

D0253

Class lists (use chart in 71):

Text: Fri., 1 copy left.
Sec. 71: 7 Sec. 1: 9

2. Review of last class:

Phil of E. - origin of "modernity"

w. its stress on secularity of reason,
a secular humanism,

an increasing radicalism in its critique--
as everything becomes more this-worldly.

We saw how the contrast betw. this-worldly

& other-worldly emphases led to an interp'm
of history & its major epochs,

how in this age the insistence on philosophy's
freedom was all-imp't.,

how Christianity was criticized for its
denigration of this world, its
supernaturalism.

how naturalist emphasis → notion of progress

& finally how Ø is left w. an enormous challenge:

E's qu. to Christians is, Do you take this
world as seriously as we do? If not,
you are not genuinely concerned in its
welfare. To respond, Christian theology
must establish verifiable foundations
within human experience for the fund'l
faith of Christianity.

What does this mean?

but must correlate these
w. experience.

- a. Not enough to quote SS & dogma as foundations,
- b. Not enough to point out the caricatures of E. Must show how faith & reason coexist.
- c. Not enough to point to the shortcomings of the E.,

its myth of progress, etc. As we shall see, others
have done this, too, w/o reinstating Christianity: still
Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Existentialists → this world.

(over)

today, the
effect of the
of E., the
mood of secularity
Is the E. still alive?

And if you do,
how can you
believe all of these
other things?

4) The fourth contributor to the making of the modern cultural situation, and thus to the setting for contemporary Catholic theology ^(remembering we're doing this) is the ~~twofold~~ phenomenon ^{I have called the prevailing mood of secularity} of ~~secularization and secularism~~.
Continuous w/ last class.

a. Intro: It is generally conceded today that those Christian attempts to meet the challenge of the Enlightenment that tried to show that Christian faith in its original integrity also championed the rational analysis that the Enlightenment sponsored and approved the desacralizing of nature and social life -- that these attempts were too easy, that they rested on categories of revelation and religion that the Enlightenment rejected, that they made their impact only on minds that were already religious and that merely wanted to find a justification for their own continued existence as Biblical Christians in the modern world. The mood of secularity sponsored and advanced by the Enlightenment cuts much deeper than this kind of response can meet.

b. We can begin our description of the mood of secularity with a description of ^{three} ~~some~~ of the social and ^{artificial} ~~institutional~~ changes that ^{were} ~~have~~ introduced by the Enlightenment. ~~paralleled the changes this mood has introduced into our fundamental assumptions of meaning and value.~~

First, there is the slow but sure progress of technology and urbanization. It has made us aware that in many ways we are not dependent on an eternal, changeless, given order of nature to which we must submit and accommodate ourselves. The real world in which we live is a man-made world, a world constituted by human work ^{esp. of city}. We seem to have moved from God's world to our own, from being participants in an eternal order designed by God to becoming the creators of a relative and fluctuating world, an ever-changing world composed of the arrangements produced by human decision and labor. A man-made nature interposed betw. us and original nature.

Lecture 4.2

Secondly, our assumptions regarding social institutions, traditions, and customs have also changed. The state, the church, social classes, the family are no longer "given" unalterably by a transcendent authority whom we must obey. ^{Divine Right of Kings:} Social institutions are no longer regarded as temporal expressions of a divine and eternal order which humans must participate in and obey if they are to find coherence and meaning in their fragmentary life on earth. These institutions are created by human forces, they are relative, temporal, and secular, not sacred, and their rulers are no longer sacral authorities.

Thirdly, ^(seen last time) scientific advance in knowledge of the world has called into question previous beliefs that the world is peopled with spiritual beings and even that it was engineered by a transcendent power who had human purposes and needs in mind. Both we and our world seem rather to be the result of harmonious but utterly blind causes that happened to interact so as to produce our environment and our human powers of life, love, and thought. The mystery that produced us, that maintains us, and that will claim us in the end seems to many imbued with the modern mentality to be, not God, but matter blindly running its course. ^{Results:} ① Thus what is real in our universe is to the modern ^{secular humanist} mind only the profane, the contingent, the blind causes that have produced us, ⁽²⁾ the relative, man-made social institutions in which we live, the things and artifacts that we can make, and our relations to one another. Furthermore, ⁽²⁾ what we can know are only these finite, contingent factors we see around us.

