his salvation in science and in hedonistic pleasure seeking. Not

finding it there, he fell into despair. With the encouragement of an upbeat lady as he called Rita, Phil decided to make himself a better man.

Several different religions have tried to claim the message of *Groundhog Day* as their own. Buddhists see Phil as the bodhisattva who must return to help others better themselves so they may all escape the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Jews see Phil as being returned to earth to do good works to help bring the world to perfection.

For evangelical Protestants this might sound suspiciously like works salvation. But *Groundhog Day* isnt a Christian film; we shouldnt look for more in it than it offers. As I said at the beginning, it holds up a mirror to modern thought, and shows the failure of some contemporary beliefs.

Nonetheless, the film still offers us a reminder. In our zeal to proclaim salvation by faith alone, its possible that we relegate the biblical admonitions to live good lives to too low a level. Our tickets are punched; we have our seats in heaven. As for now . . . well, you know how some say Its easier to receive forgiveness than permission. Maybe we just dont concern ourselves enough with living virtuous lives.

Groundhog Day illustrates the vacuousness of some modern ideas. But it also reminds us that living a good life *does* have its rewards: we are better people for the effort, and we become more attractive to people around us.

Notes

1. Michael P. Foley, “Phil’s Shadow,” *Touchstone* 17, no. 2 (April, 2004): 12.
2. *Craig M. Gay, The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It’s Tempting to Live As If God Doesn’t Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 184.
3. Daniel Bell “The Return of the Sacred: The Argument on

the Future of Religion," in *British Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1977): 424, quoted in Gay, 192.
4. Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1983), s.v. "Teleology," by Wilbur Long.
5. Foley, 13.
6. Sparknotes, "The Prince," www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/prince/themes.html.
7. Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 5.
8. Ibid., 3.

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Worldviews, Part 2 – Comparing Postmodernism and Other Worldviews with a Christian View

Rick Wade adds to our understanding of worldviews by adding three classical and one very current life perspective to our worldview discussion. Understanding how deism, nihilism, existentialism, and postmodernism address the fundamental worldview questions helps us to deeply understand their similarities and differences with Christian theism.

This article is also available in Spanish. 

Introduction

A few years ago, former Probe staff member Jerry Solomon wrote

an article on worldviews in which he provided a basic introduction to the subject, and then gave a sketch of three major worldviews: Christian theism, naturalism, and New Age pantheism.{1} In this article we'll look at four more worldviews: deism, nihilism, existentialism, and postmodernism. We frequently refer to these various philosophies in our articles, so it seems good to give a brief description for reference.{2}

Worldviews: Some Basics

What is a worldview? James Orr, the 19th century church historian, said that a worldview "[denotes] the widest view which the mind can take of things in the effort to grasp them together as a whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology."{3} A developed worldview supplies answers to the questions of origin, purpose, and destiny among other things, or as some put it, the "why, whence, and whither" of things.{4}

But some may object that such a view of Christianity is too intellectual or esoteric, or might say that Christianity by its very nature doesn't allow being forced into some set of philosophical ideas. It's true that one can present an overly philosophical picture of Christianity, one that makes it seem very remote from real life. But does that invalidate the cognitive element? Note that the apostle Paul had no problem with considering the rational aspect of the faith. There must be knowledge of Christianity in order to live it out. Read Eph. 1:17,18.{5} In Colossians we see how Paul gave his readers intellectual grounds for rejecting the philosophy of the day (cf. 1:9ff).

There are a couple of reasons for thinking of Christianity in worldview terms. Over a hundred years ago church historian James Orr called for such a perspective because first, Christianity *does* involve a lot of interconnected beliefs which cannot be picked and chosen in a cafeteria-style

fashion. He says, “He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a ‘*Weltanschauung*,’ or ‘Christian view of the world,’ which stands in marked contrast with theories wrought out from a purely philosophical or scientific standpoint.”{6} Christianity, thus, by its nature forms a worldview.

Second, Orr says, since Christianity as a whole is under attack, it must be defended as a whole; not just as individual doctrines but the whole concept of supernatural, revealed religion. “The opposition which Christianity has to encounter,” says Orr, “is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with the natural sciences—for example, the relations of Genesis and geology—but extends to the whole manner of conceiving of the world and of man’s place in it, the manner of conceiving of the entire system of things, natural and moral, of which we form a part.”{7}

Evaluating Worldviews

How shall we evaluate a worldview? We have every right to expect that a true description of reality will be rational, be supported by evidence, provide the widest explanation for all of reality, and accord with human experience. Regarding its rational nature, it must both not contradict itself and be coherent as a system. Regarding evidence, it must not only be consistent with and explain the facts of nature and history, but it must give an adequate explanation for special occurrences in history (I’m thinking here specifically of the person and work of Jesus, including His life, death, and resurrection). A worldview answers the “why” question in its ability to explain what we see around and within ourselves. Regarding human experience, it must both explain what we know

of ourselves *and* answer our deepest longings and aspirations.

Furthermore, we should not be surprised at supernatural elements such as miracles and prophecies, and reports of such should withstand investigation as far as we're able.

Finally any truths revealed which couldn't be known otherwise—even though transcending what we can know on our own and being difficult to understand—should not conclusively contradict what we know in the range of human experience.

Let's turn now to a consideration of our four worldviews.

Deism

Historical background

The era called the Enlightenment, which spanned the 17th and 18th centuries, saw significant changes in the way Western man viewed his world. The flowering of knowledge in the Renaissance which broke through in the arts and sciences led to the restoration of a high view of man. Even in the Christian church there developed something called "Christian humanism." In the Enlightenment era which followed, though, the "Christian" part began to fall off, leaving man as the final authority on all that is true. But this change didn't occur overnight. There was a period of time when God was still recognized, although some believed He had lost touch, as it were, with His creation. He was pushed out and restricted to His heaven. Notions of God's providential care over the earth faded away. Thus was born deism, the first of four worldviews.

Several factors were involved in this transition. One was the flowering of science, specifically Newtonian physics, which supposedly gave a rational, orderly explanation of the world, thereby removing the mysterious, supernatural elements. Another factor was the religious wars a century or two before which had a souring effect on people's attitudes about organized religion. Finally, there was a growing awareness of

other peoples and religions which made Christianity seem provincial rather than universal.{8} Divine law gave way to natural law. Now there was "revealed religion" coming from God, and "natural religion" discovered in nature. And "natural religion," believed to be neutral and universal, became the norm for what could be accepted as true "revealed religion."

Described

Deism, then, is the belief that "natural religion contains all that is true in revealed religion; where the latter differs, the differences are either morally insignificant or superstitious."{9} There is nothing higher than natural religion. Reason is capable of knowing God and His will, so there is no need for revelation. On the moral side, man's duty is simply to do God's will which is to seek the happiness of all men.

How was it that deists retained belief in God? According to one writer, the Newtonian view of the cosmos seemed to demand a God; the intricate order of the universe suggested an intelligent designer. In fact, this made God seem bigger than ever. However, God was removed from an active part in human affairs. His transcendence was emphasized at the expense of His immanence. Also, although God was the author of natural law, He "receded behind the battery of secondary causes with which men have daily to do."{10} God was seen as too big to be involved in the trivial experiences of man's life. There was no real concern on God's part for the details of our lives and no divine purpose in history. Knowledge of God was "emptied of most of its concrete religious connotations."{11}

Contrasted with Christian Theism

Three major factors separate deism from biblical Christianity. First, God was separated from the workings of real life due to His awesome transcendence. As Sire puts it, "God is distant, foreign, alien."{12} Scripture teaches, however, that God

continues to be involved in His creation both in sustaining the natural order (Col. 1:17) and in relating to mankind.

