

ETHICS, CHAOS, AND COSMOS

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The study of ethics has never been as important as in 1963. While in the past, twisted or denied ethical standards on the part of some have closely affected only those within the immediate vicinity of such deviates, this is no longer the case. The world has so shrunk that it is in the power of mortals living in several parts of this contracted sphere to shrivel and waste the home of all mankind.

Our real problem, of course, is not the controlling of the atom but the controlling of the man behind the atom. It is man's personal code of ethics upon which all depends, rather than the laws governing atomic fission. The naive faith of the nineteenth century in man's essential goodness and inevitable progress has been shattered by the cataclysms of our age. As a result, the study of ethics is no longer the "dull hobby of a duller academician."¹ It has become crucial for survival.

Ethics have ever been recognized as based upon a *Weltanschauung*. One's personal world-view predetermines his conduct, and thus the inevitability of philosophy or theology for all. Now, as never before, the rightness or wrongness of prevailing world-views is pivotal for human existence.

The literature of an age is a reliable mirror of the current attitudes and philosophies of that period. One need but scan modern literature to become aware that a major shift in the realms of ethics, theology, and philosophy, has taken place in the twentieth century. To browse through Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Dickens, Scott, and their like is to be aware that their ages possessed cultures of vital

¹ Carl Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1957), p. 13.

unity wherein ethical agreement existed for the main part. In contrast the modern writer must invent for himself a system of values to interpret his world, and he has no assurance that his system will parallel that of any of his readers.

It was on July 31, 1914, that the existentialist experience ceased to belong to a sensitive few and became the dominant experience of the era, transforming our culture. Thinkers such as Berdyaev, Shestov, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Marcel, represent the feelings of moderns. At another level, writers like Tennessee Williams reflect the attitude of those typified by his following. This playwright says concerning himself "I am a definition of hysteria," and his regular use of stimulant and depressant pills testifies to the truthfulness of his claim.²

Another example is the well known play *Waiting for Godot* which cleverly expresses the hollowness of the life experience of many. This production was sent to Brussels Fair in 1958 as representative of American cultural life. Samuel Beckett's story has neither plot nor climax. Its characters fill in time on a bare stage waiting for one who never comes, representing mankind whose Messiah never eventuates.

The ontological crisis appears to preoccupy every great writer of our time. Literary scholars have suggested that the dominant conceptual myths found in literature today are (1) Voyage, (2) Hell, (3) Isolation, and (4) Doubt. All of these emphases, for example, are found in the following lines of Conrad Aiken:

We need a theme? then let that be our theme:
that we, poor grovellers between faith and doubt,
the sun and north star lost, and compass out,
the heart's weak engine all but stopped, the time
timeless in this chaos of our wills—
that we must ask a theme; something to think,
something to say, between dawn and dark,
something to hold to, something to love.³

² "A Voice in the Wilderness of Modern Life and Despair," *Christianity Today*, March 30, 1962, p. 27.

³ Conrad Aiken, *Time in the Rock*, cited by Nathan A. Scott Jr., *The Broken Center* (New York, 1959), p. 1.

This poem summarises much of modern literature. It describes moderns as "poor grovellers between faith and doubt," and thousands upon thousands of current works reveal that authors and readers fit into this category. When Aiken refers to "the sun and north star lost, and compass out" he indicates the prevailing loss of direction and absolutes.

Karl Mannheim in his *Diagnosis of Our Time* has pointed out that the despiritualization of our age is explicable only on the basis that true "paradigmatic experience" has almost ceased.⁴ He is referring to the archetypal events which men have ever regarded as of supreme importance and which have enabled them to organize a hierarchy of values whereby basic matters are accorded more significance than others. Without such a hierarchy men cherish only a kaleidoscopic concept of life which, "in giving an equal significance to everything, does, in effect, attribute radical significance to nothing at all."⁵

According to Mannheim, the loss of an ontological hierarchy means that

... no consistent conduct, no character formation and no real human coexistence and cooperation are possible ... our universe of discourse loses its articulation, conduct falls to pieces, and only disconnected bits of successful behaviour patterns and fragments of adjustment to an everchanging environment remain.⁶

About a century ago another author predicted the crisis referred to by Mannheim and Scott. The dream described by Dostoyevsky in the Epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* seems to be a parable concerning this age as foreseen by the author. Dostoyevsky pictures the whole world under process of disintegration because of a terrible and strange plague. New kinds of microbes possessing intelligence and will attacked the bodies of men. Those who were infected became mad and furious. But "never had men considered themselves so intellectual and so completely in possession of the truth as these

