

D0254

1971

Wed., Feb. 2: Class Lists

① ^{a)} Bookstore, 2nd

② ^{b)} Paper. Review. Last lecture was devoted to contemporary secular humanism, the direct descendant of the Enlightenment. We saw some of the social and intellectual changes that have resulted from the E. & that have given an added impetus to secular humanism: technology, institutional changes, and a new world view, acc. to wh. we have emerged not fr. the hand of God but fr. totally blind causes, from matter blindly running its course. Real, Know, Value. 4 features of

secular humanist attitude: contingency, relativity, temporality, human autonomy.

Today, more in detail w. a particular feature that cuts through all secular humanism of the kind we described last ~~was~~ class, but is found elsewhere too: godlessness.

End of last class: God as obstacle to human autonomy -- God must die so man can live.

The fifth constituent of modern culture that we must discuss is ~~atheism~~ the absence of God, godlessness, or what has been referred to as the death of God. It is a complicated problem, and it takes many forms, but again what we are interested in is not so much a precise argument given by a particular philosopher against the existence or the irrelevance of God, but with the factors that have contributed to a state of existence, a quality of life that I describe in negative terms as godlessness. It is, I think, more accurate and more effective to speak of godlessness than of atheism. Atheism is a proposition, godlessness a state of being. Many people who would not call themselves atheists are living godless lives. The problem is one of concrete living, not one of argument or abstract philosophical conclusions.

The theologian, John Courtney Murray, has described four kinds of godless people in the modern world: the godless person of the Academy, who wants to explain nature, human existence, history, and society without God; the godless person of the Market place, who wants simply to prosper in the world without God; the godless person of the communist world revolution, who wants to transform the total system of material production and human relationships that human labor has brought into being, not only without God but by the suppression of God; and finally, the godless person of the Theatre, ^{of the arts,} of the world of the public imagination, common impressions, shared feelings, for whom the world is absurd and who does not even want to change the world, for even

The change would simply replace one absurdity with the other. This person simply wants to be godless in a world that he or she also wants to be godless; wants to live without commitments, without passion, without hope or fear in a world where there is, after all, nothing to lose because there is nothing to gain. This person is masterfully represented, I believe, in Kierkegaard's description of the aesthetic mode of existence in Either/Or. Implied in all of these descriptions is that godlessness is a result of a choice, not an intellectual position reached by argument. It is a total option made by free decision.

It issues from the deepest reaches of the self. It antedates all arguments, all theories, it inspires atheistic philosophies, but it never results from them. (As we shall see, Lonergan argues in similar manner regarding the existential recognition of God).

1. Murray ^{traces} ~~roots~~ ^{roots} the first ^{two} kinds of ^{godlessness, that of the Academy,} ~~godlessness~~ ^{is something} that occurred in the pre-modern period, in the medieval philosophy -- ^{to two developments}

rearranged what we might call the order of wisdom it had inherited from its Christian past, and especially from St. Augustine. In the Augustinian tradition, ^{faith was} the beginning of all wisdom was faith. Crede ut intelligas: believe, in order that you might understand.

No problem, and especially not the problem of God, was squarely put to human reason independently of faith. Faith and reason were co-implicating factors in the life of inquiry, and no question was faced or resolved successfully by one of them acting independently of the other. Medieval philosophy, however -- albeit

within the context of faith -- exposed the problem of God to rational inquiry that was regarded as in principle, if not in fact, independent of faith. The universes of faith and reason were not in fact divorced by medieval philosophy -- every great medieval philosopher was in fact a theologian -- but the possibility of divorcing them was opened up by the distinction. Modern philosophy accepted the invitation.