Second, deists saw man as just a part of the clockwork universe, operating according to strict laws. While man was recognized as a creation of God and made in His image, he wasn't seen as essentially a sinner. Gone was the sense of the drama of human interaction with God over concerns about sin and grace and judgment. Man was now in charge of himself. However, he was not truly free for man was locked in the natural system of cause and effect.{13}

Third, because the world was not seen as fallen, but rather as God created it to be, the natural order reflected what was good and right. As Pope said, "One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."{14} Not every deist went this far, however. Ethics was very important to deists; they didn't turn morality over to the subjective realm. But wrongdoing wasn't against God so much as against some abstract ethical principles discernible in nature.

Internal Weaknesses

Although few if any people would claim to be deists today, there are some aspects of deism which still reveal themselves in our beliefs. For example, some speak of one God who is all-powerful yet not directly concerned with the daily lives of human beings, who is known through the world of nature, but who hasn't revealed Himself authoritatively and finally in Scripture or through Jesus.

However, the halfway position of deism made it incapable of standing as a serious worldview for very long. Deists believed they knew things about God, but they were limited to empirical knowledge; that is, knowledge obtained through nature. If we only gain knowledge from nature, we cannot see the whole picture, and there are certainly things about God which can't be known unless He tells us (which is what revelation is). It

would seem that they were presupposing certain things about God learned from special revelation without giving credit where it was due.

Thus, one needed to either keep God in the picture and acknowledge His significance, or remove Him altogether. The latter was the response of naturalism. Since that worldview was considered in the previous article, we'll move next to nihilism, a frame of mind growing out of naturalism.

Nihilism

Now that God was pushed to the edge of human experience, why not remove Him altogether? He had lost all practical value; why believe in Him at all? Thus was ushered in naturalism, the belief that there is only one order of existence and that is nature; there is no supernatural order. This view was discussed in the earlier article, so I won't develop it here.

Historical Background

For many, naturalism was a breath of fresh air, for now one needn't look to religion to find answers. Modern man with his naturalistic beliefs tended to be optimistic about man's prospects for making a good life for himself. Being free from the confines of the supernatural, man was free to make of himself whatever he wanted

Many, however, didn't see the clear benefits of this "freedom." Naturalism produced an emptiness it couldn't fill. Are we really just another stage of evolutionary development? Is this present reality all there is? Is there no permanent, transcendent value in the universe? The worldview—or perhaps we should say, mindset— which emerged was *nihilism*. Nihilism isn't really a philosophy because it doesn't present any kind of a systematic conception of the world. It is more anti-philosophy than philosophy because it is essentially denial—denial of real value in anything. There is no real

right and wrong, no beauty, no knowledge, etc.

A name very often associated with nihilism is that of Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th century philosopher. Having decided that God was dead, Nietzsche saw that with God's death went the high values of Western man which were based upon belief in God. He also recognized the loss of freedom which this loss entailed. That we are just the natural products of evolution, just materialistic bodies and minds means that there is no real freedom at all. We are determined parts of a determined universe.

Another explanation for the rise of nihilism brings in the social and political elements. After going through many "isms" this century, many people have decided that one simply cannot put one's confidence in any of them, so they simply adopt a basic pragmatism, the idea that workability is all that matters. German theologian Helmut Thielicke made this comment:

> In a world that is saturated and infested with pragmatism, the question inevitably arises whether everything is not "pseudo," whether everything is not—at best—a productive lie, and thus whether at the tail end of this parade of idols there is *Nothing*, a *Nothing* which is always dressed up in some new ideology, but still nothing but nothingness."{15}

Described

Thielicke continues, "Nihilism is not a program but rather a value judgment. It is the last of all conceivable value judgments—at least in any logical series—and to that extent a judgment of death. Nihilism has no other will or purpose; it is content to draw a line and call it quits."{16}

James Sire mentions *Breath*, a play by Samuel Beckett, as a prime example of nihilism in theater. There are no actors, just a pile of rubbish on the stage. The light on the stage dims, then brightens, then dims again. "There are no words,

only a ‘recorded’ cry opening the play, an inhaled breath, an exhaled breath and an identical ‘recorded’ cry closing the play. For Beckett life is such a ‘breath.'”{17}

Nihilism, then, is a philosophy of loss; those who toy with it as a trendy worldview either don’t understand it or haven’t tried to. As one writer said, “Nietzsche replaces easy-going atheism with agonized atheism.”{18}

Contrasted with Christian Theism

Nihilism is obviously out of accord with Christian doctrine. God is *not* dead, and His nature and will provide a structure for value and meaning which transcend us. Because God is active in the world and is working to bring about His plans, there is real basis for hope. *Internal Weaknesses*

Nihilism also has its own internal weaknesses. Because it is fundamentally naturalistic, it carries naturalism’s weaknesses. It robs us of any real freedom since the natural order is believed to operate either on a strictly causal basis or by chance (or both). Yet nihilists, like everyone else, act as if they have significant freedom. We are all daily confronted with the responsibility of making right choices and of facing the consequences if we don’t. Also, the strict naturalism of nihilists makes their claims to knowledge suspect. If the chemicals and electrical charges in our brains are simply following the physical laws of cause and effect, why should we believe our ideas reflect any reality outside ourselves and aren’t just the results of the random activity of our brain cells? Finally, morality can’t be simply a matter of “what is, is what ought to be” or else there would be no room for reform. Any charge that another person or culture *ought* to do something—not just because it would work better but because it is *right*—would be illegitimate. Nihilism thus leaves us empty with respect to our being, our knowledge, and our morality. With all of these goes a loss of meaning.

But all this is to say what the nihilist already knows! Sincere nihilists haven't just adopted this worldview because they like to be trendy. They are simply reflecting back in their words the way they see the world, and they grieve over it.

How can we respond to nihilism? We can start out by pointing out the existential inconsistencies nihilists exhibit. For one thing, although they say there is no meaning to anything, they indicate what *they* think is meaningful by the time and effort they put into various activities. The art of nihilism, such as *Dada*, for example, attempts to say something; it is purported to have *meaning*. If it doesn't mean anything, it can't convey the image of the world nihilism wants to reveal. Second, all their assertions about meaninglessness are supposed to be statements about the way the world *is*. But if there is no knowledge, nihilists can't know the way the world is. Third, it simply flies in the face of everything our being seems to require—meaning, value and dignity being three examples.

Very few people can live out a completely nihilistic worldview. The most thoroughgoing cynics will apply themselves to *something*—even if it's small—which they consider meaningful, even if it is crying out against the meaninglessness of life. To feel the despair of the loss of meaning and value indicates that one really *wants* such things. What can the nihilist do? He can take his life so he doesn't have to face such an absurd world. He can keep on living but keep his philosophy of no value and his life of value-seeking separate. Or he can look for something to give life value and meaning. In existentialism we find a worldview which seeks to find meaning in an absurd universe. To that we now turn.

Existentialism

Existentialism is a worldview (or really a collection of worldviews) which holds, in essence, that our choices determine what we are. We create our *own* meaning and value.

“Existence precedes essence,” it is said. What we do, the choices we make, determine our essence. Existentialists, thus, seek to create their own meaning in a meaningless world.