⁴ Cited by Scott, *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵ Scott, *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

sufferers, never had they considered their decisions, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions so infallible."⁷ Entire towns, cities, and nations went insane because of the infection. In their fury they could no longer understand one another. "Each thought that he alone had the truth and was wretched looking at the others . . . *They did not know how to judge and could not agree what to consider evil and what good.*"⁸ In senseless rage they killed one another with their armies. All day long, alarms rang in the towns and cities, but when men rushed together they were unable to find why or by whom they had been summoned. Trades were abandoned, and the land was permitted to lie fallow. "Men met in groups, agreed on something, swore to keep together, but at once began on something quite different from what they had proposed. They accused one another, fought and killed each other."⁹ Conflagrations and famine spread over the world until "all men and all things were involved in destruction."¹⁰ Dostoyevsky concludes his description by saying:

Only a few men could be saved in the whole world. They were a pure chosen people, destined to found a new race and a new life, to renew and purify the earth, but no one had seen these men, no one had heard their words and their voices.¹¹

This remarkable narrative portrays many aspects of the tragedy of this mid-twentieth century and suggests what may yet lie ahead. It is most significant that Dostoyevsky points out that a distinguishing characteristic of the crisis which he pictures was the fact that the people "did not know how to judge and could not agree what to consider evil and what good." That is to say, they possessed no agreed-upon ethical values. It is this characteristic, according to many diagnosti-

⁷ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (New York, 1950), p. 528.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 528, (emphasis ours).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 529.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

cians of our times, which particularly marks the present human dilemma.

Passing from current literature to a formal discipline we find in Educational theory a similar "fuzziness" of ethics. Despite Dewey's insistence that education *is* life, most modern educators agree that education is a preparatory process of a sort, but disagree regarding for *what* education is a preparation. Should education prepare men for making a living, or for making a life? for survival in this world only, or for survival in eternity? for harmonious relations with fellow men through faithful conformity to group processes and practices, or for peace with God? Schools are agreed that virtue is to be taught, but what is virtue? what is the *summum bonum*? Is it the development of physical strength? genius? character? And if character, what is good character? It has been suggested that modern education is much like a man who rises early, packs his port, taxis to the aerodrome, but knows not for what destination he should secure a ticket. The article in last year's *Life*¹² entitled "The Voice of the Negro" dramatized the present situation. This article referred to "the deep pessimism prevalent among boys at some of America's finest prep schools." Youth from Lawrenceville, Andover, The Hill, Exeter are cited expressing their sole conviction—that it was impossible to have convictions any more. Declares one "This is a world of madness—absurd, stupid. Nothing's solid. There are no values to depend upon." Says another: "I have no values because there is no basis for them. I haven't any goals because I don't know what to aim for."

The writer, Barbara Cummiskey, suggests that key figures responsible for this attitude include Freud, Darwin, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Arthur Miller, J. D. Salinger, Robert Penn Warren and Herman Melville "all of whose angry or searching observations on the human condition appeal to the negro." Whatever modern education is achieving, it is apparently not solving the existential vacuum in the hearts

¹² Barbara Cummiskey, "The Voice of the Negro," *Life*, July 16, 1962.

of our youth. The failure of our modern education to prepare young people to grapple successfully with life's essentials is further underlined by the results of the Communist brain washing techniques in the Korean concentration camps. Only five per cent of the young men from democratic countries successfully survived attempted indoctrination.¹³ It seems to be an illustration of the adage that if one does not stand for something he will fall for anything.

What is the cause of the chaos of aims, and the uncertainty of values in education today? Why are educators not agreed on the nature of the experience for which formal education should be a preparation? Here again we must look to the parent world-views of pedagogical philosophy.

Basic to all educational procedure, as to all of life, is the answer to the question "What is man?" A typical recent work on the philosophy of education declared: "Man is an animal; he is the product of evolutionary forces working, we know not how."¹⁴ In a \$ 2500 award for educators only, some years ago the prize went to Professor Stace, author of *The Destiny of Western Man*. A prominent member of the committee who selected the winner was Carl Van Doren, who affirmed that this book was one of "world-wide significance, sure to clarify and fortify contemporary opinion and to leave its mark on years to come." Declared Stace in his book:

The Greeks, therefore, had in general no right to their belief that man is superior to the other animals . . . And therefore we can not admit the validity of that argument in favor of the primacy of reason which bases itself upon man's superiority to the rest of creation.¹⁵

Many educators today believe this doctrine that man is the illegitimate child of nature. To them the universe is an irra-

¹³ Ronald C. Doll, "A New Crisis in Adolescence," *Christianity Today*, May 11, 1962, p. 13.

¹⁴ Stella Henderson, *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (Chicago, 1947) p. 23.