A second medieval development was connected with this first one. Prior to medieval philosophy and theology, a Platonic attitude toward this world prevailed, according to which the material universe was regarded as an arena in which man was to pursue God. This was the sole value of the world. Medieval philosophy replaced Plato with Aristotle, for whom the material universe was existent in its own right, radically distinct from God, endowed w. its own autonomy, and to be explored and explained by intelligence in terms of the principles of rational thought. The universe was profane, and so one could search out its secrets by the use of profane intelligence, without taboos. In a sense we have here a mode of inquiry ^{re: this world} that was methodologically atheist, starting not with God but with experience. Now, for the middle ages,

This profane or secular mode of inquiry was not the only one, nor was the truth it sought the only kind of truth. There were different kinds of truth, different methodologies for their pursuit, and it was believed that no unresolvable clash could occur between the valid conclusions of rational thought and the doctrines of faith. But modern thinkers took the further step and proclaimed that there is only one form of rational truth, one method to pursue it, only one way to measure what is attained by it. Scientific methodology was said by enlightenment thinkers to be the only methodology. So: there is no way of reaching transcendent truth by the mind. Since truth is known only by the mind, there is no transcendent truth. If there is no transcendent truth, there is no God.

There is manifested in these movements a will, a desire, to explain the world without God. Talk about God could go on, but only outside the Academy. Theology was removed from its place in the curriculum. Or if there was any talk about God in the Academy, it was for the sake of explaining God away. This was done in the following fashion: (4 pts.):

1. Since faith and reason are incompatible realms of the spirit, God can have nothing to do with intelligence.
2. God is therefore to be relegated to the order of fantasy. Religion is the work of imagination.
3. Christianity is thus a religion of myths. The events on which it took its stand never happened. They are only a projection of our experience of ourselves, our aspirations and our frustrations.

4. Dogmas, too, have no absolute intellectual value as statements about the objective order of being, about God and his will. They have only a relative, pragmatic, emotional value as ^{about religious experiences.} statements. They say nothing about the meaning of God's actions in history, but only about my reactions to myself in the world. Thus, "when you talk about God, remember that you are talking only about yourself."

For the godless person of the Academy, then, who emerged in the 19th century, only the world is, or at least only the world matters. The search for God is surrendered, God disappears from the human scene. The appearance this godlessness gives is that it is the conclusion of an argument, that it is a rational conclusion. But, says Murray, it is really the product of a radical decision for which no rational justification can be given. There is a will to godlessness, a ~~decision~~ decision to separate what medieval philosophy had only distinguished, faith and reason. Faith for this is fantasy and myth, reason is idea and fact. For the medievals there was a synthesis, God and the world. For the godless person of the Academy, there is a dichotomy, God or the world. The decision of the Academy was to explain the world without God. As Laplace, the great astronomer, said to Napoleon in 1796, "I have no need of this hypothesis."

The second form of godlessness, ^{again coming from E.} is that of the Market place. ^{cf. Merchant class.} These people, the bourgeois capitalists and entrepreneurs, claimed too that they had no need of God. But now the project is not to explain the world, but to make a living in it. To them the sole realities of life are economic. The business of business is business, and to

the business of business, God is irrelevant. He is not needed for the success of the economic enterprise, which is the only enterprise that matters.

The godlessness of the Marketplace thus posits the problem of God in the popular terms of economic and social fact rather than in terms of philosophy and science. ^{More understandable} It served to prepare the way for a godlessness of indifference on the part of masses of people, many even most of whom would never deny the existence of God, but all of whom would slowly but surely begin to live as though God did not exist. Religion would become a purely private matter, an affair of the inner forum, a concern only of the individual conscience. God and religion could claim no public status, no place in the City, no function in the public action of the state. Godlessness is established by law. God could dwell in the individual heart, but not in the midst of the people. The people, as such, do not recognize God, do not acknowledge his presence. They say, "He is not here, in public." God is irrelevant, not only to economics, but also to politics. Not only is God ~~denied~~ denied, as in the Academy, as the maker of the heavens and the earth, but also as the creator of a people, who dwells in their midst. Godlessness became more than a view of reality. It became a historical force that powerfully and consciously changed not only political reality but the whole of civilization.