(I should note here that there are theistic and atheistic forms of existentialism. Here we will only consider the atheistic variety.) *Historical background*

Existentialism has both philosophical and experiential roots. With respect to philosophy, naturalism had left man without God, and the radical individualism and autonomy endorsed by modernistic thinking had left individuals standing alone. With respect to life’s experience, technology had made us just another part of the machine; either be efficient or get out of the way, was the modernistic attitude. In addition, some by-products of technology such as pollution and the atomic bomb made life riskier. Then came two devastating World Wars conducted on the doorsteps of Europeans. The result was that man was thought to be in all alone and in danger. These factors provided the setting for a philosophy of despair. *Described*

Despair is at the foundation of existentialism. We are said to live in “a ‘broken world,’ an ‘ambiguous world,’ a ‘dislocated world,’ a world into which we are ‘thrown’ and ‘condemned’ yet ‘abandoned’ and ‘free,’ a world which appears to be indifferent or even ‘absurd.'”{19} Existentialists refused to accept the solutions coming from reason or nation or tradition. They saw that the usual means of happiness failed people, means such as money, physical pleasure, and fame. Of course, atheistic existentialists refused to look to God. God was dead, not only in the halls of philosophy, but also in the city streets, and man was left on his own.

The real problem, they thought, was a false understanding of the human condition itself which kept people from true happiness. We are alone in a vast and scary universe that doesn’t care a whit about us. This realization produces

anguish, an interplay between a sense of dread on one hand and the exhilaration of complete freedom on the other. We don't know why we exist or what our destiny is; we aren't told where we come from or given the value of anything. It is all up to us—to *me*—to decide. Even though I can have no confidence that the universe will suit itself to my ideas and desires, I must do something—I must act. I am condemned to make of myself whatever I can. And to be authentic I must be true to myself and my own chosen values above all.

Existentialism, then, is first of all a theory of value. It focuses on the human condition and what makes for a good life. This has made it popular with many who are sensitive to the plight of humanity living in a very impersonal world.

Existentialism proved to be very attractive in this country in the '60s. It gave individuals the "freedom" to toss aside convention and tradition and make their own rules. We see traces of it in the prevalent notion that we, individually, are the final authorities for value in our own lives, in our emphasis on experience over reason, in our live-for-the moment attitude.

The theme of turning one's back on traditional morality in favor of determining one's own life was seen in the movie *Pleasantville,* the story of two young people who are transported into the world of *Pleasantville,* a black and white TV show. Their lives only turn into color when they begin to express their sexuality. The girl eventually finds herself in the healthy area of academics, but this is a choice *she* alone makes; she is in charge of her own existence. *Contrasted with Christian Theism*

The contrasts between atheistic existentialism and Christianity are obvious. The Bible teaches that we *do* know where we came from; the universe isn't just some vast wasteland but the setting in which the true and living God is working out His plans of which we are part. We *do* have a

source for truth, morality, and values which stands above us. We *do* (or *can*) know where we're going. On the other hand, however, while we do have significant freedom, we don't have absolute freedom to make of ourselves what we will. Neither are we all alone; we have the resources of God to experience rich and meaningful lives.

There's nothing wrong with taking note of our predicament, with noting the dangers to life, and with being resolved to stand firm in the face of a seemingly absurd world. The problems come with believing we are all alone, and that the burden of our lives rests upon us. God has taken on the burden of our present and future lives. We aren't on our own. *Internal Weaknesses*

There are internal problems with existentialism as well. For one thing, one wonders why we should even care if we are in the condition existentialists say we are. Why care about being authentic, about operating in good faith, as we create our own existence? Why bother about bothering at all? Why not just eat, drink and be merry? Regarding standards of value, how can one avoid the notion that there are some values that everyone should accept, universal standards of good and evil, beauty and ugliness? We can't help believing some things are worth preserving while others are unworthy of our efforts.

With existentialism there is no basis for judging actions or for making the major decisions of life beyond the simple affirmation, "I choose it."

Is that enough?

Postmodernism

It is rather easy for us to consider the worldviews already discussed from a distance. Probably few who read this article are deists or nihilists or even existentialists. These can be safely tucked away in the cupboard of tried and forgotten

worldviews by most of us (even though many of us can find elements of one or another in our own thinking). The situation is quite different with respect to postmodernism, the last worldview we'll consider, because it describes the basic mindset of turn-of-the-century Western mankind. We are all immersed in the sea of postmodernism whether we know it or not, and its presuppositions are rooted so deeply in our thinking that even those who are Christians often reveal postmodern attitudes. *Described*

What is postmodernism, anyway? In the 1970s, Jean-François Lyotard presented "a report on knowledge in the most highly developed societies" to the Council on Universities of the government of Quebec. This report was published as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.*{20} This book, a standard text in understanding postmodernism, gives a clue as to the nature of this worldview in its very title. Postmodernism isn't really a philosophy, for philosophy traditionally has been a tool used to understand the reality in which we live. Postmodernists believe that can't be done. So postmodernism is more a condition or mood than a philosophy. In short, postmodernism is a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. But it's also an era, a historical time period which began somewhere between the late 19th and late 20th centuries.{21} In this article we'll concentrate on postmodernism as a mood rather than as a time period. *Historical Background*

By "Enlightenment rationalism" we're referring to the ideal of knowledge which was developed in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. It formed the intellectual basis of what we call *modernity*. Two issues were important in the Enlightenment: criticism and power (*criticism* referring here to close analysis). The object was, as one writer says, to free people from "myth, superstition and enthralled enchantment to mysterious powers and forces of nature."{22} Truth wasn't found through revelation but through scientific investigation

and reason. Knowledge now had to be dispassionate, objective, and certain. Everything now had to conform to the rules of computation and utility; it had to be measurable, and it had to be functional. Reason was in effect reduced to one *kind* of reason, that of mathematics or scientific precision.{23}

Postmodernists believe that when knowledge was reduced to computation, something was lost.

There were several problems with Enlightenment rationalism. First, newfound knowledge gained through science and the resulting development of technology led people to think that man could solve the major difficulties of life without any transcendent help. It was found, however, that reason didn't have the potency it was thought to have. With all our learning and technology, we still didn't have the power we desired over our lives. Natural disasters and major wars such as the two World Wars in this century made people realize that we *aren't* able to fix everything that ailed us simply through reason.

These and other factors such as new mysteries discovered by science served to undermine our ability to really know what is true. In fact, postmodernists veer away from the classical understanding of truth, that is, the correspondence of propositions with external reality. Some very influential postmodernists now espouse pragmatism, the belief that workability is all that can be hoped for. This, I would venture to say, is how many if not most Americans think today.

Another postmodern characteristic regarding truth is this. In keeping with its rejection of the individualistic attitude characteristic of modernism, postmodernism holds that truth isn't found in the workings of the individual mind, but in the group. As one writer noted, "Truth consists in the ground rules that facilitate personal well-being in community and the well-being of the community as a whole."{24} Our thinking like all other aspects of our being is shaped by our community.{25} Politically and sociologically this means, for example, that

the individual is expected to conform in his or her thinking to that of the larger group.

Still another problem which resulted from the secularized nature of knowledge and from the loss of confidence in knowing truth in general was the loss of the knowledge of *ultimate* truths. There can be no "totalising metanarratives," that is, no big stories or explanations of the way things are which encompass everything. This can be both liberating and frightening: liberating in the sense that one needn't feel bound by any system of thought; frightening in the sense that we are in the dark about what is true. This is a bit like eating in a cafeteria where one can choose from a variety of foods without having any confidence in the nourishing value of any of it.