¹⁵ Stace, *The Destiny of Western Man*, cited by Ana O'Neill, *Ethics for the Atomic Age* (Boston, 1948), p. 52.

tional asylum, and man an intruding by-product, a "fuss in the mud, a stir in the slime." The implications for ethics of such philosophy is obvious. Humanity thus viewed is a mere planetary eczema, and should not be perturbed about such ethereal matters as morals. In the words of Edward J. Carnell:

. . . why strive at all, if the end of man is but a square meal for lower animals? Shall *their* welfare stimulate us to live honestly rather than dishonestly? Will it affect their diet any if we commit fornication or if we refrain from it? Will the maggots complain about their menu if we are plunged into an atom war? ¹⁶

It is this viewpoint of the nature of man spearheaded in the late nineteenth century that gives us the explanation for the drastic revamping of world-views in our own age. The support of ethics is ever a *Weltanschauung*, but undergirding the *Weltanschauung* is a concept of origins, a belief regarding the nature of man derived from a supposed insight into the manner of his arrival.

Some thinkers have asserted that science is responsible for the change of mental and ethical climates in our world, but this is questionable. Many of the greatest scientists have been Christian in their philosophy. As already intimated, that suggestion is much nearer the mark which asserts that *materialistic theories of man's origin rather than pure science* is responsible for the change. To test this submission, let us note some interpretations of the significance of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the work which probably did more to revolutionize the concept of origins than any other volume in recent centuries. A thought-provoking chapter written by Raymond F. Surburg on this subject is to be found in *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation* edited by Paul A. Zimmerman. The following quotations appear among those presented by Surburg:

Truly, the year 1859, in which appeared Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, marks a turning point in Western thought.¹⁷

¹⁶ Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956), p. 333.

¹⁷ Vergilius Ferm, *First Adventures in Philosophy*, cited in *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation* (St. Louis, Mo., 1959), p. 169.

There is not a single field of scientific and academic study which has not been greatly modified by the concept of evolution. It provided a new approach to astronomy, geology, philosophy, ethics, religion, and the history of social institutions.¹⁸

It may well be that for posterity his [Darwin's] name will stand as a turning point in the intellectual development of our western civilization . . . If he was right, men will have to date from 1859 the beginning of modern thought.¹⁹

Not only sociologists, philosophers, and educators, but historians also have marked the tremendous impact upon society of the evolutionary view of man, for example Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* includes such chapters as "Darwinism, Religion and Morality," and "Darwinism, Politics and Society." The evidence presented by Himmelfarb goes far towards supporting the views of Surburg and those he cites.

Biography, as well as general history, affords us many illustrations of how clearly many in the past have seen the logical relationship between the Darwinian view of the arrival of man and the type of conduct therefore to be expected from him. Karl Marx was so enthusiastic over the *Origin* that he wished to dedicate the English translation of his *Capital* to Darwin.²⁰ It was four years after Darwin wrote his first sketch on evolution, and eleven years before the published volume, that Marx and Engels in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* wrote the well-known dictum that "law, morality, religion are . . . so many bourgeois interests."

Another giant of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche, declared by Will Durant²¹ to be Darwin's spiritual son, hailed the passing of God and the enthronement of the power-motivated "superman" in His place. Adolf Hitler certainly imbibed much of his personal philosophy from this source.

¹⁸ E. G. Bewkes, *Experience, Reason and Faith*, cited in *ibid.*

¹⁹ Will Durant, *Great Men of Literature*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 170.

²⁰ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (London, 1959), p. 347.

²¹ Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York, 1927), p. 435.

“Lords of the Earth” is a familiar expression in *Mein Kampf*. That in the end Hitler considered himself the superman of Nietzsche’s prophecy can not be doubted.”²² “In Hitler’s utterances there runs the theme that the supreme leader is above the morals of ordinary man. Hegel and Nietzsche thought so too.”²³ In support of this allusion to Nietzsche Shirer refers to the following lines from this philosopher:

The strong men, the masters, regain the pure conscience of a beast of prey; monsters filled with joy, they can return from a fearful succession of murder, arson, rape and torture with the same joy in their hearts, the same contentment in their souls as if they had indulged in some student’s rag . . . When a man is capable of commanding, when he is by nature a “Master,” when he is violent in act and gesture, of what importance are treaties to him? . . . To judge morality properly, it must be replaced by two concepts borrowed from zoology: the *taming* of a beast and the *breeding* of a specific species.²⁴

An illustration from this century of the relationship between the concepts of origins and behavior can be found in Clarence Darrow’s skilful defence of two youths in 1924 who had cruelly murdered a fourteen-year-old boy in Chicago. Declared Darrow:

I will guarantee that you can go down to the University of Chicago to-day—into its big library—and find over a thousand volumes on Nietzsche, and I am sure I speak moderately. If this boy is to blame for this, where did he get it? Is there any blame attached because somebody took Nietzsche’s philosophy seriously and fashioned his life on it? And there is no question in this case but what it is true. Then who is to blame? The University would be more to blame than he is. The scholars of the world would be more to blame than he is. The publishers of the world—and Nietzsche’s books are published by one of the biggest publishers of the world—are more to blame than he. Your Honour, it is hardly fair to hang a nineteen-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him at the University.²⁵

²² William L. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (London, 1962), p. 101.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. III.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ A Medical Scientist, *Evolution* (Toronto, 1953), p. 87, citing Darrow, *Classified Speech Models* by William N. Brigance.

It should ever be remembered that the philosophy of Nietzsche was the direct outgrowth of his commitment to the theory of organic evolution.

Certainly logic alone is sufficient to show the definite relationship between a belief regarding life's origin and the pattern of behavior followed by the holder of that belief. He who believes that life began by a fortuitous concourse of atoms will not hold that life to be sacred. Once one accepts the idea that our world was spawned by chance it becomes obvious that chance also will write finish to the play on the human stage. Therefore the foreshortening of the course would not be significant in view of the eternities stretching each side of the human interlude. Amoral, rather than immoral, is the child of a credo of chance. On the other hand, one who still clings to the traditional belief in creation of man by a personal God must also hold to the sacredness of life, and the necessity of responsible stewardship in what is considered to be probationary time prior to the Great Judgment Day.

In *Christianity Today* at the commencement of last year appeared a thought-provoking article entitled "An Anchor for the Lonely Crowd." The writer declared that "Creation means that God is the true home of man's spirit" and that when the knowledge of this doctrine is lost, man himself becomes lost. "Not knowing of whom he is the son, he knows not who he is." Then appear these apt appraisals of the significance of God's Creatorship and man's awareness or unawareness of this fundamental reality.

By creating the world, God reveals that he is fatherly, an outgoing, self-giving God, who willed that there be another alongside him, with whom he wills to share his divine existence and life, his divine joy and beatitude. Knowing that he was created to participate in the life of God, man regards existence as an expression of the mercy of God. Existence is no longer a curse, the universe unfriendly. The child knowing his origin declares, "This is my Father's world," and sings, "It is good to be here, it is great to be alive, and the best is yet to be!"

Ever since Western man accepted the evolutionistic contention

that man has no father save a biological process, or accepted the contention of existentialism that man's only father is a Nothingness which, quite without any ascertainable reason, hurled him into existence, the mood of Western man has changed. He became a stranger to himself, nameless (as Kafka's Mr. K.), without relatives. He has lost God as Father, the universe as something friendly, life as meaningful.²⁶

The conclusion of this article asserts that "the doctrine of creation is so basic as to be the indispensable foundation for any tolerable, viable, human existence."

The writer of "An Anchor for the Lonely Crowd" has hereby reminded us all that while theologians and expositors have long seen the importance of the doctrine of creation, it is the twentieth century which has vindicated such convictions. The twentieth century with its nihilistic creeds, and its abandonment of long-held ethical standards cries aloud for a renewed emphasis on the Christian world-view which has Christ as Creator, as well as Redeemer, for its foundation.

Recent decades have witnessed a revived stress on eschatological thought. The subject matter of inspired prophecy regarding the second advent and its preceding events has preoccupied many commentators and evangelists. But the emphasis is unbalanced without a corresponding stress on the other extreme of human history—the time of Creation. It is not coincidental that the great eschatological book of the New Testament places stress on the doctrine of origins. In Rev 14: 6, 7 we read:

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heavens, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

These verses assure us that—*only the man who recognizes God as Creator will so order his conduct as to prepare himself for the Judgment.*

²⁶ "An Anchor for the Lonely Crowd," *Christianity Today*, January, 1962, p. 3.

Many in our world will not listen to pronouncements regarding the Biblical outline of final events because they have long since discarded the Biblical view of beginnings. The first article of the "Apostles' " Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," has been forgotten. Do not these facts constitute a challenge for the man who believes that God has spoken in Genesis as surely as in Revelation? Our Lord Himself when involved in discussion regarding ethics pointed back to creation.²⁷ His views of right and wrong rested upon His belief in the Mosaic narrative concerning the "first things." At least sixty-six times the Bible writers, following His example, refer to the Divine Creatorship as an incentive for holiness. Should not Christians today follow such examples, and glance afresh at the opening statements of God's Word to man?

²⁷ Mt 19: 3-8.