The third form of godlessness is the godless person of the communist world revolution. This "person" is not an individual, but a collectivity, a class, a party. His willⁿ is not to explain the world nor to make a living in it, but to transform it, to transform the

total system of material production and human relationships that the labor of men and women has brought into existence throughout the course of human history. The world the godless person of Marxism wants to transform is thus the world of industry, of what Marx calls "man's inorganic body," our work, which presents us to ourselves and to that extent is ourselves. The transformation demands the suppression of God.

{ God tolerates evil, and evil is not to be tolerated in the revolution.
 God is too soft on evil, and religion is thus the opium of the people.
 The godless person of the revolution declares himself more ~~and~~ moral than God. There is to be no forbearance towards evil, for if there is we cannot be creators of a new order of things. To comfort himself, man in his misery projects into an illusory heaven the fantasy of a power who is master of history, who is powerful enough to rescue man from misery and to guide history into paradise. But this is a projection, says Marx, of what we are, of what we can do, and to ascribe it to God is to alienate us from ourselves, to paralyze our powers to save ourselves, to render us impotent to do our own historical work, which is to liberate ourselves from slavery.

→ The ideal of the Revolution, then, is to eradicate God and religion from private as well as from public life. Even in the privacy of one's own heart, one is not to say, "God is here, living, active, in this moment. For the Revolution, God died when man discovered that it is history and ^{not} God that makes human nature.

In Christianity, God tolerates evil because he is able to bring good out of evil. The death and resurrection of Jesus is

is the central manifestation of this for Christian faith. And only God is able to bring good, even a greater good, out of evil. But for the Revolution, man is to assume this prerogative, so much so that, evil may even be deliberately done, provided it serves the cause of the Revolution. The good will come about when the world-wide communist society is established. For the prosecution of this end, the operators of the Revolution must display their confidence in power, in arms, in weapons, in force; but also in selfless work, incorruptible by money or pleasure because dedicated to saving the world.

The ~~is~~ fourth form of godlessness Murray calls the godlessness of the Theatre, of the public imagination, of common impressions. ^{Existentialist} Its medium is art, its aim simply to "describe" the situation of humanity. Theatre & lit of the absurd. We have no essence, only a presence, a situation, a sort of process. The world is absurd, and so there is no desire either to explain it or to change it. This person begins with the death of God and tries to live it, to show how it can be lived. The world is a kind of garden surrounded by death, and beyond death there is nothing. We are threatened by death, and the godless person of the Theatre is oppressed with a sense of the futility and fragility of existence, its unpredictability, its anguish and anxiety.

This person, then, does not seek to understand and explain the world he or she sees, but summons forth the will to be the inventor of himself or herself. The world is absurd and so are we. There is no structure of meaning to anything, no set of dynamisms out of which we might act with purpose and coherence. Freedom, then, is not the will to change the world, as with the Marxist, ^{or even the secular humanist.} The world can't be changed, it is absurd. But we can assume single and full obligation for our own existence. We can be for ourselves, we can rescue and recover and realize our own absolute autonomy, without any ethical considerations. We can invent a value, and the value is ourselves; and even this absurd, but at least we have chosen it.

God for this person is not so much dead as missing, a member on the list of missing persons. Or if this causes a fear that God is not really missing, that he is here but overlooked, or a guilt that he is missing because he has been dismissed, then ^{defiance -} let's say that God is absent and must be absent if we are to have the only thing that is ours, our freedom. For if God is present, then we are made by God, and if we are made by God we have that essence or nature God wants us to have, and are not free to create ourselves out of nothingness. Our existence, if God is present, becomes a destiny ~~and~~ which we ourselves did not choose: we are made for something.

There is again a decision involved, a will that God be absent, forgotten, repressed from consciousness. As Murray says, however, if you repress something out of your conscious mind, you push it into the depths of the unconscious, and you are thus taking a serious psych'l risk.
 → (over) When God, Explosion.

In our next class,

we will investigate the
phenomena of behavioral psychology,
for its broken image of humanity,
its sterilization, stultification,
dehumanization of the person:
in my opinion the ultimate
absurdity that has come from
the Enlightenment's constricted
point of view.