A second problem with Enlightenment rationalism was the separation of fact from value. The mathematical mindset of Enlightenment didn't permit the intrusion of judgments about value; that was something separate. What grounds were left, then, upon which to make judgments? Thus the ethical dilemma of postmodernism: How does one make judgments without having any grounds for judgment?{26} One writer argues that the Holocaust itself was a model of Enlightenment thinking. "In the world of the death camps," says author Thomas Docherty, "everything was rationalized." There was the desire to master nature seen in determining which races and kinds of people should survive and which shouldn't. The process was very orderly and efficient. The tools of technology, also, were used efficiently to advance the Nazi cause.{27} They even used reason as their greatest ally in accomplishing their goals. Thus, the ideals of Enlightenment rationalism could be put to fundamentally evil purposes.

Third, with the secularization of reason in the Enlightenment there developed a growing pessimism about the future. With no transcendent Being to consult, who was to know where history was going? And who was to say whether the direction being

taken was truly *progress*? “No longer do we know with any certainty the point towards which history is supposedly progressing,” says Docherty. “Humanity has embarked upon a secular movement whose teleology is uncertain.”{28}

Postmodernism, then, leaves us without knowledge of ultimate truths, with no basis for value judgement, and with no basis for confidence in the future. In general, then, the postmodern mood is pessimistic. How, then, do we know what we should believe and do? With no knowledge of why we’re here or where we’re going to guide us, and no grounds for determining value coming from some transcendent source, people have grown to believe that we must simply choose for ourselves what will be true for us. The *will* is now introduced into knowledge.{29} The questions postmodernists ask are: “What do *I* choose to believe?” and “What do *I* choose to do?”

The postmodern mindset has shown itself in several areas of life. One is a change in understanding language. Language is now thought to be socially constructed; it conveys what the group says it does. Literature, then, is understood as reflecting the biases of a writer and his cultural group: the writer was obviously saying what would benefit himself or his group. It’s up to the reader, then to *deconstruct* the text to find the *real* meaning. Since the writer is trying to perpetuate his will on the reader, the reader adopts a suspicious mindset and looks for political demons behind every tree. Since the meaning of a text is determined by the reader, a text can have as many interpretations as readers.

In art, there was a move to the abstract, because it was thought that we couldn’t accurately represent the essence of whatever the object is being painted, for instance. Those things which couldn’t be represented accurately had to be presented abstractly. Also, since there are no rules anymore in general, there are none which define or delimit good art. The artist discovers what she’s doing as she does it.

Architecture was one of the first areas in which postmodernism showed its face. With the demise of a modernism which always looked to the future, and, again, the loss of any rules, architecture moved from a functionalistic, forward-looking style to an eclectic style. Old buildings are restored, since the past can be appreciated, too. Several different styles can be mixed together. As one writer said, "postmodern design is historically and stylistically pluralistic."{30}

Earlier I spoke of the fact that even Christians espouse postmodern beliefs without realizing it. It is so much a part of the thinking of young people today that even some in the church accept without even thinking about it a "true for you but not for me" mindset. A young woman who taught high school Sunday School at an evangelical Baptist church in Dallas told a newspaper reporter that *she* believed what the Bible taught, but that it wasn't necessarily true for everyone.{31} Perhaps she doesn't understand the claims of Scripture, but more likely she has fit Christianity into the framework of "my truth, your truth." *Contrasted with Christian Theism*

Although Christians can learn from postmodernists (especially with respect to the excesses of the Enlightenment), it's important to see the fundamental differences between postmodernism and Christianity. Most importantly, we *can* know ultimate reality because "it" is a "He" who has revealed Himself and His will. The result is that we *can* know truth even though not the exhaustive truth which the Enlightenment thought possible. We *do* have an idea of where history is going, and we *do* have a basis for moral judgment.{32} *Internal Weaknesses*

Postmodernism cannot long survive. Besides being devoid of anything upon which to build a philosophy of life, it also reveals internal problems. While we might like to take an aesthetic approach to truth—in other words, judge by style rather than by substance—we want others to treat us in keeping with universal canons of truth and morality. Also, it is

impossible, we now know, to make a clean break between fact and value. Even the most precise and objective scientists must make value decisions with respect to the very work they do. In other words, one project must be chosen over others, and such choices reflect certain values. Furthermore, postmodernism strips us of all stability beyond what our immediate culture can give us. But since even a cultural group can't know ultimate truth but can only choose its values based on a pragmatic viewpoint, there is ultimately no stability in one's cultural group either.

As I've noted, postmodernism is a mood rather than a full-fledged worldview. Something must fill the vacuum created by the demise of modernism. This is what excites some Christian thinkers. For now the door blocking out the supernatural has been thrown open, providing an avenue for Christians to announce the good news that in Christ is found truth, value, and hope for the future, indeed, for all the human race.

Notes

1. Jerry Solomon, "Worldviews," Probe Ministries International, 1996. Available on our Web site at www.probe.org/worldviews/.

2. James W. Sire's *The Universe Next Door* (3rd ed., InterVarsity Press, 1997), has provided an almost indispensable guide in understanding worldviews. The choice of views considered in this program were taken from this text.

3. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 3.

4. Orr, 6,7.

5. "[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of

His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

6. Orr, 4.

7. Ibid., 4.

8. Waring, v-viii.

9. Ibid., x.

10. Ibid., xiii.

11. Ibid., xiii.

12. Sire, 44.

13. Ibid., 46.

14. Quoted in Sire, 48.

15. Thielicke, 25.

16. Ibid., 29.

17. Sire, 76.

18. Bloom, quoted in Sire, 93.

19. Robert C. Solomon, ed., *Existentialism* (New York: The Modern Library, 1974), ix.

20. Published in English by the University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

21. Docherty, 1,2. One theologian of our day sees modernism as having ended on July 15, 1972 when a housing project based upon modernistic principles of functionality was demolished. Still another marks its demise with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Cf. Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL; 1994), 27,39. Perhaps this

wide time span points to the way philosophies can take years to come to fruition in the public sphere.

22. Thomas Docherty, ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), 5.

23. Docherty, 5.

24. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14.

25. For more on this the reader might wish to consult my article "Where Did 'I' Go?: The Loss of the Self in Postmodern Times," available on our Web site at www.probe.org/where-did-i-go-the-loss-of-self-in-postmodern-times/.

26. Docherty, 26.

27. Ibid., 12,13.

28. Ibid., 10.

29. Ibid., 6.

30. Veith, 114.

31. Mary A. Jacobs, "Truths Under Construction," *Dallas Morning News*, 31 May, 1997.

32. Another major difference is over the matter of human nature and identity. In postmodern thought, the self is lost, whereas Christian theology sees us as distinct individuals with permanent identities (even though we might experience changes in our personalities, vocations, lifestyles, etc.). See my article "Where Did 'I' Go?: The Loss of the Self in Postmodern Times" available on our Web site at www.probe.org/where-did-i-go-the-loss-of-self-in-postmodern-times/.

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The Relevance of Christianity: An Apologetic

Rick Wade develops and defends the relevancy of Christianity, encouraging believers to find points of contact with an unbelieving world.

This article is also available in Spanish.

Christianity and Human Experience

In his book, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths*, theologian Alister McGrath tells about his friend's stamp-collecting hobby. His friend, he says, "is perfectly capable of telling me everything I could possibly want to know about the watermarks of stamps issued during the reign of Queen Victoria by the Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago. And while I have no doubt about the truth of what he is telling me, I cannot help but feel that it is an utter irrelevance to my life."{1}

Christianity strikes many people the same way, McGrath says. They simply see no need for a religion that is 2000 years old and has had its day. How is it relevant to them?