Valid knowing occurs when and only when we can directly experience, manipulate, test, and verify. It is radically empirical. ^③ And what is valuable for such a secular mentality is not some far-off heaven, or some mystical union with a transcendent reality, but a better human life here and now, among men and women in this world. The secular Humanist mentality tends to see our life, our destiny, as wholly within nature, as beginning with birth and ending with the grave, as confined in space and time to this world. Our world is contingent and faceless. We should depend on no one beyond ourselves to continue in being or to know or decide about our lives. We alone are to rule and direct our destiny.

c. 4th ear's Langdon Gilkey has specified four general characteristics of the secular spirit: contingency, ~~relativity and relativism~~, temporality or transience, and human autonomy in the production of meaning and value. What follows in this lecture is a summary of what Gilkey says about these four marks of modernity.

First, contingency. By contingency, Gilkey means the sense that what is -- the world around us and we ourselves -- are the result of causes that are neither necessary nor rational nor purposeful. Everything that has evolved in time is accidental. Why things are, and why they are as they are, are mysteries which our mind cannot fathom. Seventeenth-century science had resulted in this understanding of the world around us, but it was especially Charles Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis in the nineteenth-century that persuaded us that the same was

true of ourselves. For Darwin, we ourselves are brought into being by chance interactions of blind events, the product of the blind law of selection combined with random mutations. This apprehension of contingency restricts the habits of modern thought to what is immediately given, to the sensory manifold and its verifiable interrelations. But the given is ultimately arbitrary. Beyond it there lies nothing, no ground, no ultimate order, no explanation, no reason. ^(standing on its head) Modern views of knowing are thus characterized by a radical empiricism, for which the given just appears and can be described as it appears -- period. ^{positivism} For much of linguistic philosophy, the consequence is that the only way we can talk about what is real is through statements based upon and confined to concrete, sensory data. All other statements are meaningless. In naturalistic philosophy, things as a whole just "are," and their being has no explanation. George Santayana, a naturalist philosopher wrote: "Matter is the invisible wind which, sweeping for no reason over the field of essences, raises some of them into a cloud of dust: and that whirlwind we call existence." In existential philosophy, we do not just observe contingency from the outside as a phenomenon of things. We grasp it from within as the character of our own existence. We are thrown or cast into existence, ^{Heidegger Sartre} but there is no thrower and so no reason for the throw. Even our existence, for all its noble powers of thought and of love, is ultimately arbitrary. Beyond it, there is Nothing, a Void, known especially in moments of deepest anxiety, when we cannot trace our anxiety to any thing but only to no-thing, to Nothing.

Threat.

The sense of contingency has not been threatening to some thinkers, however. For John Dewey, e.g., a confidence in the intelligence and liberal motivations of educated middle-class persons gives rise to an assurance that, through empirical inquiry into the structures of contingency, scientific and moral intelligence can create proximate, not ultimate, meanings that can foster and preserve the "good life." But whether one take this more cheerful American view of things or the darker European existentialist position, the rationale is the same, however much the emotions may differ: we are set within a universe that has no transcendent source nor an inherent or ultimate order. Our context is constituted solely by blind nature or by a meaningless Void, empty of purpose and indifferent to human welfare. ^{We are the only instances of morals in the univ., wh. itself is} The meaning, the security, amoral, and the value of our lives cannot come from outside ourselves, but only from our own efforts of knowing and of willing within the given range set by contingent existence. Whether we choose to use our wider natural environment for our own moral and social purposes, ^(American) or to shrink back from it in alienation, ^(Existentialism) the one thing we cannot do is relate to it inwardly by mind or heart or depend on it. As far as God is concerned, if by God one means a transcendent or even an intracosmic source of security, order, meaning, and purpose for human life, then God has died.

Second, relativity ~~and relativism~~, the sense of the relativity of all things to one another in the passage of time. Everything that is, is positioned within the flux of time, determined in large part by all that preceded it, shaped by all that surrounds it, and to be replaced by what will come after it. Nothing is absolute, ^{or permanent}. Everything is relative to everything else, conditioned by its environment. The only ground for explaining any thing that ^{is,} is the nexus of internal relations to which it

belongs. This includes our understanding of our own behavior. There are many implications of this sense of the relativity of all things to one another.^{first} In all realms of thought today, we tend to emphasize change as opposed to sameness and identity, process as opposed to substance, becoming as opposed to being, and context as opposed to innate capacities and powers. The being of anything is a process of becoming within a context, a changing result of the interactions or transactions of things with one another.

A second implication, quite obvious, is relativism: our deeds, our artistic creativity, even our thoughts, our categories, our systems are formed by our historical context and so by the fundamental social and intellectual forces of our era. Thus they are relative to their time and place.