One of the duties of Christian apologetics is that of making a case for the faith. We can prepare ourselves for such opportunities by memorizing many facts about our faith, such as evidences for the reliability of the Bible and the truth of the resurrection. We can learn logical arguments such as those for the existence of God or the logical consistency of Christian doctrines. While these are important components, such things can seem very remote from people today. They will not do much good in our apologetics if people are not

listening.

This is why some Christian thinkers are now saying that before we can show Christianity to be *credible*, we must first make it *plausible*. In other words, we must get people's attention first by bringing Christianity—at least in *their* thinking—into the position of being possibly true.{2} We need to find those points of contact with people that will encourage them to want to listen.

Why do we need to begin at such a basic level? A few reasons come to mind. First, many people think religion has nothing important to say regarding our public activities. So, in our daily lives religion is only allowed a minor role at best. This attitude quickly affects how we view our private lives as well. Second, many people hold that science is the only worthwhile source of meaningful knowledge. This often—although not necessarily—leads to a naturalistic worldview or at least causes people to think like naturalists. Scientism and naturalism seem to go hand-in-hand. Thus, in order to get a person's attention, the first step we might need to take is to show him how Christianity applies to his life's experience.{3}

Even though we are physically better off because of our scientific knowledge applied through various technologies, are we better off all around than before we had such things? I am not deriding the benefit of science and technology; I am simply wondering about our spiritual and moral health. Our society is trying to find itself. This is clearly seen in current debates over important ethical and social issues. At the root of our culture wars is the question, Who are we, and what are we to be about? The age-old questions continue to haunt us: Where did I come from? Why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing? Where am I going? With the loss of his exalted place in the universe following the loss of a Christian world view, man now wonders what his place is. Am I significant in a universe that sees me as just one more piece of cosmic dust? Is there any intrinsic meaning to my

existence? Or must I determine for myself what my place and role will be?

In addition to apologetic arguments from logic and factual evidence, we should also be prepared to answer questions such as these. We need to let people know that in Christ are found answers to the major issues of life. By doing this, we can engage people where they really live. We can show them that God is not some abstract force separated from the concerns of life, but "is intimately related to personal and human needs."{4} As one writer put it, "God must be shown to be necessitated or justified by *practical* or *existential* thinking."{5}

In this article I will address these three issues: meaning, morality, and hope.{7} offers and contrast it with the Christian view.

The Matter of Meaning

Let us begin with the matter of *meaning*. The question What is the meaning of life? might not be one which most people give serious attention to. But a similar question is often heard, namely, What's the *point*? When we look for the significance or the point of our activities, we are wondering about their meaning. Reflective individuals carry this idea further, wondering What's the point—or what is the *meaning*—of it *all*? Although many people would argue that life *has* no ultimate meaning, most people seem to expect it to. We search for it in creativity, in helping others, in "finding ourselves," and in a variety of other ways.

The question of meaning encompasses other questions: Where did I come from? What is the significance of the experiences of my life? What is my overall purpose, and what should I be doing? Where is all this heading?

The prevailing view in the West today, for all practical

purposes, is naturalism. This is not only the prevailing philosophy on college campuses, but we have all been encouraged by the successes of science to believe that if something is not scientific, it is not reliable. Since science investigates the natural order, we tend to see nature as all that is really important, or even as all that exists. This is called scientific reductionism.

However, the scientific method is capable of dealing only with quantitative matters: How much? How big? How far? How fast? Philosopher Huston Smith has argued that, for all the achievements of science, it is incapable of speaking to such important issues as values, purpose, meaning, and quality.{8}

This focus on science is not meant to pick on this discipline, but to point out that science cannot give answers to some of the major issues of life. Moreover, if we go so far as to adopt naturalism as a world view, we are really in a bind, for naturalism *has* no answers to give, at least to the question of ultimate meaning. Naturalism says there was no purpose for our coming into being; the only meaning we can have now is that which we superimpose on our own lives; and we are all just going back to the dust. If the universe is just a chance accident in space and time; if living beings intrinsically are nothing more than just so many molecules, no matter how marvelously arranged; if human beings are merely cousins to trees, trapped on a planet caught somewhere "between immensity and eternity," as Carl Sagan said; then there is no meaning to life that we ourselves do not give to it. Being finite, we are by nature incapable of providing ultimate meaning.

If we should seek to establish our *own* meanings, what is to guide us? By what shall we measure such things? What if that which is meaningful to me is offensive to you? Furthermore, what if the goals we pursue are not capable of bearing the meaning we try to put into them? Many people strive to move up the ladder, to attain the power and prestige that they think will fulfill them, only to find that it's not all it's cracked

up to be. The possession of material goods defines many of our lives. But how much is enough? Does the one with the most toys when he dies really win? Or, as some have said, is it simply that the one who dies with the most toys . . . still dies?

Thus, there is no ultimate meaning in a universe without God, and our attempts at providing our own limited meanings often leave us looking for more.

If naturalism is true, we should be able to shake off the fantasies of our past and give up worrying about questions of ultimate meaning. However, we continue to look for something bigger than ourselves, something that will give our lives meaning. Christianity provides the explanation. We are drawn toward the One who created us and imbues our lives with meaning as part of His purposes. We are significant in ourselves because He made us, and there is meaning in our daily activities because that is the context in which we work out His ambitions for us and our world. Recognizing the true God opens to us the reality of value and meaning. The meaning of life is found when we find our place in God's world.

The Matter of Morality

In his book, *Can Man Live Without God*, apologist Ravi Zacharias makes this bold assertion: "Antitheism provides every reason to be immoral and is bereft of any objective point of reference with which to condemn any choice. Any antitheist who lives a moral life merely lives better than his or her philosophy warrants."{9} What a bold thing to say! Is Zacharias saying that all atheists (or antitheists, as he calls them) are immoral? Not at all. But he is saying that atheism itself makes no provision for fixed moral standards.

One very important aspect of being human is morality. A basic understanding of the concept of right and wrong or good and bad is fixed in our nature. We constantly evaluate actions and events—and even people—as good or bad or, in some cases,

neither. These are moral evaluations. They are significant for our personal choices, and they are critical to our participation in society.

In our culture today naturalism is the reigning public philosophy. Even if many people claim to believe in God, practical naturalism (or atheism) is the rule of the day. Regarding morality, the general attitude seems to be that there is no moral code to which we all are subject. We say in effect, I'll choose my morality, and you choose yours. But if Zacharias is correct, naturalism (or atheism) provides no solid foundation even for personal morality.

The question we might pose to an atheist (which could be directed at a practical atheist as well) is this: How do you justify your own actions? To that question the atheist could simply answer that he has need no for justification apart from his own desires and needs. While I think it is possible to argue that naturalism cannot be trusted to provide a moral compass—even for one's own needs—we can bring the real issue to the fore more quickly by asking two questions: How do you justify your moral outrage at the actions of others in any given instance? and, Do you expect others to take your objections seriously? To expect someone to take my objections to his behavior seriously, I must presuppose a moral standard that stands in authority above us all, unless, of course, I think that I *myself* am that standard. But what does that do to his right to determine his *own* morality? The atheist sometimes wants to have it both ways. He wants to be his own standard-maker. But is he willing to give this privilege to others?

Now, some atheist might respond that, of course, as a culture we have to have laws in order to live together peacefully. Individuals are not free to do anything they please; they have to obey the laws of society. The well-known humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz believes that "education, reason, science and democratic methods of persuasion" are adequate for establishing our norms.{10} But there are educated people who

hold different beliefs. Intelligent reason has led people to different conclusions. Science can not instruct us in morality. And in a society where there are a variety of opinions about what is right and wrong, how do we know which opinion is correct? Simple majority rule? Sometimes the minority is in the right, as the issue of civil rights has shown. No, Kurtz's reason, education, science, and democracy will not do by themselves. They need to be informed by a higher law.

Besides all this, Kurtz has certain presupposed ideas about the proper end of our laws. For example, does furthering the human race mean giving everyone an equal opportunity? Or does it mean joining with Hitler and seeking to exterminate the weak and inferior?

Naturalism provides no transcendent law that stands over all people at all times to which we can appeal to establish a moral order. Nor is there a solid basis upon which to complain when we are wronged. Christianity, on the other hand, *does* provide a transcendent moral structure and specific moral laws that serve to both restrain us and protect us.

When the question of morality arises, atheists will often offer the rebuttal that Christian morality is apparently not sufficient to lead people into the "good life" because Christians have done some terrible things to other people {and to each other) over the years. While it is true that Christians have done some terrible things, there is nothing in Christianity that requires it, and there are definite commands not to do such things. The Christian who does evil goes against the religion he or she professes. The atheist, however, can justify almost any kind of activity since man becomes the measure of all things. Again, this does not mean that all or even most atheists lead blatantly immoral lives. It just means that they have no fixed point of reference by which to establish laws or to condemn the actions of others.

Christianity not only provides a moral structure and specific moral laws, it also provides for the power to do what is right. The atheist is left on his own to do what is right. Those who submit to God also have the Spirit to enable them to obey God's moral law.

There is turmoil in our society today as we try to decide all over again what is good and what is evil. In our encounters with non-believers, by tapping into the need we all have for a moral structure suitable for both our preservation and our betterment, we can pave the way for their consideration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Matter of Hope

You have likely heard the expression "hope against hope." It refers to those times when there is no hope in sight, yet we keep on hoping anyway. There is something within us—most of us, anyway—which continues to see some possibility for good beyond a present crisis, or at least causes us to long for it.

As we consider the role human experience can play in apologetics, we should give serious attention to the question of hope because it quickly finds a home in our souls. Few of us have absolutely no hope. What worse state can we imagine than to have no hope at all? What we are more likely to see than no hope at all is hope in things that are not worthy. Nonetheless, the presence of hope in the darkest of places is something with which we are all familiar.

Nowadays, however, hope seems to be in short supply. In spite of all the glorious advances made in a number of areas of life, there is a prevailing mood of unease. Americans seem to be scrambling for something in which to put their confidence for the future.

For centuries the Western world found its hope in God, the One who was working out His purposes toward a glorious end. But by

the early part of this century, naturalism had taken hold of the academy and then our social consciousness as well.

From there, people went in different directions in their thinking. Secular humanists took the optimistic route and declared their hope in mankind. They continue to do so in spite of the fact that, in this "enlightened" era, our means of advancing the cause of humanity include aborting the unborn and helping the desperate kill themselves. Education, reason, science, and democracy—the gods of humanism—have yet to give us any real cause for hope.

Other people have grown cynical. With nothing more to hope in than what they see around them, they have lost faith in everything. They do not trust anyone anymore; they doubt that anyone can be truly virtuous; and they have simply settled into hopelessness. {11} Still others of a more philosophical bent have been drawn to atheistic existentialism, the philosophy of despair, which declares that God is dead and with Him that in which we once put our hope.{12}

A good illustration of someone trying to find something positive in the loss of hope in the Christian God is found in Albert Camus' novel, *The Stranger*.{13} The protagonist, Meursault, winds up in jail for the senseless murder of a man on a beach. After his trial, as he is awaiting either an appeal or his execution, Meursault is visited by a chaplain who tries to get him to confess belief in God. Meursault informs him that he does not have much time left, "and [he] wasn't going to waste it on God."{14} Meursault angrily rejects all the priest says. He believes that the fate of death to which everyone is subject levels out everything people believe. One action is as good as another; one way of life is as good as another.

After the priest leaves and Meursault has slept for awhile, he says this as he considers his fate:

> *[I] felt ready to start life all over again. It was as if that great gush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe.* {15}

If there is no God out there, the best we can do is accept the reality of our nothingness, and begin to make of ourselves whatever we can. Like the bumper sticker I once saw which read, "I've been much happier since I gave up hope." Previously Meursault had admitted being afraid, and he had betrayed his own humanity when, after coolly thinking about how death comes to everyone, and how it really does not matter when or how one dies, the thought of a possible appeal brought a sudden rush of joy through his body and brought tears to his eyes.{16} Now he bravely faces a universe that does not care, and he feels free.

If anyone ever truly feels this way in real life, that person is the exception rather than the rule. The word *hopeless* has negative connotations; we do not normally think of it as a positive thing. The atheistic existentialist must go against what appears to be the norm to achieve this state of happiness in the face of a purposeless universe.

Of course, not all atheists will opt for Camus' philosophy. To some extent, hope for the fulfillment of our various earthly ambitions fits in with a naturalistic worldview. A boy can practice his swing with the hope of doing better in the batter's box. A woman with the hope of getting married can very likely see that hope fulfilled. A man may get that promotion he hopes for by working hard. Yet frequently people find that what they had hoped for fails to provide the fulfillment they expected.

And what about hope for the future? Is there anything to hope for after death? When old age creeps up and the elderly man

reviews his life, is there any hope that something will come of all the labors and heartaches and wins and losses of his life? Was it all leading somewhere? The most naturalism can allow is that our lives might benefit others. But naturalism cannot of itself undergird such a hope. An impersonal universe offers no rewards. And no one can predict what the next generation will do with one's efforts. Besides, we might wonder why we should worry about the benefit of others who, like ourselves, are just pieces of cosmic dust. To take this even further, naturalism can just as easily allow for the destruction of the weak and the development of a master race as it can for an altruistic attitude toward all people.

Of course, naturalism has nothing beyond the grave to offer the individual him- or herself. There is no culmination, no reward, no "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21). You live, you do your best (according to your own standards, of course), and you die.

Yet, we continue to hope. I wonder if the "hope [that] springs eternal" is rooted within us in that "eternity" which is "set . . .in the hearts of men"(Eccl. 3:11)? Or, maybe it stems from the knowledge we all have of Deity, even though that knowledge might be warped by sin. An inescapable awareness of something transcendent continually draws us upward.

Christianity holds that the psychological reality of hope, and the content of hope that does not fail, is found in Jesus who is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1). Let us look at that in more detail.

The Answer Found in Jesus

One of the great benefits of addressing the matters of meaning, morality, and hope in Christian apologetics is that they take us right into the Gospel message. Our meaning is rooted in the personal God who created us and is actively involved in our affairs. Lasting, objective moral values to which we all are accountable and which serve to protect us

find their source in God's nature and will. And hope is what He sent His Son to give us along with forgiveness and new life and a host of other things.

Before looking at these issues more closely, I should address a couple of potential objections to bringing human experience into apologetics. One objection is that the apologist can quickly fall into *selling* the faith by an appeal to the felt needs of consumeristic Americans. Such needs are not always valid.

Another objection is that such matters are subjective. To appeal to them is to become trapped in matters that are at best non-rational and at worst irrational. Our consideration of Christianity should not be based upon such flimsy foundations.

These problems can be avoided by concentrating on those aspects of our experience which are universally shared. Someone has called these "objective-subjective" matters. That is, they are subjective matters of a kind shared by all of us by virtue of our membership in the human race. The desire for moral order is something felt inwardly, but it is a universal need. Faith is subjective, but the disposition to believe is a universal one. Personal meaning also is an inward desire, but it is one we all have.