None of the systems of thought that man has created is absolute, has any ultimate authority. No cultural product, no philosophy, no religious belief, no scripture, no law, value, or practice, is relevant except to what surrounds it, to its context. The effect for religion is obvious: if permanence, universal value, and ultimate authority are essential characteristics of the sacred, is there anything sacred in the historical flux? All of the religions are founded on events that are claimed to be evidences of God's presence to his creatures. But, if everything in history swims in the relativity of time, are there any ultimate events of revelation? Is there any abiding Word of God, if all words are relevant only to their context? Is there any "mind of the Church" if all historical minds or mentalities are changing and impermanent? Is there any divine basis for authority in theology, or are there only different historical mentalities -- the Hebrew understanding, the faith of the apostles, the mind of the early Church, the viewpoint of the Middle Ages, the attitude of the Reformation, the post-Trent mentality of Catholics, and the Church of Vatican II? Is there anything common to these, any abiding basis of religious community and continuity with the past, or are all faiths and all world views simply relative to their place in history? Can any of them

claim our ultimate allegiance or promise an ultimate truth or an ultimate salvation? Is anything we experience in nature or history absolute? What can anyone possibly mean by the words he uses to point beyond nature and history? How can anyone ever talk meaningfully of transcendence when all we ever experience is contingent, relative, impermanent? Is there any basis for religious belief in doctrine, any ground in experience for our concepts of the absolute, any meaning to language that refers beyond relative causes to an ultimate ground or goal? Isn't it true that natural events are exhaustively explained by natural causes, and not by divine acts? That historical events are exhaustively explained only by natural, social, and psychological causes, and not by God? Isn't all religious language, language that speaks of acts of God or of the will of God or of an ultimate dimension appearing within nature and history, simply unintelligible, superstitious, and meaningless now that we have discovered the nexus of internal causal relations? Isn't even the word God dead?

(Break)

A third theme of the secular attitude is that of temporality or transience.

Everything is in time, and time is in everything, and so everything has its beginning, its time of development, its time of decay, and its end? As we saw earlier, classicist culture was also aware of transience, but they did not assert that everything was passing. For there was also the permanent, the unchanging, the eternal. But the secular attitude denies any dependence on what is not transient. Transience is total, time is the most fundamental structure of all experienced being. All is becoming, all is changing, all is mortal. As Whitehead says, all actual entities are "always becoming and never really are." ^{Religious implication:} From this standpoint, any mode of understanding God as a changeless, independent being is quite irrelevant, anachronistic. Nor is there any meaning for this attitude of speaking of eternally recurrent structures of existence, ^{e.g., mathematical law.} There are only patterns of development in time, and these are subject to change. Furthermore, while the future is quite

meaningful to such an attitude that places so much stock in time, men's hope within the secular mentality is not for an entrance to eternity after their temporal life in time is over, but for political, social, economic, and technological progress within history. Our own lives are bounded by birth and by death, and our hopes are relevant only to the temporal processes of nature and of history. Discussion of God's eternity, of everlasting life, eternal judgment, and eternal salvation is meaningless to such a mentality. [God's promises for salvation seem equivocal and empty.]

The fourth theme of the secular mentality provides its only source of optimism and courage. It is the theme of ^{human} autonomy. The secular mentality gains little if any confidence from the cosmic environment of nature, where everything is blind, relative, and transient. And so we are "on our own," we are aliens set within a context that is indifferent to us, and whatever hope and meaning we may have must come to us from ourselves. We do have a capacity to decide about our own existence, to create our own meaning, to establish our own values. We can destroy the gods who had determined our lives without our consent. We can declare our own autonomy from the sacred orders inherited from a now defunct past. We must, says the secular mentality, live our lives autonomously if they are to be creative and human, and we can increasingly exercise our freedom over nature and be ~~good~~ masters of our own fate. Any external authority will in the end only crush our humanity unless we have participated and continue to participate in its decisions. Marxists, naturalists, and existentialists may diverge in their estimate of free action, ^{and its context,} but they all agree that the full use of creative human freedom is the essential key to the realization of value. Again, the implications for the historic forms of religion are obvious. To require faith in revelation, obedience, submission, self-surrender,

to insist that man is fulfilled only when he patterns himself on the image of God, ^{says the secularist,} is to deny autonomy in inquiry, in ethics, in action. The final extent of such a challenge is to turn against the notion of God completely. Is not God the final challenge to my creativity as a human being? Does not religion drain away all the vitality and interest man may summon for autonomous effort? Does it not smother my freedom in passivity, take away my possibility of control over my destiny, make me weak, submissive, dependent? Are not creative autonomy and religion diametrically opposed to one another?

This leads us to the next constituent of the modern cultural situation, ^{godlessness} ~~atheism~~, which we will discuss in our next class.