Let us consider now the answers the Bible gives to the questions we're considering.

Remember that one of the questions encompassed by the question of meaning is, Where did I come from? In John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-17, and Hebrews 1:2 we learn that we were created by God through Jesus. Furthermore, we learn from the examples of David and Jeremiah that God created us and knows us individually (Ps. 139:13-16; Jer. 1:5). Unless we are prepared to argue that we were made on a whim or maybe just for sport—and nothing in Scripture indicates that God does

anything like that—we must conclude that He made us for a purpose.

The question, Is there meaning in the experiences of daily life?, is answered by the understanding that God is working out His own purposes in our lives (Phil. 2:12-13; Rom. 8:28; 9:11,17; Eph. 1:11).

Finally, to the questions, What is my purpose? and What should I be doing?, Scripture teaches that I am to obey God's moral precepts (Jn. 14:23,24; 1 Jn. [entire book]), and that I am to participate in God's work by doing the things He has given me to do in particular (Jn. 13:12-17; Eph. 2:10; 1 Pe. 4:10).

Regarding morality, the noble acts of people and the ravages of war are understandable in light of our being created in God's image, on the one hand, and corrupted by sin, on the other. Although we typically do not think of Jesus as the law-giver as much as the exemplar of moral goodness, this is not to say that He does not Himself define for us what is good. Being fully God He shares the moral perfection of God the Father. He also created us as moral creatures and planted in us the awareness of right and wrong. Furthermore, His central position in the plan of redemption—which was put into effect because of our sin-induced estrangement from God—makes Him a focal point in the matter of good and evil. Thus, in Jesus is found an understanding of our consciousness of sin and judgment as well as the solution to the crucial issue of guilt and forgiveness.

This is all too often forgotten in evangelical witness today. One theologian has noted that the central theme of the Gospel is no longer justification by faith, but the new life. But people know that they do wrong, and they want to have the burden of guilt lifted. Many do this by denying any kind of universal morality. All they have to do to maintain a clear conscience, they think, is to be "true" to themselves. But in practice this does not work. We react negatively when an

individual who is being “true” to himself does something mean to us. We also know that others are justified in objecting to our actions that are hurtful to them. Our moral outrage at the actions and words of others betrays our sense that there is a moral law that transcends us. Naturalism has no means of dealing with all this, but Jesus does.

I have already touched on the important place that hope occupies in the Christian life. We have something specific to hope for, and in our walk with Christ we can experience hope on the psychological level.

For the apostles Paul and Peter, hope finds its objective focal point in the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 23:6; 24:14-15; 1 Pe. 1:3). For our hope is eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7), and Jesus’ resurrection is objective, concrete evidence that the promise of eternal life is sure. It is with the objective content of our hope in mind that Paul can say the Gentiles had no hope and were without God in the world (Eph. 2:12).

The hope we have is not something we can see (Rom. 8:24-25); it is waiting for us in heaven (Col. 1:5). Nonetheless it provides the context for our joy today (Rom. 12:12). Hope is strengthened as we learn what God has done in the past, and as we persevere in our Christian walk (Rom. 15:4). As our faith grows and we experience the joy and peace Jesus gives, our hope is brought alive (Rom. 15:13). Rather than put our hope in earthly riches (1 Tim. 6:17), we put our hope in the God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

In short, the answers to the questions of meaning, law, and hope—which have no answers in naturalism – are found in Jesus. These truths, buttressed by the facts and logical consistency of Christianity, can be a significant part of our case for the truth of Jesus Christ. Although truth is not ultimately determined by experience, the common experience of humanity provides a point of contact for the Gospel. Even if such matters are not persuasive by themselves, they might at least

serve to show that Christianity is relevant to our lives today.

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Ethics: Pick or Choose?

Written by Ray Cotton

How to Choose Right From Wrong

After four years at Harvard University as an undergraduate, one student proclaimed in his graduation oration that there was one central idea, one sentiment which they all acquired in their Harvard careers; and that is, in one word, confusion.

That same year, Harvard's graduate-student orator said, "They tell us that it is heresy to suggest the superiority of some value, fantasy to believe in moral argument, slavery to submit to a judgment sounder than your own. The freedom of our day is the freedom to devote ourselves to any values we please, on the mere condition that we do not believe them to be true."{1}

Our universities are teaching students that there are no solid guidelines to life. Since everything is relative, they are totally free to create anything they want out of their lives. Students are told that no one has a right to tell them how they ought to live. Decisions about right and wrong are strictly up to them. It makes no difference what they choose to make of their lives. Students are not encouraged to ask the traditional questions about the usefulness of life or the value of an exemplary life. As the above graduate student pointed out, they don't even want you to take your own conclusions about life seriously. It is a philosophy of

ambiguity. It is the philosophy of humanistic existentialism. Many today are striving to break away from traditional values and embrace a sense of futility. Today we see it in the lives of teenagers who have "tried everything" and found life to be wanting. We see it in the life style of the "survivalists" who have given up hope in God and the future, holing up in defense of a coming catastrophe.{2}

According to Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the fathers of humanistic existentialism, the world is absurd, lacking any concept of ultimate justification. Sartre declares we have no ultimate purpose or plan to our lives. We are nothing and are therefore free to make ourselves into anything we want to be.{3} It doesn't even matter if you believe in your own proclamations because there is no more reason for you to exist than for you to not exist. Both are the same. The existentialist says you can just pick and choose your values. It makes no difference. There is no transcendent truth or power beyond man himself. Sartre doesn't believe in any God, nor does he believe that there is any preconceived design. There is no principle of authority to determine action. He says one must invent an original solution for each situation.{4} Therefore, in the sovereignty of his freedom, man creates his own values. Morality is rooted in human choice. Man alone gives his life its importance. Mankind must somehow transcend a life of absurdity and despair.

Is this humanly created reality true or are those who believe it trying to live in a dream world? Is the existentialist trying desperately to deflect the true absurdity and despair of his position? Is this the view of life that we expect our college students to be learning?

The Foundation of Existentialism

Prior to World Wars I & II, modern man believed that through science and human engineering an ever better world was evolving. They believed that mankind was getting better, that

peace and prosperity would reign. They were convinced that we had finally figured out how to live together in harmony and to build a better world.

Then came the rude awakening of two world wars and the hideous crimes against human beings perpetuated by Hitler's Third Reich. Out of the continuing frustration and destruction of World War II came a new philosophy of life. It was a philosophy conceived by those who had lost hope, who could only see the chaos. They lost their hope in any ultimate meaning for life. They were unable to see beyond the carnage of war-torn Europe. Their view of life was called humanistic existentialism.

Men like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus sought to establish a new view of life, a "new humanism" with a whole new set of values. Prior to these men, the need for a transcendent force, a higher authority beyond man himself, helped set limits and gave guidance to our lives. An example of this transcendence would be the Ten Commandments, given to man by God. These new philosophers defined transcendence in an entirely different way. They saw transcendence only in their own aims and goals. For the existentialists, transcendence was a way to escape what they saw as the meaninglessness of life by establishing aims and goals to make whatever they wanted out of themselves, to create their own reality. For them there were no norms or standards, other than what they might choose to agree upon among themselves.

You have to realize that for these existentialist thinkers, all human activities were equivalent in value. Human activity amounted to the same thing "whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations."{5} However, without God, there can be no transcendent view of human nature because there is no God to have a conception of it.{6} Man is merely an evolved animal. Today we see many young people caught up in this attitude of cynicism and despair. They just don't care anymore. Life has become jaded. Many young people pass their time in a fantasy

world of drugs, music and sex.{7}

Man's nothingness forms the foundation of existential thinking. Man is an empty bubble floating on a sea of nothingness.{8}

Trying to build an ethic for life based on the philosophy of existentialism is quite a challenge. Not only do the existentialists have to create a set of values to live by, but first of all, they have to create optimism out of a view of absurdity and despair. It is called an ethic of ambiguity because each person has no one to answer to but himself. There is no one else to blame, each individual is without excuse. Life is merely a game to be won or lost, to seek to become one's own hero.

The existentialist wills himself to be free and in so doing wills himself to be moral.{9}

Existentialism Collides with a Biblical Worldview

We live in a world that has been characterized as "plastic", without value and sterile. Many have forgotten what it means to live, to be fully human. Hours are spent in front of the TV, in a world of fantasy and escapism. Many people are becoming devoid of human warmth and significant human interaction.{10}

In this essay I have examined the ethics of humanistic existentialism.To fully understand ethics one must have considerable clarity about what it is to be human.{11} Is man an evolved animal required to create his own essence, as the existentialist would say? Though there is freedom to choose our own actions, there is no significance in our actions. Choices are made in the face of meaninglessness. The values of existentialism are anchored in the world of ordinary experiences. Their values come from what is. And for the

existentialist what is, is man's absurd condition.{12}

How does existentialism compare to a God-centered, theistic view of ethics? For the Christian, ethical values are revealed to man by God. Perfect freedom lies only in service to God.{13} The existentialist defines God as "self-caused" and then says there is no God because it is impossible to be self-caused. The Christian says that God is "uncaused", not self-caused. If you want absolute freedom, it is all too easy to deem God nonexistent. Even Sartre admits that "since we ignore the commandments of God [concerning] all value prescribed as eternal, nothing remains but what is strictly voluntary."{14} Throwing off all limitations and declaring his atheism, Sartre explains the process in his autobiography:

> I had been playing with matches and burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands….I flew into a rage against so crude an indiscretion, I blasphemed….He never looked at me again….I had the more difficulty getting rid of Him [the Holy Ghost] in that He had installed Himself at the back of my head….I collared the Holy Ghost in the cellar and threw Him out.{15}

Aldous Huxley, another famous existentialist, said:

> For myself, no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was … from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.{16}

The truth of Huxley's words ring out loud and clear. All around us we find individuals rejecting the truth of God's word and embracing false doctrines that allow them to vent their passions and immorality. Satan loves to get us discouraged and despairing, then he shows us a false way out that caters to our old fleshly nature, a way that allows us to

do as we please.

The Bible says that we are in bondage either to sin or to God. We will serve one or the other. Our only choice is to decide who or what we will serve, the God of the Spirit, or the god of the flesh. The choice is ours.

Rejecting Biblical Truth Ultimately Leads to Despair

How did modern philosophy arrive at such a seemingly absurd state? In the late nineteenth century certain scholars assaulted the Bible and Christian beliefs. This "higher criticism" was promoted by men dedicated to the destruction of orthodox Christianity. In their minds the Bible was no more than a novel, a book of fiction with some good moral lessons. This movement was the spiritual legacy of the Enlightenment which put the claims of religion outside the realm of reason. Natural law, based on human reason alone, was slowly substituted for biblical law. Christian faith was separated from historic reality. The focus of all studies was shifting from God to man.

The real motive of higher criticism of the Bible was purely ethical. Men and women don't like the idea of having to be obedient to God. Therefore, they denied the historic validity of the Bible. This denial was based on an evolutionary model of human morality and human history. They sought to separate ethics from faith{17} in order to free themselves from God's final judgment.

Kierkegaard, a 19th century philosopher, is considered the father of existentialism. He took this idea of the separation of faith and reason and said that we could not know God rationally. Therefore, he tried to reach God by what he called an irrational leap of faith.Since it was not rational to believe in God, but it was necessary, you must believe irrationally.Sartre and Camus simply took the next step when

they said belief in God was not only irrational, but unnecessary.

Therefore, modern man started the path to a meaningless life when he questioned whether man could know God. Indeed, when man questioned even God's ability to communicate with man, this led the existentialist to ask, "If God is dead, isn't man dead also?" This existential death of man has lead to apathy, absurdity and ambiguity.The philosopher Bertrand Russell said it best when he said:

> What else is there to make life tolerable? We stand on the shore of an ocean, crying to the night and to emptiness. Sometimes a voice of one drowning, and in a moment the silence returns. The world seems to me quite dreadful, the unhappiness of many people is very great, and I often wonder how they all endure it. It is usually the central thing around which their lives are built, and I suppose if they did not live most of their lives in the things of the moment, they would not be able to go on.

Rejection of God's grace creates a world of hopeless despair. Existentialism leaves man without hope. In contrast, the Christian has the hope of eternal life based on faith in a living, personal God whom we can personally experience with all our mind, body and spirit.

Can Human Beings Live the Existential Life?

How many of your acquaintances are demonstrating by their lives that they believe there are significant ethical implications in the decisions they make and the activities they are involved in? Do you know people who live life caught up in self-preoccupation, doing only that which gives immediate pleasure? Are they filling their lives with movies, TV, sports and other preoccupations which shield them from dealing with the ethical reality of their lifestyle?

In this essay I have been discussing the ethics of humanistic existentialism, an ethic of freedom in ambiguity. It is an ethic that says man is nothing except what he or she decides to create of themselves and whatever choice they make really doesn't matter.

It sounds absurd, and it is, but sadly it is the ethic often being taught on the college campuses. One philosophy professor at a major university in Texas proudly informs his classes that he is an atheist and that his goal is to show the class that they can develop a system of ethics without a belief in a god. Of course he is right. One can design a set of relativistic ethical standards, but it is an ethic built on sand. An ethic of ambiguity will never give the support these students need in the hard world of reality. Did Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, the leading writers in existentialist theory, hold to their position till the end? There is evidence that they did not. From a dialogue recorded in 1980 when nearing his death, Sartre came very close to belief in God, perhaps even more than very close. He made a statement that may show his acceptance of the grace of God. He said,

> I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God.

In this one sentence Sartre seems to disavow his entire system of belief, his whole life of dedication to existentialism. If this is true, it is a condemnation of humanistic existentialism by Sartre himself.{18}

What about Albert Camus? According to Rev. John Warwick Montgomery, an internationally respected Lutheran minister and author, there was a retired pastor of the American Church in Paris who told him that Albert Camus was to have been baptized within the month of his tragic death and that Camus had seen

the bankruptcy of humanistic existentialism.{19}

All this is second hand information, but it does cast a shadow upon the ethics of existential humanism. Either we live a life of hope or of despair. Regardless of the claims made, existential humanism does not leave room for hope. Simone de Beauvoir, the mistress of Sartre and also an existentialist writer, came the closest of any of these writers to the real truth when she said it was reasonable to sacrifice one innocent man that others may live.{20} This is the foundation of the whole gospel message of Christianity: Jesus Christ, the innocent Son of God, died that all men might be saved. Meanwhile the existentialist stands alone with hope only in one's self. He is alone in a world without Christ, instead of being secure in the knowledge of Christ's love and redemption. Praise God that He is there and He is not silent!

Notes

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12. Otto Bollnow, "Existentialism's Basic Ethical Position," *Contemporary European Ethics,* Joseph J. Kockelmans, Ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 332.
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17. Gary North, *The Hoax of Higher Criticism* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 9-48.
18. Geisler, 46-47.
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20. De Beauvoir, 150.

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